

# Soldiers' Words

A comparative study of Australians' letters and diaries  
from the Boer and Vietnam Wars in the context of 20<sup>th</sup>  
century theories of soldiering.

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# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Abstract  | iii |
| Declaration   | vi  |
| Acknowledgements  | vii |
| Section A – Thesis Framework                                      | 1   |
| Chapter One: Introduction and Method                              | 3   |
| Chapter Two: Boer War Literature Review                           | 31  |
| Chapter Three: Vietnam War Literature Review                      | 56  |
| Section B – Analysis  | 90  |
| Chapter Four: Initial Impressions of the War and the<br>War Front | 93  |
| Chapter Five: The Impact of the Military Structure                | 138 |
| Chapter Six: Morale: The Psychology of Combat                     | 170 |
| Chapter Seven: Morale: The Role of Diversions                     | 208 |
| Chapter Eight: Soldier Interaction with the Home Front            | 239 |
| Chapter Nine: Conclusions   | 286 |
| Bibliography  | 297 |

# Abstract

Despite the participation of Australian soldiers in the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and the Vietnam War (1962-1973), the number of studies focusing on the outlook of these men is considerably limited. Although examinations do exist which focus on the personal records written by soldiers on the battlefield, these are neither sufficiently comprehensive nor analytical. As a result, the historical representation of Australian fighting men in these wars is quite simplistic, necessitating further concentration on their overall outlook towards the wars in which they were fighting.

This thesis addresses that gap by systematically investigating the publicly archived letters and diaries written by Australian soldiers while fighting in South Africa and Vietnam. Despite clear parallels between these two wars, related to reasons for Australian involvement and opposition, their colonial or neo-colonial status, as well as the guerrilla nature of warfare, these wars were fought in two very dissimilar times. Thus, soldiers' archived personal records have been examined alongside 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly opinion on soldiering, which are used as benchmarks to help determine the similarities and differences in outlook between soldiers fighting in two roughly comparable wars in two distinct periods in Australian history. This has been done while taking into account opinion and events in Australia, to determine the effect of the home front on the attitudes and behaviour of a selected sample of soldiers fighting in these wars. The decision has been made to concentrate on records

of soldiers while they were still stationed at the front, rather than also incorporate retrospective accounts from interviews or post-war reminiscences. Thus, this study aims to project a relatively unadulterated representation of a selected sample of soldiers' viewpoints while on the war front.

The resultant findings demonstrate the strength of the links between the civilians and those examined on the battlefronts during these wars. In addition, the differences in soldiers' personal expressions from the two wars show that although, generally speaking, attitudes towards war, particularly in Western countries, underwent a profound shift between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 1960s, this shift was not entirely reflected in the words of these men. The selected men fighting in the Boer War - Australia's first major experience of conventional military combat – more often openly expressed dissatisfaction with the war, despite the apparent popularity of the war at home, and the risk of their being branded 'disloyal' to the British Empire. On the other hand, the sample of Australians fighting in Vietnam were often less likely to dwell on their opinion of the war itself, particularly to express disapproval, although it had far less support from Australian civilians. Despite this, those in Vietnam – fighting in a time of increased knowledge about the psychological effects of combat – were more likely to express opinion on matters such as factors influencing morale and fear, as well as aspects of the military structure itself, than those fighting in the Boer War. This does not necessarily mean that these men approved of their position in Vietnam, or of the war itself. The fact that the living conditions of soldiers had been improved significantly by militaries after the devastating experiences of the world wars helps explain the increased

reticence of these soldiers when expressing dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War. However, it is clear that home front-based factors such as self-censorship and self-defence – more valid in an unpopular war – affected their personal expressions from the battlefield more than those by the examined Boer War soldiers.

# Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

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# Acknowledgments

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## Section A

# Thesis Framework

This thesis analyses the archived letters and diaries of soldiers from the Boer and Vietnam Wars in line with 20<sup>th</sup> century research on soldiering, thus it is first necessary to provide background that both clarifies and justifies this approach. This initial section lays out the general design of the thesis, and includes a review of the relevant literature on both wars, so as to position this study in relation to prior works of a similar nature.

Chapter One lays out the structure of this study. It outlines the similarities between the Australian experiences of the wars that highlight the value of a comparison between them. It identifies the deficiencies in similar approaches in the past that have shaped the techniques used in this investigation, and excluded others. The specific archival collections that contain the primary sources used have been listed, including the personal records of soldiers, as well as those in society with an interest in the war, such as public commentators – on both sides of the war debate – and parliamentary opinion.

Chapters Two and Three review the literature on both wars from a specifically Australian standpoint. Although reactions, and reasons for opposition, to the wars are similar between Australia and Britain during the Second Boer War, and the United



States during Vietnam, there are significant differences between attitudes towards the wars that exclude most specifically non-Australian sources.

Past examinations of the Boer War from Australia are relatively few, and the specific treatment of Australian soldiers in this war is almost non-existent. Despite this, many of the works produced are valuable interpretations of the war. Before the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, most accounts of the war were inclined towards an official view. It was not until the 1960s that revisionist studies began to appear, with a closer investigation of Australian attitudes towards the war. More recently, this has expanded to include the use of soldiers' personal records to demonstrate general opinion. This chapter shows that despite this increased focus on the war, the analysis included in many of these works is limited, thus necessitating a more comprehensive examination of Australians fighting in the Boer War.

Although there is more available literature on the Vietnam War from an Australian perspective, the standpoint of soldiers is still under-represented. Chapter Three focuses on accounts of Australian soldiers, as well as opinion circulating on the civilian front during the war, to present current thought on each of these aspects.

This combined literature review will set into place the starting point of the rest of this study, continued in Section B, which presents the actual analysis of the soldiers' personal archived records.

## Chapter One

# Introduction and Method

Widespread changes in the perception of war marked the twentieth century far more than any other century in history. Altered views of the worth of life, caused partly by the figurative reduction in the earth's size due to technological advancement in areas such as transportation and communication, have affected how members of Western societies, in particular, have reacted to government decisions regarding combat involvement. The historian Jeremy Black believes that since the First World War, the emphasis on individualism within Western populations, progressions in technology, an increase in democratic forms of governance, as well as a general lack of jingoism, have altered the willingness with which both individuals, as well as entire societies, support war. He believes that these, particularly advancements in communication and transportation technology, have 'shrunk' the earth by increasing the speed at which human beings and information travel, naturally transforming how the earth, and therefore conflict between countries, is viewed.<sup>1</sup> This concept is not a recent one, for as early as 1962 Marshall McLuhan asserted that 'the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village', thus acknowledging the contraction of the earth due to the impact of technological

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<sup>1</sup> Black, J, *Rethinking Military History*, Routledge, London, 2004, pp. 226-227. For similar ideas expressed by other researchers, see Knightley, P, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2004; Ignatieff, M, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2000.

discoveries in particular.<sup>2</sup> Societal changes are not, however, the only influence on the more recent reservations of people towards war and its outcomes.

Greater mutual tension exists today between Western populations and their armies than in the past. As the changing nature of society has reduced the value the public places on military endeavours, this disillusion also had a rebound effect – affecting the war-makers. Susan Carruthers sees this as the consequence of the increasing mass nature of war, as well as media technology that, through its ability to connect the home and battlefronts, can both raise and decrease support for war in the general public and the fighting soldier.<sup>3</sup> This is demonstrated by the Vietnam War, which ultimately ended in withdrawal by the United States due to government inability to conceal events of the war from a more technologically present population. In contrast, the Second Boer War, fought at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was physically and technologically further from the home front and, although not supported by all in society, those who did were less inclined to express ‘disloyalty’.

However, it is not only the altered nature of the links between the battlefield and the civilian front that caused the drastic change in public viewpoints between these wars. The Vietnam War occurred in the shadow of Hiroshima, in the midst of the Cold War-related panic over nuclear weapons and the ‘evil’ of communism. Citizens of both the United States and Australia had experienced the extremities of war, whether directly or through returned veterans from both the Second World War and the Korean War, the first proxy war fought during the Cold War. Also, post-colonialism had altered the opinion of many in these societies on the acceptability of subjugation

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<sup>2</sup> McLuhan, M, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1962, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Carruthers, SL, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Macmillan Press, Hampshire, 2000, pp. 2, 5.

of weaker nations by superpowers, prompting more opposition to western involvement in what some labelled a Vietnamese civil war. Ignatieff, writing in 1998, mentions the existence of a 'post-imperial age' in which greater moral responsibility by the populations of more powerful nations has appeared. He labels Vietnam the first true example of both this public morality and 'democratic politics' setting limits on military intervention in a less powerful country.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, during the Boer War, where Australians first engaged in direct combat, the connections between the general public and soldiers were in their infancy, as was the relationship of the media with war itself. It also occurred in the later period of fervent British imperialism, during a time when many Australians saw themselves, foremost, as British subjects. Thus, it is appropriate to see the differences between the Boer and Vietnam Wars as not only chronological, but also the result of a significant shift in context, including a dramatic increase in public consciousness of war.

Moreover, if soldiers are viewed as civilians who have decided to enlist, or have been conscripted, for armed service, it is logical to surmise that they would have preconceived notions of their roles within warfare, as well as its overall place in their own societies - based upon these changes in public attitudes towards war. In addition, Black mentions the effect of advances in military technology, focussing on the decreased time it now takes to both reach the battlefield and kill the enemy, to illustrate the ways in which such changes have impacted significantly on both soldiers and civilians.<sup>5</sup> These adjustments in combatant attitudes have inevitably affected current principles of soldiering, as well as created new theories about the resultant behaviour of men towards war.

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<sup>4</sup> Ignatieff, M, *The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, Vintage, London, 1999, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 225.

Investigating this attitudinal transformation leads to the question of whether it is caused by an alteration in the emotions and actions of soldiers fighting in a war, or an actual shift in the way society views the lives of these men and even war itself. If the former is more accurate, it can also be asked whether men react similarly irrespective of the period and location in which they are fighting, or whether such factors play a significant role in determining the effect of the combat experience on a man. This study will suggest answers to such questions by applying a number of the more developed contemporary theories of soldiering to the Australian commitment during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and the Vietnam War (1962-1973).<sup>6</sup> In addition, the 'home front' will be examined in each case to point to the influence of external factors such as Australian public and political opinion on the stance of soldiers towards the war they were fighting.

The decision has been made to limit this examination to the two wars in question despite the fact that the general understanding in Australia of each war places them at extremes. Traditionally, the Boer War is viewed as one that caused some very jingoistic responses from soldiers and the Australian public, whereas the Vietnam War evokes images of anti-war protesters, and of exasperated soldiers counting down the days to the end of their 'tour'. Until recently, historical studies have reinforced those views and, although most have avoided such generalisation, they generally demonstrate that attitudes towards these wars and war in general altered vastly in the time-lapse between the conflicts.

Despite the difficulty in finding conclusive similarities between any two wars, it is possible to see certain parallels between the hostilities in South Africa and Vietnam,

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<sup>6</sup> The Second Boer War will henceforth be referred to simply as the Boer War.

as well as in their effects on soldiers and the Australian public. Significant among these is the position of public opponents, all of whom claimed that these wars were not relevant to Australia despite contrary claims by government, claims based on ties to the British Empire during the Boer War, and during the Vietnam War, on the urgency of the fight against communism by a relatively new military ally, the United States. Before each war, debates in parliament stressed the potential threat to security through the withdrawal of British, or American, support if Australian involvement did not occur. In addition, both of these wars were, in a sense, colonial; both initially required Australia to take only a relatively minor, almost token, role. Also, in both Australian soldiers proved themselves well suited to the fighting conditions. Also important is the distinctive nature of the fighting in each war, which is notable in accounts of Australian soldiers, especially in the case of South Africa.<sup>7</sup> From soldiers of all countries represented, a great number of Australian men were the most able to deal with the harsh conditions of guerrilla warfare, as a large proportion of them had come from a rural background.<sup>8</sup> This increased their combat resourcefulness in the broken and mountainous terrain in South Africa, as well as in Vietnam's dense jungles, as opposed to soldiers from urban backgrounds. The research undertaken will bring together these similarities between the two wars while taking into account the immense differences in the contexts in which they occurred, in order to understand further the Australian experience of the wars demonstrated in the selected sample of archived soldiers' letters and diaries. First, however, it is necessary to investigate the events of the wars that further demonstrate these similarities.

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> See Wilcox, Craig, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902*, Oxford University Press, Victoria, 2002, pp. 77-78.

The Boer War was prompted by years of dissatisfaction by British settlers (*uitlanders*) relating to their status as residents in the two Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Despite the established independence of the Boers by 1877, in this year the States were annexed by Britain as a sign of ownership. Boer opposition to this unjust claim culminated in the First Boer War of 1880-1881, which resulted in a British-led truce, due to their unwillingness to spend money and time continuing to fight. The following years saw the Boers expand their territories and advance towards independence again. In 1885, the discovery of Witwatersrand, the richest goldfield in the world, turned the attention of the British Empire back to the Boer states, and attracted many more British settlers to South Africa. Wary of external influence, the Boers sought to restrict citizenship and, thereby, the political influence of those settlers and of Britain itself, where there were many eager to claim a piece of goldfield profits. Continuing disputes between the British and the Boers prompted official action in Britain, together with claims of unfair treatment of British citizens by the Boer republics, and requests for aid in taking what was, supposedly, rightfully theirs.

In early July 1899, a formal request was made to the Australian colonies for troops to fight in South Africa, which led to intense debating among politicians. In addition to the call for aid by their government, British *uitlanders* in South Africa had commenced their own appeal. In the same month, George Reid, the Premier of New South Wales, received a telegram from *uitlanders* in Newcastle, South Africa:

Uitlander council as representing unfranchised population earnestly praying governments & legislatures your colonies by every means in power promptly and vigorously to support appeal and not cease efforts until settlement under

British guarantee effected securing for your fellow British subjects in Transvaal rights equal those enjoyed by Boer population.<sup>9</sup>

This telegram was promptly forwarded to the Premiers of all other Australian colonies. Despite the desperation conveyed in telegrams such as this one, many opposed the prospect of sending men to fight for Britain once it became an actual reality in September. There was a range of grounds for this opposition, from the simple fact that it was not Australia's responsibility to fight the war, to bolder arguments about the unwarranted nature of the British claim to any ownership of the Boer states. Illustrating this, the Victorian Henry Bournes Higgins – the most fervently opposed parliamentarian of the war – claimed that, for this reason alone, the war was of 'doubtful justice'.<sup>10</sup>

Such doubts expressed by lawmakers were mirrored in Australian society, although in the public arena this was to a much smaller extent. Despite protests, the fact remained that a substantial section of Australia's population still saw Britain as their 'home' country, and endorsed the 'our country right or wrong' perspective expressed repeatedly in political circles. According to this assertion, it was irrelevant if Britain's reasons for entering this war were unworthy, as Australians enjoyed a somewhat privileged position as white colonists of the British Empire. As such, rejecting any British request for aid could be risky as it could threaten the protective bond of 'Empire' that existed over the country. In this way, Haydon attributes government knowledge of Australia's 'Pacific isolation' and the fear of Germany, France and Russia as potential aggressors, as significant factors behind support for

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<sup>9</sup> Uitlander Council, Telegram to CSO SA, GRG24/6/469/813, State Records of South Australia, 31 July 1899.

<sup>10</sup> Higgins, HB, Victorian Parliamentary Debates, vol. 92, 1777, in Staiff, R, *Henry Bournes Higgins: His Attitudes to the Boer War, Australian Defence and Empire*, Unpublished thesis, Flinders University, Bedford Park, September 1972.



the war.<sup>11</sup> This can be directly compared with the reasons for later involvement in Vietnam – Australia’s large size and relatively small population continued to make it impossible for its citizens alone to fully protect its borders. Thus, the need for external security has always been paramount in foreign policy decisions – from Australian settlement till today. In this way, the decision to join Britain and the United States in these two wars was justified in very similar ways, despite the sixty year gap.

The colonial mindset was still strong at the turn of the twentieth century, but by the official beginning of the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the British Empire had suffered through two world wars and had lost the position of headship once enjoyed. The United States had now become the predominant world power, and 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism had given way to the Cold War battle against communism. This is the atmosphere in which the United States entered Vietnam – to protect South Vietnam and, presumably, the entire world against North Vietnamese, Chinese and, ultimately, Soviet communism. From a resource-based struggle between predominantly European powers for potentially profitable areas of the globe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, now a new clash was occurring - between competing ideologies. As Australia had followed Britain to South Africa, so the decision was urgently made to join the United States on their neo-imperialist mission in Vietnam.

Australia’s position in the world had also significantly changed by the early 1960s. The Australian government was conscious of the replacement of British by American power in the world, as well as of the increasing threat of Asia on Australian stability, an example of which was seen by the Japanese attacks on Darwin in February 1942

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<sup>11</sup> Haydon, AP, ‘South Australia’s First War’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 11, 1964, p. 225.

and the high drama of the Fall of Singapore in the same month. The European threat on Australia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, against which they felt themselves protected by the British, had now been replaced. A closer menace had appeared, and Australia was conscious of the need for greater security – which the United States was best able to provide.

A new alliance was formed, resulting in the Australian - New Zealand - United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) coming into force on 29 September 1951, during the Korean War, in which Australians also fought. This was to serve as protection against the ‘Pacific threat’, namely Japan and China. In 1954, following the French phase of the Vietnam War, Australia began feeling the pressure of another threat. North Vietnam’s provisional takeover by Communist forces led to fears that such encroachment would spread throughout South East Asia. As a result, another pact was signed on 8 September 1954, creating the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO). This not only included Australia, New Zealand and the United States as major powers, but also Britain and France. The aim of SEATO was to act collectively to prevent the spread of communism in South East Asia through a defence arrangement involving the signatories. Both of these agreements resulted in ongoing debate in Australian parliament. Although many leaders considered these agreements a high priority for continued security against the Cold War peril of communism, there were some who doubted the integrity of the United States. Political scientists Siracusa and Cheong highlight the disbelief existing among political leaders over the willingness of the United States to come to their aid if future attacks on Australia occurred, fearing that Australia would ultimately be forced to give much more than was received.<sup>12</sup> Doyle, Grey and Pierce confirm such

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<sup>12</sup> Siracusa, JM & Cheong, Y-H, *America’s Australia, Australia’s America: A Guide to Issues and References*, Regina Books, California, 1997, p. 32.

misgivings, stating that ANZUS was seen by the United States as nothing more than the method by which they could ensure support against the Communist threat in Asia through satisfying Australian fears of a rearmed Japan.<sup>13</sup> So the trust felt by many Australian policy-makers in the intentions of the United States was not unanimous. Yet, despite the scepticism expressed by many in parliament, the pacts were signed and Australia officially entered an alliance with the United States. This decision was to contribute to the twelve controversial years of Australian involvement in Vietnam.

It was within this setting that the United States extended their request for military backing by Australia. When the United States made its first appeal for assistance in the early 1960s, Australian political leaders were already conscious of the potential consequences on public opinion. As early as 1954, the Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, had approached the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and warned him that the Australian people should be mentally prepared for potential conflict in Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> The war in Vietnam did not constitute a direct threat to the homeland security of either Australia or the United States, despite government claims that it was combating the ‘thrust by Communist China’ towards Australia.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the decision to send Australian men to fight would certainly cause public controversy unless introduced sensitively. The Australian role was debated widely in Federal Parliament, for reasons that were not unlike those raised during debates at the turn of the century regarding Boer War involvement. John Murphy maintains that in Cabinet there were ‘a couple of voices that hold that the USA is our only standby in this part

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<sup>13</sup> Doyle, J, Grey, J & Pierce, P (eds.), *Australia's Vietnam War*, Texas A&M University Press, Texas, 2002, p. xvi.

<sup>14</sup> Murphy, J, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Menzies, Sir R, in Department of External Affairs, *Vietnam: Recent Statements of Australian Policy*, DEA, Canberra, 1965, p. 3.

of the world, and that we should follow them whatever they did',<sup>16</sup> strongly reminiscent of sentiments from late 1899. However, more widely, involvement in the Vietnam War was seen as necessary for security, so preparations began to join Australian troops with those of the United States in Vietnam.

As the reasons for involvement were similar during the two wars so too were the reasons for opposition. Although maintaining a bond between Australia and Britain, then with the United States, was frequently quoted as a necessity and served as a precursor to military commitments, not only parliamentary representatives, but also the general population questioned this bond. This opposition increased during the wars, more dramatically during the many years Australians spent in Vietnam.

Not only was the social and political background to the wars similar, the experiences of Australian soldiers in each war are also directly comparable. The British request for aid in 1899 was presented as a general appeal, as there was no perceived need for skills that were specific to Australian troops. Robert Murray supports this view by portraying the original Australian force as 'moral support', a means of displaying to the world that subjects of the Empire outside Britain supported the war.<sup>17</sup> This decision was to benefit the British Army significantly, despite the original expectation that the superiority of the British troops would ensure a short war. The rigid training of British troops, upon first encounter with the highly mobile Boer forces and the unfamiliar South African terrain and conditions, revealed itself as vastly inadequate. Black Week confirmed this, with three devastating British defeats within the week of 10-17 December 1899. Despite the Australian population regarding the Ladysmith and Mafeking victories of 28 February and 17 May 1900 as

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<sup>16</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, R, 'Australia's Boer War', *Quadrant*, vol. 54, no. 5, January-February 1999, p. 54.

overwhelming successes, the Boers were continually presenting themselves as an unbeatable force. British incompetence escalated from late 1900, by which time the Boer forces had resorted predominantly to the guerrilla mode of fighting. An Australian soldier, Lieutenant PH Lang of the Fourth Imperial Contingent, in his diary of 1900-1901, reported on the horsemanship of the British troops: ‘Many of these Yeomanry appear never to have been on a horse before, & it will be weeks before they have learnt to ride well enough to go on the trek’.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the predominantly rural background of the Australian troops gave them an advantage in this mode of fighting.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the United States expected originally that the Vietnam War would not last long, given their size and strength compared with the North Vietnamese. The British perception of the Boer forces in 1899 was similar to that of the United States towards the Vietnamese Communists – as a weak force that would not last against the military and political might of the then most powerful nation on earth. Both Britain and the United States were proven wrong. Like the Boers in the later stages of the Boer War, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army were originally guerrilla forces - taking advantage of their knowledge and experience of the humid, often jungle, terrain to outwit the American forces. This mode of fighting was one that the United States army was inadequately prepared for. Like the war in South Africa, the dissimilarity in fighting styles was to extend the war further than originally thought.

The similarities between the Boer and Vietnam Wars thus highlight the value of a comparison between the two, particularly one concentrating on the effects of combat,

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<sup>18</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40-701/57/14, Australian War Memorial, 15 April 1901.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War*, 32; Wallace, RL, *The Australians at the Boer War*, The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 84.

as well as the nature and impact of public and parliamentary opinion on the Australian participants. Although the degree to which these affected soldiers altered between the two wars - as both government structures and public attitudes to war had undergone significant changes, and there were differing levels of success between them – similar standpoints towards the conflicts existed. However, such a comparison also demands in-depth analyses into the Australian home and battlefronts, as well as reference to scholarly examinations of soldiering that have emerged in the years between and since the wars.

Existing theories concerning soldiers at war suggest that, despite minor dissatisfactions, soldiers still essentially enjoy combat.<sup>20</sup> This thesis will test such theories by focussing specifically on personal narratives, in the form of unpublished publicly archived letters and diaries of Australian troops in the Boer War and the Vietnam War, in order to identify and analyse their reactions, including emotional responses, towards going to war. Within this analysis, attitudes of a selected sample of soldiers in the two wars will be compared in order to suggest whether it is possible to follow general theories of soldiering, or whether each war is truly unique - not only as an experience, but also in its impact. Although past studies on each of these wars have utilised such sources, there has not yet appeared a sufficiently systematic analysis of such personal records written by soldiers, particularly one taking into account both the effects of the home and war fronts on these responses. In addition, the concentrated use of archived unpublished original letters and diaries is intentional, so as to avoid the use of those that were made public during the war itself, usually in newspapers. The possibility that these were subject to editing, or chosen for publication for a specific ideological purpose, seems to have been largely

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Bourke, J, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Granta Books, London, 1999.

overlooked in past studies of each war. Thus using both archived and published letters as evidence of soldier opinion without due distinction could be a factor in distorting conclusions. So, although published letters can often provide valuable evidence on the viewpoints of fighting soldiers, in this study only unpublished letters and diaries have been chosen, to provide a better-controlled sample of soldier attitudes.

The behaviour of soldiers in war, as well as the thoughts that govern their actions, is a topic that has not always attracted the interest in it we see today. This is marked in Australia where very few analyses of combat soldiers exist, particularly based on those who fought before the Vietnam War. The change in attitudes to warfare within Australia, as well as much of the rest of the world, has reduced the risk associated with speaking out against any particular war, war in general, or any action by soldiers which demonstrates a lack of 'loyalty' to their country and their cause. The First World War - due to its length and grand scale – produced the first recorded and recognised mass experience of psychological damage caused by warfare. It was from this war that in-depth research into soldier psychology took place on a much larger scale than before, thereby revealing more of the ill effects of war on soldiers and, combined with more media coverage, aiding in the growth of anti-war sentiment.

Since the apparent change in Australian attitudes towards war, new interpretations of events in earlier wars have emerged. For example, from the 1960s new studies into the Boer War began appearing, occasionally with more controversial views on both public and soldier responses to the wars.<sup>21</sup> These reinterpretations did not, however,

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Penny, B, 'Australia's Reactions to the Boer War – A Study in Colonial Imperialism', *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 7, no.1, November 1967; Connolly, C, 'Clan, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71, October 1978.

succeed in closing the gaps in understanding of how this war impacted on Australians. The lack of available documentation from socio-economically lower sectors of society has resulted in conclusions that are intended to encapsulate Australian society in general, but the result has been an inadequate representation of the views of certain groups.<sup>22</sup> However, there are positive aspects to these more recent studies into the war. Overall, their arguments have questioned the position that dominated early 20<sup>th</sup> century perceptions of the war, in which opinion was seen as being overwhelmingly in support of Australian troops aiding the British Empire.

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of the Vietnam War. Despite the fact that new ideas concerning war had emerged by the 1960s, the political and military need for public support ensured that the prevailing position on the war did not represent all opinion, particularly that criticising Australian involvement. Although numerous works contradicting the official viewpoint were published while Australian troops were in Vietnam, the immediate post-war period was marked by a relative silence. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that significant revisionist histories appeared, some taking the stance of those who actively opposed the war and others presenting new interpretations of the war itself, the actions of the Australian government and the role of the home front.<sup>23</sup> These have, like more recent works on the Boer War, critically re-examined previous accounts and openly disputed their assertions. But, as in the earlier war, they have not adequately represented all groups, neglecting particularly the opinions of soldiers themselves.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Connolly, C, 'Clan, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71, October 1978, p. 226, in which Connolly admits that the conclusions that he and others have made about Australian civilians during the Boer War are flawed, as all available documentation comes from one sector of society – and thus does not represent society in general.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Murphy, J, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993; Burstall, T, *Vietnam: The Australian Dilemma*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1993; Pierce, P, Grey, J & Doyle, J (eds.), *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam: A Bold Reassessment of the Myths, History and Culture of Australia's Longest War*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1991.



Those histories which use soldiers' first-hand records to demonstrate the reasons for their attitudes and behaviour often fail to sufficiently analyse the words of the fighting men.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a fuller understanding of the opinions of Australian soldiers on each of these wars is clearly necessary.

The aim of the current investigation is to analyse the attitudes of a sample of Australian soldiers, and their resultant conduct, through close inspection of their publicly archived letters and diaries. Within this study, viewpoints of civilians on the home fronts as well as government policy that directed the Australian war effort in each instance will be taken into account, in an attempt to determine their relative effect on these soldiers. While documenting these factors, any similarities will be noted. In this way, it will be possible to determine whether the thoughts and actions of the selected soldiers in these different wars are comparable, especially in these relatively similar wars, or whether the views of the men fighting in each war should be considered as distinct. This will be achieved using the archived words of these soldiers throughout the wars, as well as by applying 20<sup>th</sup> century research into soldiering to the letters and diaries considered, as well as other contemporary reports of their conduct throughout the wars.

In searching for a basis of analysis and comparison of soldiers' writings, a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century 'theories of soldiering' have been used. The work of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century writers on war such as Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) and Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869) have been set aside, as they are less directly relevant to the central concern of this thesis - developing an understanding of soldiers' own views and

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Chamberlain, M & Droogleever, R (eds.), *The War with Johnny Boer: Australians in the Boer War, 1899-1902*, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus, 2003; McKay, G, *Bullets, Beans and Bandages: Australians at War in Vietnam*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999.

reactions from their wartime writing. While such ‘philosophers of war’ command considerable respect in their own right (and continue to provoke debate) much of their work deals with problems of strategy and tactics—notwithstanding the importance someone like von Clausewitz places on the role of the commander and the impact of morale. By contrast, this thesis, in having soldiers’ writing from the war zones as a central focus, has a different orientation - so studies of combat soldiers that provide a framework for analysing fighting soldiers’ responses are especially useful. All these principles are based on warfare from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but some derive their arguments from a single war or even battle, while others develop their ideas from a wider sample. It is necessary to point out that not all those whose work is drawn on in this thesis would necessarily regard themselves as invoking or developing ‘theories of soldiering’. But their common concern with how and why soldiers react as they do makes the term of great practical use in this study. The works selected include Bill Gammage’s *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (1974), Anthony Kellett’s *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (1982), Richard Holmes’ *Firing Line* (1985), Tobey Herzog’s *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost* (1992) and Joanna Bourke’s *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (1999). Such studies give a comprehensive view of modern warfare, as they take into account specific home front factors as well as soldiers’ combat experiences.

So, in carrying out this investigation, a variety of sources have been utilised. The archived letters and diaries of soldiers provide the basis of soldier opinion, although newspapers and other primary sources related to each war have also been used. For example, letters to the South Australian Chief Secretary’s Office during the Boer War have been examined, as well as letters between civilians during each war.

Secondary sources provide insight into past and current thinking on each war, as will be seen in Section B, which analyses the letters and diaries of soldiers from each war in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly research into soldiering.

The decision has been made to limit the interpretation of soldiers' letters and diaries to those archived in Australia. More specifically, these include those held in the state libraries of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, National Archives offices in Victoria and Canberra and the State Records of South Australia. Documents found in these sources include personal letters from fighting soldiers to their respective home fronts, comprised of those to loved ones and government offices, as well as official letters between military and government leaders from Australia, Britain and the United States. The bulk of the records from all parts of Australia, it must be noted, are held in the Australian War Memorial, with sizeable collections also in New South Wales and Victoria. In total, the archived records of 73 individual soldiers from the Boer War, and 50 from Vietnam, were investigated. For some of these men, only one letter or diary was archived, but others wrote a daily journal of their experiences, or hundreds of letters home to Australia.

This study relies on the publicly archived personal records of soldiers to provide insights on their attitudes and behaviour towards the war in which they were fighting. The letters and diaries used, as well as other primary sources such as autobiographies, life narratives and oral histories, can all provide valuable insights into soldiers in war, but can also all be affected by factors such as bias, subjectivity and faulty, as well as failed, memory.<sup>25</sup> In this particular examination, soldiers during

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<sup>25</sup> See Lummis, T, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, Barnes and Noble Books, New Jersey, 1987, pp. 11-12.

the Boer and Vietnam Wars are compared, and the decision has been made to focus solely on their archived letters and diaries so as to obtain a view of their actual attitudes from the war front itself. Thus, other primary sources such as those mentioned above have not been used, as this investigation is one that intends merely to investigate soldiers' epistolary records between battle and home fronts, as well as their personal diaries while in active service. This decision can be justified by insisting that even though the use of other varieties of primary source would, no doubt, prove useful to the historical record as a whole, this particular group of sources from these two wars do represent a perspective that is unique, and can most easily be compared, for one individual war, as well as both considered in this thesis.

Archived sources are not without interpretative problems of their own. Blouin, for instance, maintains that the archive itself 'may implicitly reinforce certain cultural and political constructs', through the ways and reasons why it has been chosen for public view.<sup>26</sup> There are problems in the interpretation of personal records of all kinds. This study merely intends to focus only on these particular primary sources, as explained above.

The limitation of sources also succeeds in increasing the potential value of the approach adopted and its usefulness in gauging soldier opinion. As mentioned, almost all Australian studies of these wars that use soldiers' letters and diaries fail to analyse these sources sufficiently, and often use both those archived and those published in newspapers during the war years without differentiating between the two. It can be misleading to place personal records from these two different sources in the same category, as one can be subject to much more editing than the other. It is

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<sup>26</sup> Blouin Jr, FX, 'History and Memory: The Problem of the Archive', *PMLA*, vol. 119, no. 2, March 2004, p. 298.

difficult enough to generalise about soldiers based merely on archived records. However, the level of caution with which a newspaper editor, who often has a particular agenda in mind while not necessarily having a personal attachment to the content, selects a letter or diary entry can possibly affect the historical record more than those chosen by the soldiers or their families to be placed in public archives. It is hoped the unique decision to limit this study to archived sources, and analysing them as such, will come closer to disclosing soldiers' recorded attitudes more reliably.

Un-archived letters and diaries from the Boer War are difficult to find, especially given the absence of living veterans. Also, despite the fact that the majority of Vietnam veterans are still alive, painful memories of the war and its aftermath have caused many, understandably, to shun discussing their experience in Vietnam, thus limiting readiness to share personal records of the war. Although a search for soldiers' unarchived personal records from Vietnam was carried out, it resulted in little interest by veterans. This, added to the imbalance caused by the unavailability of such sources from the earlier war, prompted the decision to limit the basis of the study to only those publicly archived. This was justified further by considering reasons why veterans or their families decide not to archive personal records – namely, the desire not to tarnish opinions of wars, of the armies that fought them, or of the soldier author. This further emphasises the imbalance if both archived and non-archived sources are used only for Vietnam, and not for the Boer War.

A similar attitude can be taken towards soldiers' letters and diaries that were published in Australian newspapers during the wars. This is not to say that the investigation of *all* sources available would not provide a valuable contribution to

established knowledge of the Australian experience of the Boer and Vietnam Wars. The incorporation of these records into the public sphere has certainly protected them against extinction, and they are still undoubtedly a significant source of information about each war. However, the motivation of those who decided which letters were to be published is an additional variable. It is possible to find valid reasoning for the decision to either include or exclude such records, which highlights the fact that all primary sources create some problems in their usage. But this only confirms the overall benefit of restricting the sources used in this study to those publicly archived – as it ensures that comparisons between, or conclusions arising from, these particular personal records are as consistent as possible. Naturally, limiting the number of possible sources in this way does also limit the significance attributable to conclusions that emerge from them.

It is also necessary to understand that editors each had their own motives determining the inclusion of each record. This is not to say that each of these volumes necessarily projects and protects a particular agenda, but it is vital to acknowledge each layer of selection that could affect the way the records have been presented and, thus, potentially mislead the reader.

This is a problem that extends to a source of public attitudes used in this examination: newspapers. Clearly, there are various pressures on editors, owners and journalists, particularly when their country is at war. These particular wars beg special attention, as in neither war was censorship formally imposed. The Boer War occurred at a time when the relationship between the media, government and the military was relatively undeveloped, especially compared with today when the media is an essential, but controlled, part of a country's war effort, as can be seen by the

mainly post-Vietnam War practice of ‘embedding’ journalists within military contingents.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, war in Vietnam was never formally declared by either the United States or Australia, making it impossible to impose official censorship. Correspondents were permitted to travel to any part of Vietnam in researching their stories. However, even though the Australian Army and Federal Government officially endorsed this rule, it did not extend into full practice. Given the increasingly anti-war sentiments present in Australia, such journalistic freedom could not be allowed, so other forms of ‘informal’ censorship occurred. For example, on the home front the Federal Government placed similar pressure on editors and owners of commercial newspapers to publish only positive reports from Vietnam. Herman and Chomsky maintain that the dependence of major media organizations on the government is a main deciding factor affecting the content of their publications, likening this effect on content to a ‘filter’.<sup>28</sup> They argue that the mass media’s need for government approval leads to a straining of all information they choose to display before ready to print, or in the case of television, present. The need for government licenses and the present profit-oriented forces affected by the government achieve this by exerting financial pressure to coerce the organization into agreement.<sup>29</sup> Newspaper evidence in this thesis is assessed with these facts in mind, in recognition of the fact that the use of press reports as a reliable historical resource in studying war can be particularly problematic.

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<sup>27</sup> See Knightley, P, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Herman, ES & Chomsky, N, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1988, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Herman & Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 13.

Despite these issues, media publications remain an important source of information when considering the context of public support or opposition reported within them, or exhibited by journalists or correspondents. For the war in South Africa, six have been chosen – both rural and urban - and examined from September 1899 until June 1902. Those predominantly ‘for’ the war are Mount Gambier’s *Border Watch* and the more widely circulated *The Argus*, a Victorian commercial newspaper. In addition, three newspapers and one journal have been selected which displayed less enthusiasm towards the war. These are Broken Hill’s *Barrier Truth*, the ‘Official Journal of the Federated Workers of Queensland’ *The Worker*, Adelaide’s *The Herald* and *The Bulletin*, from Sydney. For the Vietnam War, an attempt has been made to use very similar sources from Australia sixty years later. The publications used here are the *Barrier Daily Truth*, *The Bulletin* (which became significantly more conservative in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), the Labor Party’s *Workers’ Weekly Herald*, and the commercial Victorian newspaper *The Age*, which was chosen because of the concentration of anti-war activity in that state. Given the lengthy nature of the Vietnam War, four years have been sampled – 1965, when Australian combat troops first entered the war; 1968, the year of the Tet Offensive and resultant negative public reaction; 1970, the year of the first two Vietnam Moratoriums; and 1972, which saw the electoral downfall of the Liberal Party and the withdrawal of Australian combat troops. Since the chosen years are particularly significant in the Australian history of the war, the sample has provided essential information regarding the events of the war and public attitudes surrounding them.

Further choices made in this study regarding sources demand some explanation. The decision to use archived letters and diaries over reminiscences and oral history has been carried out with a particular purpose in mind, and in an attempt to avoid some



of the problems associated with cultural memory. Published personal narratives by soldiers can be problematic, as most are written retrospectively. Depending on time delay, issues of reliable memory recall and accurate recording arise here, well known as factors in using personal reminiscences. Historians writing on such issues place importance on the role of collective or national memory in influencing a person's individual recollection. For instance, Peter Burke argues that, aside from an individual's memory of a public event, there are social groups surrounding them who decide what is of vital importance in public memory, and in this way directly influence individual memory by their own interpretations of the past.<sup>30</sup> Samuel Hynes values the words of soldiers while at the battlefield for a related reason – namely, the absence of 'filtering' through people or time, which distinguishes memoirs, or accounts of past events.<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Grey, when exploring the Vietnam experience, also recognises the existence of public myths that serve to inform, if not define, a country's understanding of particular wars.<sup>32</sup> This factor is especially valid in the case of wars that provoke enormous public interest. Thus, for each war, the attitudes of soldiers on the battlefield will be limited to those written while actually at war. This does not assume that soldiers' reminiscences are not historically useful – they merely constitute a different project.

For similar reasons, this study does not employ oral history or interviews, despite their considerable value as a primary source. There is a variety of opinion on oral history, with both sides raising convincing points for and against its use. Many of those who concentrate on the negative aspects associated with the use of oral testimony claim that societal pressures, such as those mentioned above, can affect

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<sup>30</sup> Burke, P, *Varieties of Cultural History*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Hynes, S, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration' in Winter, J & Sivan, E (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> Grey, J, 'Memory and Public Myth' in Grey, J & Doyle, J (eds.), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992, p. 137.

remembrance, as can the interview process itself. John Tosh challenges the view of those who regard oral history as an invaluable way to ‘recreate’ the past and an opportunity to hear non-elite perspectives. He cites problems such as the method of interviewing; subsequent changes to a person’s impressions of the past; and the inadequacy of one person’s testimony as representative of an entire experience; all being potential hindrances to the integrity of the historical record.<sup>33</sup> Jan Vansina echoes Tosh’s thoughts and argues for the importance of taking extra time to analyse such sources very thoroughly if a research project requires their use.<sup>34</sup>

There are other possible issues that need to be addressed, particularly in a sensitive area such as wartime recollections. When interviewed, veterans could be tempted to speak more generously about their actions during war or avoid any mention of events that involve painful memories. Alistair Thomson observed that during his interviews with veterans of the First World War, many men would speak behind the cover of the Anzac legend – because that was the observed norm and helped them avoid struggling with potentially traumatic memories.<sup>35</sup>

However, many scholars also point out the positive aspects of oral testimony in the study of history. Tosh mentions that, despite the fact that the oral sources should be ‘critically evaluated’ – as all sources should – and used in conjunction with other types of sources, it does have unique benefits in that it has the capacity to provide a new perspective on particular events or concepts. Also, its use can often lead the scholar to undiscovered documentary evidence.<sup>36</sup> In addition, he does maintain that

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<sup>33</sup> Tosh, J, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, Pearson Education, Harlow, 2006, pp. 316-320.

<sup>34</sup> Vansina, J, *Oral Tradition as History*, James Currey, London, 1985, p. 196.

<sup>35</sup> Thomson, A, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 4-10.

<sup>36</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 323.

oral history has been successfully used ‘as a means of restoring the particularities of human experience to their central place in historical discourse’, thus supporting the popularity and success of grass-roots history.<sup>37</sup> Vansina, while conceding that there are limits to the usefulness of oral sources as a *sole* source in a historical study, contends that there are significant possible benefits associated with their use.<sup>38</sup> Trevor Lummis cites numerous advantages to oral history, including its ability to broaden historical methodology. He says: ‘The practice of oral history has had the important, if unforeseen, effect of revitalizing debates on common-sense interpretation, methodology and theoretical formation which lie behind the interpretation of most forms of historical evidence’, thus presenting a wholly new perspective on particular historical periods.<sup>39</sup> Megan Hutching agrees, mentioning also that new avenues of historical study can be discovered through oral history, as well as different, and newer, perspectives on events that have been studied for decades, or longer.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the value of oral testimony as a historical source is well recognised by scholars.

Future studies using records that utilise a variety of primary source material should definitely be encouraged. However, the particular focus of this study is one that is not entirely suited to the incorporation of oral history. It is the intention of this study to examine the letters and diaries written by soldiers during their military service, so as to determine their attitudes and behaviour while actually on the war front and motivations for including particular opinions in these personal records. To do so then also requires an analysis of the Australian home front during the wars themselves.

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<sup>37</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 325.

<sup>38</sup> Vansina, J, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Lummis, *Listening to History*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Hutching, M, *Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993, p. 60.

Although oral testimony would provide valuable insight into this topic, the intention of this study is to investigate the expressions of soldiers from the war fronts alone, thus only archived personal records from the wars themselves have been chosen for examination.

Also, the comparative nature of this study does present difficulty when considering the use of oral sources. Even if one were to discount the warnings of Burke and others, the research undertaken does not include oral history due to the fact that it is impossible to personally do so for veterans of both wars, considering the Boer War ended over 110 years ago. Interviewing veterans from one war and not another could create an imbalance in the evidence used, critically affecting the reliability of any comparison between the wars. It is possible to look into past interviews conducted by other researchers to gain insights into the earlier war, but the difference in interviewer could significantly affect potential responses.<sup>41</sup> This does support the decision to limit the examination of soldier opinion to that expressed in personal records from the battlefield, despite the acknowledged value of oral history as a source.

So, archived soldiers' letters and diaries will be used as the main basis of the investigation, providing a unique investigation into each war separately, as well as the two remarkably similar wars together. As mentioned earlier, using such a limited range of primary sources does make it more difficult to come to conclusions about the behaviour of soldiers. However, using a collection of sources that are differentiated by a minimal number of variables does allow this thesis to provide a final view on this particular group of soldiers. The fact that they were all selected by

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<sup>41</sup> See Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 319 for a discussion of ways in which each party affects the other during an interview.

family or friends of the authors to be publicly archived does suggest that there were similar motivations for their inclusion in the archives, and so increases the value of comparing and contrasting them.

Carrying out a serious investigation necessitates the use of supplementary sources. Thus, the chosen soldiers' personal records will be analysed in terms of other primary sources, such as newspapers, official government documents (including correspondence between politicians and army leaders), personal records by interested parties in the wars, as well as a large number of secondary historians' accounts of both wars. It should be noted, however, that newspapers and personal records would only be used to give insight about home front attitudes, not to reinforce soldier attitudes. Soldiers' reactions recorded in their letters and diaries will be considered in terms of current principles of soldiering. The reason to focus on relatively contemporary research related to soldiers and war is because an increased focus on such studies has only occurred since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. What was known, or examined, about soldiers at the time of the Boer War is a mere fraction of the information available now, a result of conflicts such as the world wars and Vietnam. Moreover, interest in these men and women has been increasing particularly since these wars, all of which seemed to introduce new horrors into both warfare and its effects. Chapters Four through Eight will focus on research which has emerged on soldiering, and analyse it in conjunction with the selected sample of Boer and Vietnam War soldiers' letters and diaries. This will provide a basis for the comparison of soldiers who fought in both South Africa and Vietnam, providing a preliminary indication of whether or not soldiers in such similar wars in vastly different times can be likened to one another or not.



## Chapter Two

# Boer War Literature Review

The Australian experience of the Boer War has produced a valuable, albeit small, historical record. Earlier published works were generally one-sided, following the optimism of the generally accepted consensus on the war. It was not until the 1960s that more radical interpretations began to appear, and even these have been unable to adequately widen both scholarly and public knowledge on both military and public perspectives on South Africa. This is not entirely the fault of the relevant historians; in fact, it is due to the difficulty in finding sources to demonstrate these aspects. In more recent years, personal records such as letters and diaries have been more popularly used to represent opinion. Although this has revealed insights on the war that were previously unknown, the lack of deep analysis in some such works has been to the detriment of the historical record of such an important war in Australia's military history. This has presented the need for renewed analysis of these sources, particularly in the context of both public opinion and policies put in place by both the colonial and the post-Federation Australian governments.

The early 20th century produced few historical works on the Australian perspective of the war in South Africa, other than those concentrating on campaign accounts or recounting the actions of certain contingents. Personal reminiscences by soldiers proved relatively popular, due to the demand for tales of Australia's first combat experience. Frank Wilkinson, special correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*,

Sydney, wrote the earliest and most comprehensive account of the war. His *Australia at the Front: A Colonial View of the Boer War* (1901) presents a very one-sided view of public opinion, with the frequent mention of ‘fever’ when describing support for the war. Wilkinson contends, when speaking of men who did not wish to volunteer for service in South Africa, that ‘each morning’s mail brought them consignments of white feathers from erstwhile friends’.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the few indications of public attitudes mentioned in this work. Such a limited interpretation is surprising given Wilkinson’s willingness, when dealing with events on the battlefield, to show both soldier eagerness and dissatisfaction with the war, a rarity among earlier work such as this.

In the same year R. Scot Skirving, a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps, published *Our Army in South Africa*. Despite the clear belief that the British soldier was wholly incompetent in comparison with the Australian ‘citizen-soldier’, he was a supporter of involvement, saying of war: ‘There is no better remedy for individual and national selfishness, no greater moral tonic’.<sup>2</sup> This opinion, however, was often obscured by anti-British sentiment, including the following joke found on a wall in a Boer *laager*:

Scene – A school

Dramatis Personae. Teacher and Pupil

Question – “What is a fool?”

Answer – “A British soldier”

Question – “What is a d \_\_\_\_d fool?”

Answer – “A British officer.”

Question – “What is a d \_\_\_\_d, \_\_\_\_ fool?”

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, F, *Australia at the Front: A Colonial View of the Boer War*, John Long, London, 1901, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Skirving, RS, *Our Army in South Africa*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1901, p. 15.



Answer – “A British general”.<sup>3</sup>

Skirving’s writing follows Wilkinson’s concentration on the battlefield over the home front, as well as his indications of dissent as part of a broader approval. This pattern is common among earlier works. As Jack Abbott, Corporal of the First Australian Horse, expressed it: ‘To us of Australia this has been the first experience of war’.<sup>4</sup> This can easily explain why the opinions of those who had no involvement in combat itself were often overlooked, or rather, generalised. Abbott shares Wilkinson’s view of the home front, which stresses its predominant support for the war. He merely mentions the ‘drunkenness of the “hurrahing” streets, and the hysteric quays, and the lying newspapers’, and does so only as a comparison with what ‘war really is’.<sup>5</sup>

Abbott’s reference to newspapers is apt, as the great majority of newspapers in Australia were openly supportive of the war in South Africa. Despite protests by various members of parliament, such as the Victorian politician Henry Bournes Higgins, the colonial governments who had decided to send contingents portrayed their involvement as necessary, even urgent, to display loyalty and prove their worth to the British Empire. Many newspapers, both colony-wide and those limited to small towns, imitated their enthusiasm. For example, the *Border Watch*, the biweekly paper based in Mount Gambier, South Australia, openly stated: ‘Great Britain and her colonies are practically unanimous in the view that the war now recognised as inevitable against the Boers is not only justifiable, but necessary, in the interests of

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<sup>3</sup> Skirving, *Our Army in South Africa*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Abbott JHM, *Tommy Cornstalk: Being some account of the less notable features of the South African War from the point of view of the Australian Ranks*, Longmans Green and Co, London, 1902, p. 260.

<sup>5</sup> Abbott, *Tommy Cornstalk*, p. 236.

the Empire'.<sup>6</sup> Such a view was common, particularly before the war, and in its early months. Such reports would, no doubt, have contributed to the limited scope of home front opinion presented by Wilkinson and Abbott.

However, such sentiments were not the only evidence of public opinion provided in newspapers. Many – even those without wide circulation, such as *Border Watch* – although openly supportive of the war and its effects on Australia and the British Empire, upon closer scrutiny were a little less clear cut in their opinions. For example, a prominent article in Gawler's *The Bunyip* of 13 October 1899 states, when speaking of the treatment of British settlers (*uitlanders*), that 'the brutality of the Boer to distressed women calls for redress'. The same article earlier labels opposition to the war as 'unwillingness to shoulder the Empire's burden' and 'unfederal...ungenerous'.<sup>7</sup> However, the editorial in the same issue expresses a more impartial view of involvement, admitting that 'the pros and cons appear to be so evenly balanced'; but when raising the issue of the New South Wales contingent that was sent to Sudan in 1885, admits that it 'would have been better if that precedent had never been set'.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that not all were supportive of the sending of troops to South Africa, but were nevertheless eager to display their loyalty to the British Empire. The same editorial later explicitly protests the need for violence in expressing dedication to Britain: 'the sentiment of loyalty might have been given expression to in other and less objectionable forms than those of powder and shot'.<sup>9</sup> This highlights the importance of loyalty, or rather, the fear of being branded

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<sup>6</sup> 'Is the War Really Justifiable?', *Border Watch*, 4 October 1899, p. 3

<sup>7</sup> 'Town Tattle: The Boers', *The Bunyip*, 13 October 1899, p. 2

<sup>8</sup> 'Editor's Notes', *The Bunyip*, 13 October 1899, p. 2

<sup>9</sup> 'Editor's Notes', *The Bunyip*, 13 October 1899, p. 2

‘disloyal’ towards the Empire in Australia’s decision to enter and openly support Britain’s cause for war.<sup>10</sup>

Similar sentiments appear in more popular newspapers with larger distributions. Melbourne’s *The Argus*, for example, would report dissent or complaints against the war, but was careful to do so in a relatively constructive light. For example, when the decision to commit troops to South Africa was being made by the various colonies, the Victorian parliament displayed considerable caution – especially when compared with Queensland, which was the first and most eager to provide England with soldiers. The Liberal Premier of Victoria Sir George Turner advised that although troops were to be sent, a limit of two hundred men was recommended.<sup>11</sup> *The Argus* reported on both the positive and negative opinions raised, which was rare for newspapers of the time, generally eager to avoid being labelled ‘disloyal’ to the British Empire. *The Argus* also, despite several articles in late 1899 that reported on the enthusiasm of Victorians towards the war, still chose to include reports of public dissidence.<sup>12</sup> Even Labour opposition in the South Australian parliament to the sending of a contingent reached the pages of *The Argus*, as well as a meeting held in Sydney to express opposition to the war.<sup>13</sup> Rare reports such as these displayed clearly the acceptance of both points of view, rather than the overwhelming optimism seen in other publications. It is clear that the threat of being labelled ‘disloyal’ prompted more pro-war displays of opinion, but it would be simplistic to regard Australian attitudes towards the war as purely supportive. If Australians were

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Field, LM, *The Forgotten War: Australian Involvement in the South African Conflict of 1899-1902*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1979, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> ‘An Australian Contingent: Views of Sir George Turner: A Cautious Policy Advocated’, *The Argus*, 2 October 1899, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> See ‘New South Wales Lancers: Enthusiastic Demonstration’, *The Argus*, 10 October 1899, p. 5; ‘The Medic’, *The Argus*, 30 October 1899, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Debate in the South Australian Parliament’, *The Argus*, 6 October 1899, p. 5; ‘A Meeting in Sydney: Broken Up By a Crowd’, *The Argus*, 13 November 1899, p. 5.

near unanimous in their support for the war, to find such articles in widely distributed colonial newspapers would, surely, be unlikely.

Furthermore, there were publications that openly rejected the need for Australian contingents in 1899, and continued to oppose the war in South Africa until its end in 1902. One example is the traditionally outspoken, anti-imperial magazine *The Bulletin*, established in 1880. After outlining and rejecting the reasons given by British and colonial authorities for the sending of local troops, *The Bulletin* confidently stated, 'Assuming all is true, what has Australia to do with the matter?'<sup>14</sup> The weekly magazine disagreed completely with Australia's place in the war, calling any man who wished to support Britain 'one of the richest crowds of capitalists... a fraud and a hypocrite and a mercenary'.<sup>15</sup> Such allegations were common, and were based on the idea that a dominant, wealthy country attacking weak South African colonies was immoral, based on the asymmetrical nature of the warfare. Incidentally, such allegations would arise again sixty years later when Australian men were being called to aid the United States in their war against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong.

Despite the observed range of opinion in the Australian press in the early months of the war in South Africa, later examinations present a more limited view of public attitudes towards Australian involvement. New interest in Australian attitudes towards imperialism and Federation began emerging from the 1950s. This led to more in-depth studies of the Boer War itself, and particularly public reactions to the war, appearing in the 1960s and 1970s. These analyses can perhaps be attributed to new attitudes towards war itself emerging from World War Two and Australia's latest neo-colonial adventure in Vietnam. Although this attention came from only a

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<sup>14</sup> 'Jingo!', *The Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 1024, 30 September 1899, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> 'More Contingents', *The Bulletin*, vol 20, no. 1023, 23 September 1899, p. 8.

few researchers, the conclusions formulated did result in an altered view of public opinion during the war. Generalisations were still clearly in place, but they were – by 1980 – much narrower than before.

Among researchers concentrating on Australia on the eve of the 20th century, two in particular have made connections between the war in South Africa and the growing divide between ‘Imperialists’ and ‘Federationists’. Charles S. Blackton, in an article focussing on the ‘new’ Australian nationalism in this period, states clearly that the Boer War delayed the advancement of those who were moving towards less reliance on Britain. This, in turn, exaggerated the divide between these and Chamberlain’s ‘Imperial Federationists’, represented in society as the tension between ‘pro-Boer’ and pro-war citizens.<sup>16</sup> Charles Grimshaw clarifies this point, claiming that the split in society over involvement in the Boer War caused anti-imperialist ‘Australianism’ to be exhibited openly for the first time.<sup>17</sup> Works such as these were able to bring the division between Australians at this time to the forefront. In light of such emerging political beliefs, needed now was a more comprehensive analysis of Australia’s direct reactions to the war.

Barbara Penny, in her 1967 article ‘Australia’s Reactions to the Boer War: A Study in Colonial Imperialism’, admits that there was opposition to the war, but after analysing this still confidently maintains that ‘Australia’s participation in the Boer War had been a consolidating rather than shattering experience’.<sup>18</sup> She does acknowledge that the ‘jingo madness’ present in Australia in 1899 waned over the

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<sup>16</sup> Blackton, CS, ‘Australian Nationality and Nationalism: The Imperial Federationist Interlude, 1885-1901’, *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 7, no. 25, November 1955, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Grimshaw, C, ‘Australian Nationalism and the Imperial Connection 1900-1914’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1958, p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> Penny, B, ‘Australia’s Reactions to the Boer War: A Study in Colonial Imperialism’, *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, November 1967, p. 127.

years until 1902.<sup>19</sup> However, she is convinced that the population's backing of the war effort was strong throughout. This view agrees with that expressed by Anthony Haydon in a 1964 article focussing on South Australia's parliamentary reaction to the war. Haydon concluded that popular newspapers, such as the *The Register* and *The Advertiser*, approved of the sending of a contingent and, although a minor group opposed this decision, their numbers were too small to be significant. Haydon maintains that anti-war sentiment was rarely publicly heard.<sup>20</sup>

By 1971, Penny had re-published on the war in South Africa with a slightly altered outlook. Although her perspective on public opinion had not markedly changed, she did provide a deeper analysis of those opposed to the war, particularly Australia's 'pro-Boers'. This small sector of society sympathised with the helplessness of the Boers against the mighty British Empire and criticised the latter for their actions in South Africa. In addition, many of these comprised the small actively anti-war sector of the Australian population. Penny focuses her later article on this group and the desire of many in it to develop the 'Independent Australian Briton' – the unique citizen of Australia who proudly originated from the British Empire.<sup>21</sup> Seeing Britain display such 'moral degradation' towards the Boers shattered such an ideal, as it removed any pride felt towards their 'mother country'.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, Penny raises an issue that was revisited over sixty years later when Australia made the decision to go to Vietnam. She claims that members of parliament in 1899 saw the South African adventure as a relatively undemanding

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<sup>19</sup> Penny, 'Australia's Reactions to the Boer War', 127.

<sup>20</sup> Haydon, AP, 'South Australia's First War', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 11, 1964, p. 229.

<sup>21</sup> Penny, B, 'The Australian Debate on the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 56, April 1971, p. 526.

<sup>22</sup> Penny, 'The Australian Debate', 528.

way to ensure British military protection for Australia. Our contribution to the Vietnam War was to be a ‘token’ one and similarly, there were low expectations of our role in South Africa. Wilkinson confirmed: ‘Australians, generally, appeared to be regarded as a somewhat risky experiment’.<sup>23</sup> Penny goes on to declare that pro-Boers were confronted by this need to gain British support, causing even *The Bulletin* to acknowledge Australia’s potential gain through involvement.<sup>24</sup>

RL Wallace was to provide a break from more radical, innovative treatment of attitudes towards the war in *The Australians at the Boer War* (1976). This book, published by the Australian War Memorial, serves up a bland repeat of the narrative-based, pro-war accounts that emerged in the early 20th century. Wallace concentrates more on soldier opinion than that of the Australian population, but clearly projects the view that involvement was necessary. One of the clichéd quotes found in Wallace’s examination came from Claude Lenthall, a Sydney-based civil engineer:

War is a fearful thing, but it would be worse still to settle the matter without fighting. We would be despised by the Kaffirs and, worse still, we should lose all our self-respect and deserve the name of coward which the Boers give us...<sup>25</sup>

As merely an edited record of soldiers’ words concerning the Boer War, Wallace’s study is useful – but the narrow range of opinion presented limits its worth as a comprehensive historical record of attitudes towards the war. Similarly, DH Johnson’s *Volunteers at Heart* (1974) is an event-based concentration on

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<sup>23</sup> Wilkinson, *Australia at the Front*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Penny, ‘The Australian Debate’, 538.

<sup>25</sup> Wallace, RL, *The Australians at the Boer War*, Australian War Memorial & Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 37.

Queensland's contribution to the war effort.<sup>26</sup> Labour opposition in parliament to the sending of troops is mentioned, but the attitude of the public towards the war is, on the whole, neglected. Such studies tend to be overshadowed by the more analytical works on the war appearing during this period.

The renewed interest in South African involvement in this period also prompted some Australian postgraduates to focus their work on the war. One noteworthy doctoral thesis, by Rosemary Thompson at the Flinders University of South Australia, addressed press representation of opinion on the war. She concludes that the mainstream press is faulty as an indicator of public opinion toward the war, as the news reported was distinctly upper class:

It is sufficient to assume that on most imperial issues the papers chosen reflected the opinion of those sections of the Australian public whose political awareness gave them a concern for Australia's position in the Empire and the world beyond it.<sup>27</sup>

Those considered 'politically aware' are generally not found in the lower levels of society. Hence, these are unlikely to accurately represent lower-class opinion. Here Thompson identified a clear problem with the use of the press to gauge Australian opinion. Unfortunately this did not prevent the future use of the press as such a source.

The next major re-interpretation of attitudes towards the Boer War came from Chris

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<sup>26</sup> See Johnson, DH, *Volunteers at Heart: The Queensland Defence Forces, 1860-1901*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1974.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, RH, *South African and Imperial Affairs 1895-1911: A Study of Australian Press Opinion*, Unpublished Thesis, Flinders University, 1 September 1969, p. iv.



Connolly's two articles on the topic. Connolly questions Australian enthusiasm for the war based on claims that troop offers by colonies and the general public were 'spontaneous'. He confirms, in his article 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity": The Australian Offers of Troops for the Boer War' (1978), that despite such assertions, only two of every six offers of troops were truly 'spontaneous'.<sup>28</sup> He admits that there was widespread opposition to the war that was not widely publicised, even by those who markedly opposed Australian troops being sent. Focussing predominantly on parliamentary members, Connolly shows that an underestimation of the seriousness of the war in South Africa, as well as the desire to project the appearance of a united parliament, caused many to conceal such views:

Most voted for the war because imperial manipulation, the machinations of the military and finally the offers of their own governments made any other course incompatible with traditional conceptions of loyalty.<sup>29</sup>

Here the claim is that, above all, Australia was part of the British Empire, and its citizens had to behave accordingly.

Despite Connolly's scepticism towards the widespread enthusiasm for the war, his article on public reactions to the war published a month later presents a slightly altered view. Focusing on parliamentary opinion, he rejects the possibility that birthplace determined approval of the war. Although politicians who were native-born were more likely to support the war, Connolly maintains that it was class status above birth that influenced their position on involvement, as the great majority of

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<sup>28</sup> Connolly, C, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity": The Australian Offers of Troops for the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 70, September 1978, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Connolly, 'Manufacturing "Spontaneity"', 115.

politicians were members of the upper class.<sup>30</sup> Connolly notes that the opinions of the working classes were not necessarily congruent with those of the middle classes, or even of their peers in the labour movement. But although Connolly maintains that it is impossible to generalise about public opinion on the war because most written evidence we have available to us comes from the upper sectors of society, he also goes on to say that if common working men were opponents of the war, it was because they saw it as 'none of our business'.<sup>31</sup> This is a reasonable statement to make, as this was one of the platforms used by those who openly opposed the war, such as members of the predominantly middle class-based Anti-War League. But it is almost impossible to prove conclusively, particularly given the material used by Connolly, namely parliamentary debates, articles in newspapers and journals of the time, as well as published personal reminiscences of the war mainly written by middle and upper class soldiers, often officers.

Despite the limitations of Connolly's work, his research did succeed in a major revision of opinion on Australia's involvement in the Boer War. His work appeared to be following the trend set by British researchers such as Richard Price, who was also examining public opinion of the war from a less 'official' perspective. However, this British study achieves more than Connolly's mere recognition of an absence of working class opinion towards the war. Price, in *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902* (1972) realises that it is necessary to separate opinions found in the Labour movement and those of the working class to determine the true views of the latter. Thus, he explores records from working men's clubs and uses theories formed by writers such as Hobsbawm and Rudé to determine the composition of the 'jingo

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<sup>30</sup> Connolly, C, 'Clan, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War' in *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71, October 1978, p. 226.

<sup>31</sup> Connolly, 'Clan, Birthplace, Loyalty', 220.

crowd'. His conclusion is similar to Connolly's, as he maintains that the response to the war found among the working classes was 'neither imperialist, patriotic or jingoistic' but rather an indication of 'indifference'.<sup>32</sup> However, Price's thesis is based on the analysis of records that represented a large cross-section of the population, in class terms. Connolly's is not, which is a failing of most who have carried out research on the Australian experience of the Boer War until now. Although such a detailed examination as Price's is outside the realm of this study, this research is still expected to contribute to a renewed view of the lower classes through the analysis of soldiers' personal reminiscences from the battlefield.

Connolly's views on the Australian impetus toward involvement are shared with Laurie Field, whose MA thesis *The Forgotten War: Australian Involvement in the South African Conflict of 1899-1902* was published in the following year. This examination of Australian attitudes during the war concentrates on the imperial factor in the original decision to send troops to South Africa. Field maintains that, given increasing nationalist thought in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the imperial fervour that appeared just before the war is unexpected. He rightly attributes part of this movement to Australian security fears and the desire to keep Britain in a protective role by joining them in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> The other factor that influenced this pro-Empire view before and in the early stages of the war is pressure from Britain itself, through Joseph Chamberlain, as well as imperial backers in Australia.<sup>34</sup>

Field also claims that the frequent accusations of 'disloyalty' and attacks on 'pro-Boers' clearly indicate that there was a significant level of dissent in Australia in the

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<sup>32</sup> Price, R, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972, p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> Field, *The Forgotten War*, 2-3.

<sup>34</sup> Field, *The Forgotten War*, 11.

early years of the war, but this became difficult to gauge in later years when the original fervour of the war subsided and such attacks largely disappeared.<sup>35</sup> His views here again coincide with Connolly's, as he believes that organised opposition emerging in early 1901 was based in the middle classes. Field does not mention any predominant absence of opinion on the war by the working classes as Connolly did – however, he does mention that the NSW Anti-War League, during their first meeting in January 1902, appointed a literary committee to reduce 'the dense ignorance' of the general population.<sup>36</sup> As with Connolly, the lack of sources based in the lower classes does not allow him to make such an assertion conclusively. Despite this, Field's analysis of Australia during this war was progressive and provides an excellent insight into the war from the standpoint of the middle classes and above. Although more recent studies have included a more prominent concentration on grass-roots anti-war movements and external perspectives of soldiers, they have neglected the deep analysis apparent in *The Forgotten War*. It is unusual that it took fifteen years, until the years preceding the 1999 centenary of the war, for renewed Australian studies of the war to appear.

One of the first of these later investigations into the war was Len Harvey's discussion of Queensland volunteers in South Africa, *Letters from the Veldt: An Account of the Involvement of Volunteers from Queensland at the War in South Africa (Boer War), 1899-1902* (1994). This book presents soldiers' letters as indication of both home and war front attitudes. Letters from both newspapers and public collections are used – however, Harvey fails to differentiate between these as sources of opinion on the war. This lack of deeper analysis is disappointing and reduces the value of this book as a historical source. On the other hand, *Letters from*

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<sup>35</sup> Field, *The Forgotten War*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1902, in Field, *The Forgotten War*, 150.

*the Veldt* is a single volume that has effectively combined many varied sources. Generalisations do occur, such as the claim that Australians were eager to provide soldiers, but based only on the numbers present when troops were leaving for South Africa.<sup>37</sup> However, Harvey does acknowledge that attitudes present at the end of the war contrast strongly with the enthusiasm displayed in 1899, because the Australian public were ‘heartily sick’ of the war.<sup>38</sup> Future works on the Australian contribution to the war were to explore further Harvey’s concentration on indifference, as well as clear-cut opposition.

In his 1999 article ‘Australia’s Boer War’, Robert Murray presents a clear narrative-based account of Australia’s attitudes and involvement in the war in South Africa, making a brief comparison with the Vietnam War, based on similarities in cause and extent. He does admit that there was ‘abundant’ pro-Boer opposition to the war in Australia, but much of this did not reach the general population, causing apathy.<sup>39</sup> Murray gives three reasons for public indifference in Australia to the war: the existence of more important domestic issues, such as Federation; the danger of being seen as a supporter of Holland, or even Germany; and the problem of distance, which restricted the transfer of anti-war ideas from Britain to Australia and allowed biased anti-Boer sentiments to overpower the daily press.<sup>40</sup> Although these views are valid, Murray’s attention to them is brief, resulting in an insufficient analysis of the Australian anti-war population or its case against British imperialism.

Murray’s article mirrors the increased focus on anti-war movements during the war in South Africa that were appearing in Britain at this time. David Nash, in his article

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<sup>37</sup> Harvey, L, *Letters from the Veldt: An Account of the Involvement of Volunteers from Queensland at the War in South Africa (Boer War) 1899-1902*, R & J McTaggart & Co., Queensland, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *Letters from the Veldt*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> Murray, R, ‘Australia’s Boer War’, *Quadrant*, vol. 54, no. 5, January-February 1999, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> Murray, ‘Australia’s Boer War’, 57.

of the same year ‘The Boer War and its Humanitarian Critics’, presents the British reaction to this war as the beginning of public questioning about ‘imperial adventuring’ in general.<sup>41</sup> He clearly maintains that although strong opposition did exist, not all who opposed the war were virulent pro-Boers. Rather, the prevailing feeling toward the war among dissenters was one of mild unease.<sup>42</sup> Although Nash’s analysis focuses on British opponents of the war, his observations on the state of disapproval toward the war can also be applied to Australia, albeit to a much lesser extent, given the smaller military commitment. Murray directly states that some like-minded Australians adopted ideas advocated by British opponents of the war.<sup>43</sup>

Also in 1999, Donald Lowry published an article on worldwide reactions to the Boer War, entitled ‘When the World Loved the Boers’. Although he pays little attention to Australian reactions when compared to the United States and Europe, he does address an issue earlier raised by Barbara Penny in 1971 – the late 19<sup>th</sup> century emergence of the ‘Independent Australian Briton’. Lowry claims that involvement in South Africa increased enthusiasm for imperialist ideals, stifling Australia’s shift from a nation of loyal British citizens to independent Australians with a faithful tie to Britain.<sup>44</sup> A claim of the existence of the ‘Independent Australian Briton’ is valid, but Lowry simplifies public enthusiasm for the war as mere evidence of imperialist fervour, neglecting public opposition to the war in Australia.

During this same year, the 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference was held, for which both local and international experts on the Boer War gathered. The proceedings were later published and edited by Peter Dennis

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<sup>41</sup> Nash, D, ‘The Boer War and its Humanitarian Critics’, *History Today*, vol. 49, no. 6, June 1999, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Nash, ‘The Boer War’, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Murray, ‘Australia’s Boer War’, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Lowry, D, ‘When the World Loved the Boers’, *History Today*, vol. 49, no. 6, May 1999, p. 44.

and Jeffrey Grey. This collection presents some re-interpretations of Australian ‘home front’ opinion during the war, of which the contributions of Craig Wilcox, Stephen Clarke and Bobbie Oliver are the most noteworthy. In the first chapter, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’, Wilcox follows the example of South African and Canadian historians in attempting a ‘post-national’ redefinition of Australia’s intentions and role in the war.<sup>45</sup> Within this he shifts the focus of participation in the war from Australia alone and joins its war efforts with those of all other English-speaking countries that fought in South Africa. As a result, he makes two claims – firstly, that Australia was not coerced into fighting by the Imperial government, and secondly, that those who enlisted cannot be seen as ‘Australian soldiers’ but as ‘imperial volunteers’. In short, Wilcox believes that it was the ‘local pressure of pro-war advocates’, not colonial governments, that pushed Australia into war – the role of these governments was merely to ‘channel’ jingoistic ideas.<sup>46</sup> Wilcox maintains that more recent scholarship on the war has moved past the ideas of Connolly and Field, who attribute involvement to imperial pressure and loyalty to the British Empire, and claims that Australia went to South Africa due to the workings of a ‘coalition of loyalists and opportunists’, as a ‘great social movement’.<sup>47</sup> However, it seems some misinterpretation occurred, as Field, in *The Forgotten War*, did clearly state that the first offer of troops by Queensland alone was ‘possibly as much opportunist as loyalist’, despite the imperialist viewpoint throughout his book.<sup>48</sup> This clearly agrees with Wilcox’s claim, if only in the case of Queensland.

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<sup>45</sup> Wilcox, C, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’ in Dennis, P & Grey, J, *The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire: The 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference*, Army History Unit, Canberra, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Wilcox, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Wilcox, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Field, *The Forgotten War*, 12.

Wilcox uses as his basis for this view recent research carried out by Stephen Clarke, who presented a revision of Connolly's views at the same conference. His paper "“Manufacturing Spontaneity”?: The Role of the Commandants in the Colonial Offers of Troops to the South African War’ questions Connolly's prior claims that troop offers in Australia were ‘manufactured spontaneity’, namely, disguised machinations by the British government to urge Australians to South Africa. Rather, through a close analysis of primary sources, he shows that military leaders who made the first and vital steps towards this were not imperial ‘conspirators’ but men simply eager for war.<sup>49</sup> At no point does Clarke refer to a ‘social movement’ that accompanied these offers of troops, nor does he suggest that the imperial government and Australia were equally fervent in sending troops to South Africa. Wilcox presents these assertions in his own paper in an attempt to follow trends set by historians from other countries that participated in the war, but fails to provide adequate evidence to support his views. Thus, his declarations appear speculative, despite his own accusation that past historians have relied ‘more on assumptions than on scholarship for understanding how much, and in what ways, the South African War actually helped shape Australian politics and society a century ago’.<sup>50</sup>

The second claim made by Wilcox attempts to group Australian volunteers in the war and the British military, arguing that the former have been misinterpreted by past historians who focussed on their easier adaptability to guerrilla warfare than British professional soldiers. However, he uses few sources to support his view that when they reached South Africa, due to British headship over all contingents, colonial volunteers were more like members of the British army than a distinctly ‘Australian’

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<sup>49</sup> Clarke, S, "“Manufacturing Spontaneity”?: The Role of the Commandants in the Colonial Offers of Troops to the South African War’ in Dennis, P & Grey, J, *The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire: The 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference*, Army History Unit, Canberra, 2000, p. 129.

<sup>50</sup> Wilcox, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’, 2.



force.<sup>51</sup> This can be attributed to the fact that Wilcox uses predominantly British sources to demonstrate this point, without acknowledging their content as distinctly British. His cause would perhaps have been strengthened had he used a combination of Australian and Imperial sources. In Wilcox's attempt to present a post-national perspective on the war, his paper appears critically lacking in Australian source material. This produces uncertainty in his assertions, suggesting that there is a limit to how much the Australian experience of this war can be internationalised.

Bobbie Oliver, in her paper “‘A Wanton Deed of Blood and Rapine’: Opposition to Australian Participation in the Boer War”, examines more radical views during the Boer War. An expert in the Western Australian labour movement, Oliver follows the example set by Richard Price in which he analyses the British labour movement to determine a segment of working class opinion during the war. Although this approach produces less conclusive results in the Australian case - as the labour movement was relatively indifferent toward the war - the paper does reveal details of opposition that had previously not been investigated. Oliver separates those who argued against the war into four groups: those who questioned the morality of the British Empire in, for the sake of gold mines and territory, preventing the Boers from gaining independence; a small number in the Labour movement who saw the British instigators as capitalist profiteers; those who feared Australia's vulnerability and economic retardation, if left lacking in fighting men; and later opposition that resulted from human rights abuses, such as farm burning and concentration camps.<sup>52</sup> This examination, for the first time, lists all major anti-war groups during the war in

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<sup>51</sup> Wilcox, ‘Looking Back on the South African War’, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Oliver, B, “‘A Wanton Deed of Blood and Rapine’: Opposition to Australian participation in the Boer War’ in Dennis, P & Grey, J, *The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire: The 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference*, Army History Unit, Canberra, 2000, pp. 192-194.

South Africa, and successfully puts their activities into the wider context of 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian opposition to war.

Investigations into Australia's role in the Boer War that have emerged in the 21st century range from comprehensive histories to less publicised accounts of particular contingents, or groups of soldiers. Distinctive among these later works is their concentration on soldiers' attitudes through the use of archived letters, as well as those found in newspapers, following a wider trend among historical works.<sup>53</sup> The latter group contains Ian Wood's 2002 self-published collection of letters written in South Africa by Goulburn area volunteers, published originally in the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*. Given the origin of the letters – namely, a country newspaper – their content is somewhat predictable. Clichés and generalisations found in many newspaper headlines of the time are also found in these letters. The fact that they have clearly been chosen for inclusion by representatives of the press reveals a potentially problematic layer of editing that must be taken into account when using them to determine soldiers' attitudes. For example, an interview with S. Parry, an injured trooper, revealed the following:

...the fact of being under fire did not trouble the Australians, on the contrary, the excitement made fighting somewhat fascinating but there were few regarded with complacency the personal discomfort inseparable from forced marches, insufficient food, unwholesome water and dirt and filth generally.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> In addition to the volumes discussed, see Gow, R & Gow, W, *Boer War 1899-1902: Making to the Manning: Letters from the Front*, Self-Published, Cundletown, 1999; Maddrell, R, *Letters from the Front: Boer War to WWII Through Letters Sent by Servicemen to their Families in Braidwood*, Self-Published, Braidwood, 2004; Durrant, D, *Letters from the Front: Quirindi Servicemen Write Home from the Boer War, 1899-1902*, Self-Published, Quirindi, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, I, *Transvaal: The Boer War, 1899-1902: Goulburn and District Volunteers [from the] Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, James Ian Wood, Canberra, March 2002, p. 12.

Statements that attribute one soldier's outlook to fighting Australians in general are common in examinations of the war in South Africa. Despite Wood's inclusion of such examples, he does question press reliability in his introduction, serving as a warning for the reader.<sup>55</sup> This admission is sadly rare among later works on the war that use similar sources.

One such consideration of the war is *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902* (2002), a volume commissioned by the Australian War Memorial and written by Craig Wilcox. This book employs the widest range of sources used in such a study to produce an extensive history of the Boer War. In this Wilcox has succeeded, as the use of sources – including private collections, African, British and Australian public archives, newspapers and an extensive list of secondary sources – and arrangement of subject matter make this book a worthy history of the war's events, as well as middle and upper class 'home front' opinion. Such a limited range of opinion is valid to an extent, as evidence of lower to lower-middle class opinion is almost non-existent in Australia. Thus sources used to record views from this sector of society are generally newspapers, parliamentary papers and correspondence between colonial authorities.

Wilcox also makes extensive use of letters and diaries from South Africa as evidence of soldier opinion – archived, un-archived and those printed in newspapers during the war. The wide variety of sources ensures that many viewpoints are represented, and their interpretation by Wilcox is very well integrated into the events. Where this volume is lacking is in its analysis of these personal records. There is no distinction made between soldiers' accounts of the war from different sources – namely, public

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<sup>55</sup> Wood, *Transvaal: The Boer War, 1899-1902*, i.

archives, newspapers or private collections. There are undoubtedly reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of records from each of these sources, by either those who have written them, or their descendants. These reasons must be acknowledged when such records are used - particularly in a historical analysis of both public and soldier opinion of the war – as their use as equal bases of opinion can be misleading. Despite this, as a historical record of the war itself and views of upper sectors of society *Australia's Boer War* is valuable. However, although the use of soldiers' first-hand accounts of the war is effective, the lack of analysis when using them damages its accuracy as a record of soldiers' attitudes. Thus, this volume fails to address the problem of under-representation of the lower classes in Australia during the war. To an extent, this is a problem of source availability. However, Wilcox should have carried out further analysis in the treatment of such a range of soldiers' letters, so that a more precise perception of soldiers' attitudes can be achieved.

Chamberlain and Droogleever's vast collection of Australian soldiers' letters and diaries in *The War with Johnny Boer: Australians in the Boer War, 1899-1902* (2003) followed Wilcox's study. This sizeable work presents hundreds of soldiers' personal accounts of Australian troop movements and noteworthy battles throughout the war, all in chronological order. Max Chamberlain's knowledge on the war itself contributes to the significance of this work as an account of the events of the war. However, the work loses its value as a historical record in two ways. Firstly, it subscribes to classic generalisations that research decades before it has disproved. The writers admit that Australians since the war's end have questioned the value of involvement, but neglect to acknowledge that this doubt occurred both before and during the war itself. Allegations claiming 'in 1900...the war seemed highly relevant' and that Australians saw 'themselves as an essential part of the British

Empire' fail to take the viewpoints of all Australians into consideration, including Federationists who were a strong and essential force before 1901.<sup>56</sup> As a result, its depiction of Australian home front attitudes both before and during the war appears decidedly one-sided.

Unfortunately, Chamberlain and Droogleever extend this approach to the soldier authors of the included letters. In the book's acknowledgements, the authors admit that, in order to create such a comprehensive account of the war from the perspective of soldiers, it is necessary to use not only personal reminiscences from public archives and private collections – of which there are few – but also personal accounts published in newspapers.<sup>57</sup> However, a critical analysis of these sources – namely, their differences, and possible shortcomings as historical documents - does not follow. Soldiers' words found in newspapers must be treated differently by historians for two reasons. One of these is the editing process applied to these letters by newspaper authorities in Australia, affecting the context in which the soldiers' words should be taken, as well as the general representation of soldiers' attitudes. In addition, more than one publicly archived letter from South Africa reveals that soldiers did not want their letters published, indicating possible self-editing by these men, again affecting representation and perception of first-hand impressions of the war.<sup>58</sup> Thus the consideration of these letters and diaries in *The War with Johnny Boer* is one-dimensional, which affects its ultimate worth as a source of soldier opinion on the Boer War.

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<sup>56</sup> Chamberlain, M & Droogleever, R (eds.), *The War with Johnny Boer: Australians in the Boer War, 1899-1902*, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus, 2003, p. xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Chamberlain & Droogleever, *The War with Johnny Boer*, xix.

<sup>58</sup> See Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 21 August 1900; Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 6 July 1900.

Investigation into public and soldier opinion during the Boer War remains incomplete when considering Australia as a whole. Perception of attitudes among the general population has certainly broadened since the war's end to include both dissent and approval, but the basis of opinion continues to be limited. Sources that originate in the middle to upper classes prevail in examinations of the war, yet are used to identify both public and soldier viewpoints. Admittedly, sources representing lower class opinion are difficult to find. However, more recent studies that deliberately attempt to represent a broader class base by also using soldiers' first-hand expressions fail to adequately analyse their origin. For example, the use of letters found in the press, a medium that includes war content on the basis of editor and owner approval, give an unbalanced view of soldier opinion, as the range of information would be restricted. The added use of archived records or those obtained from personal collections can contribute to more representative source material, and indeed, the use of letters in historical research has increased in popularity in the last few decades. However, this approach can only lead to a more accurate historical record if any conclusions take into consideration the context of the source.

Thus, in the case of the Boer War, Australian attitudes are often grouped together, irrespective of class basis. But attributing upper class opinion to soldiers in the war produces inaccuracy, as most fighting men came from the lower sectors of society, with their own distinctive values and beliefs. It is necessary, then, to analyse the expressed viewpoints of these soldiers from their publicly archived unpublished letters and diaries in order to gain an insight into the outlook of those of the lower classes in civilian society who have not yet been fully represented in examinations on the war. Available information on corresponding 'home front' opinion, as well as government policy, will be taken into account when analysing these soldiers'

accounts. This will lead to an investigation of the position the selected sample of soldiers took towards war in general, by also using concepts of soldiering developed during the 20th century as a theoretical base.

## Chapter Three

# Vietnam War Literature Review

As demonstrated in Chapter One, the significant similarities between the Boer War and the Vietnam War, notwithstanding the telling distinctions, make a comparison valuable when focussing on the attitudes of soldiers, as well as the effects of the home and battle fronts on those attitudes. As existing research into public and soldier opinion during the Boer War was earlier examined, it is also necessary to do the same regarding Vietnam. This will involve an analysis of Australian government policy and public opinion, both before and during the war, that would have had an influence on men on their way to Vietnam, thus affecting their reactions in their letters and diaries. It will also include home front opposition to the war, which increased as the war progressed, as well as the changing position of mainstream media. This provides a necessary basis for discussing the significance of such external pressures on the sample of soldiers' behaviour and attitudes when analysing their archived letters in line with principles of soldiering. Numerous studies of the war from the standpoint of the United States exist, but this review will focus solely on Australian studies, despite some similarities between American and Australian motives for both involvement and disapproval. It must be noted, however, that the difference in scale of involvement between the two countries, as well as Australia's closer proximity to South East Asia, meant that divergence from the US model of reaction to the war was unavoidable - by soldiers, the general public, as well as by the Australian government.



The central focus of this thesis, being on soldier opinion during the wars themselves, as well as factors influencing their attitudes and behaviour, means that current research on why Australia entered into the war, the conscription debate, or the anti-war movement do not warrant extensive consideration here. More applicable to this study is an analysis of the civilian front during the war, including both public and government stances towards the war, as well as an examination of existing studies on Australian soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War.

The war years produced numerous works by both pro- and anti-war academics and politicians, including Labor's outspoken Jim Cairns, who focussed on the injustice and futility of Australian involvement. The years after the war were marked by a predominant silence – but from the early 1980s, retrospective histories of the war began to appear. With the exception of a few studies, including Michael Sexton's controversial *War for the Asking: Australia's Vietnam Secrets* (1981), the majority of these studies closely followed the official history disseminated since the war's end. It was not until the public release of government documents in the early 1990s that broader analytical studies on the impetus for involvement, as well as the shifting standpoint of Australian society during the war, began to appear. Studies such as Terry Burstall's *Vietnam: the Australian Dilemma* (1993) and John Murphy's *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (1993) succeeded in clarifying many earlier misconceptions about Australia's reasons for participation. As mentioned, these will not be focussed on, as views informing soldier opinion *during the war itself* are more significant to this investigation. However, these studies are of high importance in a general account of the war, as they demonstrate the clear reshaping of its history that followed the public release of information.

When focussing specifically on studies of soldier reactions to the Vietnam War, the findings are somewhat scanty. Studies of soldiers during the war, including those concentrating on psychological effects, are difficult to find. Veterans' personal reminiscences are the most common form of recorded soldier opinion, many of which were written as a therapeutic exercise to reduce the psychological effects of military service.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the recent popularity of the letter as a historical source has seen the emergence of publications containing letters from not only soldiers, but also nurses and military support staff on the front. Such collections can often be compared to similar works based on Boer War soldiers' reactions that lack an analytical dimension. It is clear from an examination of Australian studies of Vietnam that certain trends have become established fairly consistently in the years since the war. The release of classified information from the early 1990s has resulted in various political 'exposés', but when concentrating on soldier and public opinion the results are disappointing. General public reactions are neglected in favour of the seemingly ever-attractive peace movement, which has created an erroneous lasting image of an entire population against the war. In addition, the majority of soldier accounts are retrospective, incurring difficulties associated with accurate recollection, as well as the impact of cultural memory mentioned in Chapter One. Different problems arise from those that use first-hand soldiers' records, with a failure to sufficiently scrutinize these sources by taking into account the impact on the serving soldiers of government actions and public attitudes on the home front. A closer examination of these sources clearly demonstrates that a broader, more analytical study of soldiers in this war is required. However, it is first important to establish the political and military ideas disseminated in Australia towards Vietnam

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Heard, B, *Well Done, Those Men: Memoirs of a Vietnam Veteran*, Scribe, Carlton North, 2007.

during the war itself, to establish both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ attitudes toward the war that may have had an impact on fighting or future soldiers.

Before 1965, most of Australia was relatively uninterested in events occurring in Vietnam, despite the sending of ‘advisors’ to aid the United States in 1962.<sup>2</sup> Public attention to the war increased after the National Service Act was renewed on 24 November 1964, after the 29 April 1965 announcement that combat troops were to be sent to Vietnam, and after the decision to send conscripts to Vietnam was announced in March 1966, when it became clear that many of those who would eventually serve in Vietnam would not do so by choice. It is around this time that ideas regarding Australia’s stance towards Asia and the emerging war in Vietnam came more prominently into public view – generated by supporters of the war, including those in government, as well as opponents of Australian involvement. Although the peace movement was stirring before this time, the announcement that conscripts were to be sent to Vietnam confirmed the seriousness of the matter, and investigations began to appear from those who disagreed with the war and Australia’s involvement.

Many government publications were written at the time with the intention of ‘educating’ the population on the importance of the war to Australia, so as to ensure they adopted the often exaggerate views of the Liberal Party. This was often done in pamphlet form. The Department of External Affairs (DEA) released a range of pamphlets designed to inform the public about the reasons for the war itself, and Australian involvement. Generally, these concentrate on the alleged link between communism in China and Vietnam, and its potential impact on Australia, through the

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<sup>2</sup> Mackay, I, *Australians in Vietnam*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968, p. 200.

‘domino theory’ – namely, the effect of a downward-moving communist takeover from China, through Vietnam and eventually to Australia. In 1965, *Viet Nam: Current Statements of Australian Policy* was published by the DEA; it consisted of quotes by Liberal politicians regarding the reasons for entering the war. The relevance of the war to Australians was raised repeatedly – something which had been questioned since the 29 April announcement of the same year that combat troops would be sent to Vietnam. In the words of Paul Hasluck, Minister for External Affairs, ‘It would not be in the Australian character or consistent with our national self-respect to stand aside while the Americans do the fighting in what we know are our own interests and our causes’.<sup>3</sup> These ‘interests’ were identified as the ‘domino theory’. Hasluck directly asserts that the war was not an ‘internal’ struggle, but ‘the application of the methods and doctrines of Communist warfare first evolved in China and then successfully used in North Viet Nam’.<sup>4</sup> This clearly lays out a justification for sending Australian men to Vietnam, through the potential danger of this war to both Australian, and world, democratic traditions. The concentration on China, particularly, succeeds in portraying the war in Vietnam as an essential part of the Cold War conflict against communism.

One of the most circulated Liberal Government pamphlets during the war, entitled *Vietnam: Questions and Answers* (1966), repeats the justification of both the war itself, as well as Australian actions. This pamphlet concentrates particularly on the claim that the United States, and thus Australia, broke the 1954 Geneva Agreements by providing military aid to the South Vietnamese, as one of the provisions was that neither North nor South Vietnam was to establish such a connection with any external power. The response of the DEA, in this publication, transfers the blame for

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<sup>3</sup> Hasluck, P, in Department of External Affairs, *Viet Nam: Current Statements of Australian Policy*, DEA, Canberra, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Hasluck, in DEA, *Viet Nam*, 9.

this to the North Vietnamese, directly stating that it was they who initially breached the Agreements.<sup>5</sup> It later addresses communism, assigning the blame for all violence in Vietnam to China.<sup>6</sup> This, again, serves to justify Australian actions by invoking the ‘domino theory’. These were not the only pamphlets that were published by the Federal Government in the years of the war, but readily demonstrate the Liberal line regarding Australia’s role in Vietnam to a public that included thousands of future soldiers.

Numerous pamphlets and other publications were distributed in opposition to these views. By their rebuttal of ideas circulated by the government, these serve to confirm the existence of an ‘official’ position on the war. Harold Levien, founder of the political journal *Voice*, wrote and distributed *Vietnam, Myth and Reality* in 1967 with the aim of providing the Australian public with crucial information that had been previously concealed from them as a result of the predominantly pro-war press. He did this by structuring his pamphlet in the same question and answer format as the DEA’s *Vietnam: Questions and Answers* but instead, contradicting the ‘myths’ used by the Australian government to justify participation in the war. One of these is the ‘domino theory’ explanation for Australian involvement, focussing on China’s communism and its ‘inevitable’ spread down to Australia through Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> In similar reaction, Alex Carey, Lecturer in Social and Applied Psychology at the University of New South Wales, wrote the pamphlet *Australian Atrocities in Vietnam* (1968). In it he argues emphatically that Australia became involved in Vietnam through ‘gross ignorance of Vietnam and purblind anti-communism’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Alan Watt, in *Vietnam: An Australian Analysis* (1968), exposes the hypocrisy of

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<sup>5</sup> Department of External Affairs, *Vietnam: Questions and Answers*, DEA, Canberra, 1966, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> DEA, *Vietnam: Questions and Answers*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Levien, H, *Vietnam, Myth and Reality*, H Levien, Rose Bay, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Carey, A, *Australian Atrocities in Vietnam*, RS Gould, Convenor, Vietnam Action Campaign, Sydney, 1968, p. 19.

South Vietnamese ‘democracy’, and contrasts it with the allegedly ‘evil’ linked Chinese and North Vietnamese communism.<sup>9</sup> Levien, Carey and Watt all oppose the DEA’s perspective on the war and present numerous reasons for its invalidity, however these will be focussed on further later in this chapter. They are significant here in so far as the felt need to rebut government justifications for involvement reveals how widely those ideas were spread in Australian society.

In retrospect, more recent accounts confirm the questionable accuracy of the views of the Australian Government in the years before and during the war. Michael Sexton, in his controversial book *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam* (2002), repeats the Cold War-themed emphasis on the threat of North Vietnamese communism in explaining the impetus for involvement.<sup>10</sup> He identifies a link between Australia and Vietnam as early as 1951, quoting the then Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, referring to ‘democratic forces in Vietnam’ and their readiness to combat communism.<sup>11</sup> He also demonstrates that when Australia began to consider sending troops, this focus was tied in with security concerns over South East Asia.<sup>12</sup> John Murphy, in *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia’s Vietnam War* (1993), also quotes Casey to demonstrate fears of communism from the 1950s, such as the reference in May 1954 to ‘the black cloud of communist China’ and the overwhelming need for protection against it so that Australian ‘children do not end up pulling rickshaws with hammer and sickle signs on their sides’.<sup>13</sup> Again, this concern is closely related to Australian security and, as Murphy suggests, the

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<sup>9</sup> Watt, A, *Vietnam: An Australian Analysis*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1968, pp. 106, 130.

<sup>10</sup> This is the second edition of Sexton, M, *War for the Asking: Australia’s Vietnam Secrets*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Sexton, M, *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Sexton, *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Casey, R, in Murphy, J, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia’s Vietnam War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p. xviii.

fear of 'Asian' communist takeover.<sup>14</sup> This follows Liberal Government pamphlets that fail to distinguish between Vietnamese and Chinese communism, but instead group them as a common menace – a problem of understanding identified by both dissenters during the war and revisionists after the war. Such a simplification of the issues surrounding the Vietnam War was surely an influence on future Australian soldiers, whether volunteers or those conscripted.

Other sources published since the war reveal similar reasons for both Australian entry into and general attitudes toward the Vietnam War. Greg Lockhart's chapter 'Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy 1965-1985' in Kenneth Maddock and Barry Wright's *War: Australia and Vietnam* (1987), focuses on what he sees as Australia's obsolete imperialism and the need for increased guarantee of security from the United States as instigators in involvement. Lockhart maintains that the source of Australia's fear of the 'red peril' was lack of knowledge of Asia as a whole, particularly of South East Asia.<sup>15</sup> Also following this security-focused idea are two authors of the official histories of the Vietnam War, Peter Edwards and Ian McNeill. Edwards' chapter 'Some Reflections on the Australian Government's Commitment to the Vietnam War' in Doyle, Grey and Pierce's *Australia's Vietnam War* (2002) points towards the threat from Malaya and Indonesia and the need to keep the United States in South East Asia as a protection.<sup>16</sup> McNeill agrees in his chapter 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War' in the same volume – although

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, xxii.

<sup>15</sup> Lockhart, G, 'Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy 1965-1985' in Maddock, K & Wright, B (eds.), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, Harper & Row, Sydney, 1987, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, P, 'Some Reflections on the Australian Government's Commitment to the Vietnam War' in Doyle, J, Grey, J & Pierce, P (eds.), *Australia's Vietnam War*, Texas A&M University Press, Texas, 2002, p. 7.

Vietnam was not Australia's biggest concern in the area, fears that Australia would lose the security of the US remained a major incentive for involvement.<sup>17</sup>

There is another connection with the United States that dominated accounts of Australian involvement in the years of the Vietnam War – the centrality of the request for aid by both the US and South Vietnam in convincing the Liberal Government to join them in fighting against North Vietnam. Sexton mentions the existence of an 'official' claim that it was these appeals to Australia that prompted entrance into the war, rather than more self-seeking desires.<sup>18</sup> Supporting this, Stuart Rintoul, in *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices* (1989) quotes former Prime Minister Robert Menzies in 1969 asserting that the decision to enter Vietnam was contingent on an invitation by South Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> This stance reveals that Australians living through the war were told that Australian authorities did not want to enter the Vietnam War of their own volition, but were obligated to by their 'loyalty' to the United States and desire to protect South Vietnam from the dangers of communism. This can be directly compared to reasons given, particularly in parliament, for involvement in the Boer War – that is, the need to prove loyalty to Britain, and to aid British settlers against supposedly tyrannical Boers. In both the South African and Vietnamese case, these reasons were questioned, and disproved, during and after the war's end.

One of the most controversial topics during the war was the issue of conscription. This affected all male youths, who were forced to register, as well as those who were eventually called up. Not all men who were drafted were willing to go to Vietnam,

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<sup>17</sup> McNeill, I, 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War' in Doyle, J, Grey, J & Pierce, P (eds.), *Australia's Vietnam War*, Texas A&M University Press, Texas, 2002, pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> Sexton, *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Menzies, R, in Rintoul, S, *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices*, Mandarin Australia, Melbourne, 1989, p. 1.



choosing instead to either go into hiding, openly refuse and face imprisonment, or plead conscientious objection through the court system.<sup>20</sup> Such a reaction from conscripts shows the effect of this issue on men in Australia, whether future soldiers or not. The conscription debate spawned both open supporters and opponents, but publications focussing on this issue during the war itself came mainly from the latter group. It is important to note, however, that not all who opposed conscription also disagreed with the war itself. Most who wrote on the topic at this time highlighted the importance of Australia's military contribution while labelling conscription unnecessary. Such a stance from supporters of the war further confirms the effect this issue would certainly have had on potential or current soldiers.

In *Politics and Foreign Policy in Australia: the Impact of Vietnam and Conscription* (1970), political scientist Henry Albinski analyses the protest movement that appeared after the renewed National Service Act was announced in November 1964. Albinski openly maintains that Australia needs to strengthen its military so as to be able to defend itself, but does so while emphasising his perceived need to prevent conscription.<sup>21</sup> The focus of this book is on the effect of conscription on party politics, as well as the relationship between Australia and Asia. Albinski maintains that enhanced public awareness of events in Vietnam also increased interest in foreign policy issues generally, particularly concerning Asia. As a result, this brought the public's reactions into the minds of Australian politicians, as a further factor influencing Australian foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> This then affected those men who were later randomly chosen for military duty. Albinski's overview of the anti-conscription

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<sup>20</sup> For Australian first-hand accounts of these, see Langley, G, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Albinski, HS, *Politics and Foreign Policy in Australia: the Impact of Vietnam and Conscription*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1970, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Albinski, *Politics and Foreign Policy in Australia*, 207-208.

movement is excellent, and his observations on the influence of the population on government policy are rare among works on the topic written during the war itself.

Albinski was not the only academic to comment on conscription during the war. In 1968, Roy Forward and Bob Reece edited the volume *Conscription in Australia*, which contains a number of anti-conscription perspectives, including significant opinion pieces on the re-introduction of the National Service Act in 1964. Roy Forward, in 'Conscription, 1964-1968' presents a relatively simple account of the laws governing the Act. Important within this is his view that conscription was unnecessary for the Vietnam War, based on his observation that in the years before 1964, around 70% of army volunteers were rejected, and only 14% each on medical or educational grounds. He presents the argument that if the Army educated some of those refused entry or raised more taxes to pay higher wages to volunteers, the need for conscription would be reduced.<sup>23</sup> The concluding comments clearly state that conscription could have been avoided by changing Army policy, but he does say that the conscription agenda has generally been impartial with the exception of the inconsistent treatment of conscientious objectors.<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, this point has been confirmed since the war in the unpublished working paper by Ann-Mari Jordens entitled *Conscientious Objection and the Vietnam War* (1989). In this short study, the laws supporting those who claimed to be conscientious objectors of the Vietnam War were proven ineffective in adequately providing for the needs of this group, namely, aiding them in the avoidance of military duty.<sup>25</sup> This is done through an analysis of both the laws that govern the National Service Act and individual cases of conscientious objection that went through the courts during the Vietnam War.

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<sup>23</sup> Forward, R, 'Conscription, 1964-1968' in Forward, R & Reece, B (eds.), *Conscription in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1968, pp. 83-85.

<sup>24</sup> Forward, 'Conscription, 1964-1968', 137.

<sup>25</sup> Jordens, A-M, *Conscientious Objection and the Vietnam War*, Working Paper no. 73, Peace Research Centre, Canberra, 1989, p. 37.

Thomas B Millar, a former academic in International Relations at the Australian National University, agrees with Forward that altered provisions for volunteers would have been more effective than the introduction of conscription in his chapter 'Military Considerations'. However, his grounds are slightly different – Millar opposes the option of educating the rejected volunteers on the grounds that the military is not an appropriate place for such training.<sup>26</sup> He also disagrees with the lowering of Army standards or the increase of pay rates for volunteer soldiers. Rather, he focuses his objection to conscription on the 'Australian spirit of voluntarism', which he believes will be adversely affected if a significant part of the Australian Army was made up of conscripts. Although Millar does not reject the National Service Act outright, he firmly believes that the number of conscripts in the Australian Army should be minimal.<sup>27</sup>

This point is directly opposed by James McAuley, founder of *Quadrant* and open supporter of the war in Vietnam, in 'For Volunteers Only?' in Jim Main's *Conscription: the Australian Debate* (1970). In this short opinion piece, McAuley clearly backs conscription, rejecting the defence of 'voluntarism' as a valid reason for opposition. He states that conscription is an obligation which 'a good citizen loyally accepts', despite any unwillingness.<sup>28</sup> Main's book not only illustrates support, but also includes excerpts from statements by opponents (such as Arthur Calwell, leader of the ALP until 1967), clearly showing both sides of the conscription discussion during the war years. Such a volume is valuable when considering the position of Australians toward conscription, as it recognises the

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<sup>26</sup> Millar, TB, 'Military Considerations' in Forward & Reece (eds.), *Conscription in Australia*, 146.

<sup>27</sup> Millar, 'Military Considerations', 151.

<sup>28</sup> McAuley, J, 'For Volunteers Only?' in Main, JM, *Conscription: the Australian Debate, 1901-1970*, Cassell, Stanmore, 1970, p. 150.

widespread opposition to the renewed scheme from 1964 from not only ‘protesters’, but also contemporary scholars interested in the war. Future or current soldiers in Vietnam would definitely have been exposed to these views, particularly through the mainstream media – monitored very closely by the Federal Government.

Shifts in the popular press in Australia during the Vietnam War can be directly related to emerging public opinion, as each was an influence on the other. This study will analyse newspapers with similar positions towards each war, focusing mainly on mainstream newspapers. Although Australia sent advisors to Vietnam from 1962, interest in the conflict shown by the media and general public was not largely noticeable until 1965 when the announcement was made that Australian soldiers would be involved in direct combat. Mainstream newspapers, such as Melbourne’s *The Age*, largely presented official government views from this time, but the pro-war bias implicit in their reports was far less overt than that seen in comparable newspapers during the Boer War. This can be attributed to the fact that there were more correspondents from media organisations in Vietnam itself with no official censorship. Thus, they were able to see the war from both the official and unofficial standpoint and report on it immediately. Despite this, Prue Torney-Parlicki notes that Australia’s press representation on the war front was scanty, and those who were on the war front generally relied on the US military-controlled ‘Five O’clock Follies’, ensuring their reports followed the official line.<sup>29</sup>

The war in Vietnam was never officially declared, which made it impossible for the Australian government or military to impose official censorship, thus giving media representatives unprecedented freedom to travel around Vietnam. Unofficial

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<sup>29</sup> Torney-Parlicki, P, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia’s Neighbours 1941-75*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, pp. 184-185.

editorial censorship certainly occurred, whether self-imposed by individual journalists or at the behest of editors back in Australia, but the opportunity to see the war first-hand pushed many representatives of the media against involvement, including many in Australia. This can be seen clearly by the appearance of an unprecedented number of letters published in *The Age* by opponents of the war both before and after the 1968 Tet Offensive.<sup>30</sup> The appearance of anti-Vietnam letters in a mainstream newspaper before Tet, the event that has often been quoted as the main reason for the widespread dissent from early 1968, suggests that more pronounced opposition was already occurring. In fact, Lecturer in History at the Australian National University, Geoffrey Fairbairn, commented in 1968 on the increasing amount of opposition appearing amongst Australian correspondents reporting on Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> This is particularly significant in a newspaper as popular as *The Age*, which almost certainly would have been under a level of government pressure to follow the ‘official’ line. Naturally then, this would reach future combat soldiers, and demonstrates that those who were conscripted or volunteered to fight in the later years of Australian involvement could have reached Vietnam with a very different point of view on the war than those who had ended their ‘tour’ by the late 1960s.

Two more recent investigations into the Australian media during the Vietnam War have focussed on government control of the media. Trish Payne and Prue Torney-Parlicki have both concentrated on the success with which the Liberal Government imposed limitations on the press during the war. Payne, in *War and Words: the Australian Press and the Vietnam War* (2007), investigates five major events during the war and their press coverage to determine the extent of US and Australian

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Hearn, AB, ‘Teachers’ views on Vietnam’, *The Age*, 4 January 1968, p. 5; Henderson, JA, “‘Press-ganged’ into Vietnam War”, *The Age*, 6 January 1968, p. 5; Hornabrook, RK, ‘A time to speak up on Vietnam’, *The Age*, 5 February 1968, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia*, 199.

government control over media reports. Each period chosen by Payne is significant from a press viewpoint, especially from the political background from which she is writing: the beginning of Australia's advisory role in 1962; the sending of a battalion in 1965; the 1966 entry of a Task Force; the 'water torture incident' of 1968; and the first withdrawal announcement in December 1969. However, these were not necessarily the most historically significant events. It could be argued that the Tet Offensive would have been more fitting, or the 1969 Liberal Party electoral victory that magnified the popularity and importance of the Vietnam Moratoriums of 1970-1971, or even the National Service Act announcement of November 1964.

Despite her choice of events, Payne's intention – that is, to demonstrate the ability of the Liberal Government to orchestrate the media during the making of major public decisions – is a success. The blame apportioned to the media for its inaccurate and biased reportage during the war, particularly by dissenters, is demonstrated by Payne not to be the fault of media organizations. Rather, the centralisation of all political news, as well as the utter lack of overseas correspondents, forced most of the press to rely on the one-sided Canberra Press Gallery for announcements, as well as Reuters and the Australian Associated Press (AAP).<sup>32</sup> This is supported in Torney-Parlicki's account in *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia's Neighbours 1941-75* (2000), which takes a more controversial stance on censorship than Payne's. Here the Australian media's lack of scope during Vietnam is attributed to preoccupations with Indonesia and Malaysia. Both Torney-Parlicki and Payne claim that the term 'uncensored' is invalid, despite the lack of formal censorship on Vietnam as an 'undeclared war', and that the Australian Army and Liberal Government attempted to impose censorship. *Somewhere in Asia* claims that after the Tet Offensive the

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<sup>32</sup> Payne, T, *War and Words: The Australian Press and the Vietnam War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2007, pp. 12-14.

Australian government attempted to introduce a form of censorship named the ‘D-notice system’ without a formal public announcement, as it became clear that relying on media and government ties to ensure self-censorship by editors and journalists was no longer effective.<sup>33</sup> These studies are both significant as they reveal government and military constraints on the press, although in both cases media organisations themselves are not scrutinised closely enough in apportioning blame for the often biased reportage.

It is clear that those who either volunteered or were conscripted to fight in Vietnam would have been exposed to the official government line through the media and perhaps even the above pamphlets published by the Liberal Party.<sup>34</sup> For some, this may have aided them in their decision to enlist. However, they would also have been aware of the opposition to the war, demonstrated by press content such as that mentioned above in *The Age*, as well as the fact that protests were, for various reasons, almost always reported by the media. Sean Scalmer, in *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (2002), presents an opposing focus to Payne and Torney-Parlicki – the Australian protest movement and its relationship with the media from the Vietnam War until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Scalmer exposes the changes that have occurred in Australian society, especially regarding its attitude to, and involvement in, politics. Quoting Wayne Haylen, a draft resister during the Vietnam War, Scalmer labels the public protest act a ‘political gimmick’.<sup>35</sup> He claims that dramatic public actions, such as draft card burning, were devised during Vietnam to get both public and political attention through the media, and by doing so emphasise to the general public the importance

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<sup>33</sup> Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia*, 201, 203.

<sup>34</sup> See pp. 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> Scalmer, S, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 4.

of standpoints which opposed the war. This was accomplished particularly by the occupation of, and attacks upon, official government buildings in an attempt to ‘demystify the powerful’ for the first time in Australia.<sup>36</sup> Thus, his study provides an alternative viewpoint to traditional accounts that focus on effects on the media by those who supported the war, particularly the government and military, and reveals the influence of those in Australia who openly opposed the war in the public arena, including soldiers.

Opponents were also directly making views against the war public, but on a much smaller scale. University-based anti-war societies such as the Monash University Labor Club (MULC) and the University Study Group on Vietnam (USGOV) published pamphlets revealing their version of the ‘truth’ about Vietnam. Individuals who wished to make their views public, usually academics or students, also joined these groups. Carey, in *Australian Atrocities in Vietnam*, labels the justifications for involvement, that Australia was protecting South Vietnam from communism and that North Vietnam breached the Geneva Agreements through ‘aggression’, as ‘two vast lies’ backing the war.<sup>37</sup> These ideas are also identified and condemned in other similar publications by the war’s opponents, such as Levien, who exposes the strong trade links between Australia and China, and reveals the irrelevance of communism to the nationalist struggle between North and South Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> He also mentions that the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) alliance with the United States did not require Australia to join them in any war and that the war itself was a breach of the 1954 Geneva Accords.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Scalmer, *Dissent Events*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Carey, *Australian Atrocities in Vietnam*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Levien, *Vietnam, Myth and Reality*, 16-18.

<sup>39</sup> Levien, *Vietnam, Myth and Reality*, 28.



In 1965, the MULC published a series of lectures entitled *The Vietnam Tragedy*. Anthony Clunies-Ross and Graeme Duncan, both Monash academics, spoke about Australia's role and the impact of the war on the Vietnamese people, respectively. Both lecturers were in favour of discontinuing involvement, with Clunies-Ross presenting what he claimed were the real reasons for Australian involvement and exposing the exaggeration of the 'Communist threat'.<sup>40</sup> Duncan presented his lecture as a rebuttal to the recently published Liberal Government pamphlet *The Facts about South Vietnam* (1966), attacking its claims as simplistic and inaccurate.<sup>41</sup> Many works published during the war by anti-war individuals took a similar position. Duncan's claims that the 'domino theory', namely, the consequences of allowing communism to flourish in Vietnam, was misleading, and that the North Vietnamese army was, in fact, popular among South Vietnamese citizens, were common in 1960s literature against the war. Such views were popular ones among those who opposed the war, but few of these were able to reach the general public until after the Tet Offensive of 1968 – as mentioned earlier. Thus, soldiers who were leaving Australia for Vietnam after this time would have been far more likely to be exposed to such viewpoints opposing the war.

Another strong voice against the war was Dr Jim Cairns, the greatest left-wing parliamentary opponent of the war and Labor member for Yarra, then Lalor. Cairns was outspoken and direct about his disapproval of the war, publishing numerous works on the topic, and acting as chair of the Vietnam Moratorium Committee in the early 1970s. Although the earlier war in South Africa was notable for its parliamentary opposition, men such as Henry Bournes Higgins were not able to extend their ideas to the Australian population to such a degree as Cairns – due, no

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<sup>40</sup> Clunies-Ross, A, 'Vietnam – Australia's Role' in Monash University Labor Club, *The Vietnam Tragedy*, MULC, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Duncan, G, 'Vietnam – The War and the People' in MULC, *The Vietnam Tragedy*, 11.

doubt, to differences in communication technology, as well as public disapproval associated with ‘disloyalty’ throughout the Boer War.

Cairns’ publications on the war were written with the same intention as those published by the Liberal government – to reveal to the public the realities of the war, including the relationship between South East Asia and Australia. *Living with Asia* (1965) warns against the alienation of Asia and urges Australians to gain more knowledge of Asian cultures. In addition, Cairns stresses the importance of concentrating on Australia’s own defence requirements in order to stand alone militarily, but to do so with a more accurate view of its close proximity to Asia, as well as communism in general.<sup>42</sup> *The Eagle and the Lotus: Western Intervention in Vietnam 1847-1971* (1971) was the second edition of a study that came after the decisive Tet Offensive in Vietnam from 31 January 1968. In this book, Cairns reiterates past statements on the effectiveness of Western intervention against ‘Communism’, declaring that it had not reduced its power in either North or South Vietnam.<sup>43</sup> Cairns repeats the claim that Australian reasons for intervention were invalid, including fear of Communist China and need for US protection from South-East Asia, restating that the original hostility came from South Vietnam’s Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by the United States, and not China or North Vietnam.<sup>44</sup>

Cairns, through both his words and actions, certainly aided the change in Australian public opinion. However, the greatest instigator for opposition to the war was the lack of honesty by the Liberal government when providing reasons for entering the war. This was rarely commented on during the war years. Interestingly, the

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<sup>42</sup> Cairns, JF, *Living with Asia*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1965, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Cairns, JF, *The Eagle and the Lotus: Western Intervention in Vietnam 1847-1971*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 227.

<sup>44</sup> Cairns, *The Eagle and the Lotus*, 224-225.

viewpoints of those who disapproved of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War were to be finally confirmed from the 1980s, due to the declassification of official documents under the thirty year rule.

The years immediately after the withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam were characterised by a predominant academic silence on the war. After Gough Whitlam's election as Prime Minister, cancellation of the National Service Act and withdrawal from Vietnam, many in the anti-war movement lost interest in the cause, leading to an increased focus on other domestic issues such as Aboriginal rights and gender equality. Also, the profound effect of military service in Vietnam on soldiers made it difficult for returning veterans to speak publicly about their experiences, particularly in the years immediately after the war. Thus, excluding 'official' histories, few Australian examinations of Vietnam were written in the late 1970s.

Retrospective examinations of the Vietnam War, appearing from the early 1980s, cover various aspects of the war, but focus mainly on Australian politics and public opinion, rather than soldiers' perspectives. Studies of Australia's relationship with the United States and the actual reasons for entering the war were popular among scholars, as well as the anti-war movement and general public reactions, including those of women. In addition, psychological and medical studies on the effects of the war itself on soldiers, including the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder and illnesses caused by defoliants used in Vietnam are common from the late 1990s until today. These are significant in the history of the war, but given the focus of this research – namely, contemporary public and soldier attitudes to the war, as well as government policies surrounding it – a deep analysis of such studies is not justified in this thesis.

The official reasons provided by the Liberal government for involvement before Australia's entry into the war included the need to ensure security against South East Asia, the force of the 'domino theory', and through this, the need to protect South Vietnamese civilians from Communist China-led North Vietnam. On the whole, these were believed by a large section of the Australian public for the majority of the war. As demonstrated above, many who opposed the war, such as Levien, Carey and Cairns, disputed these justifications at the time. After the war, it took almost ten years for scholars to begin concentrating on this aspect of Australia's Vietnam involvement.

Although this thesis is focussing on the attitudes of soldiers during the wars themselves, viewpoints on the Vietnam War that have emerged after the declassification of government documents, mainly from the early 1990s, are not entirely relevant to the actual state of opinion affecting those who were to fight in Vietnam. However, when investigating later studies, even those by 'official' historians, it is important to note their similarities with publications written by opponents during the war, particularly when discussing the reasons for Australia's involvement. Overall, these 'revisionist' examinations emphasise that Australian security concerns were based on an outdated view of Asia in general, connected to ANZUS and SEATO responsibilities. Many criticise government concentration on the 'domino theory' in explaining involvement, echoing dissenters such as Levien and Carey. Although it is impossible to state conclusively, such evidence emerging in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century perhaps gives more credence to the idea, stated earlier, that opponents of the war had an impact on the attitudes of men on their way to Vietnam – particularly after 1968, when it became clearer to the general public of both the US

and Australia that they were being misled, even lied to, concerning the success of the Vietnam mission.

Michael Sexton's *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam* (2002), focuses on Australian goals – namely, security from South East Asian communism – to explain the Liberal Government decision to send combat troops to Vietnam in 1965.<sup>45</sup> This focus on Australia disputes 'official' histories during the war itself that emphasise the plight of the South Vietnamese and requests made by the US as alternative major initiators. Such an explanation was to become a theme in studies of the war from the 1990s.

On the other hand, Siracusa and Cheong, in *America's Australia, Australia's America: A Guide to Issues and References* (1997), attribute Australian involvement in the Vietnam War to the problem of maintaining relations with the United States. They claim that, although encouraged by the US, Australia willingly entered the war because of the need to keep the US in the South East Asian region as strong allies, particularly after Britain's post-World War Two fall from power.<sup>46</sup> This idea is supported by Murphy, who, in *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (1993) focuses on fear of the Asian 'other' and of communism in the decision to support the US in South East Asia, as the only hope of protection after the predominant British withdrawal.<sup>47</sup> This can be aligned with Lockhart's view in his chapter 'Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy 1965-1985' (1987), as he, too, agrees that an obsolete view of Asia, particularly Communist China, had led to closer ties with the United States in Vietnam. Lockhart also admits that the threat of

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<sup>45</sup> Sexton, *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Siracusa, JM & Cheong, Y-H, *America's Australia, Australia's America: A Guide to Issues and References*, Regina Books, California, 1997, pp. 43-44.

<sup>47</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, xix.

communism was exaggerated both in the minds of the Liberal Government and of the Australian public, who did not ideologically separate Chinese and North Vietnamese communism. This led to involvement in Vietnam, to ensure US protection from the impact of the 'domino theory'.<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting, however, that although the Liberal Government repeatedly mentioned the 'domino theory' - predicting Chinese communism spreading south through Vietnam towards Australia - as a major reason for involvement in Vietnam, recent histories focus on threats coming from other parts of Asia when explaining the decision to commit troops. Woodard, in *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* (2004), expresses such a view.<sup>49</sup> As mentioned earlier, both Edwards and McNeill also focus on the threats coming from Malaya and Indonesia, for example, and the need for US protection from forces in these countries. In addition, one of the official histories of the war, *Crises and Commitment: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* (1992), co-authored by Peter Edwards and Gregory Pemberton, stresses the necessity of Australian dependence on the US for protection and backing, based not on Vietnam directly but on Australian relations with Indonesia and the United Kingdom, as well as pressure through the Laotian crisis.<sup>50</sup>

Incidentally, it warrants noting in this literature review that the Edwards and Pemberton study is one of nine extensive and well-researched official volumes written by various experts on the Vietnam War. These cover a range of topics,

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<sup>48</sup> Lockhart, 'Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy 1965-1985', 13.

<sup>49</sup> Woodard, G, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 159.

<sup>50</sup> See Edwards, P, with Pemberton, G, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in the Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp. 182-228.

mainly concentrating on military operations, but extending to medical teams and the role of the RAAF in South East Asia. In the context of the current study, which is an investigation into human attitudes and behaviour as a result of war, more strictly military history does not entirely apply. Thus, accounts of Australian society, as affecting soldiers in Vietnam, have formed the focus of the research undertaken.

Another aspect of involvement in Vietnam disputed since the 1960s is the reaction of the Australian public to the war. The concentration of the press on the anti-Vietnam War movement focussed on the sensational, creating a lasting image of those who opposed the war as extreme and often violent. Thus, post-war opinion of Vietnam has clung to such representations, with those who opposed the war more prominent in people's minds than its supporters. Since the war, scholarship on Australian public opinion, including the protest movement, religious opposition and the position of women has been relatively popular. Although the home front has received a little more attention than other aspects of the war, there is still an alarming dearth of information, especially considering the effect this war had on both Australia and Australians. In addition, there have not been any investigations into the potential impact of home front opinion on the battlefield, or specifically, soldiers at war – both conscripts and regulars. Thus, an in-depth examination of such sources is unnecessary in the context of the present study, which focuses on both home and war front factors that had a direct influence on the fighting soldier.

The under-representation of public attitudes in Australia during the war is important to note, however, as it is a direct reflection of the lack of scholarly attention paid to Australia's Vietnam War involvement, particularly when focussing on the viewpoints and behaviour of soldiers. This is not to say that the tale of the Vietnam

‘digger’ has not been told. As is the case with the Boer War, numerous soldiers during and since the war have published personal reminiscences of their Vietnam experience. These were often carried out for different reasons, at times being, for the sake of remembrance, an account of military actions the author was involved in, but occasionally a deeper intention is revealed. For example, Barry Heard, in *Well Done, Those Men: Memoirs of a Vietnam Veteran* (2007) admits that he began writing his experiences of Vietnam after a suggestion made by his psychiatrist that this may provide a release from wartime memories. With him a victim of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Heard’s story portrays a very different version of Vietnam than many other veterans who have written personally about their service. Although this account does not set out to analyse the war itself, or the reasons for Australian involvement, it presents an unbiased account by a veteran who has been deeply affected by his war service. But such reminiscences are of limited relevance to this study for reasons associated with the problems of remembrance and cultural memory that have been discussed earlier, as well as comparability of records between the two wars.<sup>51</sup>

However, it is necessary to compare Heard with former Australian Army officers such as Captain Arthur Barry Petersen, for example, who have written predominantly narrative retrospectives of the war. Added into this group are collections of veteran impressions of the war, such as Noel Giblett’s edited volume *Homecomings: Stories from Australian Vietnam Veterans and their Wives* (1987) and Stuart Rintoul’s *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices* (1989), both excellent collections of soldier reminiscences of events and emotions towards the war. Also, Gary McKay’s *Going Back: Australian Veterans Return to Vietnam* (2007) documents the feelings of men

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<sup>51</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 26-27.



encountering Vietnam memories when revisiting the battlefronts they had fought in. This is, again, a relevant record of the Vietnam experience, but as an aid to understanding soldiers, it is not as representative of their emotions while at war as much as accounts they have written from the actual battlefront. While these accounts are useful in understanding the retrospective views of veterans towards their involvement in Vietnam, they have been written after the soldier has not only experienced home front reactions but also had years to reflect on experiences, which can possibly affect the accuracy of lasting memory of events. As Frank Kermode maintains: 'Writing about memories is less a way of finding out what actually occurred than what, in the fullness of time, one is capable of making of what may have done so'.<sup>52</sup> Also, in this study in particular, living veterans do exist for one war, but not the other – which reduces the comparability of their primary source base. Thus, published retrospective accounts of the war will not be used within this study – any accounts by soldiers will be restricted to those written while at the battlefront.<sup>53</sup>

The recent popularity of the use of letters in historical studies has extended to the Vietnam War. Like published collections of letters from the Boer War, those based on Vietnam are notable for their lack of editorial analysis, despite the value of the letters themselves as evidence of soldier opinion. Gary McKay has published on various aspects of the Vietnam War. The republished version of *Vietnam Fragments* (1992), the renamed *Bullets, Beans and Bandages: Australians at War in Vietnam* (1999) attempts to record the opinions of not only soldiers, but also support staff, while in Vietnam.<sup>54</sup> Again, this collection provides an excellent insight into attitudes

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<sup>52</sup> Kermode, F, in Hynes, S, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration' in Winter, J & Sivan, E (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> For more information, see Chapter 1, pp. 25-26.

<sup>54</sup> McKay, G, *Bullets, Beans and Bandages: Australians at War in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999.

toward the war, but the fact that these first-hand impressions are not evaluated while taking either public attitudes or government policies into account prevents a full contextual understanding by readers. Published collections of letters sent home from Vietnam by an individual soldier are not common but can also be found, some of which are self-published. These are intended purely as a record to ensure that the words of these soldiers are not lost, as can be seen by Ted Mertens' *'Dear Mrs Casey': the Letters of Jim Houston...Just an Ordinary Anzac* (2000), which is a short collection of letters by an individual conscript.<sup>55</sup> Other than personal accounts, examinations of soldiers in the Australian Army, and as a military force in Vietnam, have also been published. These generally follow the pattern set by the categories outlined above.

When compared with the number of studies from the United States, however, it is evident that Australia's experience of the war is alarmingly under-represented, particularly regarding the attitudes and behaviour of soldiers themselves. Those investigations of the war that do concentrate on soldiers are either veterans' reminiscences or factual accounts of the war's events or of the Australian Army. Like more recent works on the Boer War, even those containing soldiers' reactions to the war while in Vietnam very rarely analyse their content. The historian, Jeffrey Grey, whose examination of Australian historiography of the Vietnam War reveals its deficiencies when compared with that of the US, highlights this; he mentions that reminiscences by both soldiers and journalists are predominantly narrative-based.<sup>56</sup> There are no Australian studies, as yet, which compare public and soldier reactions

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<sup>55</sup> Mertens, T (ed.), *'Dear Mrs Casey': the Letters of Jim Houston...Just an Ordinary Anzac*, Self-Published, July 2000.

<sup>56</sup> See Grey, J, 'Getting into the Books: Vietnam as History in Australia' in Doyle, Grey & Pierce (eds.), *Australia's Vietnam War*, Texas A&M University Press, Texas, 2002, p. 100.

to the Vietnam War in the years of the war, taking into account government and military policies. This raises the value of conducting such an investigation.

Given the relatively small number of Australians sent to Vietnam compared with those from the United States, the difference in output on the war is understandable. Although Vietnam was a highly contentious issue in Australia, it was a much more visible social issue both during the war and after the war in the United States – for both soldiers and veterans. This can be explained by the fact that the number of Australian soldiers sent comprised less than three per cent of the total US allied force. This explains the existence of classic texts on the experience of US soldiers such as Peter Bourne's *Men, Stress and Vietnam* (1970) and Christian G Appy's *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (1993).<sup>57</sup> These studies examine the Vietnam War soldier in terms of his background and training, so as to understand the resultant behaviour when in direct combat. Like Australian studies, many studies use first-hand US soldier narratives, such as Lloyd B Lewis' seminal work *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (1985). Moreover, many – including Lewis - not only transcribe the words of soldiers, but also analyse them in conjunction with home front views.<sup>58</sup> In Australian studies, the focus has unfortunately been on biography, rather than analysis – leaving our historical record on Vietnam lacking. In addition, in the United States there was not such a long scholarly silence on the war, particularly on the subject of soldiers. Works such as psychologist Robert Jay Lifton's *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims nor Executioners* (1973) and sociologist John Helmer's *Bringing the War Home: The American Soldier in Vietnam and After* (1974) appeared during the war,

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<sup>57</sup> Bourne, PG, *Men, Stress and Vietnam*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1970; Appy, CG, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, University of Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993.

<sup>58</sup> Lewis, LB, *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1985.

both outlining the impact of military duty on Vietnam War soldiers.<sup>59</sup> This also explains the greater number of US-focussed examinations of the experience of the Vietnam War. In contrast, most Australian studies appeared after the declassification of government documents, another reflection on the lack of research on specifically Australian soldiers.

The fact that a deep scholarly study of Australian soldiers' attitudes and behaviour in Vietnam does not exist, other than what is mentioned in the official histories, is alarming. Although some historical, psychological and medical examinations of veterans have surfaced, these are minimal in both number and scope when compared to the attention paid to veterans in American studies. It is clear, therefore, that a deeper analysis of the attitudes and behaviour of Australian soldiers in Vietnam is still required.

The lack of publications on Vietnam for more than a decade immediately after the war extended particularly to accounts of soldiers and veterans. Maddock and Wright's *War: Australia and Vietnam* contains only two chapters focussing on soldiers. Jan Green's 'A Soldier's Wife's Story' reports on reasons for enlistment in the Army, as well as soldiers' feelings towards the war. The rationale expressed by Green is markedly positive, stating that 'Vietnam was an all consuming military passion' for soldiers involved.<sup>60</sup> This personal account represents a group of men who went to Vietnam, but fails to address dilemmas faced by all, particularly conscripts. In the same volume, the other chapter devoted to soldiers, 'The Attack at Chin Duch/Duc Hanh', by Peter Rothwell, is a clichéd description of soldier

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<sup>59</sup> Lifton, RJ, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims nor Executioners*, Wildwood House, London, 1973; Helmer, J, *Bringing the War Home: The American Soldier in Vietnam and After*, The Free Press, New York, 1974.

<sup>60</sup> Green, J, 'A Soldier's Wife's Story' in Maddock, K & Wright, B (eds.), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, Harper and Row Publishers, Sydney, 1987, p. 121.

behaviour in Vietnam. Rothwell speaks of the Australian soldier in Vietnam's ability to be 'unique' and the fact that they would 'not quit until the job is done'.<sup>61</sup> Such comments are far too general and fail to take into account any conflicting soldier opinion.

Peter King's *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War* (1983), published four years before Maddock and Wright's volume, contains a similar chapter by Jane Ross entitled 'Australian Soldiers in Vietnam: Product and Performance'. In this, the logistics of the commitment to Vietnam are discussed, with a brief explanation of the 'nature' of the Australian soldier. Although highly generalised, Ross makes a few noteworthy points. She states, for example, that Australian soldiers never acted as though they felt dissatisfied by the Australian Army or with the war itself, although an earlier comment in the same chapter reveals that Australians were often displeased with the standard of their officers, and objected openly as a result.<sup>62</sup> Despite this inconsistency, her reflections on the difference between the grouped nature of Australian soldiers when rotated, compared with those from the US who were sent in and out of Vietnam individually within contingents, are accurate and useful. Ross attributes to this difference the more common breakdown among soldiers from the United States.<sup>63</sup> But this chapter is, again, too oversimplified when considering the reactions of soldiers to military policy, thus limiting its usefulness, despite the comparative lack of other accounts based on soldiers themselves in the early 1980s.

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<sup>61</sup> Rothwell, P, 'The Attack at Chin Duch/Duc Hanh' in Maddock, K & Wright, B (eds.), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, Harper and Row Publishers, Sydney, 1987, p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Ross, J, 'Australian Soldiers in Vietnam: Product and Performance' in King, P (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 87, 97.

<sup>63</sup> Ross, 'Australian Soldiers in Vietnam', 85.

After official documents began to be released from the early 1990s, more studies concentrating on the soldier began appearing. In Peter Pierce, Jeff Doyle and Jeffrey Grey's edited book *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam: A Bold Reassessment of the Myths, History and Culture of Australia's Longest War* (1991), Grey successfully analyses the Vietnam veteran's role in the Anzac tradition in the chapter 'Vietnam, Anzac and the Veteran'. He demonstrates that Australian civilians' view of soldiers is unrealistic, due to their never having experienced a war in the full sense. This, therefore, impacted on veterans of Vietnam by pressuring them to forego their own memories of war in favour of society's limited memories.<sup>64</sup> The next year, in Grey and Doyle's edited volume *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam* (1992), Grey went on in 'Memory and Public Myth' to compare the position of veterans of Vietnam to those who returned to Australia from earlier wars. Similar ideas are expressed, although Grey concentrates more on the label of 'professionalism' assigned to returned soldiers. This classification succeeds in differentiating the Vietnam veteran from both those in earlier wars, as well as from US soldiers, although the intention here was merely to confer an honourable image on Australia's veterans.<sup>65</sup> This examination of soldiers in terms of the Australian public's perceptions, as well as traditions of war before them, is excellent – however, it is unfortunate that more exploratory works such as this one have not resulted from the Vietnam War, especially those that involve the opinions of soldiers while on the war front, as well as their reactions to both a dissatisfied public and government policies they had no control over.

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<sup>64</sup> Grey, J, 'Vietnam, Anzac and the Veteran' in Pierce, P, Doyle, J & Grey, J (eds.), *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam: A Bold Reassessment of the Myths, History and Culture of Australia's Longest War*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1991, p. 65.

<sup>65</sup> Grey, J, 'Memory and Public Myth' in Grey, J & Doyle, J (eds.), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1992, pp. 141-143.

Robin Gerster and Joseph Pugliese both wrote chapters addressing the gender-focussed role of the Australian soldier in Vietnam. In Pierce, Doyle and Grey's *Vietnam Days*, Gerster discusses the rise of the 'Ocker' in Australian pop culture from the 1960s, and how this affected the image of fighting soldiers as opposed to the 'larrikin' image popularised around the Second World War. In his chapter 'Occidental Tourists: the "Ugly" Australian in Vietnam War Narrative', this image, with its 'chauvinistic' and 'xenophobic' connotations, is said to have extended into the male soldiers' perceptions of Vietnam.<sup>66</sup> This included the way the Vietnamese enemy and civilians were treated, particularly young Vietnamese women. This fear of 'the other' then extended, for young soldiers confused in an unknown country, to all outside the Australian Army, including Vietnamese, US soldiers, and anti-war protesters.<sup>67</sup> As a result, Gerster argues, this 'ockerised' image of Australians increased the alienation felt by Australian servicemen. He revisits this idea in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake's *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century* (1995), in which his chapter 'A Bit of the Other: Touring Vietnam' presents the 'otherness' of Vietnam, but, this time, in the context of soldiers as tourists.<sup>68</sup>

Considering both the large number who have experienced trauma as a result of their service in the Vietnam War and its relatively recent end, it is understandable that few non-autobiographical, non-narrative soldier analyses exist. Rather, particularly in the past twenty years, the concentration has been on veterans of the war or civilian reactions to their return from Vietnam. Janine Hiddlestone has written two essays on

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<sup>66</sup> Gerster, R, 'Occidental Tourists: the "Ugly" Australian in Vietnam War Narrative' in Pierce, P, Doyle, J & Grey, J (eds.), *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam: A Bold Reassessment of the Myths, History and Culture of Australia's Longest War*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1991, p. 204.

<sup>67</sup> Gerster, 'Occidental Tourists', 224.

<sup>68</sup> Gerster, R, 'A Bit of the Other: Touring Vietnam' in Damousi, J & Lake, M (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

Vietnam, based on interviews with 35 Australian ex-servicemen in Queensland. The first, 'Voices from the Battlefield: Personal Narratives as a Historical Tool in Studying the Place of the Vietnam War in Australian Society' (2002) documents the memories of these veterans regarding their return to Australia and subsequent treatment. Although this article acknowledges problems with memory that may arise in oral histories, her article ends with praise for oral history, stating it 'has the ability to give worth to the lives of those who may have felt disenfranchised by traditional history'.<sup>69</sup> However, she fails to consider the impact of this 'disenfranchisement' on recollected accounts from the war. Despite this, she does assert that incorrect memories can still produce a valuable account and her findings regarding the rejection of many veterans in post-Vietnam Australia are valid and well evidenced.

This is revisited by Hiddlestone in 'Continuing the Great Adventure? Australian Servicemen and the Vietnam War' (2004), which draws on principles of soldiering to investigate the effects of the specific type of military duty served by Australian soldiers in Vietnam – the shortness of the tour and the travelling distance from Australia, for example.<sup>70</sup> This is then related to the post-war experiences of veterans, including negative responses by society. This account reveals veteran reactions that have not been observed before, as well as providing a rare analysis, rather than narrative account, of Vietnam veterans. Thus, its value as a historical study is well defined.

Opinion on the Vietnam War has altered dramatically since the years of the war, particularly in the realm of 'official' history. More extensive examinations have been

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<sup>69</sup> Hiddlestone, J, 'Voices from the Battlefield: Personal Narratives as a Historical Tool in Studying the Place of the Vietnam War in Australian Society', *Journal of Australian History*, vol. 73, 2002, p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> Hiddlestone, J, 'Continuing the Great Adventure? Australian Servicemen and the Vietnam War', *Linq*, vol. 31, no. 1, May 2004.



carried out about the various facets of the home front during the war since the 1980s. This has extended to soldiers in relatively few Australian instances, especially when considering the attitudes and behaviour of soldiers on the battlefield and the influence of the home front and the Federal Government on them. Individual cases of soldiers are considered, but it is clear that a single comprehensive study relating the home and battlefronts during the Vietnam War does not exist in Australia, particularly based on the words of soldiers while at war, from letters and diaries.

Australian scholarship on the Vietnam War, as well as the Boer War, is lacking – especially when compared to that from Britain, for the war in South Africa, and the United States, for the Vietnam War. Although this is directly proportional to the number of soldiers who were involved in the war from each country, the fact that Australia sent fewer soldiers to each war does not make the effect on both soldiers and civilians less profound or the contribution any less significant. The absence of such studies has prompted the decision to focus in this present study on these somewhat similar wars to determine their effect on Australian soldiers fighting them. To do so, it is necessary to carry out an investigation into predominantly 20th century scholarly research into soldiering, and their specific application to each war through examining the letters and diaries of soldiers fighting in each war. This will ascertain whether the experience of warfare is similar irrespective of the war being fought or whether the various effects of the home front, with regard to both population and government, is a greater determinant of a soldier's behaviour in combat.

## Section B

# Analysis

There are numerous factors that contribute to a soldiers' overall experience of war and determine their attitudes and behaviour while fighting, not all of which are based on the battlefield. The second section of this thesis outlines these numerous aspects, highlighting predominantly 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly opinion on their significance to a soldier, and applying them to the publicly archived letters and diaries of Australian soldiers in the Boer and Vietnam Wars. For each aspect of warfare examined, there are often numerous relevant examples from the personal records. Every attempt has been made to include each one in the thesis itself, but due to the numerous examples found in each section, some are merely referred to in the footnotes. In this way, the similarities and differences between the sample of men fighting in these wars will be discovered, as well as the synonymy between their expressed viewpoints and past studies of soldiering.

Although the various facets of a soldier's war 'tour' are interrelated to a large extent, they have been separated into five general categories for the purposes of this thesis, each of which concentrates on a broader component of combat service. Chapter Four begins with the earliest stages of military service for a soldier, including reasons for enlistment, soldiers' outlooks between acceptance into the military and the beginning of combat duty, as well as the inevitable change in attitude upon discovering the 'realities' of war. Next, Chapter Five is based on the military structure itself,

including pre-war training, leadership, discipline, rotation and the role of comradeship in combat.

Following this more practical assessment, the focus lies on the psychological aspects of warfare, particularly morale and its workings. Chapter Six applies more recent research that emphasizes a soldier's enjoyment of killing itself to the archived personal records, in an attempt to discover whether the words of the sample of soldiers fighting in South Africa and Vietnam coincide with these views. In addition, the importance of fear, survival and morale itself as an active force in warfare will be investigated. Next, Chapter Seven continues the psychological concentration by highlighting various techniques adopted by soldiers in war to sustain high morale, including humour, drugs and alcohol. In addition, soldiers' attempts at diversion from combat itself will be examined, such as mutiny, 'fragging', desertion and suicide.

Chapter Eight will complete the direct analysis of soldiers' letters, by focusing on evidence of the differing impact of the home front in the everyday expressions of the Australians fighting in South Africa and Vietnam. This chapter will take into account both the soldiers on the war front as well as public opinion on the home front, to determine the differences between these soldiers fighting in two very distinct times.

These chapters are collectively aimed at pinpointing the various factors influencing soldier attitudes and behaviour during these wars, as well as war in general, in order to create a fuller picture of the similarities and differences between men in combat.

Their findings will culminate in the concluding chapter of this thesis, so as to discover whether the selected soldiers reacted similarly irrespective of the war in

which they were fighting, or whether individual features specific to each war were more significant in determining their stance.

## Chapter Four

# Initial Impressions of War and the War Front

The initial stages of a soldier's war journey begin long before enlistment takes place. All humans are surrounded by certain pressures since birth that contribute to the formation of their attitudes toward warfare in general and their own role within it. One such pressure is the continuing impact of the home front on a future or fighting soldier.<sup>1</sup> Factors like these contribute to a soldier's actual decision to enlist, as well as first impressions of battle, willingness to fight and perceptions of the enemy. They can contribute, as well, to the inevitable transition from 'new' to 'seasoned' soldier – that is, when the realities of war set in, resulting in possible disillusionment with warfare, a respect for the enemy, or a greater emphasis on 'duty' as combat motivation. This chapter will discuss principles of soldiering that deal with these phases of a soldier's tour of duty. These ideas will be examined in conjunction with evidence from the publicly archived letters and diaries of Australian Boer and Vietnam War soldiers in order to test whether they are corroborated by the attitudes of a group of soldiers fighting in these wars. This investigation will provide an indication of whether soldiers react in similar ways irrespective of the war they are fighting or whether unique factors, relating to both home and battle fronts, must also be taken into account in explaining their reactions before, and during, the first phases of their combat duty.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Eight.

Although ideology and patriotism – namely, the relationship between soldiers and their country – are often quoted as major factors in the willingness to go to war, more practical reasons can provide the critical motivation. Bill Gammage, in *The Broken Years: Australians in the Great War* (1974), attributes soldiers' expressions of patriotism to popular discourse within the societies from which they have come, rather than their own innermost desires.<sup>2</sup> This conclusion follows his examination of Australian World War One soldiers, where he found that public pressure and the notion of 'duty' influenced men far more, as did the prospect of secure employment and escape from pressing problems.<sup>3</sup> This coincides with views of other historians who similarly discount traditional concepts such as 'love of country' when considering reasons for enlistment. Richard Holmes admits that patriotism is roused when men are considering the prospect of enlisting, but denies this can be named as a major motivation for going to war. Rather, he names alternative incentives, such as the desire to leave unemployment, a dull occupation, as well as 'professional pride', or the call of duty.<sup>4</sup>

However, to discount patriotism as a motivator for military duty does not mean that soldiers who volunteer do not support the war's official cause. The concept of 'cause' is an important one when considering soldiers' reasons for enlistment. Kellett maintains that any soldier volunteering for war service will not do so unless he believes in the 'rightness of his country's cause'.<sup>5</sup> Major-General Richardson labels 'the cause' as a necessary mental factor in the creation and retention of morale in a

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<sup>2</sup> Gammage, B, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* [1974], Penguin Books, Victoria, 1975, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Holmes, R, *Firing Line*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1987, pp. 274-275.

<sup>5</sup> Kellett, A, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, 1982, p. 171.

soldier, both of which become more difficult as a long war continues.<sup>6</sup> If a soldier does not believe that the reasons for fighting a war are worthy, it is highly likely that this will reduce fighting ability. In fact, when considering US soldiers in World War Two, Holmes directly links positive opinion towards the war and effective combat performance.<sup>7</sup> Thus, soldier approval of the war is necessary both before and during conflicts, to ensure efficiency in combat persists.

The written words of the selection of soldiers fighting in South Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century appear to confirm some of these arguments. Most writers cited reasons unrelated to the war's cause for their enlisting to fight in the Boer War, and there was only one soldier in the sample who spoke openly about his belief in the justness of the cause, or the need for loyalty to Britain. Private Watson Augustus Steel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Regiment of Mounted Rifles, referred directly to the decisions of the colonial governments to send troops to demonstrate his approval of Australian involvement:

The action of the colonies in sending them was looked upon at the time more in the light of moral assistance than anything else, proving the unity of the Empire, and as a pledge of greater help should further complications render it necessary.<sup>8</sup>

Steel here points to more 'official' reasons for entry into the war, as mentioned in Chapter One. But other evidence calls into question whether all soldiers knew, or cared, about such reasons. Trooper Alured Kelly, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Victorian Contingent,

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<sup>6</sup> Richardson, Major-General FM, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War*, Leo Cooper, London, 1978, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 277.

<sup>8</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS 892, State Library of New South Wales, 1900, p. 3.

conceded that he ‘took no more than a passing interest’ when he heard about the war, and it was only after being questioned by his tailor about whether he would like to fight that he said he ‘did not mind’ and subsequently enlisted.<sup>9</sup> This comment does not indicate an overwhelming urge to fight in South Africa, rather Kelly’s lack of concern for the British cause. The diary of Trooper John Alexander (Jack) McBean also demonstrates how the war itself was not as attractive as the employment it provided. Although he did express the desire to fight in South Africa, he had travelled from New South Wales, to South Australia, to Western Australia, then back to Adelaide in search of employment before enlisting. When this did not prove fruitful, he ‘decided to have a try’ at joining the 4<sup>th</sup> South Australian Imperial Bushmen Contingent, and was ultimately successful.<sup>10</sup>

Any patriotic justifications for enlistment that exist can be partly attributed to the pressure on Australians to exhibit ‘loyalty’ towards Britain, shown by the fact that Australian commercial newspapers were filled with opinions critical of ‘disloyalty’, particularly in the first year of the war. For example, Gawler’s *The Bunyip* reported that in Adelaide three months after the beginning of the war, an unofficial ‘boycott’ was in place against ‘business people who show Boer sympathy’.<sup>11</sup> Also, on 13 January 1900, an article in *The Argus* reported that a Sydney police constable had been dismissed because he had publicly protested ‘against the actions of the British in regard to the Transvaal war, and applauded the Boer victories’.<sup>12</sup> Such pressure would certainly be pronounced in the minds of those with an existing military connection, but there is little indication that those in the sample who enlisted in the Boer War were primarily concerned with these matters. However, given the

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly, A, Diary, 3DRL/1915, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>10</sup> McBean, J, Diary, D6338, State Library of South Australia, n.d.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Interesting Items’, *The Bunyip*, 26 January 1900, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> ‘A Disloyal Constable’, *The Argus*, 13 January 1900, p. 14.



pervasive emphasis on ‘loyalty’ in society, it is possible that some soldiers would have enlisted out of a sense of duty, mainly towards the ‘mother country’, Britain, and there is indication later in this chapter that ‘duty’ often helped soldiers carry out less savoury tasks.<sup>13</sup>

The soldiers’ letters and diaries investigated in the course of this study, as well as the literature on soldiering consulted, openly demonstrate that not all soldiers go to war for such high-minded reasons or have a single overriding incentive for involvement. Many soldiers do not see their war service in terms of what they are able to do for their country and people, but rather for how it might enhance their own lives. George Mosse, in *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (1990), points to soldiers’ desire for freedom from ‘the confines of bourgeois life’ as a motivation for enlistment.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Gammage found that specific reasons such as the wish for companionship, the desire to escape from family trouble or the wish to experience adventure were often quoted in soldiers’ letters as reasons for enlisting in the First World War. It is noteworthy, however, that as the war dragged on, more men began to refer to duty as a compelling factor rather than opportunities that the war may afford them, a shift perhaps caused by the fact that the Australian death count was increasing, thus prompting the desire for justice or revenge.<sup>15</sup> It seems, also, that for some the concept of ‘duty’ bound up in society’s initial enthusiasm was contagious – prompting men to associate the war with excitement and, as a result, to enlist. In this way, Hynes presents the incentive for involvement as a combination of factors – including both the desire for thrills and responsibility towards the home front.<sup>16</sup> The concept of ‘adventure’ is an important one when considering the motivations of

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<sup>13</sup> See also pp. 131-135.

<sup>14</sup> Mosse, GL, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, 10, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Hynes, S, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, Penguin, New York, 1997, p. 51.

soldiers, as those who see war in this idealised way often experience the deepest change in attitude when reaching the battlefield – a reaction labelled by Paul Fussell the ‘irony’ of war.<sup>17</sup> This aspect will be focussed on more comprehensively later in this chapter.

In the letters and diaries of the selected sample of men, the concept of ‘adventure’, or at least the prospect of an escape from the predictability and drudgery of monotonous, often low-paid employment, is frequently quoted as an incentive for enlistment. As mentioned earlier, Trooper Jack McBean of the 4<sup>th</sup> South Australian Imperial Bushmen was preoccupied with an alternative employment that military service provided, writing in his diary: ‘Being on the White Cliff opal fields when the First Contingent left Australia, I thought how much I’d like to go too’.<sup>18</sup> Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich constantly compared his life in the 6th Queensland Imperial Bushmen in South Africa with that at home when writing to his family: ‘But still for all the rough and ready time we have had, I wouldn’t swap it for anything and go back to banking’.<sup>19</sup> He later wrote to his sister:

Altogether the life suits me down to the ground and I often wonder was I ever a poor devil of a bank clerk and how I managed to endure that life so long...It’s by no means all gilt and gingerbread but such as it is it suits me better and am more happy and contented than ever before in my existence.<sup>20</sup>

Rich’s words suggest strongly that he at least went to war to leave a dissatisfying life, a view supported also by Private William Hamline Glasson (known as

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<sup>17</sup> Fussell, P, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> McBean, JA, Diary, D6338, State Library of South Australia, 1899.

<sup>19</sup> Rich, DSG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 19 May 1901.

<sup>20</sup> Rich, DSG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 5 July 1901.

‘Hamline’), an Australian working on the South African railways. He wrote in a letter to his mother, less than a month before joining the Bushveldt Carbineers: ‘We got fairly sick and tired of the railways waiting until the war was over...stuck in an office all night in a hole like this doesn’t suit me so *we have decided to see a bit of the fun*’ [emphasis added].<sup>21</sup>

This reference to ‘fun’, or at least the hope of finding diversions and enjoyment in war, can be found in several of the examined letters and diaries.<sup>22</sup> This was Australia’s first experience of direct combat, so expectations of war were relatively innocent, particularly when compared to those of the men on their way to Vietnam, many of whom had heard tales of past wars, or seen its aftermath, in the lives of Australian veterans of the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Korean War. In addition, conscription was not in existence during this war and volunteers were plentiful, demonstrating the expectation of many that involvement in battle would be an satisfying pursuit. Stowaways were frequently found on ships bound for South Africa, men either too young or unfit to be accepted for military duty but who still had a strong desire to fight. Daniel Haden Spyer, a volunteer in the NSW Army Medical Corps during the war, wrote in his diary:

Forgot to mention that our little stowaway from Sydney, the same boy who stowed away on the “Warrigal” & received a flogging in Melbourne, was put off at Melbourne on our arrival there, but managed to stowaway again, when we sailed, he was however, put off at Albany again, poor little beggar, he cried bitterly when leaving, we were all sorry to lose him.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS 3858, State Library of New South Wales, 10 April 1901.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 178-182 for more expressions of enjoyment while on active service.

<sup>23</sup> Spyer, DH, Diary, MLMSS 2032, State Library of New South Wales, 6 February 1900.

Incidentally, *The Argus* reported on this same youth numerous times in 1900, from his first capture by police while attempting to get to South Africa on 5 January to the eventual granting of consent by his parents on 26 January despite his age (fourteen years), shortly before Spyer's report.<sup>24</sup> This demonstrates the desperation with which some attempted to become soldiers, or escape from their lives in Australia.

In his diary, Martin Maddern, a Chaplain with the Imperial Queensland Bushmen, also mentioned a stowaway who wanted to fight in South Africa: 'A man named Adams who was at Lytton camp & known there as (Genl) Buller was discovered as a stowaway & set to work his passage by the Captain'.<sup>25</sup> Also, Steel reveals: 'The report is 12 stowaways have just been unearthed'.<sup>26</sup> It is difficult to say exactly why these men had decided to hide on these ships leaving Australia, but their presence on troopships seems to support the idea that men were eager to fight in the Boer War, whatever the particular motivation.<sup>27</sup>

In sharp contrast, the archived soldiers' letters and diaries from Vietnam fail to reveal with any certainty their reasons for fighting. This can be explained partly by the fact that around one third of serving Australians were conscripts; as such, they simply had little choice. Hiddlestone, in her article 'Continuing the Great Adventure? Australian Servicemen and the Vietnam War' (2004), claims *all* in her sample of 102 interviewed Vietnam veterans went to war out of 'duty', or 'a sense of debt to the past', with many referring to the past war service of family members in the world

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<sup>24</sup> See 'A Warrigal Stowaway', *The Argus*, 5 January 1900, p. 5; *The Argus*, 26 January 1900, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Maddern, M, Diary, D4860(L), State Library of South Australia, 25 May 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Steel, WS, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 21 January 1900.

<sup>27</sup> Maddern also mentioned deserters hiding on ships, but this is an issue that will be dealt with in Chapter Seven.

wars as a motivation to enlist.<sup>28</sup> However, in contrast, the lack of references in the archived letters and diaries to any direct motivation to fight in the Vietnam War creates a marked difference between retrospective records and those from the war front. This calls into question the validity of theories based solely on one type of primary source, especially with those soldiers who have a personal and cultural insight into both Vietnam and other past major wars, derived from family members, and highlights the value of using more than one kind of record, particularly in a non-comparative study where each war has a different source base.

The only specific mention of an incentive to fight, or lack of one, in the examined archives is that made by Corporal Wallace A Lillebo, a Medic with C Company, 2nd Field Ambulance, 5RAR, who in his collection of letters from Vietnam stated: ‘None of us ever regarded the war in Vietnam as a bringing of aid to the South Vietnamese’.<sup>29</sup> This could indicate that the Cold War-related fight against communism was foremost in soldiers’ minds, rather than the security of South Vietnam. However, it could also demonstrate that the ‘official’ reasons given for entry into the Vietnam War – the appeal for help from South Vietnam – was not an overriding motivation for the entry of any non-conscripts into the war, a finding which is consistent with writing on soldiering that discounts patriotism or belief in the ‘cause’ as primary reasons for soldier enlistment in all wars. The relative irrelevance of the ‘cause’ may also indicate why so many Vietnam veterans were openly against the war after they ended their service, following the views of Kellett

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<sup>28</sup> Hiddlestone, J, ‘Continuing the Great Adventure? Australian Servicemen and the Vietnam War’, *Linq*, vol. 31, no. 1, May 2004, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG 1363/4, State Library of South Australia, n.d; RAR is a commonly used abbreviation for Royal Australian Regiment.

that the insignificance of ‘the cause’ to any combat soldier will inevitably reduce their will to fight.<sup>30</sup>

Another explanation for the unwillingness of Vietnam War soldiers to reveal their reasons for enlistment is related to the large percentage on the home front that openly disagreed with Australian involvement, particularly in the later years of the war. Some of these opponents physically and verbally attacked soldiers after they were discharged. This could have caused soldiers to refrain from mentioning any appeal they saw in the war for fear of attracting unwanted criticism.<sup>31</sup>

A crucial phase of a person’s war journey is when the transformation from civilian to soldier occurs through military training. Reactions in every battlefield event from then on are dependent on the effectiveness of this training and how receptive the soldier was to it. Holmes stresses the value of concentrating on military training for this reason – as it helps determine how well the soldier will be able to avoid wounds – both physical and psychological – or even death while in battle.<sup>32</sup> Despite the various goals of training – including socialisation, morale-building, the use of weapons and the dehumanisation of the enemy – its fundamental aim is always to give soldiers the ability to withstand battle and survive. Kellett maintains that a soldier who is given adequate information about conditions of war will not collapse in the face of combat.<sup>33</sup> This coincides with Fussell’s concept of war’s ‘irony’, in which he argues that soldiers with realistic expectations of war are less likely to be overcome psychologically by the realities of the battlefield.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is essential to

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<sup>30</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> This is dealt with in Chapter Eight, when discussing the effect of the home front on soldiers, as well as soldiers’ self-censorship in letters home.

<sup>32</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 225.

<sup>34</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 7.

examine the techniques and desired results of army training to better understand the behaviour of soldiers during combat.

The practical usefulness of military training is in teaching a soldier how to use weapons and adapt to military formations. During the Boer War, British soldiers initially employed traditional methods of fighting completely unsuited to Boer combat methods, as well as the South African terrain. In fact, although battle techniques were altered to adapt to the enemy's tactics during this war, it was during the First World War that more significant modifications to tactics and style were adopted. These included physical preparation for a country's particular environment and battle itself, as well as psychological training focussed on the element of fear. Other armies in the world later adopted such changes.<sup>35</sup>

The importance of thorough and specific training was highlighted by Sergeant Arthur James Vogan, of the Prince of Wales Light Horse Regiment, in his diary written while fighting in South Africa. He complains repeatedly about how the lack of training had impacted on various soldiers he had encountered, revealing his desire for more adequate preparation in warfare:

Things that *seem* wrong, somehow, in the working of our column: -  
Horsefeed Rifles – No training in shooting is given our troops. Many never fired out of a rifle till they did [sic] or at an enemy they could not see. I know for a fact that one at least was afraid to fire at all, as they did not know what would happen when they pulled the trigger.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Vogan, AJ, Diary, MS113, State Library of New South Wales, 30 October 1901.

He had earlier foreshadowed Holmes' assertion that one overriding purpose of training is to reduce the incidence of death or wounding: 'My only fear is that the inexperience of these untrained men will cause trouble...when they shouldn't, or injury [sic] themselves, their comrades'.<sup>37</sup> Peter Groves, a Bombardier in the 105th Battery, Royal Australian Artillery and a Vietnam War conscript, in a letter to his wife Wendy, also expressed discontent at the insufficient training he and his fellow soldiers received:

This will make you laugh I think. I was informed the other day that every person the Army sends out here is supposed to have at least '12 months' training before leaving Australia! My training finished in December which means I had 8 months training before I came over! I know quite a few here who didn't get that much training.<sup>38</sup>

Groves' tone here expresses clearly that he saw thorough military training as a necessity. Such expressions demonstrate the psychological, as well as the practical, importance of training to these soldiers in battle.

The aim of essential weapons training has not changed in the last two hundred years, despite alterations in the techniques used to teach such skills. The unpredictability of war makes it necessary for attack and defence to become almost instinctive for soldiers, to enable them to act swiftly and appropriately without thinking. Actions in battle, whether related to the use of a weapon or movements, are to be automatic.<sup>39</sup>

The aim of this is not only to benefit the group as a whole, but also to reduce the risk of injury or death to the individual soldier. Traditionally this took the form of

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<sup>37</sup> Vogan, AJ, Diary, MS113, State Library of New South Wales, June 1901.

<sup>38</sup> Groves, P, Letter, PR86/248, Australian War Memorial, 25 May 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 37-38.



frequent drill and weapons training, a monotonous but relatively effective method. Private RJ Byers, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent, complained about this area of military training – perhaps also affected by general conditions on the troopship - in a letter to his mother, saying:

I do not like Major Eddy, in fact hardly a man on board the *Medic* has a good word for him; we have had nothing but unnecessary drills, marching order parades and kit inspections, while the SA, Tasmanian and WA contingents have been having a holiday, and laughing at us.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, most complaints about the necessity of drills were tied to dissatisfaction with the officer in charge.<sup>41</sup> It seems that although soldiers understood the necessity of training for their survival in combat, there were few soldiers who enjoyed the necessarily repetitive day-to-day activities of that training. Private Watson Augustus Steel also wrote in his diary about the outdated nature of the training provided before the Boer War, by means of the British Army ‘Regulations’ in use:

‘The Regulations’ are as a nightmare to the army. I have heard a distinguished Imperial General not unacquainted with colonial commands, damn “The Red Book” twice in an hour...The unwritten laws of a past age regulating chess, duties, social responsibilities...should be relegated the lance, the sword and the muzzle-loading field gun – only the museum of antiquities.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 25 October 1900.

<sup>41</sup> The link between soldiers’ physical discomfort and resentment towards leaders is focussed on in more detail from Chapter Five, p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 30 June 1900.

Since the Second World War, training has also included 'battle inoculation', which introduces the use of visual and aural elements to familiarise the soldier with the particular war environment to be encountered.<sup>43</sup> This can be seen in the existence of Jungle Training Centres in Australia during the Vietnam War that, like drill during Boer War soldier training, prompted complaints by those about to fight in Vietnam, such as that of Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith of 8RAR, who labelled his training centre a 'god forsaken hole'.<sup>44</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite and Murphy evaluated both the benefits and implicit problems with this technique in a 2003 analysis of the Australian Defence Force. Their chapter 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield' focuses on the ability to reduce soldier anxiety in battle, but also mentions that related stress during training can also decrease combat effectiveness.<sup>45</sup> Still, repetitive drill in some form has remained; as psychologist JT MacCurdy said: 'No one has as yet devised any other system which will so quickly inculcate the habit of automatic obedience'.<sup>46</sup>

Not everyone who enlists or is conscripted for military duty has had ingrained in them the will to kill. Humans living in most 20<sup>th</sup> century societies are taught and abide by certain rules - of which the prohibition of murder is foremost. It is difficult to reverse such deeply entrenched standards, but this is necessary to encourage a soldier to kill other human beings in battle. Thus, one of the major aims of military training is to 'dehumanise' the enemy. Joanna Bourke maintains that the effectiveness of this technique lies on two levels - in the creation of both an

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<sup>43</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 84-85.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, July 1969.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, C, Braithwaite, H & Murphy, PJ, 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield' in Kearney, GE, Creamer, M, Marshall, R & Goynes, A (eds.), *Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force Experience*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> MacCurdy, JT, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 40.

‘uncivilised’, as well as an ‘inhuman’, enemy.<sup>47</sup> This constructed differentiation between combatants is essential in encouraging soldiers to kill. Holmes concurs, arguing that if soldiers are put in a position to see commonalities between themselves and the enemy, they find it more difficult to kill. He maintains that this also explains the use of demeaning terms in referring to both the enemy and killing itself, citing the example of the United States and its allies during the Vietnam War.<sup>48</sup> The use of such language serves to increase both the willingness to kill and the ability to avoid any psychologically damaging guilt after killing has taken place.

The archived letters and diaries from both the Boer and Vietnam Wars reveal ample evidence that soldiers relied on this ‘dehumanisation’ or ‘animalisation’ of the enemy to fuel their eagerness to kill, a clear consequence of military training. However, it is interesting to note that in these records such expressions were more common in the first stages of service – attitudes towards the enemy definitely tended to shift as these soldiers became more familiar with them and with conditions of the conflict, to include even admiration or pity. This was somewhat marked in the Boer and Vietnam Wars, when Australia was allied with a world superpower and was fighting against a relatively undeveloped enemy who was proving almost impossible to defeat. This shift will be highlighted later in this chapter and contrasted with soldiers’ first impressions of warfare, so as to demonstrate that the attitudes of the sample of soldiers during the initial stages of military duty in both South Africa and Vietnam do confirm corresponding research into soldiering.

An investigation into the Australian press during the Boer War reveals another source of these ‘dehumanising’ attitudes towards the enemy. The most hawkish

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<sup>47</sup> Bourke, J, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Granta Books, London, 1999, p. 231.

<sup>48</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 361, 364.

Australian newspapers investigated in carrying out this study, *The Argus* and *The Bunyip*, often included articles describing the Boers with terms such as ‘insolent’, ‘corrupt’ or demonstrating ‘inhumanity’, to illustrate their uncivilised character.<sup>49</sup> The decidedly anti-Boer War newspaper *The Bulletin* reported unfavourably on this tendency by commercial newspapers, saying that these allegations made of the Boers were almost always untrue.<sup>50</sup> It seems the propagandist techniques used to incite soldiers to kill the enemy were also used to encourage a population to back a war their country was involved in.

Some Australian soldiers on the war front were not immune to these attitudes. Private Watson Augustus Steel, upon first arriving in South Africa, expressed physical distaste for the Boers in his diary:

I therefore had my first view of the fighting Boer. We kept complete silence. They are a wild, uncouth looking lot such as one might have seen in New South Wales 30 years ago, in such isolated localities as the Abercrombie...They were dressed in all ends of clothing and looked dirty and sullen.<sup>51</sup>

Given the frequent complaints about their appalling living conditions in letters and diaries by Australian soldiers in South Africa, it is likely that such a description would fit not only the Boers, but also some British and Australian troops. Therefore, Steel could have used such descriptions of the Boer soldiers to justify combat against them. Lieutenant George Harris, of Winston Churchill’s unit – the South African

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<sup>49</sup> See ‘Boer Inhumanity’, *The Argus*, 15 March 1900, p. 5; ‘Canting, Hypocritical and Insolent’, *The Argus*, 16 March 1900, p. 6; ‘Town Tattle’, *The Bunyip*, 6 October 1899, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> ‘War Literature and Other Matters’, *The Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 1029, 4 November 1899, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 29 February 1900.

Light Horse - used similarly demeaning terms when expressing his feelings towards the Boers. Less than three months after arriving in South Africa he expressed his attitude towards the enemy in a letter to his mother: 'A small lot of our fellows went on to another house and were fired on and a sergeant shot so we shot two Boers and burnt the whole farm down. This is the only way to treat the brutes and what is keeping on the war so long is that we are treating them too well'.<sup>52</sup>

A singular feature of Boer War soldiers' letters was the tendency to liken Boer attributes to those of animals rather than humans, constituting another part of 'dehumanisation'. Holmes, while speaking of this process, reported that in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, such as the First World War, some soldiers exhibited amazement when encountering a distinctly human-looking enemy.<sup>53</sup> This helps explain why they made such comparisons in their letters and diaries. In a similar vein, Trooper Charles Cawthorn of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen adopted the language of hunting when describing battle against the Boers in his diary, using phrases such as 'out again this morning but have no luck' when referring to being out on patrol.<sup>54</sup> If the reader was unaware that Cawthorn was at war, it could easily be assumed that he was on an animal hunting expedition. Similarly, Surgeon-Lieutenant James Harold Patterson with the 5th Victorian Rifles wrote: 'we surrounded a farm suppose [sic] to contain Boers but the birds had flown just before we got there'.<sup>55</sup> Sergeant Arthur James Vogan used similar terms when describing female Boers: 'The younger women are often decidedly good looking, that the race is a healthy,

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<sup>52</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 15 July 1900.

<sup>53</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 368.

<sup>54</sup> Cawthorn, C, Diary, PR85/056, Australian War Memorial, 11 May 1901.

<sup>55</sup> Patterson, JH, Diary, NLA MS 3663, National Library of Australia, 6 December 1901.

animal one is beyond question'.<sup>56</sup> Such instances suggest that training and propaganda did impact on some Boer War soldiers' perceptions of the enemy.

It is important to note that, during the Boer War, it was not only whites in South Africa who participated in combat. Both sides made a conscious decision to avoid employing black African soldiers – each for different reasons. The British feared disapproval by non-Boers in South Africa for breaking the 'racial divide', whereas the Boers saw danger in arming native forces, for fear that they may then turn against white colonists in the country.<sup>57</sup> More recent examinations of the war, however, reveal that these resolutions were not kept, as both sides frequently wavered in their use of black African soldiers.<sup>58</sup> The personal records of the Australians in South Africa seldom included mention of these men, particularly in reference to combat itself. It is noteworthy, however, that when soldiers did refer to black Africans, they were described in far more respectful terms than the Boers were. For example, Private Alexander McQueen wrote to his family of the African soldiers: 'They are very dignified & picturesque in speech'.<sup>59</sup> However, despite comments such as this, implicit racism is still apparent. This is illustrated in the diary of Sergeant Arthur James Vogan, who wrote:

...the Zulus are physically superior – some, as is well known being beautiful examples of perfect manhood, clean-handed, lithe, active, fearless & strong –

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<sup>56</sup> Vogan, AJ, Diary, MS113, State Library of New South Wales, June 1901.

<sup>57</sup> Marwick, P, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 16, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Marwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902*, 25-26; Nkuna, N, 'Black Involvement in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', *Military History Journal*, vol. 11, no. 3/4, October 1999, viewed 23 March 2011, <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol113nn.html>.

<sup>59</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 15 March 1900.

in fact as beautiful animals superior to any human I have seen I think except among some trained athletes some sees [sic] occasionally.<sup>60</sup>

Although a level of racism is still evident here, it is in conjunction with predominantly positive views of the various merits of the black Africans – which can be directly contrasted to the more frequent negative references to the Boers in the archived personal records. This further demonstrates the power of dehumanisation, particularly at a time when the public perception in the British Empire of black Africans was so markedly different from that of white people.

The tendency of the press to express openly derogatory statements about individual enemy soldiers during the Boer War was not as obvious during Vietnam. More subtlety was employed in expressing ideas about the Vietnamese communists, with increased focus on leaders rather than individual members of the Viet Cong. Also, given the tremendous advances in communication technology between the two wars, there was simply much more to report from the war front itself, even with the existing unofficial censorship.<sup>61</sup> In addition, in contrast to the Boer War, many more anti-war reports from the home front can be found. These two factors made it less likely that the media, despite the fact that it was available in more varied formats, would have the time and space to focus on Viet Cong soldiers themselves. This, however, did not extend to some Australian soldiers in the sample, as frequent references - often derogatory - to enemy soldiers or even South Vietnamese civilians were found in the archived personal records examined.

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<sup>60</sup> Vogan, AJ, Diary, MS113, State Library of New South Wales, 24 October 1901.

<sup>61</sup> Carruthers, SL, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 108.

Initial expressions of opinion by many Australian soldiers in the sample towards both the North and South Vietnamese were decidedly racist. This cannot be completely blamed on military training, however, as many who have reported on general attitudes towards Asia in the 1960s and 1970s emphasise the semi-archaic ways in which Australians viewed the Vietnamese and Asia in general, often due to memories of the Japanese attacks during the Second World War. While discussing the anti-war movement, Ann Curthoys maintains that 1960s Australia was marked by ‘xenophobia and anti-Asian racism’.<sup>62</sup> WJ Hudson confirms that from the 1950s Australian society was decidedly ‘white, western’ and ‘culturally Christian’, which supports the anti-Asian attitude of Australians portrayed by Curthoys.<sup>63</sup> Historian Prue Torney-Parlicki discusses the racism of many Australian media correspondents and soldiers in Vietnam, and attributes this to the fact that it was increasingly difficult to be sure of the loyalties of any South Vietnamese person, specifically, whether they were on the communist side or not. In addition, prejudice against the Vietnamese was caused by broadly perceived differences in culture, as well as the opposing ideologies of Australians and some Asian countries, particularly China and North Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> This ambivalence is actually demonstrated in a letter written by Ron Kelly while in Vietnam: ‘They seem to be a very friendly sort of people, but I don’t trust any one of them’.<sup>65</sup> The archived letters and diaries examined demonstrate clearly that these attitudes extended to and persisted in some soldiers in Vietnam.

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<sup>62</sup> Curthoys, A, ‘The Anti-War Movements’ in Grey, J & Doyle, J (eds.), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia’s War in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992, p. 97.

<sup>63</sup> Hudson, WJ, ‘Strategy for Survival’, in McKernan, M & Browne, M (eds.), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, Canberra, 1988, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Torney-Parlicki, P, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia’s Neighbours 1941-75*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 190.

<sup>65</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 22 June 1965.



During his military training, Andrew Treffry, Armourer in the 1 Field Squadron and 5 RAR Light Aid Detachment, wrote to 'Eileen' about what soldiers were being taught during training: 'Everytime [sic] we get a lecture they make reference to the Vietnam War and the Viet Cong. It's all brainwash but I don't think I could pick up a weapon and kill anyone at this stage'.<sup>66</sup> This demonstrates the intention of the military in focussing on the enemy while training soldiers, to inspire them to kill, in accordance with the views raised earlier by Holmes and Bourke, among others. Yet, once in Vietnam, Treffry writes: 'I'm afraid most of the soldiers have little respect for the Vietnamese people'.<sup>67</sup> He demonstrates this further in a later letter to Eileen, in a telling comment about her false tooth: 'I see enough stained teeth with the 'slope heads' over here without seeing it when I get home'.<sup>68</sup> Private GM Heffernan of 3RAR also used derisive terms to describe the Vietnamese. When discussing his electronics purchases made while out of Australia – many soldiers bought such equipment while in Vietnam, due to the cheap prices – he wrote: 'We spent about 3 hrs in the gook shop'.<sup>69</sup> Corporal Ron Kelly of 1RAR wrote in a letter to his wife: 'By hell when we get home we will have to go through the car wash, to get rid of the nog smell. I can imagine how we smell now, just like these stinking nogs, because we live just like them'.<sup>70</sup> These are only a few of the derogatory references to the Vietnamese by Australian soldiers, and demonstrate that such views were not restricted to those higher up in the military hierarchy.<sup>71</sup>

However, not all were as unfeeling. Second Lieutenant C Forde of 1RAR wrote: 'It is hard to understand the enemy here. They don't act like humans at all – every time

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<sup>66</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 12 February 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 8 April 1969.

<sup>68</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 28 June 1969.

<sup>69</sup> Heffernan, GM, Letter, PR86/363, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>70</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 13 September 1965.

<sup>71</sup> For more evidence of this, see also Keating, D, Diary, PR00330, Australian War Memorial, 28 February 1969; Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, n.d.

they attack they drug themselves up to the eyeballs so that they won't feel any pain'.<sup>72</sup> Despite the sometimes insensitive nature of such comments, it is possible to explain their existence and prevalence in these soldiers' letters and diaries by viewing them as a coping mechanism by soldiers encountering the prospect of killing another human being for the first time, a mechanism enhanced by the clear physical and cultural differences.

Keeness to kill is something that cannot be found in all soldiers - though, as discussed, it is the intention of military training to override normal restraints and convince combatants to ignore human instincts against murder. This can account for positive pre-combat attitudes by soldiers in their personal records that identify fervour for battle, but not necessarily for killing itself. A close analysis of the archived Boer War soldiers' letters and diaries indicates that this aim of training may have been successful, with many exhibiting signs of the 'exhilaration' mentioned by Bartlett in *Psychology and the Soldier* (1927), both before reaching the front and in the first few months of their military service.<sup>73</sup> Lieutenant George Harris demonstrates this in a letter to his mother, less than two months before his arrival in South Africa. He says: 'We will have some fun with the Boer soon again and I don't want to miss it'.<sup>74</sup> Private Samuel Hedley Jones, of the Second Commonwealth Contingent SA, expressed his disappointment when arriving in South Africa after the war had ended: 'I don't know what they are going to do with us now peace is declared. I wish they had held out a big longer so we could have had a cut at them'.<sup>75</sup> Jones' frustration is especially acute, as he had followed his brother Stan to battle, and had hoped to share in his experience. Private RJ Byers expressed similar

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<sup>72</sup> Forde, C, Letter, PR91/187, Australian War Memorial, 23 May 1968; Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 10 August 1965.

<sup>73</sup> Bartlett, FC, *Psychology and the Soldier*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1927, p. 178.

<sup>74</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 15 May 1900.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, SH, Letter, D 6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 6 June 1902.

enthusiasm in letters sent home while on board the *SS Medic* to South Africa. When speaking of British victories during the siege of Mafeking, he wrote: ‘If they go on like this, it will be all over before we get near South Africa’.<sup>76</sup> He later reports: ‘All our Chaps [sic] are very anxious to get to the front’.<sup>77</sup> These three examples do not demonstrate direct fervour for killing itself – rather, an almost romanticised zest for battle – following the words of soldiers mentioned earlier that express a desire to fight based on often incorrect preconceptions of warfare.<sup>78</sup>

This overt fervour for combat is short-lived, however, as in most soldiers disillusion soon sets in. This follows Bartlett’s claim that after this initial phase, most soldiers experience ‘depression’ and the excitement seen before or at the beginning of a soldier’s tour never returns.<sup>79</sup> Gammage also maintains that his sample of Australians fighting in the First World War experienced disenchantment in the latter stages of their service.<sup>80</sup> It is important to note, however, that this is not the case for all soldiers, as there is always a group who feel constant exhilaration throughout their war service.<sup>81</sup> The secondary stages of a soldier’s tour will be discussed later in this chapter.

Some of the enthusiasm seen in men on their way to South Africa can be attributed to the fact that the Boer War was the first time Australian soldiers in significant numbers actually saw combat. According to scholars of war, men form their impressions of war through stories told to them by older generations, as well as

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<sup>76</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS 9691, State Library of Victoria, 18 September 1900.

<sup>77</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS 9691, State Library of Victoria, 29 October 1900. See also Maddern, M, Diary, D4860 (L), State Library of South Australia, 4 June 1900; Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 2 May 1901.

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 98-100.

<sup>79</sup> Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 179.

<sup>80</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, 216.

<sup>81</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 271.

exposure to ‘popular notions of war’, such as those conveyed in literature and film.<sup>82</sup> Janet and Peter Phillips, in *Victorians at Home and Away* (1978) focus on the popularity of both literary accounts of the ‘day-dream world of war’ before the First World War, as well as public dialogue on ‘patriotism’ in late 19<sup>th</sup> century periodicals and newspapers, to demonstrate the unrealistic image of war in the minds of British civilians, including future soldiers.<sup>83</sup> In 1899, Australia’s military past was in its infancy. Naturally, soldiers would have heard British tales of war either through books, newspapers or possibly from British ex-soldiers. Compared with soldiers on their way to Vietnam, however – most of whom would have either known veterans of the First and Second World Wars, or the Korean War, or at least been exposed to cultural interpretations of those wars – men on their way to South Africa in the sample were more openly excited about their war journey. Less optimism towards combat is found in the archived letters and diaries of soldiers on their way to Vietnam, a feature which can be explained by the fact that these men simply had more of an idea of what they were to encounter on the war front.

It is also possible to attribute positive expressions by Boer War soldiers to the fact that Australia was fighting for Britain, a country with which many Australians felt a close bond – whereas in the Vietnam War, Australia was fighting as an ally of the United States, where ‘loyalty’, of more recent origin, was a more complex issue. However, given the findings in soldiers’ archived personal records regarding their reasons for volunteering to fight in South Africa – which reveal that patriotism or ties

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<sup>82</sup> Herzog, TC, *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 4; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 217.

<sup>83</sup> Phillips, J & Phillips, P, *Victorians at Home and Away*, Croom Helm, London, 1978, pp. 166, 175-176.

to Britain were not always an overwhelming concern – this explanation is not particularly telling.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the fact that fear itself, along with the sights and sounds a soldier encounters while fighting, is now included (by simulation and role playing, for example) as part of military training, studies insist that many new recruits still experience shock or surprise once at the actual war front. In fact, Kellett contends that, despite closer similarities between modern training techniques and real life battle, a soldier's preconceived notions of battle must still deviate from the actual experience.<sup>85</sup> This can result in the war front appearing surreal, or at least unreal. Holmes claims that many soldiers, on first facing the battlefield, see 'a unique land with logic, rules and values all of its own'.<sup>86</sup> He quotes Philip Caputo, US Vietnam veteran and author of the well-regarded *A Rumor of War* (1977): 'My first reaction, rooted in the illusion that anyone trying to kill me must have a personal motive, was: "Why does he want to kill *me*? What did I ever do to *him*?"'<sup>87</sup> The sample of soldiers' letters and diaries from both the Boer and Vietnam Wars do reveal that such feelings of amazement as those described by Holmes and Caputo do occur, even for the later war - despite the advances by the 1960s that made training more realistic.

Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich was one who expressed his surprise at the sight of the battlefield in a letter to his mother after first reaching South Africa, writing: 'I have yet to realise that I'm where I am. It seems just as if we were on a small outing'.<sup>88</sup> Private Alexander McQueen wrote in a letter to his family: 'It is queer how adaptable a thing man is, nothing seems strange now [author's emphasis]', referring

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<sup>84</sup> See pp. 95-97.

<sup>85</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 229.

<sup>86</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 149.

<sup>87</sup> Caputo, P, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 148.

<sup>88</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 25 April 1901.

to the initial peculiarity of the battlefield.<sup>89</sup> These were the only two references to the strangeness of the battlefield found in this selection of archived records by Boer War soldiers.

Those newly arrived in Vietnam, however, were very open about the ‘otherworldliness’ of the war front. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray wrote to his wife about his first combat encounter:

So the whole affair had a pantomime atmosphere – fighters diving, anti-malarial measures, troop lifts and bus runs all merrily proceeding together. Strange and unreal yet not a joke. Just a very strange war and a fascinating introduction to it all.<sup>90</sup>

In a later letter he wrote: ‘You feel strange at times here because noises are very different again’.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in a letter to his parents on his first night in South Vietnam, Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith wrote: ‘There’s so much I could tell you. This is a *totally different world in every way*’ [emphasis added].<sup>92</sup> Private Len McCosker, also in a letter to his family, expressed his disbelief at actually being on the battlefield:

Gee it’s hard to realise that we’re at War. So far it seems like its just another exercise. I suppose that’ll change though the first time we get fired on by the

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<sup>89</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 17 April 1900.

<sup>90</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 27 February 1968.

<sup>91</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 19 November 1969.

VC. The only thing different seems to be the planes going over all the time and the mortars dropping about ½ mile away.<sup>93</sup>

Naturally, part of this fascination would result from the fact that for almost all soldiers, this was their first time in Vietnam, or even out of Australia. However, it is clear from these soldiers' words that an integral part of warfare itself lay in the unfamiliarity of their new surroundings, thus reflecting the findings of Kellett and Holmes in both Boer and Vietnam War soldiers. It is also noteworthy that the majority of soldiers in this sample who commented on the otherworldliness of South Africa or Vietnam were further up in the military hierarchy. Perhaps soldiers were too distracted with day-to-day duties to allow such a reflection. A future study incorporating a larger variety of primary sources could perhaps clarify this point, particularly in non-comparative study focussing on only one war.

Other researchers support the contrast between a soldier's pre-war impressions of combat and the actual battlefield, specifically revealing that it can lead to extreme discontent. During the Second World War, Grinker and Spiegel reported that most soldiers had idealised pictures of the war front in their minds before deployment.<sup>94</sup> Most studies based on the world wars concentrate on the concept of 'romance' intertwined with soldiers' mental image of combat. However, Dawson, concentrating on British soldiers in the First World War, mentions, too, the 'nightmarish horror' that results from having such an unrealistic notion of 'war'.<sup>95</sup> Janet and Peter Phillips agree, maintaining that 'the shock of war was probably greatest to those who came to the battlefields filled with a romantic and make-believe view of war, and of death in

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<sup>93</sup> McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 20 June 1966.

<sup>94</sup> Grinker & Spiegel, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 137.

<sup>95</sup> Dawson, G, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 56.

war'.<sup>96</sup> Also, Fussell argues that not only is the act of war very distinct from its aims, but so are soldiers' expectations of war and its reality – and as such all wars can be labelled 'ironic'.<sup>97</sup> This discrepancy can adversely affect the soldier's opinion of the worth of the war he is fighting. Despite the First World War-based focus of these assertions, this was the case before the Second World War too. Holmes also mentions that soldiers generally experience 'disbelief' when first entering a war zone, and that many are prompted as a result to think negatively toward the war itself.<sup>98</sup> The journey from exhilaration to discontent is strongly implied by Private Douglas James (Doug) Bishop of 5RAR, who wrote to his mother shortly before the end of his tour in Vietnam:

Not much longer to go now, only 18 days before we are non-operational, it was terrific to see the advance party of 7RAR arrive, they are a good bunch of guys and seem very keen about everything, *I know how they will feel in 10-11 months time about Vietnam though* [emphasis added].<sup>99</sup>

However, it is not only disillusion that a soldier experiences after the initial period of enthusiasm that ends when reaching the battlefield, or soon after. Often, they can also start to feel sympathy or respect towards the enemy. Gammage found that Australian soldiers fighting in the First World War often reached a point where they began to see the opposing German soldiers as human beings, after realising that their respective circumstances were much the same.<sup>100</sup> Bourke also reports that many US soldiers in Vietnam began to respect the Viet Cong after they realised how important

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<sup>96</sup> Phillips & Phillips, *Victorians at Home and Away*, 175.

<sup>97</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 146.

<sup>99</sup> Bishop, D, Letter, PR91/018, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>100</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, 223.



their cause – namely, Vietnamese independence – was to them.<sup>101</sup> As mentioned earlier by Holmes, one of the aims of military training is to ensure that soldiers feel enough hatred towards the enemy to allow them to be able to kill other human beings.<sup>102</sup> Thus, if instead soldiers begin to sympathise with or understand the enemy, they will cease to enjoy or tolerate their role – to kill enemy soldiers – and consequently begin to resent the war itself and their position within it.

Numerous examples can be found in the archived records from both wars that demonstrate both respect for the fighting abilities of the enemy as well as sympathy for civilians. In most cases - for both wars - this occurred after the soldier had been on the front for a significant amount of time, thus indicating that negative feelings towards service can also cause, or be caused by, a closer affinity with the enemy. Eight months into his service, Private Stan Jones wrote to his brother Hedley (who would later fight in the Boer War himself): ‘The Boers are scattered nearly all over the country now...in fact the Boer army was very much underestimated at first’.<sup>103</sup> This is a clear reaction to the confidence with which the British, and Australians, entered the war. For the small Boer forces to overrun those of Britain, a world military power, had seemed unthinkable at the beginning of the war. This opinion dramatically changed after the Boers proved themselves resilient and effective fighters. Some Australian soldiers met the Boers on a more personal level. In his diary, Private Watson Augustus Steel wrote:

After enquiring about my health, and asking my nationality he told me he had served in the field against us, had guarded Australian prisoners, and had drunk their health in his tent, that he was against the war, was intermarried

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<sup>101</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 217.

<sup>102</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 361.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D 6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 18 July 1900.

and connected with Dutch and English families, but being a burgher was compelled to fight...I found him educated, tolerant and kindly.<sup>104</sup>

Trooper John T. Jennings of the Victorian Rifles wrote in his diary of a meeting with a Boer:

Camp at a farm and had a conversation with a Boer (a nice young fellow about 18 years) who fought against us at Colesberg. He told me he had a Martini Henri rifle but was not allowed to shoot at long range as the black powder he had would give away their position to us but he had to wait until the enemy came near and then shoot.<sup>105</sup>

The level of familiarity between Jennings and the Boer soldier is clear, as the South African man was willing to divulge combat details.

There is evidence that Boers fought on the British side in at least one contingent, as Private William Hamline Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers wrote to his mother: 'Our corps is made up principally of Australians & strange to say a few Boers, who the early part of the war were fighting against us, of course we keep our eyes on the gentlemen, one fellow has already been shot for opening his mouth too wide'.<sup>106</sup> This may have encouraged some of the kinder expressions regarding the Boers in the archived personal records.

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<sup>104</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS892, State Library of New South Wales, n.d.

<sup>105</sup> Jennings, JT, Diary, PR87/65, Australian War Memorial, 21 March 1900.

<sup>106</sup> Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 8 August 1901. See also Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 24 December 1899.

Such positive feelings towards the enemy were sometimes linked with a soldier's view of his own role in the war. Private William Hamline Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers wrote to 'Dolph' (perhaps a reference to the property 'Godolphin', at which he once worked – incidentally, with the infamous Harry 'Breaker' Morant): 'I have seen enough to satisfy me that the Boers are not so bad as they are painted when you take into consideration some of our actions'.<sup>107</sup> It must be noted, however, that his letter was written in early 1902, when Roberts and Kitchener's 'scorched earth policy' had been in place for over a year, which may have provoked more sympathy than during earlier phases of the war. Many soldiers expressed disgust that their duty involved burning Boer homes and moving civilians to the confines of British-built concentration camps.<sup>108</sup> It is also noteworthy that those commenting on the enemy were generally common soldiers, who, in the case of the Boer War, were generally rural workers, thus having most in common with Boer soldiers.

There is one case, however, when an Australian officer expressed open admiration for a Boer. Lieutenant Patrick H Lang, a medical officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> Imperial Contingent, wrote in his diary of a visit to the home of General Louis Botha, Commander of the Boer forces, and later Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa:

Spent a good time at Commander Botha's house. They seem very nice people, & Miss Botha is rather pretty for a Boer girl...these were educated Boers. They say thought [sic] that the Boers liked the Australians, but they could not understand why on earth they had come out to fight.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS 3858, State Library of New South Wales, 19 January 1902.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 17 February 1902. More examples are highlighted from p. 120.

<sup>109</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 20 October 1900.

Lang's description clearly sets these Boers apart from those described earlier by Australian soldiers such as Steel and Glasson, as does a later entry in his diary in which he wrote: 'the well-bred Dutch people here seem awfully nice'.<sup>110</sup> Lang's admiration does not seem ill founded, although it is significant to note the class difference between Botha's family and the Boers earlier referred to, which almost certainly would have increased Lang's appreciation. Still, this case does demonstrate the observed closeness between some of the Boer and Australian forces.

Most Australians who enlisted to fight in South Africa were rural workers, due to the drought persisting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, so many out of work saw military service as a way to earn a living. Thus, Australian soldiers soon realised that their background and fighting style were more similar to the Boers' than to the traditionally trained British. Australian mounted infantry troops were in demand - particularly during the guerrilla phase of the war - because of their greater ability compared with the British to cope with the terrain and fighting style of the Boers. The British were eventually forced to adapt their own soldiers to match the Australians, and so prove a more effective force against the guerrilla Boers. Private Watson Augustus Steel expressed this in his diary: 'The pastoral Boer has shown what he can do and has been best met by Irish and Scotch farmers [sic] sons, Canadian cowboys and, Australian yeomen and bushmen'.<sup>111</sup> This perceived resemblance to their foes would certainly have prompted soldiers to describe them in such positive terms.

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<sup>110</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 13 November 1900.

<sup>111</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 30 June 1900.

On the other hand, soldiers in Vietnam were fighting an enemy with whom they felt much less of a connection. As mentioned earlier, Australian attitudes towards Asia remained generally very prejudiced in the 1960s, despite some signs of change. This was intensified particularly by memories of the Japanese attack on Darwin and surrounding towns, as well as the Australian POW experiences during the Second World War, the Cold War atmosphere of the time, and the alleged links between Chinese and North Vietnamese communism as an instigator of the war. This was intensified by the fact that Viet Cong were virtually indistinguishable from South Vietnamese civilians. Added to that was the simple fact that less Vietnamese spoke English when compared with the Boers in South Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, making it more difficult for soldiers to bond with both enemy Vietnamese soldiers as well as South Vietnamese allies. Also, the occupations and socio-economic status of most Australians who enlisted to fight in South Africa had been directly comparable to those of the Boer farmers. This was not the case with the Vietnamese, many of whom lived in poverty. Thus, attitudes of Australian soldiers towards the Vietnamese were much less complimentary than those shown towards the Boers around 60 years earlier.

Still, Bourke's claim that some soldiers began to feel empathy towards the enemy is true in the case of this study, in some observed cases during Vietnam. Armourer Andrew Treffry, of 5RAR, said of the Viet Cong: 'I pity the enemy and there [sic] in their bunkers & foxholes'.<sup>112</sup> Treffry's words are the only expression of direct sympathy in the archived letters and diaries from the Vietnam War, and the only positive reaction by a common soldier towards the Viet Cong.

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<sup>112</sup> Treffry, A, Diary, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 12 April 1969.

All other admiring statements by Vietnam War soldiers about the communist forces refer predominantly to their fighting ability. For example, Major DH Campbell of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) expressed ambiguity towards the Viet Cong while describing their actions in a letter to his 'dear Jeanette': 'I have always had a grudging admiration for the VC in view of what they have accomplished in the face of what was against them but any respect that I had had now gone'.<sup>113</sup> Campbell here clearly reveals his admiration for the Viet Cong persistence in fighting a seemingly unwinnable war but, on encountering their atrocities firsthand, he changed his mind. Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith also held VC combat skills in high regard: 'You must give the VC their due, they are tough little fighters. Little is the word, all the natives here are tiny people'.<sup>114</sup>

Although these records indicate that soldiers and officers did feel some affinity with the enemy, given the limited sample of soldiers examined in this thesis, it is difficult to be conclusive on this matter. A more extensive study focussing on Vietnam War soldiers alone would benefit from further investigation into their attitudes towards the Vietnamese communists. It is apparent, though, that the selected soldiers' letters from Vietnam, although revealing some positive feelings towards the enemy, are not nearly as empathetic as those by the Australians fighting in the Boer War. However, given the fervour with which the US, and Australia as its ally, were fighting against communism as a world 'evil', any degree of identification with the enemy is significant.

A difference in soldiers' attitudes towards enemy civilians can also be observed between the two wars. During the Boer War, many expressions of empathy appeared

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<sup>113</sup> Campbell, DH, Letter, PR86/267, Australian War Memorial, 4 March 1967.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 28 November 1969. See also Lillebo, WA, *Choppers in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, n.d.

in the letters and diaries after the introduction of the ‘scorched earth policy’ in November 1900. But some soldiers openly sympathised with Boer women and children well before this date. Private Stan Jones wrote to his family about Boer women:

If you enter into conversation with them you find that they have had their husbands, brothers or sons shot in the War and this the cause of their trouble. Although they are the wives and daughters of our enemies, one can’t help but sympathise with them.<sup>115</sup>

Private Watson Augustus Steel expressed a similar sense of uncertainty regarding the guilt of civilians in his diary: ‘The saddest incident in the war was that these women and children should suffer, even though they sought, and forced the conflict’.<sup>116</sup> Such words used by Australian soldiers in South Africa are not unusual, but it is noteworthy to compare the greater frequency with which Boer War soldiers mentioned enemy civilians in kindly terms, compared with those fighting in Vietnam.<sup>117</sup> Lieutenant Patrick H Lang even wrote in his diary of a Boer civilian who came to them for help for his ill wife, which was gladly provided.<sup>118</sup>

The sample of letters and diaries from Vietnam tend to express less concern for civilians. Some soldiers spoke of the South Vietnamese in fond terms, but less effort was made to relate to or openly sympathise with them. As mentioned above, this can be attributed to both the context of the war, as well as the language barrier between

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<sup>115</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 19 May 1900.

<sup>116</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS892, State Library of New South Wales, n.d.

<sup>117</sup> See also Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.; Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 5 July 1901; Sabine, CG, Letter, PRG57/10, State Library of South Australia, 25 August 1900; Lang, PH, Diary, PR86/40, Australian War Memorial, 13 November 1900.

<sup>118</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR86/40, Australian War Memorial, 29 December 1900.

Australians and Vietnamese. Also, the simple fact that it was impossible to distinguish confidently between South Vietnamese allies and those who had sided with the North Vietnamese communists created a huge divide between soldiers and civilians. Corporal Ron Kelly revealed his distrust towards the South Vietnamese in a letter to his wife Dianne: 'I tried to buy you a postcard, but they could not cash a 5 dollar bill. Boy what rogues they are, they try and con money out of you all the time'.<sup>119</sup> Also demonstrating the distrust for Vietnamese civilians, Corporal Wallace Lillebo wrote:

Many of the VC were the 'non-combatant' peasants whom you saw working daily in the paddy fields; or such people who inhabited the towns and villages...Time and again we captured documents which revealed the true identities of the farmer peasants and townspeople to us – our own 'Noggie' barber at Binh Ba, who used to merrily cut our hair...later became unmasked as a VC.<sup>120</sup>

Still, some soldiers expressed affection for the Vietnamese they encountered on a day-to-day basis. Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith wrote to his parents: 'Some of the natives are friendly, but many choose to ignore or even hide from us. The...kids are friendly as a rule. It must be terrible to be born in a war and grow up as they are'.<sup>121</sup> Lieutenant BL Smith of the Australian Civil Affairs Unit wrote: 'Most women I like too, they are polite (in their way) and the kids, of course, I think they are terrific'.<sup>122</sup> Lieutenant Bernard O'Sullivan, who served on the Australian Army ship AV Clive

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<sup>119</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 10 June 1965.

<sup>120</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, n.d.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 22 November 1969.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, BL, Diary, PR00331, Australian War Memorial, 7 August 1969.



Steele, wrote in a letter to his parents: ‘The people are lovely, for the most part, but their lot is miserable’.<sup>123</sup> It is important to note, however, that despite these kindly words, the level of familiarity occasionally expressed by Australian soldiers towards Boer civilians rarely occurred towards the Vietnamese in the later war.

In both wars, clear links can be found between feelings of identification with the enemy and increasing dissatisfaction with combat, or disenchantment with the war itself. It is interesting to note that more negative expressions by soldiers can be found for the Boer War, especially significant in a comparison to Vietnam - one of the most unpopular wars in Australian history. This different degree of soldier discontent between the two wars is a theme that will repeat itself in the remainder of this thesis, but in both instances it is at this point, when the original excitement at the prospect of warfare disappears and the next stage in fighting begins, that it first becomes evident in the sample under consideration.

An excerpt of the diary of Trooper Alured Kelly reveals the change in soldier attitude from anticipation towards the war to disillusionment with its overall basis, thus demonstrating the point that a soldier must believe in a war’s ‘cause’ to fight wholeheartedly:

When I joined the Second Victorian Contingent in December 1899 I honestly felt proud to be a soldier fighting for my Queen and Country against the ignorant, deceitful, bible-punching Boers who demanded taxes from the British and other foreign citizens but refused to give them any franchise and, generally speaking, made life difficult for them in every way. After spending

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<sup>123</sup> O’Sullivan, B, Letter, PR86/285, Australian War Memorial, 25 December 1967. See also Denley, F, Letter, PR01533, Australian War Memorial, 1969.

a few days in Johannesburg I realised that there were two sides to the story of the British versus Boers. I came to the conclusion that if there had been no diamonds in Kimberley or gold in Johannesburg, there would not have been a South African War.<sup>124</sup>

In this case, Kelly had also come to a different conclusion about the justness of the war itself, despite having had very specific views regarding British-Boer relations in South Africa before enlisting.

A similar change of heart also occurred in soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. Private Shayne O'Brien of 5RAR wrote a long letter to his family about a book he was reading by an 'American Marine Colonel' that opposed the methods employed in fighting against the Vietnamese. O'Brien agreed with what he had read, writing:

So far the book has given me a logical truthful answer to what I have seen, thought about and encountered. After one has been out here, one gets the feeling something is 'phony' and this book answers this feeling very clearly and simply...I am discovering more of the fine print in this conflict and I'm afraid it does little to raise the dignity & purpose of the people involved.<sup>125</sup>

Bombardier Peter Groves expressed similar sentiments in less complex terms regarding the difference between what he was taught in training and later discovered on the war front. When discussing his role in the war in a letter to his wife Wendy, he wrote: 'God they had us on back home'.<sup>126</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray, of

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<sup>124</sup> Kelly, A, Diary, 3DRL 1915, Australian War Memorial, n.d. See also Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 19 January 1902.

<sup>125</sup> O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>126</sup> Groves, P, Letter, PR86/248, Australian War Memorial, 16 March 1969.

the 547 Signal Troop, also demonstrated his altered perception of the war in a letter home to his wife: 'I am less sure of my ideas in this country than I ever was before I came! Now I just know the war is wrong – but it would be worse if we were not here'.<sup>127</sup> Despite this change in attitude toward their position, most soldiers continued to fight until the end of their 'tour'. A major reason for this, judging from the archived letters and diaries of men in both wars, and particularly the above words of Murray, is closely related to the soldier's sense of duty and determination to complete their assignment, despite their dissatisfaction.

Kellett maintains that if an army experiences numerous defeats, morale drops, as does the belief of soldiers in the cause for which they are fighting.<sup>128</sup> This is exaggerated when those fighting a war have entered it convinced that they will be victorious – the case in both the Boer and Vietnam Wars, as each was fought between a world power and a small, seemingly powerless enemy. Kellett links such feelings among troops to their concept of 'duty'. If a soldier's own contingent, or even another group of soldiers fighting on the same side, is defeated, he will often feel as though he is personally shirking his duty.<sup>129</sup> Martin Stone supports this idea when discussing shellshock in the First World War. He ties in some symptoms of shellshock with the self-perception by soldiers that they have not completed their duty, claiming that shellshock can be avoided if military leaders 'internalise the notion of duty in the rank and file soldier'.<sup>130</sup> Stone is not suggesting that only this factor caused all cases of shellshock, but that this is one factor that affects the extent to which men suffer from it. Bartlett agrees, stating that those at risk of suffering

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<sup>127</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 3 September 1968.

<sup>128</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 260.

<sup>129</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 263.

<sup>130</sup> Stone, M, 'Shellshock and the Psychologists' in Bynum WF, Porter R & Shepherd M (eds.), *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry: Volume II: Institutions and Society*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1985, p. 262.

from anxiety neuroses are often focussed on the concept of duty as an attempt to rid themselves of ‘the dishonourable thoughts of an easy way to safety’ – namely, ceasing to fight.<sup>131</sup> He also maintains that this occurs predominantly after a soldier’s initial phase of fighting, when ‘depression’, ‘strain’ or final resignation to the task sets in.<sup>132</sup> Thus, a soldier’s concentration on their duty is often the result of dissatisfaction with their situation in, or reasons for fighting, a war. In both Boer and Vietnam War letters and diaries, there are frequent references to the concept of duty, often tied in with a soldier’s dissatisfaction at having to perform disagreeable tasks.

During the Boer War, many soldiers expressed reluctance when ordered to burn Boer homes and move civilians to concentration camps as part of the ‘scorched earth policy’ initiated by Roberts and launched by Kitchener from his arrival in South Africa as Commander of the British Army in November 1900. In line with the scholars mentioned, many soldiers explained their compliance by falling back on the concept of duty – perhaps to motivate themselves to carry out such atrocities, or lessen some of the guilt associated with having to commit them against innocent women and children. This was usually found in the archived personal records of the rank and file, who were most often on the front lines taking the ‘scorched earth’ orders from their superiors. This is demonstrated in a letter written by Private Alan Wellington to his friend Philip Thomas Teer:

We even burn the farms down now, beside taking the cattle etc & we burn the veldt down as we go. We take the women and children out of the houses & burn the farms in their faces. I had a horrible experience one day, I had to go in a house & carry an old lady that couldn’t walk out & help to put her in a

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<sup>131</sup> Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 190.

<sup>132</sup> Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 178.

wagon, she cried like a child. It was hard for me to have to do it but Phil *it was my duty I had to do it* [emphasis added].<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, Trooper Herbert S Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote in his diary: ‘Came across another valley and burnt all the farms, some of the Boer women abusing us in a terrible manner, telling us we only fight women and destroy their homes. I’m very sorry to see the women turned out but there is nothing else for it’.<sup>134</sup> Both of these examples demonstrate the use of the ‘duty’ justification for committing violence that, clearly, they themselves did not entirely agree with.

Some soldiers in the sample exhibited pride in their ability to last so long under such difficult conditions, and attributed this to their dedication to duty. Again, such expressions were usually found in the archived personal records of soldiers – those who were required to do the most physically and emotionally challenging work, and for whom there would have been a greater need to justify potential actions. Explaining the harsh conditions he had to endure on the war front, Trooper Fred Stocks of Bethune’s Mounted Infantry wrote to his parents: ‘You ought to see some of us sometimes coming into camp leading a bag of bones behind us a beard a month old knees out and elbows and black with dust; but anyway no one can say that I have ever shown the white feather’.<sup>135</sup> Here Stocks is telling his family that although his lot is difficult, he will not give up – expressing commitment to his obligations as a soldier. Private Alexander McQueen similarly wrote in a letter to his family: ‘I will be glad when the war is over, but would not like to go before’.<sup>136</sup> Some related this to the requirement to continue fighting the Boers. Private Stan Jones wrote: ‘War is a

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<sup>133</sup> Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 17 February 1902.

<sup>134</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR83/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>135</sup> Stocks, F, Letter, MS11729, State Library of Victoria, 14 June 1901.

<sup>136</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 17 April 1900.

cruel affair and it is terrible to think that so many valuable lives should be lost, but I suppose it cannot be helped as the Boers are a bad lot'.<sup>137</sup> By describing the Boers as a 'bad lot', Jones is justifying his own actions as a soldier fighting in a 'cruel' war. Although many of the examined soldiers openly expressed dissatisfaction when carrying out tasks that they found psychologically difficult, they often explained their willingness to do it in terms of their duty, implying that they did not have a choice. As Trooper Jack Cock of Bethune's Mounted Infantry said: 'We must go through this time at any price whatever the loss is'.<sup>138</sup>

An investigation of the archived letters and diaries of Vietnam War soldiers reveals that less direct reference is made to compulsory obligations – namely, to a sense of duty - when describing their day-to-day tasks. In the two instances found, soldiers tend to express their duty with more resignation than those fighting in the Boer War. For example, Armourer Andrew Treffry writes to 'Eileen' about a mission he was about to embark on: 'I don't like the idea very much but there's not much we can do about it'.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Corporal Ron Kelly of 1RAR wrote to his wife: 'Old Fitzie is going crook about it all here. Hell he is funny always going crook about something. The subject today is, we should not even be here. Of course I agree with him, but we can't do anything about it'.<sup>140</sup> Although these soldiers have not directly referred to 'duty' as a concept, or as an incentive to continue fighting, it is clear that they do feel some responsibility attached to their role, so even though they do not completely agree with their position in the war, they will not give up. This reluctant sense of duty does not entirely fit with the findings of Kellett, Stone and Bartlett that connect soldier dissatisfaction to disillusionment with 'the cause' or combat itself, and to

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<sup>137</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 24 December 1899.

<sup>138</sup> Cock, J, Letter, MS13385, State Library of Victoria, 1 January 1900.

<sup>139</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 10 May 1969.

<sup>140</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 17 August 1965.

greater emphasis on the concept of duty. However, this is a limited sample. A wider study incorporating a larger range of primary sources, focussing perhaps solely on the Vietnam War, would certainly give more insight into this matter.

One of the main findings when comparing the content of archived letters and diaries from South Africa and Vietnam is that the number of open declarations of discontent is significantly lower for the later war. At first sight, this is unexpected, as there was far more dissent on the home front during Vietnam, but the words of the soldiers themselves do not generally reflect this. In terms of the early days of a soldier's war service, as discussed in this chapter, it is possible to see a reason for this. As mentioned earlier, Dawson, Phillips & Phillips and Fussell have carried out research on soldiers in the First World War which has found that they are more negatively affected by war if they have an unrealistic picture in their minds before they encounter actual battle, which generates shock and, often, dissatisfaction for the rest of their period of service.<sup>141</sup> It is possible, then, to see the higher incidence of disapproval in the letters home from South Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the result of the fact that it was Australia's first actual combat experience, whereas by the Vietnam War, Australians had fought in the world wars, as well as in Korea. Thus, soldiers fighting in Vietnam had a more realistic picture of what war was like and, as a result, experienced less shock upon first encounter with the enemy and battlefield. This caused less unhappiness expressed in their day to day activities and, thus, also in their letters and diaries.

This is only one explanation for the difference in degree of satisfaction expressed by soldiers in the two wars. It is possible also that the fact that many Australian civilians

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<sup>141</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 56; Phillips & Phillips, *Victorians at Home and Away*, 166, 175-176; Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 7.

turned against the war in Vietnam, particularly after 1968, promoted self-censorship within the soldier community. This issue will be discussed later, but at this stage it is important to note that the lower number of pessimistic expressions within this sample of Vietnam War soldiers' letters possibly demonstrates that there was less cause for them to discuss in-depth the many negatives of the war they were fighting. This is not to say that many of these soldiers were not dissatisfied with their lot, but they simply were not inclined to let those on the home front know this, whether to avoid worrying them, or whether as a form of self-defence of their position as soldiers in a publicly unpopular war.<sup>142</sup> Such a theory would benefit from further investigation, incorporating more varied sources, perhaps in a study concentrating on Vietnam soldiers, however in the context of this study, the archived Boer and Vietnam War soldiers' records indicate that soldiers in Vietnam generally appeared more positive about the war and their position in it.

In terms of a soldier's initial experience of war and the period of disillusionment experienced by many immediately after this, the archived letters and diaries of those who fought in the Boer and Vietnam Wars tend to follow the established theories on soldiering. It is noteworthy that when soldiers' expressions deviated from these findings, it was often the result of occurrences or attitudes on the home front. For instance, when comparing the sample of Vietnam and Boer War soldiers' reasons for enlisting, there are significantly fewer references to Australia found in the words of those in Vietnam. As mentioned above, this can be explained by the fact that the home front, particularly in the later years of the war, was predominantly against its continuation – this would almost certainly dissuade a soldier from speaking openly about their reasons for enlistment. A similar explanation can be given for the fact

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<sup>142</sup> More reasons will be offered to explain this throughout Section B, particularly in Chapter Eight, which investigates the effect of the home front on soldiers at war.



that Vietnam soldiers less frequently referred directly to their ‘duty’ in explaining their actions, whereas those in South Africa often justified more brutal actions by looking to their notion of obligation in war. The selected soldiers in Vietnam did mention their perceived obligation to carry out certain tasks, but expressed much more unwillingness than those in the Boer War. This, again, can be seen as a reflection of negative opinion on the home front towards the war, as attitudes among the public and within the military towards a soldier’s obligations in war had changed dramatically since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>143</sup>

It is now necessary to investigate the ways in which the military structure itself, namely, the physical composition of the army, affected the attitudes of the selected soldiers towards the war they were fighting, combat in general and their resultant behaviour, before discussing how war itself psychologically affected these fighting men. These coming chapters will also look for deviations from the findings of scholars concerning soldiering in the archived letters and diaries of these men and explain these in the context of each war, to understand more fully whether the sample of soldiers behaved similarly irrespective of the time period in which they were involved in combat.

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<sup>143</sup> This point will be dealt with in Chapter Six, which discusses the perceptible shift in soldiers’ outlook from reliance on the ‘hero mentality’ to viewing their military service in terms of survival.

## Chapter Five

# The Impact of the Military Structure

Whereas military training is the initial step towards transforming a civilian into a willing combatant, it is also essential that obedience to the rules introduced before battle and commitment to being actually engaged in war continues throughout a soldier's tour of duty. Kellett maintains that intensive training alone will not maintain morale throughout an entire tour of duty, but merely provides a necessary foundation for soldiers' initial fervour for battle.<sup>1</sup> It must be supplemented at the front by further development of group morale (or *esprit de corps*), which will be vital in combat as well as in between engagements with the enemy.

There are various means used to carry out this goal, all of which begin before a soldier reaches the war front and last for the duration of service. Firstly, the group environment is relied on to ensure that soldiers become dependent on their comrades. This both increases fighting ability and reduces the chance of disillusionment or reluctance for battle. It can be encouraged through effective leadership, as combat motivation is significantly affected by troop opinion toward commanding officers, depending on the ability of military leaders to impose appropriate disciplinary procedures, as well as the extent to which 'regimental spirit' and morale is built up. The maintenance of high morale is essential throughout a soldier's period of service,

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<sup>1</sup> Kellett, A, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, 1982, pp. 73, 79.

and is the aim of many established military procedures. The concept of morale will be more closely examined in Chapters Six and Seven, but it is important to note that it is one intended aim of the entire military structure, and particularly the issues directly pertaining to a soldier's tour as dealt with in this chapter. Morale, comradeship and the leadership used to sustain regimental spirit, as well as impose discipline, are all intrinsically linked when considering a soldier's motivation to fight. Thus, a more officially imposed influence on Boer and Vietnam War soldiers - the military structure itself - will now be analysed to determine the extent to which this affected expressions of opinion in the selected archived letters and diaries, and the overall attitudes towards the wars these men were fighting. This also extends to soldier opinion of not only superiors, but also allied troops, as examining these together reveals more successfully why soldiers felt the way they did about Britain and the United States, as well as their armies.

A major tool used by most militaries to both encourage soldiers to kill, as well as help them psychologically withstand the battlefield, is group solidarity. This sense of inclusion in a cohesive group is essential from the beginning of military training until a soldier has left the war zone. Copeland identifies three essential facets of the military structure when focussing on the British Army during the Second World War – 'discipline, team spirit and endurance', labelling 'team spirit' the most important.<sup>2</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite and Murphy focus on this comradeship as a stress reduction technique for soldiers, insisting that its ability to enhance 'social support, group morale and cohesion' also improves their combat skills.<sup>3</sup> Despite these expressed goals of the group environment on the war front, some researchers maintain that

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<sup>2</sup> Copeland, N, *Psychology and the Soldier: The Art of Leadership*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1944, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, C, Braithwaite, H & Murphy, PJ, 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield' in Kearney, GE, Creamer, M, Marshall, R & Goyne, A (eds.), *Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force Experience*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, 2003, p. 27.

there are negative effects also implicit in its usage, resulting in a reduction in a soldier's willingness to fight. There is little mention of attachment to fellow soldiers in the archived personal records of men in both the Boer and Vietnam Wars. However, the occasional references to soldier bonding do indicate that strong affection was felt between at least some soldiers in the same unit, and when one was killed in battle, others suffered considerably.

There are many different reasons proposed by military theorists for the psychological benefits of comradeship. Steedman shows that the close relationships between soldiers in war is something that has been nurtured for centuries, pointing to the mental advantages of soldiers' physical closeness when square battle formations were used in earlier wars.<sup>4</sup> Holmes agrees with this view, claiming that if men encounter danger they want their companions as close to them as possible.<sup>5</sup> This can often be more effective if the soldiers are placed into smaller groups. Kellett states that smaller groups are stronger psychologically and, thus, more valuable during combat.<sup>6</sup> Also, Holmes points to how the unofficial 'buddy' system among very small groups of US soldiers in Korea increased loyalty to both fellow soldiers and the military as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Most who have studied this aspect of soldiering agree this approach often results in increased battle effectiveness.

Some have placed even more emphasis on the psychological benefits of the group environment. Dinter highlights the loneliness experienced by soldiers separated from their loved ones on the home front, claiming that this will increase the bond felt

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<sup>4</sup> Steedman, C, *The Radical Soldier's Tale: John Pearman 1819-1908*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, R, *Firing Line*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1987, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 293, 295-296.

between soldiers who are all sharing the same dislocation.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, George Mosse stresses how necessary closeness is between soldiers on the war front by arguing that in an ‘abstract and impersonal society’ such as that during war, soldiers are more likely to bond to escape the chaos of the war.<sup>9</sup> This retreat into close relationships on the front allows soldiers to make sense of their surroundings. Martin Middlebrook agrees, maintaining that British soldiers in the First World War relied on their fellow soldiers for the mental strength to continue fighting.<sup>10</sup> However, when focussing on the First World War, Mosse labels the concept of close comradeship the ‘myth of the camaraderie of war’.<sup>11</sup> He does acknowledge that men will form strong ties with their fellow soldiers, but maintains that the claim that such an environment can provide a positive life-changing experience for men is misleading. Another approach focuses on the everyday activities of soldiering, such as the carrying out of domestic tasks and the eating of meals in groups. For example, Holmes says this increases the bonds between men, which then leads to greater synchronicity between soldiers in combat, thus improving effectiveness in battle.<sup>12</sup> However, as mentioned further on, it is important not to overstate the importance of the group environment on a soldier, despite its positive military objectives.

An increase in morale and in the willingness to fight is the intended outcome of the strategic grouping of soldiers within militaries. On the topic of soldiering in the Second World War, Glenn Gray writes: ‘loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale’.<sup>13</sup> Copeland agrees, saying that: ‘even the most depraved and selfish person can be convinced to do for the group what he could never be persuaded to do

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<sup>8</sup> Dinter, E, *Hero or Coward: Pressures Facing the Soldier in Battle*, Frank Cass, Great Britain, 1985, pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Mosse, GL, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Middlebrook, M, *The First Day on the Somme, 1 July 1916*, Penguin, London, 1971, p. 299.

<sup>11</sup> Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Gray, G, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 300.

for himself'.<sup>14</sup> Kellett mentions an experiment carried out by Buss and Portnoy that administered electric shocks to men to see how a supportive group environment affected the ability to withstand pain. It was found that the closer the group, the higher the pain threshold of these men.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Richardson found that soldiers from an established, well-bonded group are less likely to talk when being questioned by the enemy.<sup>16</sup> These dominant views highlight the specific aim of militaries to encourage solidarity between their soldiers.

The archived letters and diaries of soldiers from the Boer and Vietnam Wars do reveal the closeness between men and their fellow troops, particularly when they are wounded or killed. Such sentimental references to other soldiers support the above theories that emphasise the strength of the connection between these men. Private Alan Wellington wrote to his friend Philip Teer from South Africa: 'Clem left the column on 14<sup>th</sup> October, going to have a spell until his arm gets alright. I can tell you that I miss him very much'.<sup>17</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Troop wrote to his wife about the relationship between soldiers: 'most blokes are quick to help their friends'.<sup>18</sup> Private Garry Heffernan of 3RAR, writing from Vietnam in 1971, expressed deep affection about a friend who had died:

Patto was a good friend of mine...He was a devout Catholic and had only been married about 2 years, with a 6 month old baby daughter. It suddenly hit

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<sup>14</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Buss & Portnoy, in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Richardson, Major-General FM, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War*, Leo Cooper, London, 1978, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Wellington, A, Letter, D 7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 21-22 October 1901.

<sup>18</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 3 May 1968.

me what war was that day and I declared war. I only hope we don't lose any platoon blokes.<sup>19</sup>

Heffernan's words are the only mention found in the archived letters or diaries of either war with a direct positive link between the death of a comrade and the motivation to fight, following the assertions made by theorists like Copeland and Kellett. The above soldiers' expressions are surprising, given that the archetypal image of brave soldiers is largely incongruous with the tenderness of the expressions found in these personal records.

Following the findings of Dinter, one main reason soldiers feel such sorrow upon the death of a comrade is because it diminishes their defences, thus possibly increasing their fear of battle. It is the threat of losing their basis of security, their comrades, which controls the much larger menace – the terror of warfare itself.<sup>20</sup> This explains extreme reactions such as that described by Lieutenant Douglas St George Rich of the 6th Queensland Imperial Bushmen in a letter to his parents:

A sad thing took place when we arrived at camp. One of the New Zealanders who had been sub with us, was shewing [sic] another a Mauser he had got and the other chap picked it up and pointed it, never dreaming it was loaded. Off it went and shot him through the lungs and he died this morning. The other poor chap who was his bosom friend has gone mad and had to be tied up to prevent him committing suicide.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Heffernan, GM, Letter, PR 86/363, Australian War Memorial, 26 March 1971.

<sup>20</sup> Dinter, *Hero or Coward*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 24 October 1901.

Alan Desmond O'Connor, a supply officer serving in Vietnam, expressed similar sadness in his diary when confronted by the death of a comrade: 'All the girls & blokes were very upset & this knocked us for the rest of the day'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Private Geoffrey Jones of 3RAR wrote in his diary of the effects of grief resulting from comrade deaths:

The news that the two killed are the machine gunner and his mate makes my stomach turn. It could so easily have been my mate on the gun and myself had we gone on patrol in correct order. The usual big booze up on return to Nui Dat is somewhat subdued as the blokes killed were our mates and not some other unknown name from another company or battalion.<sup>23</sup>

In these cases, the discovery that a fellow soldier had been killed was so stressful that it exposed a recognised negative feature of such close companionship between troops in war – a degree of extreme grief, which would almost certainly affect the ability to engage in combat.

Researchers have clearly identified negative aspects of close companionship between soldiers in war, caused by various factors. Holmes quotes the findings of Marc Bloch, who openly states that strong bonds between soldiers in a group are vital within the military, but they do not necessarily result in an increase in combat effectiveness.<sup>24</sup> Niall Ferguson discounts the importance of comradeship by mentioning that during the First World War, many soldiers were put in groups shortly before intense combat began, which would inevitably cause many to lose only very recent comrades. This highlights the constant importance of 'individualist'

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<sup>22</sup> O'Connor, AD, Diary, PRG843, State Library of South Australia, 9 February 1971.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, GR, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> Bloch, M, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 316.



methods to withstand the stresses of battle, despite any less reliable relationships between soldiers.<sup>25</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite and Murphy claim that while closeness between soldiers can reduce anxiety among them, it can also lead to enhanced anxiety.<sup>26</sup> This can clearly be seen in the above cases of Rich and O'Connor, where close relationships shared between fellow soldiers caused extreme distress, and potential inefficiency in combat.

Some researchers maintain that this is particularly the case if the soldiers themselves do not share the same values or aims as the military in which they are fighting. Wilson, Braithwaite and Murphy recognise that group solidarity can increase an army's competence, but the opposite may occur in cases where soldiers do not agree with decisions made by officers.<sup>27</sup> Kellett agrees, arguing that only solid groups of soldiers with the same principles and goals as the wider military structure will work in full accordance with their leadership.<sup>28</sup> Evidence of this has been found in the sample of soldiers' letters and diaries, but will be fully discussed when dealing with the concept of mutiny and 'fragging', a Vietnam-based example of soldier rebellion, named so due to the use of the fragmentation grenade.<sup>29</sup>

In more recent decades, particularly after the widespread psychological injury among US troops during the world wars, the 'rotation system' was introduced in Korea and Vietnam. This system, which imposed a limited 'set' tour on soldiers rather than forcing them to fight until peace is declared, was intended to reduce the number of soldiers mentally wounded on the war front, something that would also ensure that

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<sup>25</sup> Ferguson, N, *The Pity of War*, Penguin, London, 1998, p. 354.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite & Murphy, 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield', 24.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite & Murphy, 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield', 25.

<sup>28</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 220-223.

morale remained high.<sup>30</sup> Evidence from the Boer War suggests that such a system would have been well-received in this instance, as some soldiers enlisting for South Africa were asked to select whether they wanted to stay in South Africa for only a year, or until the end of the war.<sup>31</sup> A substantial majority of volunteers opted for the latter – a result accounted for not only by the desire to exhibit ‘loyalty’, but also by the very general expectation that the war would be over in matter of months. However, when it became apparent that the war could last longer than a year, some soldiers became impatient – shown by a telegram sent to the South Australian Chief Secretary’s Office from the New South Wales Premier, William Lyne, on 19 February 1901:

Have recd private telegram from South Africa that discontent exists amongst Australian troops being kept there over twelve months and suggesting that Imperial Govt should give definite assurance to the men as to their early return.<sup>32</sup>

The problem was sufficiently widespread to prompt official action, as shown by the reply of the same day from the South Australian Premier, Frederick Holder, which directed that all men who wished could leave the front after twelve months of service.<sup>33</sup>

Although the emphasis on group solidarity within a soldier’s unit can have psychological value, there are also disadvantages connected with the consequent

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<sup>30</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 263; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Attestation declarations for the fifth South Australian Contingent, AP613/7, National Archives of Australia, 1-31 January 1900.

<sup>32</sup> Lyne, W, Letter to South Australian Chief Secretary’s Office, no. 307, GRG24/6/480, State Records of South Australia, 19 February 1901.

<sup>33</sup> Holder, F, Letter to Sir William Lyne, no. 307, GRG 24/6/480, State Records of South Australia, 19 February 1901.

disbandment of previously cohesive groups. Studies have found that when soldiers spend only a short period of time together on the battlefield, and more so when individual soldiers do not join contingents collectively, reliance on group solidarity to promote combat efficiency may not be possible.<sup>34</sup> 5RAR Private Douglas Bishop's letter to his mother which discusses the arrival of fresh troops, previously mentioned when discussing soldier disillusionment in battle, illustrates the 'us and them' attitude that arises out of rotation: 'Only 18 days until we are non-operational, it was terrific to see the advance party of 7RAR arrive, they are a good bunch of guys and seem very keen about everything, I know how they will feel in 10-11 months time about Vietnam though'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Private Roland Lloyd of 6RAR wrote in a letter home: 'The first lot of the advance party of 2RAR arrived about 30 minutes ago, *that really cheered me up knowing that they have a year over here*' [emphasis added].<sup>36</sup> Here Lloyd expressed joy at the fact that it is another group of soldiers, not himself, who will continue to fight in Vietnam – illustrating both the detachment with which he viewed the new troops and his relief at leaving the war front and returning home. Such attitudes are observed also among those who, in their letters or diaries, counted down to the end of their service, and stated adamantly that they wanted to go home.<sup>37</sup>

This also demonstrates the fact that if soldiers are replaced after a limited time, it is less likely that those fighting will reach the lowest established point of soldier disillusion with the war.<sup>38</sup> However, this did not prove overwhelmingly effective. In fact, the short tour in Vietnam led to 'short-timer's fever', during which soldiers spent their final month more isolated and less willing to engage in dangerous

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, Braithwaite & Murphy, 'Psychological Preparation for the Battlefield', 25.

<sup>35</sup> Bishop, D, Letter, PR91/018, Australian War Memorial, 1966. See also Chapter Four, p. 114.

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd, R, Letter, PR00171, Australian War Memorial, 29 April 1970.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Eight, pp. 276-277.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 115, 119-120.

combat.<sup>39</sup> Lloyd, who writes in a letter less than three weeks before the end of his tour, demonstrates this:

There is talk that Nui Dat will be rocketed and mortared on 1<sup>st</sup> May and poor old 6RAR have sent out a company to look for the baddies. They will send out a different company every two days for the next ten days. It is a bit upsetting for the blokes having to go out again.<sup>40</sup>

Overall, although it is clear by research carried out since the Second World War that rotation can increase the willingness of soldiers to fight and reduce the risk of psychological damage, the archived letters and diaries from soldiers in Vietnam do indicate that there are less desirable effects of such a system. A wider study, focussing solely on the Vietnam War and incorporating oral history, could perhaps elaborate on the discussed theories so as to provide a more adequate conclusion.

One of the most important sources of morale in an army lies in the quality of its leadership. Norman Copeland claims that a good leader is one whose commands will be followed by soldiers even when they are left unsupervised.<sup>41</sup> This involves a combination of qualities within a leader that succeed in inspiring soldiers to continue the behaviour inculcated in them during military training. Stouffer et al., in *The American Soldier* (1949) surveyed soldiers on the subject of leadership. The findings revealed that 31% wanted 'leadership by example and personal courage'; 26% 'encouragement by pep talks, jokes and information'; 23% 'demonstration of concern for soldiers' safety and welfare'; and 5% 'friendliness and informality' from

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<sup>39</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd, R, Letter, PR00171, Australian War Memorial, 29 April 1970.

<sup>41</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 21.

their officers.<sup>42</sup> These findings coincide with those of Copeland, who maintains that, for an officer to be an effective leader, soldiers must respect them both as a human being and as a combatant. In addition, their influence must be a constant presence during battle, to infuse both confidence and the spirit of group solidarity in their troops.<sup>43</sup> The importance of leadership during both the Boer and Vietnam Wars is clear in the examined sample of soldiers' letters and diaries, as their opinion of officers is expressed freely and frequently.

An important part of a leader's role on the battlefield is the imposition of discipline on soldiers.<sup>44</sup> Effective discipline has several critical functions, the most important being the maintenance of morale, as well as increased combat effectiveness. Copeland writes that the latter is the ultimate objective of discipline, and that punishments should be designed with that end in mind.<sup>45</sup> Richardson agrees, adding that good discipline is a morale-booster in battle, and that a by-product of this is lower rates of psychological damage among soldiers.<sup>46</sup> The intention of discipline is similar to that of general military training – to encourage soldiers to act in line with military objectives without needing constant supervision by officers. This does not only include everyday behaviour, but also soldier's actions within combat itself. Hocking claims that officers will use discipline until soldiers instinctively follow orders, thereby increasing efficiency.<sup>47</sup> Also, as mentioned, Copeland agrees, maintaining that a good leader is one who can use discipline to cause a group of people to act in the correct way even in his absence.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Stouffer, SA, in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 153.

<sup>43</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 37-38.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 104-106 for a focus on drill as part of military training.

<sup>45</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 88.

<sup>46</sup> Richardson, *Fighting Spirit*, 89-90.

<sup>47</sup> Hocking, WE, *Morale and Its Enemies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1918, p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 79.

At the time of the Boer War, the British Army held discipline to be one of the most important roles of a leader.<sup>49</sup> However, its use in this role has decreased since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly by the Second World War, during which crimes like desertion were not punished by death. Kellett dates this from the experience of the First World War, when armies realised that soldiers will develop essential self-discipline if the incidence and severity of punishments is reduced.<sup>50</sup> The archived letters and diaries of Australians in the Boer and Vietnam Wars contain references to the use of discipline. Soldiers writing from South Africa, and particularly on the ships en route to the war, often mentioned cases of discipline - for even relatively minor crimes such as sleeping on duty and stealing porridge.<sup>51</sup> Major Joseph Dallimore of the 4<sup>th</sup> Victorian Imperial Bushmen describes punishment for crimes such as this in a letter to his 'dearest Beatrice':

The colonel keeps very strict discipline, & everything has to be done to the minute, there is a cell on the ship & any man misbehaving himself in any way is at once put in by the guard...drunkenness and insubordination is the general crime...it is only when they are violent that the irons are put on.<sup>52</sup>

Private Watson Augustus Steel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Mounted Rifles, also referred to discipline for more serious crimes:

Selling horses off the lines to civilian dealers by some of our worst characters has become a common practice...a man has just been arrested. Besides it gives Australians a bad name. To take another man's horse & fight on is

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<sup>49</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 133.

<sup>50</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> See Coulter, SR, Diary, PR86/234, Australian War Memorial, 4 March 1901; Jennings, JT, Diary, PR 87/65, Australian War Memorial, 1 November 1899.

<sup>52</sup> Dallimore, J, Letter, PA99/75, State Library of Victoria, 6 May 1900.

inexcusable, but to see it and make money out of it, is a grave breach of the ethics of war.<sup>53</sup>

The famous case of Harry ‘Breaker’ Morant and his fellow soldiers Peter Handcock and George Witten, court-martialled for murder, is one of the most serious, resulting in the execution of Morant and Handcock, and the life imprisonment of Witten.<sup>54</sup>

In the archived Vietnam War letters and diaries, however, only two mentions of the use of discipline can be found – perhaps a reflection of its lesser importance and effectiveness as a motivator or morale-booster during this war. This is demonstrated by the fact that the punishment of death by the British Army for acts such as desertion and ‘cowardice’ was abolished in 1930. Captain Reginald Bruce Dittmar of the 102 Field Workshop reports in his diary that he had been chosen as a prosecutor in a court-martial of a soldier who was arrested for ‘willfully inflicting bodily harm with intent to become unfit for military service’.<sup>55</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith of 8RAR also wrote to his parents of a weekend he was ‘Duty Officer’, during which he encountered some discipline cases: ‘A drunk soldier I have to throw in the “can” for the night. I subsequently released him and didn’t charge him as he was a decent type’, as well as ‘a sodomy case with one of our diggers’.<sup>56</sup> During Vietnam, crimes that resulted in military discipline had to be more serious - drunkenness had been a much more serious offence during the Boer War. This also indicates why fewer references to this perspective of army life appear in the archived letters and diaries

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<sup>53</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 29 March 1900. See also Campbell Family Papers, MLMSS2156, State Library of New South Wales, n.d.; Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 19 August 1901; Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 4 August 1901; Howland, FH, Diary, PRG248, State Library of South Australia, 10 November 1899, 22 November 1899.

<sup>54</sup> For Private William Hamline Glasson’s account of this, see Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 19 January 1902.

<sup>55</sup> Dittmar, RB, Diary, PR91/191, Australian War Memorial, 22 July 1968.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, NC, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 19 February 1968.

from the Vietnam War, and why those that do are by those who impose the discipline – officers - rather than common soldiers. Furthermore, in both wars the sample of diarists and letter writers mention leaders themselves far more than the discipline they imposed.

References to officers in the archived personal records occurred far more frequently during the Boer War than in Vietnam. This can be partly attributed to the fact that soldiers lived in better physical conditions during the latter war. Evidence from the Boer War shows that much of the annoyance directed at officers can be related to the degree of the soldier's own physical discomfort, which can be directly linked to a soldier's perception of their treatment. Copeland maintains that soldiers need to be given a 'sense of importance', 'courtesy' and 'dignity' by their officers.<sup>57</sup> Most mention of officers in the archived records is negative in tone, extending also to the British 'Tommyes' – the common soldiers. The admiration and praise of the Boers discussed in Chapter Four occurred far more than that towards their allied British troops.<sup>58</sup> In the case of the selected Vietnam soldiers, although they did not often mention officers, there was clearly more disapproval than admiration when they did. Also, negative comments towards fellow troops were more focussed towards the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) allied soldiers than the US Army men.

Criticism of British headship in South Africa was commonly directed at the British military in general, the top of the army hierarchy, or army commanders such as Lord Roberts, or his predecessor General Buller, and came from many levels of the military hierarchy. For example, Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich wrote to his mother on 16 November 1901:

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<sup>57</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 42, 57.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 121-124.



Upon my soul the more I see of the British Arms the more contempt you have for them. Not that I don't say their men are as good or even better than ours, but it is their officers who are to say the least of it, incompetent. You would scarcely believe the contempt in which the Colonials hold regiments like the Hussars and Dragoons whom heretofor [sic] we used to revere as all that was brave. The more I see of them the more the feeling grows and [ I ] don't wonder at the scorn in which the Boers hold them. It's the Colonials who are doing all the work and these English johnnies know it and aren't they just jealous of us, for it's made so evident in any special work – the Colonials are taken to do it.<sup>59</sup>

Lieutenant George Harris of the South African Light Horse expressed similar disdain – this time towards British military headship - in a letter to his mother on 25 October 1900: 'I can tell you something now that is not known at home and it is this that Roberts is not at all the popular man with the troops that he is supposed to be'.<sup>60</sup> He then described a speech given by Lord Roberts, Commander of the British Forces in South Africa, to encourage soldiers to continue fighting, saying:

It seemed so funny after his speech in comparison to when Buller spoke to us as there was not a single cheer and we were just wheeled round and marched home and I heard a lot of fellows say that they would stop if 'Old Buller'

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<sup>59</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 16 November 1901. See also Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 14 March 1900; Campbell Family Papers, MLMSS2156, State Library of New South Wales, n.d.; Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 19 January 1902; Dallimore, J, Diary, PA99/75, State Library of Victoria, 30 May 1900.

<sup>60</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 25 October 1900.

would have asked them but not for Roberts, so our Regiment is just half its size now.<sup>61</sup>

This is notable because Lord Roberts was far more successful than General Buller in commanding the army in South Africa and surprising, too, as the South African Light Horse comprised both British and Australian soldiers. Roberts had replaced Buller due to the numerous British defeats while Buller was in command, and, for at least the first six months, Roberts led the army through successive victories. When it proved impossible for him to continue this success and quickly end the war, the soldiers soon tired of him – despite the fact that his popularity remained high among the British public. Private Alexander McQueen wrote to his parents of Roberts on 12 January 1901, after he had handed over South African command to Lord Kitchener:

I may say, although it may seem almost disloyal, that universal satisfaction is felt among the troops that Bobs has given over command as the men are heartsick of the shocking easy way he played with the Boers...Buller is the only man that has really done much here.<sup>62</sup>

These words support Copeland's assertion mentioned above that leaders within an army must reveal themselves as gallant fighters and wise decision makers to gain the respect of subordinates.

A major part of the respect an officer must pay to his subordinates seems, by the records examined, to include the ability to prevent their getting into any needless danger. This is closely tied in with soldier opinion that requires a leader to be

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<sup>61</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 25 October 1900.

<sup>62</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 12 January 1901.

proficient in battle command. Numerous letters by soldiers in both wars show that dissatisfaction was expressed at not only the commanding officers of entire armies, but also those leading single individual contingents or units. In these cases, it is more likely that a sole encounter has inspired their frustration, rather than their general living conditions. Sergeant Andrew Duncan Warden of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Victorian Contingent wrote in his diary of the Lieutenant of his division: ‘Oh for a decent officer – our divisions had to stay behind & guard camp while all the rest went out and fought the Boers. This is most discouraging and annoying. May the Boers soon catch him’ [author’s emphasis].<sup>63</sup> He later wrote to his mother: ‘We all hope he will be detained there until the war is over, as he is almost out of his mind with excitement and nervousness when in action, or near the enemy; & so risks our lives unnecessarily; at present I am in charge of the whole division’.<sup>64</sup> Trooper Charles Cawthorn of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen confirms the concern by soldiers that their lives would be risked unnecessarily, by praising an officer because he did not exhibit rash decision-making in combat, specifically in scouting operations. Cawthorn writes that he:

...believed that our business was only to watch the enemy & supply the column with information regarding their movements. Was not popular as it was generally believed that he had ‘cold feet’. During the whole time he was in charge of us we did not lose one man & we were continually in touch with the Boers. I believe a coldfooted [sic] officer makes the best scout officer provided he is competent in other ways. He is always on his guard & never risks his men unnecessarily.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Warden, AD, Diary, MS10459, State Library of Victoria, 23 February 1900.

<sup>64</sup> Warden, AD, Letter, MS10459, State Library of Victoria, 14 March 1900.

<sup>65</sup> Cawthorn, CFR, Letter, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 4 August 1901. See also Vogan, AJ, Diary, MS113, State Library of New South Wales, June 1901.

Here the opinion Cawthorn held of his leader was directly related to his ability to preserve the lives of his soldiers. Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen, said of an officer's actions during a Boer encounter:

Our party should have had a go to cut them off but our chief seems to have been suffering from some mental aberration for we could not get him to shift till it was too late. We were all mad at his behaviour but I suppose all of us are liable to make a mistake and he may have seen the movement in a different light. He was a NZ officer which made us all the more disgusted.<sup>66</sup>

Here Rich expresses the general frustration felt by many Australians who viewed their leadership as incompetent.

The diary of Lieutenant Patrick Lang contains a 'yarn' he'd heard from a New South Wales soldier that epitomises the general disdain with which Australian soldiers saw British officers:

Out Elands River way Kitchener rode up to a sentry; sentry engaged in propping himself up on his rifle & smoking his pipe, "Where is your commanding officer," said Kitchener. "O, he's down in his b\_\_\_\_ dug out" replied the bushman without removing his pipe. "Come, come my man, I asked where your commanding officer was". Sentry with air of finality,

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<sup>66</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR10964, Australian War Memorial, 26 November 1901. See also Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 19 August 1901.

picking up his rifle and moving off, “Well I told you he was down in his  
b \_\_\_\_ dug out, where he’s been all the time”.<sup>67</sup>

Although most mention of officers found in archived soldiers’ letters and diaries from Vietnam is negative, this is generally in reference to Australian headship, as US officers were rarely put directly in charge of Australian units. A small number of soldiers’ records from Vietnam express similar disdain for the US military system and the mistakes of individual officers. Lieutenant Bernard O’Sullivan, writing to his parents, made no secret of his disapproval of the American handling of the war:

If we (meaning the allies) ever win this war, it won’t be through efficient logistics. The waste of stores, men and time is just too fantastic to comprehend. I always thought the Yanks were masters of organisation, but the more I see of them, nice as they are, I become convinced that they couldn’t organise a kiddies Christmas party to go properly.<sup>68</sup>

It seems, however, that many soldiers were simply frustrated with their overall position in the war, as expressed by Private Frank Denley of the 1 Field Squadron in a letter to his parents:

I’m sorry about telling you my troubles [sic] but I was just fed up with the system & I’m glad I’m going out tomorrow. I’m not the only bloke this way

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<sup>67</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 4 September 1900.

<sup>68</sup> O’Sullivan, B, Letter, PR86/285, Australian War Memorial, 27 February 1968.

all the rest of the fellers in the Troops feel the same way. What started this we got a new Boss & he is a propper [sic] NUT (would not have a clue).<sup>69</sup>

Denley's words indicate another similarity with soldiers fighting in the Boer War – their absolute intolerance for superiors whom they did not trust. As mentioned earlier, this was heightened when a soldier was close to completing his one year 'tour'. An example of this, as well as the fear that the superior in question was placing his men in avoidable danger, can be found in Signaler Andrew Clyne's letters home, most of which – even from the beginning of his service in the 110 Signal Squadron – contain a count of the days remaining until his return to Australia. Near the end of his tour he wrote to his girlfriend:

Monday night we went out on patrol. There were seven off [sic] us and a dickhead lieutenant led us and got us lost it ended up we were only about 400-500 yards from camp...were meant to be at least a mile but we walked around in a circle and nearly ended up back in camp.<sup>70</sup>

Clyne's frustration is typical of men approaching the end of their military service, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

This, as well as Denley's words earlier, beg the conclusion that perhaps such expressions among these soldiers were symptomatic of a general discontent with their current position, rather than direct objection to particular officers in command. In general, there were many fewer expressions of disdain or disgust directed at

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<sup>69</sup> Denley, F, Letter, PR01533, Australian War Memorial, 8 March 1970. See also O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, n.d; Dittmar, RB, Diary, PR91/191, Australian War Memorial, 1 April 1968.

<sup>70</sup> Clyne, AP, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 1 June 1971.

superiors by soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Given the vast difference in living conditions between the wars, this suggests that if the soldiers were not satisfied with their current state of physical comfort, security or place in the war, their frustration could have been expressed in their letters and diaries as dissatisfaction with military headship. A more extensive study focussing specifically on Vietnam War soldiers, perhaps tying oral evidence in with archived personal records, would allow for a more decisive conclusion regarding this.

In the archived personal records, such negative views extended also to the allied troops – the British soldiers ('Tommies') fighting in South Africa, as well as both the American and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces fighting against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. This can be partly explained by the circumstances surrounding Australia's entry, as well as their role, in each war. Given Australia's relatively small army, invitations from Britain and the United States to join them in each war came with the hope of gaining a 'token' ally - a supporting force that was not expected to significantly influence the overall course of the war. The Australian governments in power were, on the whole, prepared to accept these invitations on the basis of further promise of security from these world powers. Nonetheless, Australian soldiers proved themselves invaluable, particularly during the Boer War where the inadequacy of British military formations became clear when faced with the South African climate, terrain, and also the guerrilla nature of warfare from September 1900, resulting in particular requests by Britain for additional Australian mounted infantry. For example, in a letter to the British Secretary of State for War St. John Brodrick, the Commander of the British Army Lord Kitchener wrote: 'I

shall be very glad indeed to have the Colonials they are splendid men and most useful'.<sup>71</sup>

Theorists of war have often mentioned the importance of regimental spirit in combat troops. This is somewhat related to the concept of comradeship, as well as to the morale that results, as it stresses the soldier's inclusion in a prestigious military group to inspire maximum battle motivation and willingness to sacrifice. Holmes insists that such feelings can urge soldiers to continue fighting despite challenges to soldier morale, such as defeat in battle. He attributes this to the pride inculcated in them, and their fear of betraying the regiment through cowardice.<sup>72</sup> Leese agrees, but places 'regimental membership' above comradeship as an instigator of loyalty, due to the potentially negative effects of losing close companions in a smaller group situation.<sup>73</sup> This regimental pride can be seen clearly in the sample of Australian Boer War soldiers. However, during the Vietnam War, such feelings seem to have been significantly muted in the archived letter and diaries. It is possible that this is due to the lack of time to form solid unit or group-wide traditions.

During the Boer War, such opinion was occasionally expressed through comparisons between the fighting ability of the Australian and British troops. Gammage claims that Australians believed they were superior to the British, due to 'the rigours of life in the bush', which had 'refined the [Anglo-Saxon] race'.<sup>74</sup> This appeared to be a great source of pride for Private Watson Augustus Steel of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Mounted Rifles in particular. He wrote in his diary while in military hospital: 'the

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<sup>71</sup> Kitchener, Lord HH, Letter, PR7055, State Library of New South Wales, 4 January 1901.

<sup>72</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 311-312.

<sup>73</sup> Leese, P, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2002, pp. 29-30.

<sup>74</sup> Gammage, B, 'The Crucible: The Establishment of the Anzac Tradition', in McKernan, M & Browne, M (eds.), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, Canberra, 1988, p. 150.



Jewish nurse rated me and told me that I was soon to die. On telling her I was an Australian, I think she altered her opinion'.<sup>75</sup> Here Steel is frank about his physical superiority, as an Australian, over British troops. It is clear, then, how Steel felt about his own military prowess. Private William Hamline Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers wrote in a letter to his mother: 'A lot of Imperial Yeomanry have been going up lately, they seem a very ordinary crowd, not to be compared with the Australian troops'.<sup>76</sup> Trooper Herbert S. Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry expressed his opinion of the British troops as childlike figures compared with the Australians:

The tent mates here 'the Tommies' are terrible afraid of lightening [sic], cover over the steel and hide the looking glass. Some of them even cover their heads over. I told them they ought to live in Australia, 'thunderstorms' there, are what you might call 'thunderstorms'.<sup>77</sup>

Trooper Charles Cawthorn also criticised the British inability to fight: 'Our horses...are likely to carry the next lot of Tommies, who don't know a horse from a bar of soap to the front. I hope the first Tommy who mounts mine gets planted on his head in the nearest mud-hole'.<sup>78</sup>

It is noteworthy to see that the skills exhibited by many Australians ironically often resulted in resentment by those who became weary of being chosen above the British for more dangerous military operations. Private Watson Augustus Steel said of the British soldier in his diary: 'He was brave, with a great sense of discipline and duty,

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<sup>75</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 6 June 1900. See also Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 14 October 1900.

<sup>76</sup> Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 10 April 1901.

<sup>77</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>78</sup> Cawthorn, CFE, Diary, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 21 April 1901.

dogged and humane, but he has no initiative and want of ambition explains the want of individual initiative he has so frequently shown in this conflict'.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Percy Ralph Ricardo of the 1<sup>st</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry, wrote of a recent defeat: 'The whole show does not reflect much credit on the British arms, we lost 5 guns & a lot of prisoners and all because the British tommy will not scout'.<sup>80</sup> Steel and Ricardo were relatively generous – Private RJ Byers, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent, wrote to his mother after a conversation with a Boer prisoner:

The Boers can generally tell when they are fighting Australians, as the bullets whistle ever so much closer than the Tommie's [sic] bullets do. And also when our troops are advancing, he says that the Australians ride like wildfire...the Boers reckon they would rather meet 100 Tommies than 20 Australians. One wanted to know why the Horsetralians were called Horsetralians; and the only conclusion they could come to, was, that it was because they were all so used to horses. I do not know what part they are came [sic] from, but they did not know very much.<sup>81</sup>

In the same letter, he said of the British forces: 'It seems they can't do without the Australians and Canadians, who have already done most of the dirty & most dangerous work', thus demonstrating his view of the abilities of the Colonial troops compared with the British. Lieutenant Patrick Lang of the 4th Imperial Contingent supports this in his diary:

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<sup>79</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS892, State Library of New South Wales, n.d. See also Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 3 May 1900.

<sup>80</sup> Ricardo, PR, Letter, MLMSS1561, State Library of New South Wales, 5 May 1900.

<sup>81</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 18 August 1901.

My private opinion is that the Australians here are getting more than their share. Of course it is a compliment in a way, & we undoubtedly...are more capable than the Yeomanry, but we never get any credit. The Australians here don't growl at being given a larger share of any danger going – but in addition to getting this, we get a great deal more than our share of night work, such as outposts and convoy duty, & our men are often run [sic] very short as regards sleep.<sup>82</sup>

Lang later wrote: 'Many of these Yeomanry appear never to have been on a horse before, & it will be weeks before they have learnt to ride well enough to go on the trek'.<sup>83</sup>

It is clear, then, that the esteem with which the British were held by the Australian troops is not consistent with the more general opinion of the British Army as the most powerful on earth. The above comments can be explained by the fact that Australian troops signalled the need to the British Army for mounted infantry troops, rather than the more traditional cavalymen who were unsuited to the Boer tactics and the South African terrain. However, this comparison by Australian soldiers of their combat skills and those of the British can be partly attributed to the need – as recognised by Holmes and Leese – for pride in one's unit, or perhaps, cultural group, as shown by the frequent references to their distinctly separate status as Australians within the overall British force.

Although Australians fighting in the Boer War often clearly defined themselves separately from the British troops, some also expressed a stronger sense of closeness

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<sup>82</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 9 February 1901.

<sup>83</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 15 April 1901.

with Britain. Before Federation in 1901, Australian political and intellectual circles disagreed about the future of the relationship between Britain and Australia. Although most agreed that Australia needed new definition by way of Federation, the degree of control to be retained by Britain was a bitter point of debate.<sup>84</sup> Despite the fact that such ideas did not make their way into the everyday rhetoric of the sample of Australians in South Africa, the assumption was still expressed by some soldiers that although they were Australians, they were also fighting as British subjects. For example, when speaking of some stamps he'd 'commandeered', Private Alexander McQueen referred to: 'the stock belonging to the Orange Free State, taken over by *our* Government' [emphasis added].<sup>85</sup> Equally significant were the words of Private RJ Byers, fighting in the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent: 'There is a lot of talk of us going *home* to England to parade before the Queen, after the campaign is over; I hope we do' [emphasis added].<sup>86</sup> These soldiers were both Australian men fighting in Australian contingents, however their choice of words seems to indicate that although this was the case, they were essentially fighting for Britain. Naturally, this can also be explained by their own personal links with Britain – those whose families had more recently moved to Australia may have felt more affinity with their mother country.

It is difficult to find so many clear comparisons between Australians and Americans when reading the archived letters and diaries of Australians fighting in Vietnam. The sample of Australian soldiers seemed to be quite ambivalent about their American counterparts. In contrast, they expressed their frustration more towards the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN), which was considered an inadequate force by American

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<sup>84</sup> Penny, B, 'The Australian Debate on the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 56, April 1971, p. 526; Lowry, D, 'When the World Loved the Boers', *History Today*, vol. 49, no. 6, May 1999, p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 18/19 May 1900.

<sup>86</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 29 October 1899.

and Australian soldiers alike. Positive remarks can be found in soldiers' archived private records with regard to US troops, such as Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray's references in a letter home to their 'interesting' and 'hospitable' nature.<sup>87</sup> Murray's opinion, however, could have been tainted by his position as an officer in the Australian military, which was in Vietnam as a supporting force for the United States. This is also perhaps demonstrated by the fact that negative opinions can more commonly be found – summed up by Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith of 8RAR when speaking of general attitudes towards the American force in a letter to his parents: 'The Yanks aren't very popular here really, except when we want some of their good gear'.<sup>88</sup> The fact that there are fewer negative comments about allied troops, as well as officers, during Vietnam when compared with the Boer War can be possibly explained by the fact that Australians during this war were provided with far more comfortable living arrangements, more everyday provisions, as well as the possibility of regular R&R leave from active duty. During the Boer War, these soldiers were more often critical of the British when it somehow affected their own physical comfort – therefore, the relative lack of such comments in the archived personal records of Australians fighting in the Vietnam War can possibly be linked to the higher standard of living during this war.

Among the selected Australian soldiers, expressions of open disapproval for the fighting techniques and attitudes of the ARVN troops are common. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray writes to 'Barbara': 'Saw an ARVN patrol last week...Our boys say their tactics are slightly different to ours – the ARVN version of a "Search and Destroy patrol" is called "Search and Avoid". Not too far wrong either'.<sup>89</sup> This demonstrates the fact that the South Vietnamese troops were commonly labelled as

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<sup>87</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 5 June 1968.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 13 December 1969.

<sup>89</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 7 April 1968.

cowards by their US and Australian allies. Corporal Wallace Lillebo of 5RAR expressed similar disdain, in this case for the South Vietnamese in general, in a letter home to his parents about a particular military operation: ‘This again illustrates how the South Vietnamese are not concerned with a war they themselves are not personally fighting; and how they don’t give a hoot for anybody outside themselves’.<sup>90</sup> Lieutenant Barry Langham Smith, serving with the Australian Civil Affairs Unit, was very open in his diary about his opinion of the South Vietnamese troops: ‘THEY ARE NOT PREPARED TO HELP THEMSELVES OR US NOW, INCLUDING A LARGE PORTION OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS (of whom, in my opinion, the larger portion are bums)’ [author’s emphasis].<sup>91</sup> In Vietnam, there was a significant amount of racism expressed by Australian troops towards both the communist and non-communist Vietnamese, which could explain partly the differences between the opinion expressed of US and ARVN troops.<sup>92</sup> More likely it is simple disapproval of the apparent lack of regimental spirit, or battle readiness, exhibited by the South Vietnamese troops, particularly among Australian men who felt as though they were taking more risks with their lives. It is unfortunate that none of the references to the ARVN in the archived personal records available date post-1969, when Richard Nixon announced that the Vietnam War would be left to the ARVN, who were to be further trained so as to be able to fight the entire communist Vietnamese force – a task that the US and their allies, including the ARVN, were unable to do successfully! This would have perhaps revealed a different opinion of the ARVN by Australian soldiers. This is an example of where a future study focussed specifically on the Vietnam War and incorporating a range of primary source types could benefit future historians.

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<sup>90</sup> Lillebo, WA, Letter, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, 14 February 1967.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, BL, Diary, PR00331, Australian War Memorial, 17 December 1969.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 112-114.

It is noteworthy, however, that although the overall stance of the sample of Australian soldiers toward allied troops was predominantly negative in each war, the archived letters and diaries reveal a small amount of approval for Britain and the US themselves. This is illustrated, too, by the above personal references to Britain by the Australian Boer War soldiers. Evidence of soldier support for the British Empire itself is directly expressed in several different ways including references to pride, loyalty and confidence in the British cause. Private Watson Augustus Steel wrote in his diary on 15 May 1900: ‘Those who doubt the military strength of Britain should see it here, and this is only a portion of it. It is open to doubt whether any nation in the world could have done the same’.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Private Alfred Stawell Gillespie of the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen wrote on 3 March 1901: ‘the Empire is in no way imperilled now, it’s only a matter of time’.<sup>94</sup> Private Stan Jones, of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian contingent, also displayed confidence in a British victory on 10 August 1900: ‘No doubt there will be some great rejoicing when peace is proclaimed, and you may bet that no one will be more pleased than us soldiers that have gone through the war’.<sup>95</sup> Although these positive reports can, in part, be explained by when they were written (as the first half of 1900 was notable for its consecutive British victories), they still reflect the body of archived letters found, which rarely, if ever, mention the possibility of overall British defeat – throughout the entire war.

This can be explained partly by the strong relationship between Britain and Australia – most soldiers were either directly from Britain or had British roots. Such a personal link did not exist for the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Only one positive comment about the US role in Vietnam can be found in the archived personal

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<sup>93</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 15 May 1900.

<sup>94</sup> Gillespie, AS, Letter, MLDOC3084, State Library of New South Wales, 3 March 1901.

<sup>95</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 10 August 1900.

records. Corporal Wallace Lillebo of 5RAR wrote in a letter home: ‘The Americans have my wholehearted admiration...Their professionalism and maturity comes from hundreds of years in constant combat experience’.<sup>96</sup> It is impossible to determine from this sample whether other soldiers shared this opinion – a more extensive study on the Vietnam War incorporating oral history may be able to provide a conclusion regarding this matter. Also, such comments, as well as those directed at Britain from the Boer War, are difficult to label as uncritical adulation of their allies – in any case, as the effect of propaganda both before enlistment and during military training is impossible to determine conclusively. However, the fact that the sample of Australian soldiers fighting in both wars express more negative than positive comments about allied troops, while praising Britain and the US themselves more than not, does give more credence to the suggestion that physical comfort was foremost in their minds, and directly affected their written attitudes towards both allied officers and soldiers. This is strengthened somewhat by the fact that, during Vietnam, less criticism towards allies appeared in the archived letters and diaries, as soldiers were living in much better conditions than those during the Boer War.

As mentioned earlier, the overall aim of the entire military structure is to train soldiers who will be able to fight effectively, with minimal chance of psychological damage, and maintain a high level of morale throughout their entire tour. When focussing on the effect of the army itself on the sample of Australian soldiers both in the Boer and Vietnam Wars, it is possible to see that these aims were met, but only to a certain extent. The effect of the small group environment on this sample of soldiers did appear to bring them closer together, thus encouraging stronger group morale, but in both wars also caused some grief at comrades’ deaths, which reduced combat

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<sup>96</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, n.d.



ability. The rotation system in place during the Vietnam War lessened this latter disadvantage, and ensured that soldiers would only be on the war front for twelve months. However, this also – at least in a few cases - caused an ‘us and them’ attitude among soldiers, preventing close companionship between old soldiers and those new to the battlefield, as well as ‘short-timer’s fever’, both identified by soldiering theorists. The leadership imposed did incite respect in many soldiers, but only when they felt that their basic needs – namely, adequate food, shelter and safety – were being met. This did not seem to be an overwhelming issue for those in the sample fighting in Vietnam, as living conditions had improved significantly by this time. However, during the Boer War, frustration at poor physical comfort appeared to provoke annoyance and resentment towards not only officers, but also allied troops, even when soldiers felt predominantly positive about Britain and the US themselves. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the chosen sample of soldiers did react to the military environment imposed upon them similarly between the two wars, but the expected changes in army life itself, as well as the increasing difficulty of maintaining morale in later wars when soldiers were more reluctant to sacrifice themselves in war, caused significant differences between the two wars. The military structure is organised in a certain way to ensure that soldiers can psychologically withstand combat, however there are other factors within war that act as a counterweight to this. The next two chapters will highlight these, focussing on the psychological pressures during war on soldiers and morale, as well as their potential consequences.

## Chapter Six

# Morale: The Psychology of Combat

One of the most difficult obstacles facing modern militaries is the incidence of serious ill effects on soldiers, resulting from combat service. However, this did not always appear to be the case. Despite the fact that soldiers in the past did exhibit signs of mental strain, this was not widely evident, or rather, it did not appear to be. This was predominantly due to limited understanding of the psychological effects of warfare, which made it impossible to both recognise and correctly diagnose such trauma. It was not until the First World War that the mass incidence of recognised psychological injury occurred, in the form of ‘shellshock’. Given the infancy of military psychiatry at the time, armies involved in this war were baffled as to its deeper cause, and eager to prevent its repetition. Despite increased concentration on the causes of shellshock in both Europe and the United States, the Second World War – more widespread and mechanised than the first – did not produce fewer soldiers with mental injuries. Rather, the numbers of soldiers exhibiting such signs, as well as their severity, have been increasing until today. The Vietnam War was singular as an example of this, after which new and more pronounced signs of psychological damage were labelled ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD). The next two chapters will define the similarities and differences between the selected sample of Australians fighting in the Boer and Vietnam Wars in terms of their attitudes towards combat itself, as well as the killing within it. In addition, influences on soldiers’ morale and the damaging psychological results if morale is lost - from

alcohol dependence, to desertion and suicide – will be explained in relation to these wars.

It is important to note that although a number of theories of soldiering discussed in this thesis are those by psychologists or psychiatrists, and the effects on soldiers fall into this realm, this study is one based primarily around history. The aim of this chapter and the examination as a whole is to compare the outlooks and reactions of a group of Australian soldiers fighting in the Boer and Vietnam Wars, based on similarities and differences expressed through their archived letters and diaries, as well as assess how these correspond to the findings of a selection of military theorists. The inclusion of psychological viewpoints is vital, as psychiatrists and psychologists have made significant advances towards the better understanding of soldiers. However, the overwhelming focus of this chapter will be to develop a *historical* understanding of the attitudes and behaviour of soldiers in these wars.

To explain the attitudes of soldiers throughout their war service, it is first necessary to acknowledge the phases of a soldier's tour as recognised by military theorists. In Chapter Four, the transition from the initial stage of enthusiasm in soldiers new to combat to a period of disillusionment was mentioned, quoting historians such as Fussell and Dawson.<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, however, identifies a third phase of military duty – which results from the disenchanting phase that follows some soldiers' original optimism on their way to, or immediately after reaching, the war front. He insists that some soldiers spend the majority of their combat duty with persistent thoughts of their loved ones on the home front or, alternatively, the chance of being injured or killed. Others avoid such fixation, instead living a more detached life of constant

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 119-120.

alternation between extreme boredom and periods of intensive action. The vast difference between these heightens the anxiety involved, thus soldiers who are affected by the constant rotation of duties often experience the greatest mental injury.<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, however, was writing before the advent of the Second World War and also later wars such as Vietnam, which brought considerably altered soldier training and combat techniques.

Examples of all of these stages of a soldier's war service can be found in the publicly archived letters and diaries of Australians fighting in South Africa and the Vietnam War. Following the main finding of this thesis, however, it is the soldiers fighting in the Boer War who were more frank when communicating their feelings about being on the field of battle and separated from their home lives. Thus, more open expressions concerning soldiers' feelings towards their position can be found in archived personal records from the earlier war.

The selected Boer War soldiers expressed themselves much more directly in their letters, despite the public emphasis on loyalty and courage, while those fighting in Vietnam were less likely to communicate feelings of melancholy or desire to return home – especially at a time when opposition to war was not publicly punished as harshly, or at all. It must be noted, however, that it is impossible to conclude that soldiers fighting in the Boer War actually wished the war to end any more than those fighting in Vietnam – it is simply the communication of these views that occurred far more in the archived personal records, for various reasons. Later in this thesis, soldiers' direct expressions of dissatisfaction with their position while on the war

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<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, FC, *Psychology and the Soldier*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1927, pp. 177-178.

front will be examined.<sup>3</sup> At this stage, however, it is necessary to mention this finding, as it is consistent with Bartlett's view concerning the various different ways soldiers react to warfare.

This is particularly true of soldiers' third reaction to war identified by Bartlett – namely, incessant thoughts of both home and death. The selected soldiers fighting in the Boer War were very open about their desire to return home and see their loved ones. Private Stan Jones of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent demonstrated this in a letter to his mother:

Do not think for a moment that I forget about home and do not think to write...For the way in which we are situated one is constantly thinking of home and the dear ones there, especially when the bullets and cannon balls have been whizzing around you nearly all day...when night comes and firing ceases, one's thoughts ramble very much and naturally it is home that one thinks about first.<sup>4</sup>

Such sentiments are found in the sample of archived letters and diaries of those fighting in Vietnam but in such instances, their frequency and intensity of feeling are not as marked as those from the earlier war. Rather, these soldiers seemed to be more preoccupied with Bartlett's fourth reaction – that is, disillusionment resulting from the constant transition between dangerous combat movement and normal day-to-day activities. This did not seem to be as much of a problem for those in the Boer War, certainly a consequence of their simply having more to do on the war front – a fact that can be proven by the number of complaints by these soldiers about their day-to-

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Eight, pp. 272-278.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 27 February 1900. For more examples of this, see Chapter Eight, pp. 275-278.

day activities.<sup>5</sup> There are numerous examples of soldiers in Vietnam commenting on this aspect of their tour. Andrew Clyne, a Signaler in the 110 Signal Squadron expressed his tedium in a letter to his parents: ‘Ask dad what soldiering on is Mum. I reckon he would have more idea than me, this place is so slack it’s a wonder they even know what a soldier is’.<sup>6</sup> Private Len McCosker of 6RAR was more blunt when sharing his experience of the military: ‘Hope you are all well over there as I’m not too bad, but naturally the morale isn’t real high at the moment. Boredom seems to be the main trouble’.<sup>7</sup>

When comparing McCosker’s words with those of Major Donald Campbell, however, it is possible to see that these complaints about the dullness of army life could be the result of self-censorship by these men, so as to protect their families from worry. After describing his everyday activities, Campbell wrote in a letter to his wife: ‘It’s all the normal type of life that we got to crave for instead of this artificial existence when you go from having fear of death to utter boredom’.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Clyne and McCosker did not mention the other half of their war service in the same way as Campbell – although it undoubtedly occurred – suggests that they had consciously chosen *not* to mention it. Important also is the fact that both Clyne and McCosker were members of the rank and file, whereas Campbell was a military superior, and less likely to actively fight in the front lines. This raises the possibility that the difference in expression between these two groups of soldiers could be attached to possible trauma from active combat and the unwillingness to relive past experiences, thus the self-censorship theory does gain credence when directly

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<sup>5</sup> For evidence of this, see Chapter Five, pp. 152-159.

<sup>6</sup> Clyne, A, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 8 March 1971.

<sup>7</sup> McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 16 January 1967. See also Murray, P, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 2 March 1968; Moriarty, LF, Letter, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 16 June.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, DH, Letter, PR86/267, Australian War Memorial, 15 November 1967.

comparing negative attitudes expressed towards the war front with those of the Boer War soldiers.<sup>9</sup> The Vietnam War was much more public than the earlier war, particularly because of the advent of television news reportage, so every day civilians encountered visual images of war. Soldiers who were fighting in the war were undoubtedly conscious of this fact, which would naturally reduce the potentially upsetting content of their correspondence, in an attempt to protect their families from worry. A more extensive study focussing solely on the Vietnam War and including a larger range of primary sources – including oral history – could provide firmer conclusions on this matter.

This is not to say that none of the sample of soldiers from the Boer War complained about boredom. Private Stan Jones, a few months after writing the above letter, wrote to his sister: ‘We have been expecting the Boers to give in for a long time now, but it seems they have made up their minds to hang out as long as ever they can. We are still following the Boers, but it has become a very stale game now’.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Trooper Herbert Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry, wrote in his diary: ‘This is a terribly dull life, nothing to do and nothing to see, only black...’.<sup>11</sup> He later wrote: ‘This life here is getting very monotonous, I walk down to the beach daily and take a stroll for a mile or so along the sea side’.<sup>12</sup> It is apparent that both groups of soldiers did feel, to differing extents, a range of Bartlett’s phases of military duty. It does seem, however, that those examined from the Vietnam War were more likely to mention the dullness of military duty when compared with the sample of soldiers from the Boer War. As mentioned earlier, it is likely that this may have been the case

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<sup>9</sup> This can be found in Chapter Eight, pp. 261-264.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 10 August 1900.

<sup>11</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>12</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

because of the simple fact that those in South Africa had more allotted day-to-day tasks than those in Vietnam.

Some of the sample of soldiers, however, expressed satisfaction with soldiering in their letters home. Some theorists believe that this is a demonstration of the enjoyment soldiers often feel in a killing role. Joanna Bourke, in *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (1999), uses a range of individual soldiers' accounts to label killing a 'fundamental human urge' for soldiers – believing that the tightening bonds of comradeship and the strength felt as a result of direct fighting cause a soldier to take pleasure in their combat role.<sup>13</sup> She does not attribute such feelings to physical killing alone, but also to its psychological benefits within the military structure. These benefits emerge from the higher esteem with which they are treated by other soldiers and their superiors after they have made successful kills, as well as the appeal of possible promotion. She particularly focuses on US soldiers in Vietnam – claiming that any remorse felt from combat duties was instinctively disregarded for fear of losing possible admiration from fellow soldiers, as well as the chance of career advancement in the military.<sup>14</sup> She also highlights the function of killing during war, claiming that it helps soldiers cope with combat by distracting them from the guilt and stress associated with their role.<sup>15</sup>

Dinter agrees with Bourke's view, but only to an extent. He asserts that the rules dictating behaviour in warfare allow soldiers to ignore the morals concerning murder in the societies from which they come. Thus, killing with the permission of their military and home government rids them of any possible associated guilt. Quoting

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<sup>13</sup> Bourke, J, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Granta Books, London, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 33, 199.

<sup>15</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 41.



Freud: 'The living being preserves its own life, as it were, by destroying other life'.<sup>16</sup> This can then be interpreted as pleasure when, actually, it is merely the absence of guilt.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Bourke's assertion that the act of killing is innate is itself contradicted, through both the justifications she herself has provided for this impulse within soldiers, as well as Dinter's similar interpretation of soldiers' expressed satisfaction while on the war front.

Added to this are the numerous theorists who do not agree that killing in warfare is instinctive. Of these, Martin van Creveld and David Grossman provide the most convincing arguments. Military historian van Creveld argues forcefully that there is no proof that the act of going to war, or battle itself, is an instinctive urge. He points to experiments carried out on the human brain throughout the 1980s and 1990s that attempted to locate a 'war gland' or 'aggressive gene' in human beings. No conclusive result has ever been found in such experiments, due to differing human reactions when individuals are alone or placed in a group.<sup>18</sup> David Grossman expands on this changeability, giving a range of reasons for the impossibility of claims such as Bourke's. He raises the point that one of the most significant theories of soldiering that has emerged is that human beings intuitively defy orders or expectations that involve the killing of other human beings. He quotes the great Second World War military historian Samuel Lyman Atwood Marshall who demonstrated that humans are not naturally killers by their frequent incapacity to kill in the absence of urging by military leaders or comrades.<sup>19</sup> Grossman also points out that as a result of this fact, militaries have successfully reversed that tendency in

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<sup>16</sup> Freud, S, in Dinter, E, *Hero or Coward: Pressures Facing the Soldier in Battle*, Frank Cass & Co Ltd, Great Britain, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Dinter, *Hero or Coward*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Van Creveld, M, 'Why Men Fight' in Freedman, L (ed.), *War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Grossman, D, 'Human Factors in War: the Psychology and Physiology of Close Combat' in Evans, M & Ryan, A (eds.), *The Human Face of Warfare: Killing, Fear and Chaos in Battle*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2000, p. 17.

many soldiers, using ‘conditioning techniques’ that place a soldier in a more realistic setting during training to reduce shock while on the actual battlefield.<sup>20</sup> Scholars such as Kellett, Wilson, Braithwaite and Murphy have also raised this more recent approach to military training.<sup>21</sup> These points, as well as the fact that Bourke’s view is contingent on the connection of killing in war with other associated positive rewards, such as respect or promotion, suggest that pure love for carnage itself rarely exists in soldiers. Instead, it is likely that there is a range of reasons why soldiers express enjoyment associated with this aspect of military service.

Two theorists who agree with this conclusion are Richard Holmes and Samuel Hynes. They clearly identify evidence of expressed pleasure by soldiers in intense combat roles but associate this, instead, with its more general psychological and physical benefits. Holmes believes that it is rare that soldiers will not find at least one positive aspect to war and that, even though most soldiers will become disillusioned with warfare after an initial period of enthusiasm, some will retain these high spirits throughout their entire tour. This can have various causes, including excitement due to the riskiness of battle, feelings of security at being a member of a close military group, as well as pleasure deriving from the simple contrast of active duty and their comparatively dull lives on the home front.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Hynes associates the love of war with ‘romance’ and ‘high excitement’, claiming that some feel this even after they have returned home.<sup>23</sup>

The examined letters and diaries of soldiers from both South Africa and Vietnam do reveal considerable evidence of expressed pleasure associated with active duty,

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<sup>20</sup> Grossman, ‘Human Factors in War’, 18.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 105-106.

<sup>22</sup> Holmes, R, *Firing Line*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1987, pp. 271-273.

<sup>23</sup> Hynes, S, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, Penguin, New York, 1997, pp. 27-29.

however it is possible to attribute the majority of these to factors other than the single act of killing itself. Soldiers were quite open in their letters about the physical benefits of soldiering, often tied in with comparisons with their lives in Australia. Enjoyment from killing itself was rarely communicated, and when it was, it can be directly connected to the general thrill to be gained through active service. In a letter to Thomas B Wemyss, Trooper Ernest Howard Magor from the 4<sup>th</sup> Imperial Bushmen Contingent demonstrated the duality of warfare to soldiers: ‘War isent [sic] a very nice game there are better games than war but still I don’t mind it[.] I like it alright I could shoot Boers all day its good sport’.<sup>24</sup> Magor’s words clearly indicate that he does not hold warfare itself in high esteem, but still finds some enjoyment in it. Lieutenant George Harris, fighting in the Boer War in the South African Light Horse, similarly expresses enjoyment for battle: ‘I like this life before anything there is so much excitement in it’.<sup>25</sup> Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen wrote to his parents: ‘But the day before yesterday our Squadron...had the luck to be the first to have regular action and to come under gun fire and it was about the liveliest thing you could possibly wish for’.<sup>26</sup> These three examples seem to correspond with the theories of not only Bourke, but also Holmes and Hynes – that it is not the actions required in war, but its exhilaration, that is pleasurable. Rich later demonstrates this in another letter to his mother: ‘Fighting is alright when the actual fight is on and you are excited, but it is the afterwards that knocks me kite high, seeing the poor beggars lying dead and mutilated who were but a moment before alive’.<sup>27</sup> It is clear, then, that Rich does not gain any overall pleasure from combat itself – in fact, the opposite – but that it is the excitement connected with warfare that he is occupied with.

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<sup>24</sup> Magor, EH, Letter, D4010, State Library of South Australia, 6 September 1900.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 27 June 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 29 June 1901.

<sup>27</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 18 January 1902. See also Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 4 June 1901.

Such feelings are further confirmed by the large number of comparisons made by soldiers between their army and home lives. Although most Australian soldiers who volunteered for the Boer War were rural workers and, as such, accustomed to working outdoors, some were lower- to lower-middle class white collar workers, such as clerks. Many of these men, when faced with the life of a soldier, realised how dissatisfied they were with their chosen profession at home, and how physically beneficial they found employment in the outdoors. As a result, many chose to stay in South Africa after their tour was over. For this reason positive expressions about their war roles can be found in the archived letters and diaries. Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich displayed the most frequent enthusiasm when comparing his life in active service with his civilian employment as a banker. He wrote to his father:

You never know what a day might bring forth at this game, so I'm never despondent as to the future and never felt happier in my life, and thank goodness every day that I cut the bank for ever. One thing I'm quite determined on and that is to come back again here when we are ordered home. Q'land is all very well but it is not the country this is. You do feel as if there's room to stretch your limbs here, whereas in Q'land there is always a cramped sort of feeling. At least so it strikes me, but then I'm afraid I'm a born rover and could never sit still anywhere.<sup>28</sup>

Other soldiers felt the same way about South Africa, and decided to remain there when their tours were over. Private Alexander McQueen, for example, on hearing (false) rumours that the war would soon be over after the successive British victories

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<sup>28</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 11 September 1901.

in Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking, told his family in a letter that he had decided to stay in South Africa for another six months after the war's end was declared.<sup>29</sup> This followed numerous letters containing complaints about the war and his place within it. The fact that McQueen clearly hated being both at war and away from home while still expressing a desire to stay after the war reveals that he did see some positive benefits of South Africa itself. His letter of 6 April 1900 to his family demonstrates this: 'Camp life is hard, healthy & hot, but to me is agreeable, active & attractive – some of our fellows growl like anything about the food...the officers and the work: I like it' [author's emphasis].<sup>30</sup> His words and those by Rich thus indicate that it was the outdoor life itself, rather than actual combat that was the principal attraction.

In fact, the archived letters and diaries of many soldiers fighting in South Africa mention the physical benefits of soldiering in positive terms, with some referring to increased health due to being at war. Private William Hamline Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers expresses similar sentiments to McQueen in a letter to his mother: 'Stu and myself are in the best of health & are having a good time of it, & we intend to see a bit of Africa before we are finished'.<sup>31</sup> This follows a letter reporting on the desire of the majority of Australian soldiers for an end to the war, again demonstrating that, in such cases, soldiers were fascinated by South Africa, not combat itself.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Trooper OG Small in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse Squadron wrote to Reverend Fred Wood: 'It is a very rough life but it is healthy enough if one does not contract fever. We have several down with it already, but I must say I never

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<sup>29</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 13 July 1900.

<sup>30</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 6 April 1900.

<sup>31</sup> Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 20 August 1900.

<sup>32</sup> See Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 29 July 1900.

felt better in my life'.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Private RJ Byers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent wrote: 'Hoping you are all well, as I am in the best of health & as fit as a fiddle'.<sup>34</sup> Private JDJ McBeth of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Mounted Rifles wrote to his mother and 'Bertha': 'Although we will get a pretty rough time I'm quite prepared for it...I'm thankful to say I'm enjoying perfect health, & hope to get through alright'.<sup>35</sup> These are only a few of the many references to health in the letters and diaries of soldiers.<sup>36</sup> Although it is possible to attribute some of these positive remarks to the simple fact that they did not want to upset their families, it is clear by both the content of the personal records and the fact that many chose to remain in South Africa after the war that the life of a soldier was not abhorrent to these men. This, added to the theories of Holmes and Hynes, among many, indicates that these soldiers were not expressing enjoyment at combat itself, but at the everyday life of a soldier – often in comparison with their own less interesting lives as civilians.

The archived letters and diaries from the Vietnam War contain less enthusiastic comments by soldiers about their position on the battlefield. Soldiers did mention the advantages to their physical and psychological health to be gained from soldiering, and the desire to remain in Vietnam – but reasons for such expressions can be attributed to other factors, such as promotion. One soldier in the sample did express a combination of joy and dissatisfaction at being in Vietnam - like those above from the Boer War. Private Reg Yates of 1RAR wrote in a letter to his parents: 'It's funny that although none of us like this place we still are happy here. We'll probably

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<sup>33</sup> Small, OG, Letter, MLMSS5962, State Library of New South Wales, 7 April 1902.

<sup>34</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 29 October 1900.

<sup>35</sup> JCJ McBeth, Letter, PR00743, Australian War Memorial, 29 November 1899. See also McBeth's letter of 22 January 1900.

<sup>36</sup> See also Barham, WH, Letter, CY3423, State Library of New South Wales, 7 June 1900; Harris, G, Letter, Australian War Memorial, 14 June 1900, 21 June 1900; Holme, C, letter, FM4/2210, State Library of New South Wales, 26 March 1900; Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 24 December 1899; Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 21 March 1901; Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 4 September 1900; Sabine, CG, Letter, PRG57/10, State Library of South Australia, 25 August 1900.

change but we'll still be happy. I know that'.<sup>37</sup> It is clear that other soldiers also saw positive aspects to military life – Private Manfred Wilhelm Bohn of 2RAR wrote to his fiancée Lyn: 'I have changed love I have matured the hard way. Very quickly I have learnt a lot in 2 years 3 mth[.] I have learned more in the last 7 mths than I have in the 22 yrs I have been alive'.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Sergeant Richard Yielding of the Army Aviation Corps wrote to his family: 'I do feel a lot older and wiser and so I should. If I didn't, I would have gained nothing'.<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that both Bohn and Yielding were volunteers whose duty lasted longer than the twelve months for conscripts. This indicates that their entry into the army would have taken place with much more consideration of the expected results of service. No archived records by conscripted soldiers can be found with such sentiments. This is one of the only discernible differences between the content of the publicly archived letters and diaries of volunteer soldiers and those of conscripts from the Vietnam War.

In addition, the soldiers who expressed a wish to extend their duty and continue fighting in Vietnam did so with an eye fixed on the financial reward. Immediately after being promoted to Sergeant, Richard Yielding wrote to his family: 'at this stage of the game, I would not swap for anything'.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Wallace Lillebo wrote to his family near the end of his twelve-month tour – after being promoted to Corporal: 'I've been toying with the idea of applying to do another tour in Vietnam when 5RAR returns to UC Dai Loi'.<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Vietnam War, positive remarks by the sample of soldiers about the war were rare, but those found can very clearly be connected with other factors affecting their lives on the war front.

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<sup>37</sup> Yates, R, Letter, PR91/187, Australian War Memorial, 23 April 1968.

<sup>38</sup> Bohn, MW, Letter, PR00745, Australian War Memorial, 24 December 1970.

<sup>39</sup> Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 4 April 1971.

<sup>40</sup> Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 31 May 1970.

<sup>41</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, 25 January 1967.

This finding is significant in terms of this study as a whole. Both positive and negative expressions towards the Boer War occurred far more frequently than those made in the examined personal records by soldiers in Vietnam, who seemed far more reticent about openly revealing their feelings, or even their views on the war itself.<sup>42</sup> It is not possible with this selective sample to come to definite conclusions about whether soldiers from either war felt greater happiness or displeasure at being on the battlefield. But it can be clearly stated that these Vietnam War soldiers were simply less likely to openly express their feelings towards their current position. Naturally, there are reasons for this – whether it was self-censorship intended to protect their families from worry or even a form of self-defence to protect themselves against criticism from the increasingly dissenting civilian population.<sup>43</sup> This observation is significant in terms of the wider conclusions of this thesis, which have identified these differences between the archived personal records from the Vietnam War and those from the Boer War.

Another point of significance for this thesis, particularly when focussing on the above words of Joanna Bourke, is that there are no instances when this group of soldiers referred to killing itself as a pleasurable activity. The enjoyment they clearly experienced as soldiers in both South Africa and Vietnam was often associated with other aspects of soldiering, including financial rewards, increased health from outdoor living and an escape from dull employment in Australia. Although it is impossible to gain overall confirmation of these views through oral history with Boer War soldiers, conducting interviews with those who fought in Vietnam could provide enlightenment regarding this matter. Still, the fact that not one soldier in this sample

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<sup>42</sup> For indications of negativity by soldiers, see Chapter Eight, pp. 272-278.

<sup>43</sup> These conclusions are dealt with in more detail in Chapter Eight, pp. 261-264.



admitted that they enjoyed killing itself does indicate quite strongly that Bourke's findings should be questioned.

Despite the general finding of this thesis that Boer War soldiers were more open about their feelings towards being at war, there is one aspect of a soldier's tour that prompted many more references by men in Vietnam – the concept of fear in battle. It is possible to see reasons for this in the conclusions of theorists on war. Most who have examined soldiers in war have concluded that fear is inevitable before, during and after battle, and that warfare without fear is impossible.<sup>44</sup> Dollard speaks more specifically about fear, identifying the three phases of a soldier's experience that will prompt different modes of fear: pre-battle tension caused by fear of the unknown; fear during inactive periods of actual combat; and reminiscent fear, when soldiers think about past danger in which they found themselves.<sup>45</sup> Most writers focus on the first of these – for example, Holmes maintains that the physical signs of fear exhibited by soldiers before combat are far greater than those during battle itself.<sup>46</sup> He also goes on to say that after seeing fighting first-hand, soldiers' conception of fear changes.<sup>47</sup> Evidence of this first phase is more apparent than the other two in the archived letters and diaries of Australian Boer and Vietnam War soldiers.

In fact, few references to fear can be found in the archived personal records of Australians in the Boer War. This is an unusual finding, as in most other matters involving an emotional reaction, these soldiers were far more responsive in their correspondence than those in Vietnam. In addition, the sample size of these men is

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Hocking, WE, *Morale and Its Enemies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1918, p. 155; Dollard, J, *Fear in Battle* [1944], AMS Press, New York, 1976, p. 12; Keegan, J & Holmes, R, *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1985, p. 17; Dinter, *Hero or Coward*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Dollard, *Fear in Battle*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 138-139.

<sup>47</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 182.

larger than for Vietnam War soldiers – due to the ready availability of archived records for the earlier war. Even when Boer War soldiers revealed their fear, it was not as open as from those fighting in the later war. For example, Trooper Herbert S. Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote about scouting in his diary: ‘It’s a dangerous game, you have to be constantly on the alert. You do not know what rock has a lurking foe behind waiting to get a shot at you’.<sup>48</sup> Here Conder indicates that he fears wounding or death, but has not clearly stated this in his diary. A letter written by Stan Jones to his mother was similarly ambiguous:

You do not think so much of home while the battle is raging, or as you may imagine there are many other things require your attention and you are anxious to get as many good shots at the Boers as you can, for a fellow does not know when he is having his last shot.<sup>49</sup>

He wrote later in the same letter: ‘...you can’t help but wonder how you will get on the next day or the next time that you have a set to with the Boers’.<sup>50</sup> Such expressions suggest that Jones did think about the potential of being killed, something that would almost certainly have provoked a level of fear.

Another soldier who vaguely suggested in his correspondence home that he was afraid of what was to come was Sergeant Charles Frederick Pegler of the Natal Field Force, who wrote: ‘I often wonder if I shall get spliced’.<sup>51</sup> This, again, hints at a feeling of trepidation felt before engaging in battle. Pegler later writes to his parents immediately after a period of heavy fighting: ‘I can tell you all that I thought of you

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<sup>48</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 27 February 1900.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 27 February 1900.

<sup>51</sup> Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 23 July 1900.

all during the charge, and thanked God that he had spared me'.<sup>52</sup> This seems to suggest that Pegler did experience fear during the battle, but, again, he does not directly declare this fact. Holmes provides a reason for this – he claims that soldiers' fear of being branded a coward by their comrades, or others, is far greater than most other factors in war.<sup>53</sup> This would certainly influence the frequency of references to any fear these soldiers were feeling. He demonstrates this by quoting Captain JEH Neville, who wrote in January 1917: 'I'm afraid of being afraid'.<sup>54</sup>

Another explanation could lie in the concentration on 'loyalty' by soldiers who originate from a society, such as Australia, that had never had any experience of warfare. The expectation of constant acts of loyalty and bravery could cause some soldiers to hesitate before communicating their fear in their letters or diaries, following Holmes, who maintains that many will conceal their fear to avoid setting a bad pattern for their comrades or future soldiers.<sup>55</sup> This could explain why fewer soldiers whose personal records were examined openly expressed apprehension in the face of combat during the earlier war.

When comparing the rate and intensity of the references to fear by the sample of Vietnam War soldiers with those from the Boer War, it is clear that aspects of either the war itself, the time in which it was fought, or the soldiers themselves allowed freer expression regarding this particular aspect of their battlefield emotions. Synonymous with Holmes' view, most soldiers felt, and communicated, fear most keenly before encountering battle. For example, Private Gerard Francis Lavery (Gerry) of 9RAR wrote to his family: 'It's alright sitting here in a harbour but when

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<sup>52</sup> Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 4 September 1900.

<sup>53</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 141.

<sup>54</sup> Neville, JEH, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 141.

<sup>55</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 206.

you have to move that's when you get a bit worried'.<sup>56</sup> Private Raymond Bruce Ravenscroft of 7RAR was more open about his misgivings during a recent encounter with the enemy: 'Arty was called in on his escape route until 2000, and boy did it come close to us, and it really came in only 150m from us. It sounded good, but we were still shitting ourselves'.<sup>57</sup> Army Aviation Corps Sergeant Richard Yielding wrote in a letter home: 'Then when you do sleep of a night, you don't sleep soundly, always thinking someone might come in'.<sup>58</sup> He had expressed a similar sentiment in an earlier letter: 'When we are in camp I do not feel nervous or jumpy on this side of the river. But when we go out over the other side, you get a bit nervous and tensed up. Everyone feels the same'.<sup>59</sup> Private Shayne O'Brien of 5RAR commented on collective fear within his unit upon their discovering that an operation they were on was to last longer than expected: 'As you can imagine we were reluctant to go out in the bush in the first place & when they extended our stay out there, we became very belligerent. We were so persistent in fact with our enquiries, anxiety etc that we were warned to keep quiet'.<sup>60</sup>

Many others mentioned their fear as a result of various military actions, rather than merely in their expectation of them. Corporal Ron Kelly of 1RAR wrote to his 'darling Dianne': 'Well my first patrol is over thank god, I did not think the nerves would put up with it'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Sergeant Richard Yielding, after being hit by a booby trap, wrote: 'You will have to excuse the writing, as I still have the shakes and

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<sup>56</sup> Lavery, G, Letter, PR01487/12, Australian War Memorial, 21-22 January 1969.

<sup>57</sup> Ravenscroft, RB, Diary, PR01289, Australian War Memorial, 13 March 1970.

<sup>58</sup> Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 10 October 1965.

<sup>59</sup> Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 25 July 1965.

<sup>60</sup> O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, n.d. See also Quigley, N, Diary, PR91/173, Australian War Memorial, 21 March 1969.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 13 June 1965. See also Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 26 June 1965; Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 25 July 1965.

I don't feel the best'.<sup>62</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray indicated a longer-lasting effect of direct combat in a letter to his wife Barbara: 'When I see one or two casualties come in here I thank God that I am whole. There is no doubt that an experience like this has an effect on all here which stays for the rest of our lives'.<sup>63</sup> These are only several of many examples of Vietnam War soldiers openly describing their fear in the face of battle.

Samuel Hynes and Anthony Kellett offer two theories regarding fear in war that could explain the increased expression observed among Vietnam War soldiers. Hynes focuses on the changing definitions of 'cowardice' and 'courage' since the First World War in particular, a result of the unprecedented intensity of its front line. He claims that since the discoveries were made that firstly, all soldiers experience fear, and secondly, cowardice is not a shameful offence, perspectives on soldiers who exhibit apprehension during war have changed dramatically.<sup>64</sup> Kellett adds to this finding, maintaining that the new form of realistic training that places soldiers in situations they are likely to encounter during combat aims to lessen their overall stress while on active duty. Part of this teaches soldiers that fear is not a dishonourable emotion, as all soldiers experience it while at war.<sup>65</sup> These findings may indicate why the sample of Vietnam soldiers were more open in their personal correspondence when they felt afraid – the shame that accompanied such feelings had perhaps disappeared, whereas during the Boer War 'cowardice' was a crime punished by death by the British Army.

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<sup>62</sup> Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 18 October 1965.

<sup>63</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 3 May 1968.

<sup>64</sup> Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Kellett, A, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, 1982, p. 283.

Another significant shift between the two wars is that concerning the importance of survival among soldiers on the war front. Kellett maintains that soldiers will instinctively place the conservation of their lives above anything else in battle, and consequently armies use this reaction to encourage soldiers to kill – as by eliminating the enemy, soldiers feel closer to their own survival.<sup>66</sup> Evidence of this can be found in the archived letters and diaries of soldiers from both the Boer and Vietnam Wars.

The relative importance of survival did alter between the two wars, particularly in comparison with concepts such as ‘heroism’, or ‘duty’. Holmes, focussing on Vietnam War veterans, claims that merely surviving the war was the main concentration of their military service, rather than factors such as patriotism or courage.<sup>67</sup> Numerous researchers on the Vietnam War have noted this change in attitude among soldiers, often referring to these more traditional concepts as elements of a ‘John Wayne’ mentality that stresses heroism above all other factors. Lloyd B Lewis discusses this, maintaining that the focus on John Wayne ‘gave concrete form to the abstract notion of heroism’ – in other words, providing soldiers with a role model to follow in combat.<sup>68</sup> Numerous scholars have commented on the rejection of this ideal during the Vietnam War. Military historian Christian G Appy mentions the advice given by seasoned soldiers to those first entering Vietnam: ‘Don’t try and be John Wayne’.<sup>69</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist working with American Vietnam veterans, also asserts that one main preoccupation of these soldiers was the meaninglessness of being killed in Vietnam and of the entire ‘John

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<sup>66</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 302.

<sup>67</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 281.

<sup>68</sup> Lewis, LB, *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1985, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Appy, CG, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, University of Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993, p. 140.

Wayne' concept.<sup>70</sup> This illustrates the relative irrelevance of this heroic ideal by the time of the Vietnam War.

This shift is apparent when examining the archived letters and diaries from the Boer and Vietnam Wars. The soldiers in South Africa often wrote about their wish to survive the war and return home, but did so quite briefly. In a letter home, Private JCJ McBeth of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent, for example, ended a description of his contingent with: 'If we are fortunate enough to get back to Australia...'.<sup>71</sup> He later wrote to his family: 'I hope to return some day safe & well'.<sup>72</sup> Sergeant Farrier Jack Cock expressed a similar sentiment in a letter home while still a Trooper in Bethune's Mounted Infantry: 'If I get through this I shall be fortunate. Of course...we all hope to get through it safely'.<sup>73</sup> Private Alan Wellington wrote to his friend Philip Teer: 'You will see old boy we are having it very hot indeed. I pray to god that I should be spared to see it all through'.<sup>74</sup> Private Stan Jones explained his attitude in a little more detail, writing to his brother: 'We know we won't all get through, but still we hope to...with the exception of a few men, we have got through alright, and we hope to do so again and there is nothing like hope'.<sup>75</sup> These cases are all seen in the personal records of the rank and file, as opposed to officers, which may explain why they are more inclined to talk about their hope of return. Officers may have had similar attitudes, but were less likely to openly express these for fear that their reputation may be tainted. Still, it is clear that some in the sample of Australians fighting in the Boer War were preoccupied with survival, but similar

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<sup>70</sup> Lifton, RJ, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims nor Executioners*, Wildwood House, London, 1973, p. 219.

<sup>71</sup> McBeth, JCJ, Letter, PR00743, Australian War Memorial, 24 November 1899.

<sup>72</sup> McBeth, JCJ, Letter, PR00743, Australian War Memorial, December 1899.

<sup>73</sup> Cock, J, Letter, MS13385, State Library of Victoria, 3 December 1899.

<sup>74</sup> Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 21-22 October 1901.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 26 April 1900. See also Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 1 February 1900.

references by those in Vietnam differ slightly, in line with the observations of Lewis and Lifton.

Some of the selected soldiers in Vietnam did reveal comparable expressions to those in the Boer War, such as Bombardier Jason Neville of the 105 Field Battery, who wrote in a letter to 'Roz': 'I hope and pray to God I do return'.<sup>76</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Corps, on the other hand, was open about the fact that survival was his priority over bravery: 'Don't worry about me, I am not exposed to serious danger and will be alright. I keep my eyes and ears open and am not looking for an MC!'.<sup>77</sup> Although Murray's words here could be interpreted as self-censorship for the sake of his loved one in Australia, his rejection of traditional views concerning bravery in combat is evident. Private Geoffrey R Jones of 3RAR similarly wrote: '...our time is getting short and no one wants to chance his luck any further', indicating that soldiers were unwilling to show courage in battle, preferring instead to stay safely in camp until their tour had ended.<sup>78</sup> This observation, as well as the differences found in the treatment of fear by the sample of soldiers from the Boer and Vietnam Wars, suggests that increased military knowledge of the effects of warfare on combat soldiers did cause changes in these particular men between the two wars.

'Morale' is a term that has been used by numerous theorists of war to describe the will of a soldier to engage in battle. It must be noted that most studies that deeply analyse the formation and support of morale emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a need caused by the unprecedented intensity of warfare and the rising

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<sup>76</sup> Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 15 November 1965. See also O'Brien, S, PR86/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>77</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 16 March 1968.

<sup>78</sup> Jones, GR, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.



unwillingness of soldiers to fight. More recently, examinations of soldiers in war do mention morale but concentrate more on the avoidance of psychological injury. This change of emphasis is due to the shorter tour introduced after the Second World War – there is little need to sustain morale in soldiers for years, as most only fight for up to twelve months. Although there are varied definitions of morale, most agree that it is a psychological state, even though its intention concerns physical combat. In *Psychology and the Soldier* (1944), Norman Copeland maintains that morale is more powerful than a ‘mental’ state, labelling it ‘spiritual’.<sup>79</sup> Hocking concurs, comparing morale’s effects on the mind with the impact of fitness on the body. However, he states that this differs from the fervour for combat expressed by soldiers new to the battlefield – which, as shown earlier, often disappears after fighting begins.<sup>80</sup> Morale is far more important, as it will withstand battle. All who have analysed its role attest to its importance, with some – including Field-Marshal Montgomery - claiming it is the most important element in warfare.<sup>81</sup>

Although all agree on the intended outcome of morale, there are differing opinions on the most important contributing factor, whether physical conditions, appropriate leadership, the group dynamic or success in battle. Texts concentrating on 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, when military service was marked by extended fatigue, hunger and a lack of hygiene, focus on the importance of these aspects when considering morale. Kellett argues that when a soldier is overtired, this is a direct cause of low morale, loss in fighting ability and an increase in negligence on the battlefield.<sup>82</sup> Despite this, he does claim that if high morale is created and

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<sup>79</sup> Copeland, N, *Psychology and the Soldier: The Art of Leadership*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1944, p. 64.

<sup>80</sup> Hocking, *Morale and its Enemies*, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Montgomery, BL, in Richardson, Major-General FM, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War*, Leo Cooper, London, 1978, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 236.

maintained, it can inspire a soldier to withstand extreme exhaustion while fighting.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (2002), Peter Leese connects physical fatigue and the incidence of ‘demoralisation’ and psychological damage.<sup>84</sup> He does insist, however, that if high morale is already in place, exhaustion will not tarnish it, particularly if soldiers have a good relationship with their superiors. The lack of sleep is often connected to hunger, thirst or unsanitary conditions – Keegan and Holmes maintain that if these basic needs are not met, soldiers will be more prone to disillusion and decreased combat performance.<sup>85</sup>

Evidence of this can be seen in the archived letters and diaries of soldiers travelling to South Africa during the Boer War. The conditions on ships such as the *Medic* while soldiers were on their way to the war, as well as when they had reached South Africa, were difficult and food was scarce. This appeared to dominate soldiers’ thoughts, as well as the content of their writing. Private Charles Bretheton Holme of the Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote to his mother while on a ship bound for South Africa: ‘You cannot imagine what life is aboard a troopship. We are packed like herrings in a tin & we are kept going from 6am until 8:30pm’.<sup>86</sup> Sergeant Major WH Barham of the Mounted Rifles wrote to his father about the poor state of his contingent’s uniforms: ‘Our toggery is getting a bit worn, and beginning to look disreputable. We will all soon want laying up for alteration and repairs’.<sup>87</sup> After reaching South Africa, Trooper Fred Stocks of Bethune’s Mounted Infantry wrote to his parents: ‘I am heartily sick of the war in the wet weather, it is horribly miserable.

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<sup>83</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 233.

<sup>84</sup> Leese, P, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2002, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> Keegan & Holmes, *Soldiers*, 17.

<sup>86</sup> Holme, C, Letter, FM4/2210, State Library of New South Wales, 16 March 1968.

<sup>87</sup> Barham, WH, Letter, CY3423, State Library of New South Wales, 17 January 1900.

It is very pleasant to feel the water soaking up through your blankets' [author's emphasis].<sup>88</sup> Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen expressed similar sentiments, but also complained about hunger: 'It's a case now of hard work and no grub and no mistake, the weather is miserable too, drizzling every day. Today the fog was so thick we couldn't go out which came as a blessing'.<sup>89</sup> Rich also demonstrates an unwillingness to fight, to which frequent references can be found in the archived letters and diaries of Boer War soldiers.<sup>90</sup> Here, food is quoted as a problem as well as fatigue from hard work. This recalls the words of British Army officer Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, who said: 'I would say without hesitation that lack of food constitutes the single biggest assault upon morale'.<sup>91</sup> Thus, it is clear that this group of soldiers experienced a range of unsatisfactory conditions while in South Africa, and were willing to communicate this to their loved ones on the home front.

Often, the bad conditions were then blamed on military superiors, and even resulted in soldier misbehaviour. This ties in with the previous discussion on soldier opinion of officers, in which soldier dissatisfaction with their leaders was closely linked in with their own living conditions.<sup>92</sup> Political philosopher William Ernest Hocking asserts that if soldier morale is not maintained, they will behave badly and cause

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<sup>88</sup> Stocks, F, Letter, MS11729, State Library of Victoria, 25 September 1901. See also Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 27 January 1900; Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 14 September 1901; Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 26 January 1900, 13 February 1900; Rich, DstG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 29 June 1901, 18 January 1902; Sabine, CS, Letter, PRG57/10, State Library of South Australia, 25 August 1900; Howland, FH, Diary, PRG248, State Library of South Australia, 16 October 1900.

<sup>89</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 22 October 1901. See also Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 19 January 1902; Kelman, WN, Diary, MLDOC2279, State Library of New South Wales, 2-3 March 1900; Jennings, JT, Diary, PR87/65, Australian War Memorial, 9 November 1899.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 223-224.

<sup>91</sup> Fergusson, B, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 126.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 152-159.

disorder while on the battlefield.<sup>93</sup> Kellett agrees, citing both issues with discipline, as well as decreased faith in officers and the military in general, as consequences of poor morale, however it is caused.<sup>94</sup> The archived personal records from both wars demonstrate these theories.

Letters and diaries from the Boer War often contained complaints focussed towards the British Army or Australian military headship. For example, Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich wrote in a letter home while on the front: 'I can tell you the men love the sound of Kitchener's name – they would stand anything if he would only take them on to the Boers, but he won't and sits still to starve and perish us'.<sup>95</sup> Saddler JH Wadham of the South Australian Imperial Bushmen wrote in his diary during his trip back to Australia from the war: 'We did not get clean clothes served out & are all dirty & think they have treated us badly'.<sup>96</sup> Trooper John Alexander (Jack) McBean also complained about his time on the sea with the 4<sup>th</sup> South Australian Imperial Bushmen: 'Of the time I spent in the troopship I have little to say, suffice to say, that we were starved from the day we put foot on the boat till the day we left her. Complaints were of no use, & I say that Col Rowell, the O.C. ought to be [long blank line inserted] for allowing his men to be treated as they were'.<sup>97</sup> In McBean's case, this grievance prompted him to disobey orders to stay on the ship when docked. He wrote:

Been starving for 24 hours, no rations, so I decided to get some by dodging ashore. Orders had come out that no one was to leave the boat, as it was not known the minute we would sail...I got on board again by going on board the

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<sup>93</sup> Hocking, *Morale and its Enemies*, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 261.

<sup>95</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 13 October 1901.

<sup>96</sup> Wadham, JH, Diary, D5425, State Library of South Australia, 6 July 1901.

<sup>97</sup> McBean, JA, Diary, D6338, State Library of South Australia, 30 April 1902.

boat that was lying near to us, & dropping from her bows onto the stern of the 'Manhattan'. All the others who had taken French leave were caught by the guard stationed at the gangways of the ship.<sup>98</sup>

Here McBean is clearly indicating that it was not only he who directly flouted orders, but widespread hunger on the ship forced more to do the same. These personal records show the morale of soldiers clearly dropped as a result of poor conditions on the war front and caused them to criticise their superiors, as well as defy military orders. This can also be tied in with the incidence of mutiny or 'fragging' discussed in Chapter Seven, by which officers are often physically harmed by their men.<sup>99</sup>

Similar expressions of dissatisfaction with their immediate surroundings and their superiors, as well as the resulting tendency to misbehave can be observed in the publicly archived letters and diaries from the Vietnam War. The majority of these are focussed on the humid weather compared with that in Australia, made worse by the fact that soldiers were expected to fight in such weather in full uniform, with supplies and weapons. It is noteworthy, however, that there are far fewer protests about general living conditions not associated with the weather. This can be attributed to the simple fact that, as mentioned earlier, soldiers lived in far more comfortable surroundings in the later war, certainly a result of research on the importance of personal comfort to morale.

Complaints did, however, still appear. Corporal Ron Kelly spoke about the weather in a letter to his wife: 'Boy what a hole of a place this is, boy it is stinking hot'.<sup>100</sup>

Like McBean, he later connected soldier grievances with misbehaviour: 'All the

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<sup>98</sup> McBean, JA, Diary, D6338, State Library of South Australia, 14-15 June 1902.

<sup>99</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 220-223.

<sup>100</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 10 June 1965.

blokes are grumbling around the place. I can see there will be a big blow up here shortly. Everyone is sick and tired of the place. Nearly everyone is complaining about [being] tired'.<sup>101</sup> Private Geoffrey Jones of 3RAR demonstrated the relationship between poor conditions, low morale and bad behaviour: 'This is real "going troppo" weather. Everyone goes down with prickly heat rashes, tempers become frayed and heavy boozing by some doesn't help the situation'.<sup>102</sup> Bombardier Jason Neville mentioned the lack of cleanliness in a letter home:

The most difficult thing over here to come by is the fact of staying clean...the BTY [Battery] has only one washing machine between sixty soldiers and a copper which are not in very good conditions [sic]...The camp sure has been neglected and has had very poor planning it is too spread out and the facilities are too far apart from the quarters...Boy, you would think I was in Jail [author's emphasis].<sup>103</sup>

Neville was not the only one who compared service in Vietnam with imprisonment. Armourer Andrew Treffry, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron Workshop, wrote to 'Eileen': 'You mentioned that being over here is like or sounds like I'm in prison. I can assure you that its not far from being just that'.<sup>104</sup> Signaler Andrew P Clyne of the 110 Signal Squadron also commented on conditions: 'It's ridiculous the way they treat you here. You're not a human being, you're a dumb animal'.<sup>105</sup> It is clear, then, that personal circumstances had a similar impact on the sample of soldiers in Vietnam

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<sup>101</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 6 October 1965. See also Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 10 October 1965.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, GR, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>103</sup> Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 20 February 1969. See also Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 15 March 1966.

<sup>104</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 12 April 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Clyne, A, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 12 July 1970.

and those in South Africa, although the vast difference in physical conditions did appear to cause more written complaints during the earlier war.

Some soldiers went further, and directly related these conditions to their reluctance to fight – therefore openly demonstrating their loss of morale. Common to soldiers with low morale is a general disenchantment with the war being fought. Major-General Richardson quoted First and Second World War officer, Field-Marshal Slim, on the definition of high morale, saying it ‘means that every individual in a group will work – or fight – and, if needed, will give his last ounce of effort in its service’.<sup>106</sup> Naturally, then, soldiers who are experiencing low morale will behave in the opposite way. Both Boer and Vietnam War soldiers connected the poor conditions they were living under with a general unwillingness to continue fighting. In 1900, after being caught under heavy rain for days on end, Lieutenant Patrick Lang of the 4<sup>th</sup> Imperial Contingent wrote in his diary: ‘War under these conditions is not the game it is cracked up to be’.<sup>107</sup> Trooper Charles Cawthorn, also in South Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, indicated negative feelings towards soldiering after describing the conditions of his comrades in his diary: ‘Some of our men on outpost had a still worse time & one of them lost a toe from frostbite. Who wouldn’t be a soldier’.<sup>108</sup> This obvious sarcasm clearly shows that Cawthorn was experiencing disillusionment resulting from the situation he had found himself in on the battlefield.

In fact, it is clear from the archived letters of Lord Kitchener, the last Commander-in-Chief of the British Army during the Boer War, that he was aware of the need for action by military officers when soldiers began exhibiting signs of disenchantment

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<sup>106</sup> Slim, WJ, in Richardson, *Fighting Spirit*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/040, Australian War Memorial, 24 October 1900.

<sup>108</sup> Cawthorn, CFE, Diary, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 8 June 1901.

with the war. Leese stresses the importance of positive rapport between common soldiers and their superiors in the formation and sustaining of morale during the First World War.<sup>109</sup> Kitchener wrote to the British Secretary of State for War, St. John Brodrick, in 1901:

Considering the stale and jaded state of the troops I think it would be a very good thing if I could at once reward any exceptional good service in the field...The men are getting indifferent – the Boers treat them very well as prisoners and I believe they are not always very pleased when they are released. The power of giving an immediate reward, used very sparingly, would I believe have a startling effect...I have no doubt that if it were done that you would get better service out of the men in the field.<sup>110</sup>

These words also confirm the assertion made earlier in this chapter that soldiers will express more pleasure in warfare when they are given incentives, such as promotion.<sup>111</sup>

Corporal Ron Kelly, writing from Vietnam 60 years later, displayed similar disenchantment with the war in a series of letters to his wife Dianne, caused by his longing to return home, as well as exhaustion due to extended combat operations. He wrote: ‘Well we have been out here in the jungle for 23 days and still no sign of going back to camp. Oh! Hell I hope it soon comes to an end, because it is killing all the blokes’.<sup>112</sup> Less than two months later, he wrote: ‘You feel bad about not knowing when we will come home. I can tell you if we don’t find out shortly, all the

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<sup>109</sup> Leese, *Shellshock*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> Kitchener, HH, Letter, PRO7055, State Library of New South Wales, 1 February 1901.

<sup>111</sup> See p. 184.

<sup>112</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 13 December 1965.



blokes will go bonkers. These rumours about coming home are the only thing keeping us together. Oh! Well they must bring us home sometime'.<sup>113</sup> Another letter expanded on the importance of returning home: 'Yes all the boys are sick and tired of all this over here. If it keeps up, we are going to have a lot of trouble with the blokes'.<sup>114</sup> These words by Kelly demonstrate the contribution of his situation, and that of the rest of his unit, on lasting morale. It is clear here that extended periods of combat, as well as delays in returning to the home front, were very detrimental to his own morale.

During both wars, however, the inadequate quality of surroundings was not the only clear influence on the morale, and subsequent enthusiasm for battle, of the examined soldiers. Other disappointments clearly tarnished some soldiers' opinion of the war. While fighting in the Boer War, Lieutenant Colonel Percy Ralph Ricardo of the 1<sup>st</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote to his son: 'The first news we got when we returned was that all our mails had been burnt, we have not heard from home since the beginning of March so you can fancy what a loss this means. We are all heartily sick of the war, and this mail burning business has made us very sore'.<sup>115</sup> The importance of mail from home is a more recent finding by armies, but was clearly understood much earlier here by the Boers who, on numerous occasions, destroyed mail belonging to the British and their allies.<sup>116</sup>

Lack of money also affected some of the soldiers' spirits. Private RJ Byers complained to his mother at great length in a letter home about having 50 pounds

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<sup>113</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/185, Australian War Memorial, 30 January 1966.

<sup>114</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 12 February 1966.

<sup>115</sup> Ricardo, PR, Letter, MLMSS1561, State Library of New South Wales, 20 June 1900. See Chapter Eight, pp. 251-254 for more examples of the importance of mail to soldier morale.

<sup>116</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 88.

owed to him by both the British and Victorian governments.<sup>117</sup> Trooper Herbert S Conder clearly expressed the importance of money in his diary:

I don't know what they mean by keeping us here so long, we are not starting now until Tuesday, and when Tuesday comes I suppose, it will be put off again until a later date. It would not be so bad if they would only give us some pay to go on with. Of course, as per usual, the Officers are having a high time of it. Women and Wine.<sup>118</sup>

It is obvious from these letters that both their homes and their finances were prominent in the minds of these two Boer War soldiers on the battlefield.

During the Vietnam War, however, conditions were markedly better than those in South Africa over 60 years earlier. It is clear, from the personal records assessed, that these soldiers clearly expected more from the Australian Army. Holmes highlights the fact that there are differences over time in what is needed to sustain morale among soldiers. He raises the example of British soldiers in the First World War, where a working-class background meant that they were more accustomed to the roughness of the battlefield.<sup>119</sup> In this way, he focuses on 'culture and upbringing' as essential factors in the determination of morale levels.<sup>120</sup> Comparing the mere basis of employment among Boer and Vietnam War soldiers aids in an understanding of why the expectations of those fighting in the later war appeared to be higher. Those in the earlier war were mostly rural workers, more familiar with the rigour and vagaries of outdoor living, whereas those who fought in Vietnam were

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<sup>117</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 9 July 1901.

<sup>118</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, 4 May 1901.

<sup>119</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 133.

<sup>120</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 221.

predominantly urban lower-class workers whose everyday life would, in general, be less physically demanding. As a result, there were complaints during the Vietnam War in the examined letters and diaries that focussed around the desire for leisure, as opposed to simpler complaints about hunger or fatigue. For example, Private Len McCosker of 6RAR wrote to his family: ‘We got proper beds last week, so things are really looking up over here now. They’re showing movies quite regularly now too, which is a good thing for the troops as everyone’s nerves are getting on edge, plenty of arguments raging between everyone’.<sup>121</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray described the lack of women in the army to his wife Barbara:

Our daily shower is a relief but I do need a good hot bath. Can smell my own BO almost immediately after stepping out of the shower but doesn’t matter much. We all have it and there are no ladies to worry about. Saw two US Red Cross girls at about 300 yd range early in the week – had to be reminded what women looked like!...Even Playboy bunnies are not very interesting after a while [author’s emphasis].<sup>122</sup>

Thus, such comments – about films and women – are hardly comparable to the more physical grievances expressed by those in the Boer War.

The examined soldiers in Vietnam also directly referred to morale itself when given what they desired, whereas the word ‘morale’ was not mentioned at all in the archived records from the Boer War. This was certainly the result of increased research and discussion of soldier psychology, particularly after the First and Second World Wars – research that would have been partially communicated to soldiers

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<sup>121</sup> McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 1 November 1966.

<sup>122</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 28 March 1968.

during military training. Holmes comments about the role of leisure within the army, maintaining that the US Army has, since the Second World War, recognised its value as a morale booster.<sup>123</sup> This, too, may have been communicated to soldiers during training, which explains why the sample of men in the Vietnam War were so much more willing than their Boer War counterparts to mention morale itself, particularly when it was high. For example, Captain Reginald Dittmar wrote in his diary: ‘Everyone here is well at the moment and I think quite happy as morale is fairly high and we still have our sense of Humour’ [author’s emphasis].<sup>124</sup> Andrew Clyne, a Signaler in the 110 Signal Squadron wrote to his parents: ‘The guitar comes in handy we have a few singalong’s [sic] and they help build your morale and boy! do we need that’.<sup>125</sup> Clyne’s words here clearly follow the words of Copeland, who stressed the importance to morale of games, music or other pursuits which allow soldiers to express their personality – as compensation, of sorts, for losing some individual freedom as subordinates in an army.<sup>126</sup> This tendency of some to directly mention their morale was not only the case when they were happy with their situation, however.

Some soldiers in Vietnam were openly expressive when their morale was low. Corporal Ron Kelly wrote to his wife Dianne about his wish for a letter from her: ‘I really need a big moral [sic] booster now, I am that far down in the dumps. I am really sick of this place, I will soon have to get home or I will go off my head’.<sup>127</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray mentioned, in a letter to his wife, the value to morale of the ability to use a shower: ‘Anyway, back to the shower. We have a tank mounted overhead for water...and kitchen sink inside. Cold water of course but a

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<sup>123</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 246.

<sup>124</sup> Dittmar, RB, Diary, PR91/191, Australian War Memorial, 23 March 1968.

<sup>125</sup> Clyne, AP, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 19 July 1970.

<sup>126</sup> Copeland, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 70.

<sup>127</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 13 August 1965.

splendid device and good for morale'.<sup>128</sup> Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Francis Moriarty also mentioned morale in a letter about naval officers to his 'Darling Margaret': 'Firstly morale in the navy is generally low, but individually as good as ever...officers are not dissatisfied with the navy, but with the treatment given to the navy'.<sup>129</sup> It is significant that all of these soldiers were military superiors, thus would almost certainly have been better educated on the importance of their morale, and consequently also more demanding that it remain high.

There is also another major influence on morale that is not mentioned at all by the sample from the Boer War, and hinted at in only one archived letter from Vietnam, despite its being commented on numerous times by theorists of war. Kellett maintains that the most effective aspect of warfare that increases morale is victory in combat.<sup>130</sup> Hocking claims that this relationship between success in battle and morale is reciprocal – as increased morale will appear as a result of victory, war's triumphs can also be caused by high morale.<sup>131</sup> Private Gary Heffernan, fighting in the Vietnam War in 3RAR, was the only soldier whose letter indicated that this was a realised fact:

I'm fighting fit but, like the rest of the fighting blokes over here, I'm starting to go stale. When you train for 18 months how to fight as a unit and come over here and just 'scrub bash' and sit around in bases it really buggers you up. The battalion score is only 4 VC killed, 1 VC wounded after 3 months patrolling and my section got 3 of the killed and the wounded. That's official kills of course, there are a lot of unofficial[.] But I'm starting to get sickened

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<sup>128</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>129</sup> Moriarty, LF, Letter, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 23 June 1969

<sup>130</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 257-258.

<sup>131</sup> Hocking, *Morale and its Enemies*, 9.

by the set up you can imagine how blokes in other platoons and companies feel who haven't even seen one of the VC dead or alive.<sup>132</sup>

Heffernan here is clearly expressing annoyance at not seeing enough combat action, a rare finding in the personal records of soldiers from both wars. Heffernan, of all soldiers examined in this study, was the most willing to speak at length about the act of killing itself, whereas most of the soldiers examined were clearly reluctant to share battlefield tales with their loved ones, or even write about them in their personal diaries. This could be caused by the limited sample of soldiers, but it is still significant that only one soldier expressed this view, particularly when compared with the number who openly mentioned dissatisfaction with the war caused by other factors.

Thus, it is evident that the selected sample of soldiers in the Boer and Vietnam Wars were affected by similar factors that led to a loss in morale. Personal comfort was a high priority for men fighting in both wars, but complaints about poor living conditions were significantly less frequent during the later war. This can be attributed to the increased knowledge by military leadership of soldiers' needs and of the workings of morale itself, which led to better general living conditions in the Vietnam War in an attempt to ensure that combat ability was not tarnished by low morale. Moreover, the expectations of the selected soldiers in each war were different, due to the differences in their home front living conditions. Some men in Vietnam complained about the lack of films and women, whereas those in the sample who were fighting in South Africa had more practical objections. Essentially, however, the workings of morale in the two groups of soldiers appear to be largely

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<sup>132</sup> Heffernan, GM, Letter, PR86/363, Australian War Memorial, 20 May 1971.

synonymous – grievances of any kind did create some reluctance to fight and occasionally affected combat potential in both soldiers themselves and their units.

A loss in morale is not only a danger to armies due to its ability to cause soldier disenchantment – and disengagement - with battle, it can also impel a soldier to seek various forms of psychological escape from the realities of war. The next chapter will continue the discussion of morale, focussing on the selected soldiers' attempts to sustain it during their military service through the use of diversions, including humour, alcohol and narcotics. In addition, the possible lengths taken when such diversions prove ineffective, such as mutiny, 'fragging', the avoidance of military duty, desertion and even suicide, will be considered.

## Chapter Seven

# Morale: The Role of Diversions

Scholars of war have identified several common reactions by soldiers to the loss of combat morale. Some soldiers conceal or impede their own combat stress by resorting to humour, and in the selected personal records from both wars, examples can be found where soldiers used humour to distract themselves from the high stress environment. Others take more dramatic steps by overusing alcohol or illicit drugs, and even resorting to mutiny, ‘fragging’ or desertion. In the archived letters and diaries from the Boer and Vietnam Wars, the use of these latter examples is governed by the military regulations under which the Australian soldiers are fighting in each war, and influenced by the changing official attitudes between the wars towards the needs of soldiers on the war front.

Kellett focuses on the role of ‘diversion’ in the life of a soldier, claiming that men at war will search for anything that will help them forget the reality of their situation. He points to several different methods - focusing on everyday tasks, their relationships with fellow soldiers, complaining, shouting, and the use of humour. He claims that such techniques will ensure that a soldier will not concentrate too deeply on his own emotions; as such introspection can encourage fear.<sup>1</sup> Holmes agrees, and claims that humour in particular can help a soldier avoid constant thoughts of

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<sup>1</sup> Kellett, A, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, 1982, pp. 285-286.



stresses, such as the death of a comrade or their own wounds.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, when examining the publicly archived personal records of soldiers from the Vietnam and Boer Wars, that some soldiers did use humour. However, only one soldier fighting in Vietnam mentioned its use, but in doing so seemed to be more aware of its positive functions, which corresponds with the increased knowledge of morale itself by those in the later war, as demonstrated in Chapter Six.<sup>3</sup>

A few of those fighting in the Boer War did employ humour both on the battlefield or when communicating with their loved ones on the home front, although their intention in using humour was less clearly defined than that by the men in Vietnam. Private Harry Victor Roberts of the Scottish Horse F Squadron wrote to his friend 'Chas': '25 shells came whizzing about us you would have laughed to see'.<sup>4</sup> It is clear here that Roberts is projecting humour onto a situation that would, in reality, have been quite frightening. As mentioned when discussing fear, some soldiers in the Boer War would understate their anxiety during battle, so as to retain respect from others.<sup>5</sup> Others used humour to make light of grievances. Private John Thomas Jennings of the Victorian Rifles, while insulting British soldiers in his diary, wrote the words 'Fool Britannia. Etc'.<sup>6</sup> Trooper Herbert S Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote of his fellow soldiers in his diary: '...the men are behaving very well, considering of course, there is plenty of bad language used. Sometimes its enough to turn your hair gray [sic]'.<sup>7</sup> Such relatively fleeting instances of humour are more likely to be found in the publicly archived records of those fighting in South Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Holmes, R, *Firing Line*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1987, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 203-207.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, HV, Letter, MS9882, State Library of Victoria, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 185-187.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, J, Diary, PR87/65, Australian War Memorial, 3 March 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, 16 May 1901.

Only one of the soldiers examined from Vietnam used humour in a letter home, but he does indicate that humour was used in a consolatory way. Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith of 8RAR wrote to his parents on Christmas Eve: ‘Had a few laughs today – everyone has been sending Xmas greetings over the radio and giving contact and incident reports about little old men in red, and sightings of reindeers and sounds of bells’.<sup>8</sup> He later wrote in the same letter, after speaking at length about his and his fellow soldiers’ desire to return home: ‘The guys are taking it pretty well, though everybody sounds off now and then. The diggers I’m with are pretty good and we get on well and have a good laugh when we can’.<sup>9</sup> Smith’s words show that humour was particularly important during the holiday season, during which most soldiers would certainly have experienced increased homesickness.

For most soldiers examined, however, it seems that humour alone was not sufficient to provide an adequate escape from the psychological pressures of war. The use of alcohol was mentioned numerous times by the soldiers in both wars, not only in general terms but also when it was being used specifically as a morale booster. Scholars of war maintain that alcohol, as well as narcotics, have been used for centuries by soldiers in war – even if not officially documented. John Keegan labels the use of alcohol ‘therapeutic’ in warfare.<sup>10</sup> So, too, does Holmes, who suggests numerous advantages to be gained if soldiers are allowed to drink. He points to alcohol’s sleep-inducing tendency, as well as its ability to help a soldier withstand the psychological pressures of battle. In addition, it aids in creating ties between soldiers in a particular unit.<sup>11</sup> All of these, as mentioned earlier, assist in the

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 24 December 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 24 December 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Keegan, J, in Holmes, *Firing Line*, 244.

<sup>11</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 244-245.

formation of morale. Holmes later points to the British Army during the First World War. He maintains that although it was against military regulations to distribute alcohol freely to soldiers, there is evidence that it - particularly rum - did increase battle morale.<sup>12</sup> Dinter disagrees, questioning the value of alcohol when trying to reduce direct battlefield stress.<sup>13</sup> Despite this, many in the sample of soldiers do mention the use of alcohol, but it is difficult to pinpoint whether it had a dominant role, as men in both wars were allowed certain amounts by their superiors – whether officially or unofficially. It is clear, however, that these soldiers often used alcohol in excess – a more effective indication that it was used with a therapeutic purpose in mind.

Numerous examples exist of Boer War soldiers indulging in alcohol. For example, Corporal WN Kelman of the New South Wales Bushmen Contingent wrote in his diary while on a train to the battlefield in South Africa:

Last night was one continual nightmare. Nearly all the men on the train got drunk on whisky given them at Massekessa and Umtali, and many of them were sick all over the carriage...One dirty brute was sick in my helmet last night, but I put it under the hot water tap of the Engine, and so cleaned it again, but at the expense of its appearance. An experience like this ought to keep a man sober all his life.<sup>14</sup>

Although Kelman did not seem keen to join his men, his record here makes it clear that soldiers were drinking before their first experience of war. Also, Lieutenant

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<sup>12</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 248.

<sup>13</sup> Dinter, E, *Hero or Coward: Pressures Facing the Soldier in Battle*, Frank Cass & Co Ltd, Great Britain, 1985, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Kelman, WN, Diary, MLDOC2279, State Library of New South Wales, 18 April 1900.

Douglas St. George Rich of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen confirms in a letter home that his personal alcohol consumption had increased as a result of being in South Africa: ‘If you could only see the quantity of whisky I can get through now, you would never call me light headed again. I suppose it’s the exposure that does it, and you can’t feel it, but I sometimes think I’ll develop into a confirmed toper!’<sup>15</sup> Kelman and Rich’s words do suggest that alcohol was used as a direct reaction to these soldiers’ position on the war front.

Quartermaster Sergeant WEL Lilley of Brabant’s Horse also commented on the use of alcohol in his diary: ‘A lot of our men get very drunk, although nobody is supposed to sell liquor to the troops, they get it somehow or another[,] nobody seems to know where or how only you see them drunk and that is all anybody knows about it’.<sup>16</sup> Lieutenant PH Lang of the 4<sup>th</sup> Imperial Contingent also wrote of common soldiers indulging in alcohol:

One of our men was missing – on the loose. The colour-sergeant found him, & putting him on his own horse behind the saddle, the two galloped through the street to rejoin the column. The ‘drunk’ though pretty well screwed, sitting on the rump of the horse behind the sergeant without holding on, smiling & waving his hand fatuously to the crowd, who were greatly impressed by his horsemanship.<sup>17</sup>

Lang later wrote of another instance of public drunkenness by the rank and file:

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<sup>15</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 11 September 1901. See also Jermyn, JD, Diary, PR01042, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Lilley, WEL, Diary, PR00874, Australian War Memorial, 30 August 1900.

<sup>17</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 29 July 1900.

Capt O'Farrell started to fall in the men & horses about 1pm. The men were most willing & anxious to fall in, but the greater number of them were most woefully drunk...Then all over the place men would be coming bumping off onto the ground, to be picked up by sympathizing mates & given drinks out of sundry bottles...The scene reached a climax though when the drunken rabble were crossing the market square in a...column (like a drunken snake, if that were possible). What order there was before reaching the Market Square immediately vanished – three or four men would leave the column & meander across the square towards a pub in one direction, others would go across to another pub & an occasional man would come off onto the metal road with an awful thump...In a very short time the square presented a most animated appearance. In the middle of the square an inebriated bushman was rounding up a group of screaming natives, who had the misfortune to be crossing the road at that moment, in the same way that he would round up a mob of cattle.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that the men making these remarks are all military superiors and that mentions by the rank and file of the consumption of alcohol cannot be found in the archived personal records, although this could be a consequence of its illegality in South Africa, and soldiers' fear of being caught and punished.

In fact, there are two mentions of alcohol by common soldiers in the records that support this. Trooper Herbert S Conder wrote in his diary while he was in hospital: 'The Drs asked me this morning if I would like a couple of bottles of stout a day. I

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<sup>18</sup> Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 19 November 1900. See also Lang's diary entries of 12 November 1900 and 1 January 1901.

told him ‘No’ that I had not drank in my life’.<sup>19</sup> Also, Trooper Charles E Cawthorn of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen wrote in his diary: ‘The publicans are not allowed to serve us with liquor so you need not be afraid of us taking to drink’.<sup>20</sup> Although it is clear from Lilley and Lang’s accounts that excessive consumption of alcohol did occur both in and on the way to South Africa, Conder and Cawthorn’s words suggest that the rank and file were aware of the illegality of alcohol on the war front. Although it could be true that these two men did not drink at all, this is impossible to know for certain. However, the fact that in the personal records examined, officers mentioned soldier use of alcohol whereas those in the rank and file did not, does suggest that the military regulations against drinking in South Africa did have an impact on the personal records of these men.

Even some civilians in Australia were aware of the consumption of alcohol by soldiers, demonstrated by a letter sent by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of South Australia to the Chief Secretary’s Office during the war which spoke of the ‘open secret’ that ‘some of the men have found...drinks a source of injury’, and insisting that the colonial governments control the distribution of alcohol on troopships.<sup>21</sup> These examples, among others in the archived records, do show that alcohol was being used in South Africa, but it is not possible to determine whether it was being used intentionally to reduce the strain of battle.

During Vietnam, the use of alcohol was far more widespread, and clearly recognised by some in the sample of soldiers as an essential element of warfare. There are more instances of drunkenness being reported than in South Africa – a consequence of,

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<sup>19</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131. Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>20</sup> Cawthorn, CE, Diary, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 30 April 1901.

<sup>21</sup> Woman's Christian Temperance Union of South Australia, Letter to SA Chief Secretary’s Office, GRG24/6/472, no. 248, State Records of South Australia, 20 February 1900.

firstly, the fact that open drunkenness was a crime for soldiers fighting in the Boer War and, secondly, that in Vietnam soldiers were allowed more rest periods during which alcohol appeared to be a welcome comfort.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there are just two examples of soldiers mentioning drugs – 5RAR Armourer Andrew Treffry told his partner Eileen in a letter that packages sent from Vietnam were being opened and checked for narcotics and Supply Officer Alan Desmond O’Connor wrote in his diary that he ‘took a couple of pills’ before sleeping one night.<sup>23</sup> Neither case indicates that an Australian soldier was directly using illicit drugs. Many who have examined Vietnam have commented on the extensive use of narcotics, particularly among American soldiers.<sup>24</sup> However, little investigation has been carried out on their use among Australians in Vietnam. The findings of this study seems to indicate that their use was not as widespread as by US soldiers, but it is impossible to be conclusive, as the illegality of their use would certainly prevent soldiers from mentioning them. In addition, the sample used in this thesis is limited to those that were publicly archived. It is likely that a soldier mentioning the use of drugs in their letters and diaries could be a reason to avoid publicly archiving these records. Alcohol, however, was legal in Vietnam – resulting in frequent references to it in the archived letters and diaries.

For some soldiers in Vietnam, alcohol was seen as an essential requirement to cope with the stresses of combat. Corporal Wallace Lillebo of 5RAR confirms its role in a letter written home to his parents while on R&R in Thailand: ‘Everybody is still unwound and drunk. That is, everybody would be drunk if we didn’t have the

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<sup>22</sup> For an example of drunkenness being punished during the Boer War, see: Dallimore, J, Letter, PA99/75, State Library of Victoria, 6 May 1900.

<sup>23</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 20 April 1969; O’Connor, AD, Diary, PRG843, State Library of South Australia, 22 February 1971.

<sup>24</sup> See Helmer, J, *Bringing the War Home: The American Soldier in Vietnam and After*, The Free Press, New York, 1974, p. 40; Keegan, J & Holmes, R, *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1985, p. 54; Herzog, TC, *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 45.

soldier's unlimited capacity for grog, without which no army could function' [author's emphasis].<sup>25</sup> Here Lillebo is labelling alcohol a necessity, rather than just a desire of soldiers – thus supporting the findings of Holmes connecting alcohol with morale.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Corporal Ron Kelly of 1RAR wrote to his wife:

The boys are out in the scrub again, they left this morning for 3 days. You should hear them, hell I have never heard blokes so sick of it. The blokes got as drunk as hell last night, and were fighting each other. They are all very sick of this place, I think they need a rest real bad.<sup>27</sup>

Kelly's fellow soldiers are drinking here as a result of being unwillingly sent out on another mission. Signaler Andrew Clyne of the 110 Signal Squadron described a soldier seemingly doing the same thing in a letter home: 'Things are pretty edgy over here at the moment with the [South Vietnamese Presidential] elections on. Silly bloody Pete Howards went out on an all-night patrol last Saturday night and he took two water bottles full of Bacardi and Coke and by morning was as drunk as an owl'.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Clyne here mentions soldiers' stress, then speaks about Howards' drunken antics while on patrol, indicates strongly that there is a connection between the two in this instance. This example, as well as Kelly's words above, suggests that alcohol consumption was used by some as a direct attempt to increase the will to fight, or battle morale.

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<sup>25</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PR1363/4, State Library of South Australia, 23-27 February 1967. See also Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PR1363/4, State Library of South Australia, 7 January 1967; Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 30 May 1969.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 248.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 16 October 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Clyne, A, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 13 August 1971.



These are only a few of numerous references to alcohol in the archived personal records of Vietnam War soldiers, which overall clearly indicate that these men did drink, both when on the battlefield and when on R&R. For example, Private Shayne O'Brien of 5RAR wrote in a letter to his parents: 'The women over here swarm over you especially if you pop in for an ale but after a while they find out we're Aussies and they then tend to go more for the Yanks who are bigger spenders than we are'.<sup>29</sup> Gunner Jason Neville, with the 105 Field Battery, wrote in a letter home about his recent R&R: 'I am broke again spent all my money in Saigon (whiskey & coke)'.<sup>30</sup> David Keating showed a less pleasant side to drinking in Vietnam in a letter to his family: 'We had a barbecue that night & I drank plenty of piss & got into bed at 11.30 and tried to make the tiolet [sic] but was to [sic] crook, bloody booze'.<sup>31</sup>

The extent to which this was consolatory is difficult to determine for each war, but it can be concluded that more of those examined in Vietnam – both common soldiers and officers - were open about drinking, and understood its purpose better. However, this can be attributed to the fact that, for men fighting in the Boer War, drunkenness was punished. In addition, research into the curative effects of alcohol on soldiers did not occur until after the First and Second World Wars – as such, it would be unlikely that a soldier in the Boer War would openly confess his need to drink as an escape from the pressure he was under. Therefore, it is expected that references to alcohol in their letters and diaries would be largely subdued, if not repressed.

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<sup>29</sup> O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, 1 December 1968.

<sup>30</sup> Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 27 May 1966.

<sup>31</sup> Keating, D, Letter, PR00330, Australian War Memorial, 8 April 1969. See also Smith, NC, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 19 February 1968; Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 20 February 1966.

The use of humour, alcohol or drugs, however, are only temporary avenues taken by soldiers who are having difficulty dealing with the strains of battle. Some, in their desperation to avoid combat, sought more permanent solutions to their grievances towards the war they were fighting. In both wars, evidence can be found in the archived records that some soldiers were not only creating excuses to mask their unwillingness to go into battle, but also openly refusing to fight, as well as physically harming officers who appeared to be putting their lives in danger. For some soldiers, the battlefield was completely intolerable, causing them to risk severe punishment – even death – through desertion.

Researchers have found numerous reasons for soldiers fleeing the warfront. Kellett maintains that deserters are generally soldiers who do not deal well with the group environment in war, and thus experience fewer advantages from comradeship.<sup>32</sup> He claims that although emotional disturbances such as the death of a comrade can trigger the desire to escape the war environment, it is more likely the result of inadequate training that does not foster morale, or difficulty fitting into everyday army life.<sup>33</sup> Holmes agrees, placing more emphasis on soldier discontent with day-to-day activities as a factor that has caused desertion since the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>34</sup> He does, however, agree that it is when the least connection with fellow soldiers is felt that desertion is most likely – as soldiers are suffering from homesickness more than at any other time.<sup>35</sup> Helmer, writing on his personal experience working as a psychiatrist with US Vietnam veterans, disagrees with Holmes' view. He mentions that between 1964 and 1970, desertion increased in the US Army by 235%, and exceeded the cases seen during the Second World War and Korea. This, according to

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<sup>32</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 83, 86.

Helmer, suggests that perhaps it was not caused by soldier unsuitability to military life, as suggested by the Pentagon.<sup>36</sup> Desertion rates did escalate dramatically during Vietnam, but the available archived records reveal that desertion did also occur during the Boer War.

Martin Maddern, Chaplain with the Queensland Imperial Bushmen, reported several cases of stowaways being found on the *Manchester Port* on its way to South Africa by way of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, some of whom could have been deserters. However, it is clear that not all of the men he wrote about wished to leave military service. He mentions that on 25 April 1900, two men - possibly deserters - were missing during roll call. Also, three stowaways were found, but only one was labelled a 'naval deserter' – the other two were 'old camp men' wishing to fight.<sup>37</sup> A month later, while still at sea, he reported that another stowaway had been found, 'a trumpeter from Artillery', who was also wishing to evade military duty.<sup>38</sup> From these diary entries, it is possible to see two opposing attitudes by soldiers towards the Boer War – whereas some did not want to fight, for reasons that are unclear, some wanted to represent their country so earnestly that they were willing to hide on troopships at sea for months. Similarly ambiguous is a report by *The Argus* on 2 November 1899: 'The lance-corporal who was taken aboard the *Medic* under arrest as a deserter yesterday was sent ashore before the vessel sailed, as it was felt that this course would prove a greater punishment for his offence than simply giving him 'cells' aboard'.<sup>39</sup> In this case, the military authorities saw that *not* being allowed to fight in South Africa was a greater penalty than being forced onto the ship, perhaps due to the shame he would experience on the seemingly jingoistic Australian home front.

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<sup>36</sup> Helmer, *Bringing the War Home*, 36, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Maddern, M, Diary, D4860(L), State Library of South Australia, 25 April 1900.

<sup>38</sup> Maddern, M, Diary, D4860(L), State Library of South Australia, 26 May 1900.

<sup>39</sup> *The Argus*, 2 November 1899, in Hoad, JC, Papers, MS11559, State Library of Victoria.

However, this example appeared in the commercial press, so it is difficult to know to what extent editors and writers manipulated the story to suit their own ends. Despite this, desertion did exist to some extent during the Boer War.

By the Vietnam War, desertion was more common, but the archives contain only one example. Major EM McCormick of 3RAR received a letter about a particular unit during the war from Warrant Officer 2, Geoff Scott: 'I visited SPECIAL FORCES GROUP HQ at NHA TRANG today, and I was informed that since the ASHUA business, the desertion rate of the NUNG FORCE has skyrocketed' [author's emphasis].<sup>40</sup> Here Scott is referring to a particularly difficult encounter with the enemy, which affected the troops enough to cause desertion to increase. This supports the views of Helmer and Kellett rather than of Holmes, indicating that in this case, it was not just day-to-day army life that impelled soldiers to seek escape, but the difficulty of coping with the loss of comrades, or the strains of battle. This does not suggest that everyday army life did not cause desertion, but this particular case does support Helmer and Kellett's more specific findings that link specific events with desertion rates.

The Vietnam War was also noteworthy for 'fragging', another act of direct defiance against authority. This involve the physical harming of superiors by soldiers with the fragmentation grenade, and was often accompanied by the outright refusal to obey orders. Kellett focusses on fragging as a phenomenon peculiar to Vietnam, and maintains that it became more frequent as the ties of comradeship became stronger between soldiers. He blames leaders who were unable to effectively foster morale in their soldiers, and thus failed to encourage them to continue fighting, for its

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<sup>40</sup> Scott, G, Letter, 14 April 1966, in McCormick, EM, Papers, PR83/227, Australian War Memorial.

occurrence.<sup>41</sup> Holmes labels fragging a traditional response of soldiers to combat when being forced to continue fighting longer than expected, or subjected to ‘unnecessary harassment’, insisting that it has been occurring for many years in various forms. It was merely the new use of the ‘fragmentation grenade’ in harming military superiors that was specific to Vietnam.<sup>42</sup> In other wars, soldiers did harm their superiors, but this is not specifically referred to as ‘fragging’. Others feigned illness or self-wounded in order to avoid combat. Martin Middlebrook highlights the frequent incidence during the First World War of soldiers ‘chewing cordite or sleeping in wet towels’ so as to become too ill to engage in combat, despite the risk of being punished by death.<sup>43</sup> The archived personal records of the men fighting in the Boer War confirm the existence of all of these military offences.

Examples of both the refusal to fight, as well as violence against officers, can be found in the archived letters and diaries from South Africa, but particularly those from soldiers who had either not yet reached the front lines or had completed their army service. Corporal WN Kelman wrote in his diary: ‘We had some trouble with a few of the sailors, who showed mutinous conduct, but the mate and two others having been place in irons, the trouble blew over’.<sup>44</sup> Here Kelman is reporting general mutiny, but some records indicate that this became more violent at times. Violence also occurred when alcohol was involved. Trooper Alured Kelly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Victorian Contingent wrote in his diary: ‘We were granted leave...to visit the town to see the sights. Unfortunately some of the boys had more drink than was good for them and they ran foul of the military and civilian police. They resisted arrest too

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<sup>41</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 108-109.

<sup>42</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 329-330.

<sup>43</sup> Middlebrook, M, *The First Day on the Somme, 1 July 1916*, Penguin, London, 1971, pp. 299-300.

<sup>44</sup> Kelman, WN, Diary, MLD0C2279, State Library of New South Wales, 6-30 March 1900.

energetically and a minor battle ensued'.<sup>45</sup> While on the *Medic* bound for South Africa, Private Stan Jones wrote in a letter home:

There is a court-martial nearly every two or three days, men being had up for breaking some rule or other, or disobeying some order, the Victorians I think have been the most unruly so far. One of the West. Aus. men was had up for striking his Sergeant, and he got 5 days imprisonment.<sup>46</sup>

Jones does not identify exactly why this outburst by the Western Australian soldier occurred, but it is clear that frustration did occur towards a superior, which resulted in a punishable offence.

Trooper Herbert Conder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry reported similar soldier responses, but outlined specific reasons that had caused them. He wrote in his diary about soldier attitudes towards their superior:

Our Major Tunbridge inspects the vessel every morning, and he is making far too much fuss, altogether. Falling in the men and making them stand to attention, he is not very well liked by the men, and this morning he got hit with a potato thrown at him by a Victorian (behind the ear) and I am afraid he will get worse yet, if he goes making the men play tin soldiers. The men have had 14 months of it and we want a spell now.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kelly, A, Diary, 3DRL1915, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, n.d.

<sup>47</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, 12 May 1901.

Only four days later, he wrote again – this time about the punishment of men from New South Wales and Victoria who were releasing prisoners without authorisation while journeying from South Africa:

Major Tunbridge interviewed the NSW and told them that the men would have to do their time “if not on the ship – they would have to do so on land”. He was greatly cut up the way the men were behaving, “and if you don’t kill me” he said “Before I reach shore and do away with me, I’m not frightened of you and I’m not frightened by you, for you can kill me and it will only make matters worse for you when you land, which you will have to do sooner or later”.<sup>48</sup>

Although Conder only specifically mentioned the throwing of a potato, he did strongly suggest that the soldiers in question had threatened additional violence against their superior, Major Tunbridge. Conder’s first entry links the dissatisfaction of men with their officer and the tasks he is assigning them with their misbehaviour, demonstrating that less explosive defiance to authority than ‘fragging’, but with a similar spirit, did occur at least once during the Boer War. In addition, this report supports another assertion by Holmes – that men are more likely to mutiny when combat service officially ends, but they are still employed by the military.<sup>49</sup> Although it is possible that this was the only occurrence of such behaviour, other complaints by soldiers about their officers – both Australian and British – suggest that this occurred, or at least was threatened, more often during the Boer War.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dallimore, J, Diary, PA99/75, State Library of Victoria, 16 May 1901.

<sup>49</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 328.

<sup>50</sup> For examples of soldier dissatisfaction with their superiors, see Chapter Five, pp. 152-159.

A few of the Boer War soldiers examined also reported unwillingness to fight in less dramatic ways. Two examples from the archives exist of soldiers feigning illness to avoid combat. Private Watson Augustus Steel of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Mounted Rifles wrote in his diary:

One fellow has 'bluffed' the doctor he has rheumatism, an ailment difficult to diagnose. When the electric light goes out at 8:30 he usually dances a hornpipe in front of the stove before turning in, and then tells some very original yarns for another two hours. He has marched from the Modder to here, and has been in all the fighting, and thinks he has walked far enough. Perhaps he has as he has no socks.<sup>51</sup>

While Steel employs humour in relaying this story, it is clear that the man in question is expressing his refusal to continue fighting by inventing an illness. This is not an isolated case, however, as Trooper Herbert Conder reports similar cases he encountered while in hospital:

Lots of the chaps here are not sick at all, it would make a cat laugh to hear them schemeing [sic] how to get invalided or how to stop in the hospital. Some say they have Rheumatic pains, others pains in the head, and most of them fat as whales, but although some here are only shams, others of the poor chaps are really sick and wounded.<sup>52</sup>

Although these soldiers are not as bold in their refusal to fight as those who attacked superior officers, their behaviour does directly point to their perceived need to escape

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<sup>51</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 29 June 1900.

<sup>52</sup> Conder, HS, Diary, PR84/131, Australian War Memorial, n.d.



military duty. This indicates that some soldiers during the earlier war did not engage in combat as willingly as suggested in previous studies. Although Australian volunteers for the South African force were plentiful, this initial enthusiasm clearly evaporated in some cases.<sup>53</sup>

As discussed earlier in this study, the examined soldiers fighting in Vietnam were more likely to express unwillingness to fight, particularly when their tour was nearing its end.<sup>54</sup> Although some soldiers in the sample do provide examples of outright refusal to fight, ‘fragging’ or fake illnesses are rarely mentioned. Private Geoffrey Jones of 3RAR wrote: ‘There are now a lot of good excuses being invented to avoid going out on operations or patrol, especially when a digger is killed by a sniper just outside the perimeter wire in the last few weeks before he’s due to return home’.<sup>55</sup> Jones here demonstrates the desire of soldiers to avoid fighting when they are nearing the end of their tour. Signaler Andrew Clyne expresses a similar sentiment, but focussed more on general work, not combat alone. He wrote to his parents:

I reckon I will take up smoking, because they’re always having 120 minute smoko’s [sic] and if you’re not smoking they nab you to do little jobs and you’ve gotta have them done quickly or they bawl you out and the poor old non-smokers get nabbed every time. You get tired enough without having to run around in you’re [sic] smoko breaks.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Penny, Barbara R, ‘Australia’s Reactions to the Boer War – A Study in Colonial Imperialism’, *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, November 1967, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter Six, p. 192.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, GR, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>56</sup> Clyne, AP, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 12 July 1970.

Clyne's words indicate a sense of disillusionment with his overall position in the military, and his longing to escape the everyday tasks he is asked to perform. This example seems to follow Holmes' argument that it is army life in general that causes a soldier to become weary of his place within it.

There are only two cases in the archived personal records from the Vietnam War that mention 'fragging' or the desire to leave the front due to illness. This does not indicate conclusively that these were not widespread, as both were punishable offences, which would certainly reduce their incidence in letters and diaries. Also, this study focuses on a limited sample, which suggests that other unknown motivations may exist. However, the fact that such evidence is still revealed by a smaller sample does suggest this was a commonplace occurrence in Vietnam, supporting the words of the above theorists. Corporal Ron Kelly wrote home to his wife: 'You felt only a tiny bit sorry I did not break my leg. Boy it would be heaven to do that, at least I would get a spell'.<sup>57</sup> Kelly's words here demonstrate another finding of theorists, particularly on the Vietnam War – the soldier wish for 'million dollar wounds', referring to those serious enough to ensure they were able to return home, but not so badly that they would be permanently harmed.<sup>58</sup> The expression 'million dollar wounds' demonstrates the high value of such injuries to soldiers. Although this did occur during previous wars, its incidence was also visible during Vietnam. Appy reveals that this would often happen intentionally, due to soldier desperation to end their combat duties.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 11 August 1965.

<sup>58</sup> Appy, CG, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, University of Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993, p. 244.

<sup>59</sup> Appy, *Working-Class War*, 244.

Despite the fact that ‘fragging’ is characterised by its incidence during Vietnam, there is only one report in the personal records.<sup>60</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith reported a serious case to his parents in a letter home: ‘We have got rid of 9RAR completely. They have a rather poor name, and the murder of that young officer just put the led [sic] on for them. Enquiries are still going on about it, I can’t see the young swine getting off’.<sup>61</sup> This illustrates that, at least in this instance, ‘fragging’ was undertaken with such intensity that it caused the death of a military superior.

It is evident, then, that despite the reported higher incidence of mutiny, desertion and the general unwillingness of soldiers to fight during Vietnam, a comparable number of cases can be found from the Boer War in the sample. This may be due to various factors - in particular the fact that a larger number of archived personal records were found from the earlier war. Although definite numbers of soldiers who wished to escape the battlefield are impossible to determine, the examples offered from both wars do show that some soldiers certainly did not want to engage in active duty at all, or to continue fighting after they had been on the battlefield for an extended period of time. This suggests that, despite techniques used by militaries to encourage men to fight willingly, the relationship between soldiers and combat is too complex and varied to assign set conclusions that apply to all. This is particularly valid when considering the changing nature of warfare, meaning that each military venture will create new issues and circumstances that alter both soldiers’ perceptions, and their resulting enthusiasm, towards combat. It is also fitting in the case of this particular study, in which a limited sample of archived letters and diaries has been used.

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<sup>60</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 108-109.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, NC, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 28 November 1969.

Some soldiers, however, fail to find an adequate physical or psychological escape from their aversion to combat. In such cases, the result can be severe psychological damage. Although soldiers have been suffering psychological ailments from warfare for centuries, research into their causes and possible avoidance did not occur on a grand scale until after the First World War and the 'shell shock' phenomenon.<sup>62</sup> In fact, before this, psychology was rarely employed when dealing with soldiers in this position and, indeed, the British Army was slower than other European countries to recognise that this was a problem that required some form of therapy.<sup>63</sup> The Second World War brought new and more intensive modes of warfare that, in turn, despite efforts by military psychiatrists, caused increased incidence of psychological trauma in soldiers. Richard Gabriel, in *The Painful Field: The Psychiatric Dimension of Modern War* (1988) highlights American Army studies, which found that 50% of their soldiers in the Second World War suffered mental collapse and could not continue fighting. Subsequent research found that within thirty days on the battlefield, 98% of soldiers were exhibiting signs of psychological damage.<sup>64</sup> Grossman also mentions a study by Swank and Marchand, which found that 98% of US soldiers in Normandy who fought constantly for 60 days developed psychological ailments.<sup>65</sup> The Vietnam War produced more openly acknowledged cases of psychological damage in fighting soldiers, which was soon diagnosed

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<sup>62</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 256.

<sup>63</sup> Stone, M, 'Shellshock and the Psychologists' in Bynam, WF, Porter, R & Shepherd, M (eds.), *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry: Volume II: Institutions and Society*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1985, p. 251.

<sup>64</sup> Gabriel, RA, *The Painful Field: The Psychiatric Dimension of Modern War*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Swank, RL & Marchand, WE, in Grossman, D, 'Human Factors in War: the Psychology and Physiology of Close Combat' in Evans, M & Ryan, A (eds.), *The Human Face of Warfare: Killing, Fear and Chaos in Battle*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2000, p. 7.

collectively as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This was similar to shellshock, as it was caused by a significant event that created severe anxiety.<sup>66</sup>

Although this thesis is focussing on the attitudes and behaviour of a sample of soldiers while fighting in the Vietnam and Boer Wars, it is necessary to investigate this further effect of military service, as it arises from many of the factors discussed, such as length of combat, the fighting itself, the physical environment on the battlefield, morale and the amount of fear a soldier is experiencing.<sup>67</sup> For some soldiers, the psychological effects of battle last only for the duration of their tour, whereas others feel it most keenly after returning to the home front. Holmes maintains that most veterans are aware that their views on the world in general have changed dramatically as a result of their involvement in war.<sup>68</sup> Bartlett believes that the period after a soldier returns home and begins to recover from wartime stress will often be filled with excessive melancholy.<sup>69</sup> This is caused by the fact that these men had been thrust into an environment that was not suited to their own value system and later had trouble separating themselves from it.

Evidence of this is apparent in the archived personal records of the soldiers from the Boer and Vietnam Wars, although those in Vietnam are more explicit and expressive. This difference could arise from the fact that, during the earlier war, research had not been carried out on the soldier's period of adaptation between the battle and home fronts. By Vietnam, however, military psychiatry was much more advanced and its importance acknowledged. During the Boer War, however, there is only one record

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<sup>66</sup> Creamer, M & Forbes, D, 'Long-term Effects of Traumatic Stress' in Kearney, GE, Creamer, M, Marshall, R & Goyne, A (eds.), *Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force Experience*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, 2003, p. 176.

<sup>67</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 259.

<sup>68</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 394.

<sup>69</sup> Bartlett, FC, *Psychology and the Soldier*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1927, pp. 195-196.

that demonstrates soldier awareness that home life would not be as it once was.

Major Frank Valentine Weir, while still a Lieutenant in the New South Wales Bushmen Contingent, wrote in his diary at length about the fact that life on the home front was much more difficult than that on the battlefield.<sup>70</sup> This, however, was not expressed by any one soldier in a letter home. Also, it is impossible to know whether Weir's home life was normally more or less difficult than that of the average man, so it is difficult to attribute his expressions directly to his adjustment from war to home.

Some of the sample from Vietnam simply wrote about the differences they expected to encounter between the battle and home fronts. Corporal Ron Kelly of 1RAR wrote in a letter home: 'It is going to be nice and peaceful away from all the guns, places etc when I get home, I probably will not be able to sleep[.] Oh! Well if I can't, I will have to make love'.<sup>71</sup> Others fighting in Vietnam, however, openly displayed their fears about returning home. Bombardier Peter Groves of the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, wrote to his wife: 'I think I will be a bit speechless for a few days after I get home. I won't know what to say to anyone'.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, 5RAR Private Douglas Bishop wrote to his mother: 'I hope that being in a war zone for so long won't inspire me to build a huge bunker in the front lawn and put up a barbed wire fence all round the house, walk up Meadow Crescent with a rifle shooting the first thing that moves etc'.<sup>73</sup> Corporal Wallace Lillebo was more articulate, if less graphic, when expressing the same sentiment in a letter to his parents – perhaps a consequence of his superior position in the military:

I don't think any of us realize that we are seasoned as old teak and tough

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<sup>70</sup> Weir, FV, Diary, MLMSS1024, State Library of New South Wales, 27 January 1901.

<sup>71</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 9 February 1966.

<sup>72</sup> Groves, P, Letter, PR86/248, Australian War Memorial, 16 March 1969.

<sup>73</sup> Bishop, D, Letter, PR91/108, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

as nails. For a year we have lived in that Other World of the front line soldier, cut off from what is classed as normal, accepting this existence of ours as the way life is. We have created our own standards, and anything outside of them are stupidly superfluous.<sup>74</sup>

Groves, Bishop and Lillebo are all communicating their own feelings on the same issue – their concern over their potential suitability to adapt to civilian life on the home front on their return from war. Their fears were not ill-founded, as unprecedented numbers of soldiers in the Australian Army did have difficulty adjusting to home life, with some exhibiting new forms of psychiatric illnesses.

Some soldiers were unfortunate enough to begin displaying overt negative effects of combat while they were still stationed on the war front. During the Boer War, the South Australian Chief Secretary received a letter concerning Private L. Osborne of the 6<sup>th</sup> New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, who was to be given free passage on a train from South Australia to New South Wales:

A sleeping berth should be provided for him as he is suffering from traumatic paralysis which is aggravated by the ship's motion. The man is accompanied by Sergeant Hawkins of the NSW army medical corps as an attendant as he is unable to get about without assistance.<sup>75</sup>

The severity of Osborne's 'traumatic paralysis' is partly blamed on the troopship on which he was returning to Australia. Given the fact that military psychiatry was then

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<sup>74</sup> Lillebo, WA, *Chopper in the Sky*, PRG1363/4, State Library of South Australia, 3 April 1967. See also Jones, GR, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>75</sup> Chief Secretary's Office, Letter, GRG24/6/484, no. 1361, State Records of South Australia, 9 September 1901.

in its infancy, it is likely that Osborne was suffering from psychological injury caused by fear of combat, or from combat itself. This is the only direct mention of a soldier developing a psychological illness after fighting in the Boer War, and is not contained in the soldier's own personal writings. Another example exists in the archived personal records of the adverse effects of warfare, which again has not been written by the actual soldier affected. Private Stan Jones of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent wrote in a letter home:

Three or four lads have not been well since we started on the war-path. I think if one or two of them could get back to Adelaide, it would take more than 35/- a week to induce them to leave South Australia, but it is only one or two who feel like that, but I think everyone will have enough of it before the war is over.<sup>76</sup>

Although these soldiers could have been suffering from physical ailments, it is likely that if that were the case they would have been moved to a military hospital. Jones' words more strongly suggest that these soldiers were not unwell in a physical sense, but emotionally. It is not surprising that examples in which soldiers mention their own psychological ailments do not exist. This, like soldiers' potential difficulties encountered after returning home from war, would have been a humiliating admission at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it was not yet even a publicly acknowledged side-effect of warfare.

Since the First World War, researchers have been much more careful to acknowledge the varied effects that warfare has on soldiers. Bartlett notes in his 1927 study that

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<sup>76</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 24 December 1899.



combat often causes extreme responses such as bewilderment, agitation, fainting spells, visions, nightmares and tremors. He also maintains that soldiers will be unusually tired and ‘jumpy’ for a long period after a war ends.<sup>77</sup> Although this was less than forty years before the beginning of Australian Vietnam War involvement, the fact that some soldiers then referred openly to such reactions to war while on the battlefield indicates that they were aware of the widespread acceptance of such views. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Troop wrote to his wife about an Australian military adviser who had visited him:

Quite a showman and a walking arsenal...Had plenty of old soldier stories too. Don't doubt that he saw a bit of action but he did like to magnify events and like many Advisers he was slightly around the bend by the time his tour was due to end. He probably needs hospital – quiet, peaceful surroundings – as much as prison. I think this will terminate his military service – he forgot where ‘normality’ is. This place could certainly do that to anyone.<sup>78</sup>

Murray does not speak of the adviser's possible mental illness as an unusual, or even shameful, occurrence – rather, he brands it something quite normal for men in his position. Likewise, Armourer Andrew Treffry wrote in a letter home about a potential attack: ‘No shots yet anyway but I'm sitting on the floor not 3 yards from my rifle. It's no wonder the majority of guys in the unit ‘jibber’ a bit and appear to have bad nerves. I guess I'll be like that before too long’.<sup>79</sup> Treffry seems resigned to the fact that he will exhibit the same nervousness as his fellow soldiers who had been in Vietnam for a longer period of time.

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<sup>77</sup> Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, 194-195.

<sup>78</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 28 March 1968.

<sup>79</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 27 March 1969.

Such an admission would be unheard of in the Boer War, due to the traditional and dominant ideas surrounding war still circulating at the time that stressed honour, loyalty and courage. This would also be the case because a sign of weakness in war could easily have been interpreted as ‘cowardice’, for which punishments were severe. Historian Martin Stone refers to the advice given by First World War psychiatrists to soldiers suffering from shellshock that emphasised their need to ‘put it out of your mind, old boy, and try and forget all about it’.<sup>80</sup> He repeats the findings of psychiatrist William Rivers, which state that military psychiatrists during the war actually worsened the patients’ conditions by giving them this advice.<sup>81</sup> This could explain the small number of references to this aspect of warfare in the archived personal records of those fighting in the Boer War. There is no doubt, however, taking into consideration the research undertaken on early forms of psychiatric disturbance caused by war, that this did occur in some instances during both the Boer and Vietnam Wars.

Thus, when investigating the emotional responses of the sample of soldiers to warfare in the context of the Boer and Vietnam Wars, it is possible to see some differences between these soldiers’ responses that appear to be due to the period in which the war was being fought. The overall finding of this thesis stresses the fact that, for various reasons, the examined soldiers in the Boer War were more openly expressive in their letters and diaries written from the front. However, these past two chapters have occasionally found the opposite for several different issues facing soldiers. This may not be the case for all soldiers fighting in these two wars, as the sample represents only the soldiers that are included in it. However, the finding that those in Vietnam were more aware of concepts such as morale and the

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<sup>80</sup> Stone, ‘Shellshock and the Psychologists’, 263.

<sup>81</sup> Rivers, WH, in Stone, ‘Shellshock and the Psychologists’, 263.

psychologically adverse effects of war supports the idea that research undertaken about soldiers – resulting from the increase in psychological casualties of war during the 20<sup>th</sup> century - made both militaries and individual soldiers more aware of the physical and mental support needed to maintain a consistently strong fighting force with high morale. The fact that advances into research on soldiering took place in the years between the Boer and Vietnam Wars, partly in an attempt to avoid a repetition of First and Second World War casualty figures, can be seen when examining the archived letters and diaries of soldiers in both wars.

In addition, when comparing the two collections of publicly archived personal records, the home front can be seen to have had a significant impact on the personal expression of these soldiers. For example, more of the soldiers examined from the Boer War expressed joy at living an ‘exciting’ and ‘healthy’ life at war than those in Vietnam whereas, on the other hand, those in the later war were more likely to openly express fear or the irrelevance of ‘heroism’ to them in the face of death. It would be false to conclude from these findings that soldiers in South Africa enjoyed combat itself more, or were less afraid of being killed, or that those in Vietnam were less likely to fight wholeheartedly, simply because a number of examples can be found which present the opposite view, as well as the fact that a limited sample was examined. It is more that, when focussing on this particular sample of soldiers, the expression of these emotions appeared to change between the wars. A larger study incorporating oral evidence could indicate whether these conclusions are valid for a larger cross-section of the Australian forces in the Boer and Vietnam Wars, which could then be compared with these findings. Such a comparison could provide future researchers with more knowledge on the effects of archiving on the collective content of soldiers’ personal records.

The reasons for the findings of this study, however, could lie in the intervening seismic shifts in attitudes towards war as well as in the character of war itself. The impact of such factors as the peace movements of the inter-war years and the anti-nuclear demonstrations of the post-Second World War years caused by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the increased role of the media – particularly radio and television - in publicising such movements, resulted in the increased psychological involvement of the home front in these issues. Such concentration by the protest movements in both Australia and the rest of the world was transferred, after the advent of Vietnam, to campaigning for the end of the war.<sup>82</sup> As a result, by the Vietnam War years, the interrelationship between the home and war fronts had increased, and attitudes towards warfare had changed significantly.<sup>83</sup>

The fact that theorists of war discovered the universality of fear among soldiers and established more complex causes for low morale in the years between the Boer and Vietnam Wars, and that most societies in the world were more aware of the ill-effects of war as a result of such research, did appear to change the content of the soldiers' letters and diaries examined. It is less likely that a soldier living in a society that prizes courage and heroism in war, such as Australia during the Boer War, would write home expressing apprehension about combat, for fear of suffering shame either on the home front or among fellow soldiers. On the other hand, those fighting in Vietnam had a more complex view of their own probable reactions to war, through both military training before their tour, as well as through the tales of

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<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Curthoys, A, “‘Shut up, you bourgeois bitch’”: Sexual Identity and Political Action in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement’ in Damousi, J & Lake, M (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 317-318.

<sup>83</sup> See Shaw, M, *Dialectics of War: An Essay in the Social Theory of Total War and Peace*, Pluto Press, London, 1988, p. 96; Barkawi, T, *Globalisation and War*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2006, p. 28. Also, Chapter One, pp. 3-5.

veterans of the world wars. Thus, their reactions to factors such as fear, the importance of survival, their need for high morale and methods of sustaining it can all be seen as a representation of the time period in which they were living and an altered value system.

The difference in the reactions of the soldiers examined between the two wars can also often be attributed to military regulations in place on each war front. For example, when comparing the number of times the archived letters and diaries mentioned alcohol or intoxication, it appears as though Vietnam soldiers used alcohol much more than those in South Africa. However, intoxication was a crime in the British and Australian armies during the earlier war, but not during Vietnam. This would have naturally reduced the number of times soldiers mentioned it in the earlier war. Also, soldiers in Vietnam had a more sophisticated view of the necessity of alcohol on the war front. Examples of other methods soldiers used to escape combat, such as desertion, ‘fragging’ or mutiny, all against army regulations in both South Africa and Vietnam, appear in the archived personal records from both wars. However, in both wars these actions were rarely mentioned in the records, due to the fact that they were simply not allowed. This ties in with the themes of Chapter Five, which discussed the military structure itself and its effects on soldiers, as it is clear that the rules under which soldiers were living while at war did determine the level of their expression on more controversial topics. Despite the fact that the sample of letters and diaries chosen cannot and do not represent every soldier who fought in each war, this chapter has indicated that common diversionary tactics by soldiers experiencing physical or psychological hardship on the battlefield did occur, if only to a small extent, in both South Africa and Vietnam. A more extensive study, perhaps focussing solely on one or the other of the wars so as to ensure maximum

balance between a larger variety of sources – including oral evidence or other reminiscences - would perhaps provide a fuller picture of this aspect of fighting.

All chapters comparing the theories of soldiering with the archived personal records found from the Boer and Vietnam Wars have indicated that – in these cases at least - factors such as soldiers' fear of chastisement by fellow soldiers or from the home front, as well as their need to protect their loved ones, can affect the content of their correspondence home. The following chapter will examine in more detail the effect of the home front on these soldiers. It will include an overview of the influences on future soldiers' perceptions of war since childhood, soldier opinion of political decisions concerning the war they are fighting, as well as how news of home can affect morale. Finally, a comparison will be made between the open expressions of dissatisfaction that emerged from each war that were directly connected with their desire to return home to Australia. Thus, it will be possible to suggest – at least for the selected sample of soldiers - whether the impact of the time period in which a soldier is fighting, or the individual circumstances of a specific war determine soldiers' written reactions to that war, or whether their reactions are essentially the same irrespective of the period in which they are fighting.



## Chapter Eight

# Soldier Interaction with the Home Front

The importance of the nature and impact of the ties between a fighting soldier and the home front is one that has been long acknowledged by those researching war.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, each war is fought with a specific social and political background in its country of origin, which determines a soldier's relationship with civilians and with the war itself. It is important to note, however, that although this chapter focuses mainly on the effect of the home front on fighting soldiers, this relationship is reciprocal, with each front affecting the other. With this interdependence in mind, this chapter will examine the publicly archived letters and diaries of Australian soldiers in both Vietnam and South Africa, to establish, firstly, the nature of the interaction and, secondly, the extent – and limit – of the influence of the respective home fronts on these men. Although often reluctant to write directly about general public attitudes towards each war, as well as the governments that sent them into battle, the soldiers' examined reactions do suggest that these, particularly the former, did have an impact on what soldiers chose to write in their letters and diaries. Although the earlier conflict was fought during a time of reportedly high public support for war in general, the archived personal records of these men reveal an increased tendency for negativity towards both the war itself and their place in it. On the other hand, those in the sample who were fighting in the highly unpopular

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hocking, WE, *Morale and Its Enemies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1918, p. 151; Kellett, A, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, 1982, pp. 178, 186. See also Chapter One, pp. 3-4.



Vietnam War were less likely to directly state either support or opposition for the war – rather, they expressed their general dissatisfaction largely in terms of a desire to return home to Australia and their families. An analysis of the archived letters and diaries reveals several reasons for this unexpected shift in sentiment between these two groups of soldiers – notably, self-censorship to protect family and friends from potential worry; defensiveness at their position in the war; and also, the impact of their terms of service, particularly the existence of the twelve month tour for Vietnam War soldiers. To determine reasons for this, it is necessary to initially investigate pre-war home front influences on future soldiers, as well as the later effects of such factors as shifting government and public opinion on the men in combat in both arenas.

Soldiers cite various reasons for their originally deciding to go to war and for some soldiers combat has not been a free choice. However, all who have enlisted have had a preconception of what is involved, although some were more realistic than others. Such ideas originate in the society to which a soldier belongs, at both community and individual levels. Factors such as family tradition, level of education and cultural values play an immense part in the pre-training adjustment of a man to war, which then goes on to further affect their impressions of war during their period of actual duty.

However, researchers on the topic have presented differing opinions regarding this prominent influence on future soldiers. Lloyd B. Lewis, in his sociological analysis of soldiers and their behaviour in Vietnam, claims that, for the men sent to the Vietnam War, there were three main bodies which affected their initial attitudes to

war - the media, the family and the military - each by idealising concepts of war.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Graham Dawson, in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994), examining British soldiers and their connection to the concept of Empire, stresses the role of literary narratives that emphasised the importance of Empire before the First World War in giving young men splendid views of war.<sup>3</sup> This also coincides with RL Wallace's work, *The Australians at the Boer War* (1976), in which he claims that it was adventurous ideas about the defence of Empire, tied to soldiers' connection with their Mother Country, England, that prompted them to volunteer for service in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> These opinions make it clear that men often entered war with a romanticised representation of what was to come, which instilled this spirit of adventure into them and made their war experience initially pleasurable. Hynes agrees, focussing on notions of war planted in men's minds before going to war when he argues that each war is 'fought by different ignorant young men'.<sup>5</sup> Here he attributes the thrill felt by these soldiers to the preconceptions of the societies from which they have come.

However, the image of war in the minds of civilians can also be seen as a combination of the 'home front' experience and a culturally edited version of actual battle in returned veterans. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, in their edited volume *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (1999), define 'collective remembrance' as the product of individual communities that group various facets of

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis, LB, *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1985, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Dawson, G, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 59. See also Paris, M, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000*, Reaktion Books, London, 2000 (particularly Chapter Four - 'Paths of Glory 1914-18').

<sup>4</sup> Wallace RL, *The Australians at the Boer War*, The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hynes, S, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, Penguin, New York, 1997, p. 111.

their history for public dissemination.<sup>6</sup> Tobey Herzog, in *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost* (1992), claims that older generations create a legend of war based on their own battle experiences which, in turn, fuels the sense of adventure in those newly going to war.<sup>7</sup> Kellett, in *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (1982) maintains that concepts of war in a soldier's mind are the consequence of exposure to 'popular notions of war', such as in literature and film, among other places.<sup>8</sup> Holmes, in *Firing Line* (1987) agrees that these factors, as well as art and the media, determine perceptions of war before enlistment.<sup>9</sup> Thus the values instilled into men by their respective cultures clearly affect perceptions of combat.

Since this study concentrates primarily on influences on soldiers during their actual combat duty, an extended analysis of the factors on the home front that affected them as pre-war civilians is not necessary. This chapter will focus on the impact of the selected soldiers' immediate surroundings – their friends, family and community – as well as the influence of governments in power during each war to determine the differing effects of Australian society on these fighting men.

Public perceptions of soldiers and war changed immensely in the years between the Boer and Vietnam Wars, caused primarily by the staggering loss of life and lasting ill effects of the First and Second World Wars.<sup>10</sup> Mosse – writing about the public view of soldiers since the advent of citizen armies – focusses on the honour with which soldiers were held during the world wars.<sup>11</sup> However, by the Vietnam War,

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<sup>6</sup> Winter, J & Sivan, E, 'Setting the Framework' in Winter, J, & Sivan, E (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 6, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Herzog, T, *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 217.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, R, *Firing Line*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1987, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Mosse, GL, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, pp. 18-19.

soldiering was not as prized an occupation – demonstrated by the comparatively high numbers of conscripted men who refused to carry out their military service. The archived letters and diaries of soldiers from the Boer and Vietnam Wars illustrate this sea change well.

During the earlier war, the soldiers examined did mention Australian support for their efforts in South Africa – and this was apparent in the public displays of encouragement when soldiers left for South Africa in the early years of the war. Corporal WN Kelman of the New South Wales Bushmen's Contingent wrote in his diary from Sydney:

Today was a holiday in camp, in consequence of the second contingent embarking...All the streets along the route of the procession to the vessels were thronged, and unbounded enthusiasm everywhere prevailed. Many of the men held in their hands bottles of beer and spirits given by their friends as they passed along, while their sisters and mothers hung on their arms.<sup>12</sup>

Private Stan Jones of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent reported similar scenes in South Australia when his contingent set off for South Africa:

The public seemed to take a great interest in the soldiers for the Transvaal, and many that are well-to-do sent in all sorts of things for the men...The march in the streets was rather hot as people were crushing in on all sides to get a look and give a cheer to their brave warriors as some called us. The police had great difficulty in keeping the crowd back from flocking in on top

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<sup>12</sup> Kelman, WN, Diary, MLDOC2279, State Library of New South Wales, 17 January 1900. See also Kelman, WN, Diary, MLDOC2279, State Library of New South Wales, 28 February 1900.

of us, so eager were some of them to shake hands with us and wish us good-bye.<sup>13</sup>

Trooper Alured Kelly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Victorian Contingent got a little more involved in the celebrations:

After two weeks training we marched from Victoria Barracks through the principal streets of the city with full kit, new uniforms and new boots. We received a right royal reception from the cheering citizens along the entire route of about six miles. The day was on the hot side but our admirers in the city handed us glasses of drinks of all kinds, beer, whiskey and sometimes soft drinks. At that time I was a member of the Amateur Sports Club and a few of the boys had arranged a strong post at the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets and presented me with a small bottle of champagne, which I drank without any ill-effects. It is rather amazing what one can consume without ill-effects even when mixing drinks, in the excitement of a march of would-be heroes.<sup>14</sup>

Reports such as these, however, can only be found from the early years of the war.

War-weariness seems to have overtaken Australia after it was recognised that the war would not be a short one, as had been earlier predicted by British and Australian governments and militaries due to the apparent inferiority of the Boer forces. The experience of soldiers leaving for South Africa from late 1900 till the end of the war was far different from those who enlisted amid the initial jingoistic madness of the

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<sup>13</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 3 November 1899.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, A, Diary, 3DRL1915, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

war's commencement. Reports of less enthusiastic treatment by the public cannot be found in the examined personal records of soldiers who were there. However, newspaper articles from the time describe desolate dockside scenes later in the war. For example, an article appeared in *The Argus* on 16 February 1901, stating that:

Never has Melbourne given her troops a send-off that was more picturesque and more lukewarm. Each of the previous contingents to leave Victoria was accorded a demonstration pulsing with spontaneous enthusiasm and unpardonable pride...Yet the Fifth Contingent walked yesterday through a city that gave it scarcely a cheer, and which seemed unable to realise the grandeur of the spectacle...the novelty has worn off the departure of contingents, and while Melbourne formerly gratified its patriotic instincts by cheering departing troops, it has of late grown familiar with what are hedged with far more importance and romance – troops who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, and returned with their laurels thick among them.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that the sample of soldiers was not as willing to speak about public feeling towards the war in its later years, when less public interest in South Africa was common, indicates that it was not as popular a topic as it once was. This can be directly compared to the archived personal records from the Vietnam War – which experienced unprecedented public opposition – that rarely refer to Australian support for the war. The only reference to public opinion on the war comes from the diary of Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Francis Moriarty, in which he wrote: ‘Old

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Departure of the Fifth Contingent’, *The Argus*, 16 February 1901, in Hoad, JC, Papers, MS11559, State Library of Victoria.

thingummy in Cambodia is even getting easier to live with, so things are looking up quite nicely regardless of what the anti's may try to put over our gullible public'.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that Moriarty's position as a military superior may have influenced his opinion on civilians, as it is likely that he would have more invested in his military position than some members of the rank and file – particularly conscripts. Despite this possibility, it is clear that he is aware of civilian opposition to the war, more so given the date that he was writing. After the Tet Offensive of 1968, positive attitudes towards the war notably decreased in Australia, due to positive reports by the US and Australian militaries about steadily approaching victory being proved untrue by the South Vietnam-wide attack on US Allied forces. This provides an example of the war's effect on civilians, thus illustrating that some interdependence between war and home fronts occurred during Vietnam.

Moriarty's words also suggest why soldiers fighting in Vietnam, as well as those in the latter years of the Boer War, were reluctant to dwell on negative opinion on the war by Australian civilians. Naturally, it would be difficult for soldiers to speak about public criticism for a war they were involved in – one in which the greatest sacrifice of all, their life, was threatened. This ties in with the finding - highlighted later in this chapter - that those examined who were fighting in the Boer War were more willing to speak openly about their desire to return home, despite the fact that support for the war was high for a large portion of the war. On the other hand, during Vietnam – a war with widespread home front opposition – the sample of soldiers concentrated less on the negative aspects of their tour. This suggests that home front opposition during Vietnam actually contributed to the relative lack of soldier negativity towards the war in their personal records. Although this study is based on

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<sup>16</sup> Moriarty, LF, Diary, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 30 April 1969.

a sample that cannot fully represent all Australians fighting in Vietnam, the unexpected difference between these two sets of personal records does indicate that previously held notions of Boer and Vietnam War soldier attitudes to the war they were fighting may be flawed, and so does beg further analysis of soldier records, including also oral evidence. Given these findings from the archived letters and diaries from Vietnam, it is possible to suggest that those examined who were fighting in this war omitted overt negativity in their letters and diaries as a defence against home front opposition. In this way, they are not themselves contributing to the hostility against a war they are risking their own lives to fight. This will be focussed on later in this chapter, when the direct effect of the home front on soldiers will be discussed.

This reticence in expression by the Vietnam War soldiers examined extends also to comments about the governments that sent them to war, whether as conscripts or volunteers. Joanna Bourke differentiates soldiers who fought in Vietnam from those before them, insisting that rather than focussing their frustration and anger at a common enemy, those in Vietnam directed it at politicians who had made the ultimate decision to enter and to continue to prosecute the war.<sup>17</sup> She insists that the difference between what was actually occurring on the front line and what the US government and military were telling the general public caused many soldiers to lose faith in their leaders.<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence from the archived letters and diaries of Vietnam veterans indicating that this was the case, although this could simply be the result of the sample of soldiers whose personal records are publicly archived. The only mention of resentment towards those in power in Australia can be found in the

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<sup>17</sup> Bourke, J, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Granta Books, London, 1999, p. 157.

<sup>18</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 165.



Boer War archives, when Private Watson Augustus Steel, of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote in his diary:

Officers can always get spirits, privates can get nothing in the way of [liquor], and I suppose, if we ever live to get back to Australia, we will be told we have been ‘having a good time of it’. I would fine 5 [pounds] a head to some of our fat political gas-bags who are always airing their loyalty, over here for a months [sic] march on Argentine horses, and ‘bully beef’ with a little fatigue work.<sup>19</sup>

Steel is expressing clear bitterness at his situation on the front, by referring to ‘bully beef’ supplied by the army, commonly thought to be South American horse meat, and apportioning the blame for it to the government that decided to involve Australia in the war.

The fact, however, that soldiers during the Vietnam War did not express an opinion towards the Australian government in the archived personal records does not prove that these men approved completely of their role in the war. Again, it merely shows that these men were less likely to openly state it in correspondence or their private diaries. The frequent references to home in the letters and diaries examined do suggest that these soldiers would have preferred to be back on the home front. However, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what caused these soldiers to keep silent on the topic of the Australian government, despite it being the reason they were so far from home. It must also be noted that these records are publicly archived, which may explain why there is no criticism found towards the government in power. It is

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<sup>19</sup> Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 27 September 1900.

likely that the existence of such negativity in letters or diaries may dissuade a veteran or their family to submit their personal records for public archiving. This is impossible to know for certain, which again highlights the potential value of a larger study of each of these wars that includes oral evidence, so as to better understand the effect of archiving on the historical record.

Despite this, two possible explanations do exist for the selected Vietnam War soldiers' silence on the governmental role in the war – firstly, that soldiers were simply not interested in, or did not spend their time thinking about politics. The finding in this thesis that de-emphasised patriotism or political reasons as a motivator for enlistment – for those who were not conscripted – suggests that this may have been the case.<sup>20</sup> Hiddlestone, in her article on Australian soldiers in Vietnam, reveals another potential reason. In her interviews with Vietnam veterans, she found several examples of men who did not particularly want to go to Vietnam, but as professional soldiers without another assignment, they felt obligated to go out of a sense of 'duty'.<sup>21</sup> Hiddlestone's finding thus might explain why soldiers did not complain about the government – because they simply thought that it was not useful while they were in a position they could not control.

Despite the fact that none of the Vietnam War soldiers examined mentioned the authorities that sent them to war, it is clear that the home front did affect them significantly in other respects while they were on the war front. Scholars of war have often noted the morale-based function of soldiers' loved ones, maintaining that soldiers gain strength in combat from not only the military and the war itself, but also the influence of the home front. Hocking focuses on this idea, insisting that some

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 95-101.

<sup>21</sup> Hiddlestone, J, 'Continuing the Great Adventure? Australian Servicemen and the Vietnam War', *Linq*, vol. 31, no. 1, May 2004, p. 17.

facets of morale come from locations other than the war front.<sup>22</sup> Kellett agrees, insisting that the relevance of home in the minds of soldiers increased throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as communication technology became faster and more accessible.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in more recent wars it is impossible to discount the impact of the society a soldier comes from when determining the effect on factors such as disobedience or desertion in war.

Kellett also links modes of communication between the home and battle fronts when considering soldier morale. He claims that the role of correspondents, particularly in 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, is to ensure that the morale of both soldiers and civilians remains high, again demonstrating the importance of the home front in the minds of soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Holmes maintains that the attitudes of the US public towards the Vietnam War were apparent in soldiers on the battlefield, perhaps also indicating that rotation and the imposition of a shorter tour were detrimental to morale.<sup>25</sup> Such ideas do explain why the sample of Australians fighting in Vietnam often mentioned the home front in their letters and diaries. However, it does not explain why such references, as well as those expressing a desire for the war to end, occurred more in soldiers' archived personal records from the Boer War, which was 60 years earlier than Vietnam, and during which communication between the home and war fronts was restricted to limited newspaper coverage and personal correspondence by soldiers themselves. Again, this does not necessarily indicate that soldiers in Vietnam thought about the home front, or wanted the war over, any less, as this is a limited sample of the total number of soldiers who fought in this war. It is apparent, however, that the soldiers in this particular sample were less likely to mention it in

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<sup>22</sup> Hocking, *Morale and Its Enemies*, 151.

<sup>23</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 178.

<sup>24</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 186.

<sup>25</sup> Holmes, *Firing Line*, 282. See also Chapter Five, pp. 145-146.

their letters and diaries. Possible reasons for this will be focussed on later in this chapter.

The archived letters and diaries from both the Boer and Vietnam Wars do indicate that soldiers relied on communication from home, and that it brought them great comfort. During the Boer War, the enemy would often seize and destroy letters written by or for the British and their allies in combat. The soldiers examined did openly express their irritation when this occurred, demonstrating their desire for this connection with the home front. For example, Private RJ Byers, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent, wrote in a letter to his mother: ‘The Boers used to open and read all our letters, & cut out any news concerning themselves of the war’.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Captain Frederick Howland of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent wrote in his diary: ‘the convoy containing our mails has been captured by De Wet [a Boer leader] and burnt, as we have had no letters for nearly 2 months there must have been a lot of letters for us and many curses were uttered for De Wet’.<sup>27</sup> Only three days before, Private Alexander McQueen wrote to his parents about the same event: ‘I hear all our mails were destroyed by De Wett [sic], we will give him hot beans when he is nailed’.<sup>28</sup>

Another factor that disconnected soldiers from the home front was censorship. Private William ‘Hamline’ Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers wrote to his mother with resignation:

I know you did not receive too many letters from me, although I wrote fairly often, have an idea that letters written from where we were stationed used to

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<sup>26</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 12 June 1900.

<sup>27</sup> Howland, FH, Diary, PRG248, State Library of South Australia, 16 June 1900.

<sup>28</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 13 June 1900.

be opened by some of our own officers & were then destroyed. Fairly strong, but nevertheless a fact.<sup>29</sup>

Censorship on the war front did appear to significantly affect the sample of soldiers, as many indicated in letters that they were not told many particulars of the war that were published in Australian newspapers. Sergeant WH Barham of the Mounted Rifles wrote to his father: ‘You must not expect to hear any war news from any of us, as all intelligence here seems to be suppressed’.<sup>30</sup> Private Charles Bretheton Holme of the 1<sup>st</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry demonstrated his awareness of the reasons for this while writing to his mother: ‘We know nothing whatever of the war. You in Australia know far & away more. The authorities tell us nothing – we are simply told to go. And go. I suppose it would not do to tell soldiers too much. The land is full of traitors’.<sup>31</sup> Trooper Jack Cock from Bethune’s Mounted Infantry directly mentioned censorship in a letter home, part of which seems to be written on behalf of a fellow soldier:

He says volunteering is no joke (they are up at 1/2 past 3 o’clock in the morning and saddled at 4 o’clock []) (he says cannot go into full particulars as there is strict censorship over all correspondence leaving camp)...We are right in front here so guarding towns or anything...I cannot say how many thousand we are as it would not be allowed but we are a strong force.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Glasson, H, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 20 November 1901.

<sup>30</sup> Barham, WH, Letter, CY3423, State Library of New South Wales, 17 January 1900.

<sup>31</sup> Holme, CB, Letter, FM4/2210, State Library of New South Wales, 26 March 1900. For similar sentiments, see also Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 18 July 1901; McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 2 May 1900, 15 May 1900; Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 17 July 1900; McBeth, JCJ, Letter, PR000743, Australian War Memorial, 24 November 1899; Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 19 August 1901; Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 1 July 1900; Lang, PH, Diary, PR85/40, Australian War Memorial, 1 April 1901; Cawthorn, CE, Diary, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 20 April 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Cock, J, Letter, MS 13385, State Library of Victoria, 3 December 1899.

Thus, censorship did affect the examined soldiers during this war, restricting their links to their loved ones. The frequency alone with which it was mentioned in this relatively small sample of soldiers demonstrates how keenly these men felt the gap between themselves and Australia.

The sample of soldiers in Vietnam did demonstrate more knowledge about the positive morale caused by letters received from the home front. 5RAR Private Shayne O'Brien demonstrated this in a letter to his parents: 'Thanks a lot for them much appreciated keep them up won't you, they are the only things keeping us going over here'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Private Doug Bishop, also of 5RAR, encouraged his mother to keep writing: 'It is a great help to get your letters regularly even though I can't write to you sometimes'.<sup>34</sup> It is clear, then, that the connection between the home and battle fronts was important for at least some of the soldiers in both wars, supporting the above theories which tie it in with high morale.

Other soldiers examined from Vietnam referred to the existence of censorship on the battlefield that restricted the news they received about both the war and the home front. Armourer Andrew Treffry of the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron Workshop wrote to 'Eileen': 'I don't mean to be harsh but we don't get many newspapers over here and if there are any they're selected for morale I'm sure...I've only seen the Melbourne Sun about twice'.<sup>35</sup> Private GM Heffernan of 3RAR wrote to his parents about an encounter with the enemy: 'Information is so tight that it was only today I found out who the injured bloke was. We don't know the names of the blokes to work out the codes'. Heffernan is directly referring to the use of codes, as well as military-

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<sup>33</sup> O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, 1 December 1968.

<sup>34</sup> Bishop, D, Letter, PR91/018, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>35</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 26 June 1969.

imposed restrictions on information to soldiers, both intended to conceal intelligence from the enemy. Private Gerard Francis Lavery of 9RAR demonstrated the desire of soldiers to receive classified news about the war in a letter to his mother: 'We aren't receiving any news from home yet & while we are out here we don't get any newspapers only letters, so send any interesting news cuttings out in a letter'.<sup>36</sup> These letters indicate that, as in South Africa during the Boer War, there was essential war front censorship firmly in place during Vietnam, and it caused soldiers who resented the imposed detachment from home to complain.

Some researchers, however, believe that distance between soldiers and civilians is not detrimental to morale, particularly during an unpopular war like Vietnam. Richard A Gabriel and Paul Savage believe that home front opinion on the war failed to affect the combat abilities of soldiers in the US Army during the Vietnam War.<sup>37</sup> Peter Bourne similarly insists that morale on the war front in Vietnam was not tainted at all by events in the United States.<sup>38</sup> He believes that the home front is only one of many influences on soldiers' will to fight, and in this case was not a deciding factor. It is noteworthy that those expressing such ideas were writing about the Vietnam War, the loss of which is often blamed on the anti-war movement and its frequent exposure to media attention.<sup>39</sup> Other theorists, as demonstrated above, believe differently of the home front. Kellett maintains that the relatively low influence of civilians on soldier morale in Vietnam could be so merely due to the limited one-year tour – as many American GIs who were affected by the home front would simply endure the strain until they returned home.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Kellett shows

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<sup>36</sup> Lavery, GF, Letter, PR01487/12, Australian War Memorial, 21-22 January 1969.

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel & Savage in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 182.

<sup>38</sup> Bourne, PG, *Men, Stress and Vietnam*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1970, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> See Berman, L, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam*, WW Norton and Co, New York, 1989, pp. 7-8, 183.

<sup>40</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 183.

that the home front does have an effect on soldiers, but is somewhat muted in more recent wars in which soldiers serve for shorter periods of time.

The archived personal records from Vietnam do not all support Kellett's assertion, as some soldiers were concerned with the home front during their tour - a result of both their loved ones and the anti-war movement. This, of course, could be due to the relatively small number of soldiers in the sample, and possibly does not represent all who fought in Vietnam. However, it is clear that the soldiers examined did experience negative effects as a result of the distance from home. Armourer Andrew Treffry of the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Squadron Workshop, wrote to 'Eileen':

Sorry this isn't a nice loving letter that you asked for, but I'm not very good at mushy ones; I avoid them as they're not good for my morale as I get homesick very easily when I write to you like that. I long to be with you too but it doesn't do me any good to write about it all the time. If that's what you want to hear I can accommodate you quite easily, but you won't enjoy them and I won't enjoy writing them.

Treffry's words also suggest a reason for the increased reticence in letters and diaries by Australians fighting in Vietnam. As previously highlighted, Vietnam War soldiers were often more aware of the concept of morale and its workings.<sup>41</sup> This would cause them to realise, as Treffry obviously has, that constantly thinking about the home front is detrimental to their personal morale, thus reducing more emotive expressions in letters home.

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 204-205.



There is also evidence in the archived letters and diaries from Vietnam that the anti-war movement itself did have an effect on some soldiers. Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Francis Moriarty wrote more honestly than most other soldiers regarding the reasons for the war in letters home to his wife. He openly criticised those against the war, maintaining that anti-war pronouncements would lead to US defeat:

We are winning here, but not allowed to tell lies wholesale to a gullible...public and the opposition, who consist of all communist countries, all non-aligned or aligned countries (UK for instance) who feel guilty about not taking a stand or pretend to believe their own lies, even our own people at home still use terms like 'internal civil war, not aggression from the north', 'unwinnable war' and that's not mentioning the grotesque political announcements of our own left-wing labourists.<sup>42</sup>

A soldier who was identified only as 'Holmberg' wrote even more bluntly to his father: 'If the bastards, politicians and journalists, do gooders, humanitarians would only get kicked out and get someone to bomb North Vietnam. We are in a lot of trouble over here'.<sup>43</sup> Both Moriarty and Holmberg are writing in 1969, after the widespread shift in Australian and American society against the war. Also, correspondent Neil Sheehan maintains that soldiers entering the army in 1969 were more affected by dissent on the home front than those before that date, as many who had been conscripted and given a leave of absence to attend university – centres of anti-war protest in both the US and Australia – were now bringing those ideas to

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<sup>42</sup> Moriarty, LF, Letter, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 3 August 1969.

<sup>43</sup> 'Holmberg', Letter, PR03186, Australian War Memorial, 4 June 1969.

Vietnam.<sup>44</sup> This could also explain the increased awareness of opposition to the war by soldiers and suggest that Moriarty's view was not an uncommon one.

Private Geoffrey R Jones of 3RAR goes further, revealing that the anti-war movement did have some effect on soldiers' behaviour when they returned to the home front: 'Back home you don't publisize [sic] the fact that you were in Vietnam, as, in discussing the war you could either be praised for keeping the "commies" at bay or accused of being a baby killer. It's a lot easier to avoid the subject'.<sup>45</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Neil Smith of 8RAR also identified an awareness and dread of anti-war protesters in a letter to his parents: 'I have to get up at three in the morning to fly to Brisbane...knowing my luck I'll probably land in the middle of a demonstration against NS [National Service]'.<sup>46</sup> These letters suggest that dissent towards the war did affect some soldiers in Vietnam, although it is impossible to say how much they affected morale in combat.

Holmberg's words above also demonstrate the effect that the press had on some Vietnam War soldiers. The Australian media features often in the archived letters and diaries of men fighting in both South Africa and Vietnam. This further demonstrates the close connection between soldiers and the home front, as – following the words of Kellett – one of the roles of the press is to keep morale high on both the home and war fronts, a task accomplished in part by fostering a connection between them.<sup>47</sup> Soldiers from both wars openly expressed contempt for the media, due to both the perception of journalist dishonesty, as well as – for Vietnam particularly – its tendency to turn the home front against the war. Ferguson

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<sup>44</sup> Sheehan, N, in Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 183.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, G, Diary, PR87/196, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, N, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 5 January 1968.

<sup>47</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 186.

argues that although the 'jingoistic journalism' in the press is intended to inspire support for the war on the home front, soldiers' attitudes towards it are not as favourable. He focuses on British soldiers in the First World War who clearly disapproved of the media due to the exaggerated nature of reports on the war.<sup>48</sup> Evidence of this can also be observed in the sample of letters and diaries written by Australian soldiers in South Africa and Vietnam.

The separate grounds for home front opinion in each war has resulted in slightly different reasons for disapproval of the press by soldiers, although all were grounded in perceptions of press dishonesty. During the Boer War, it was common for soldiers' letters to be published in local newspapers, which resulted in comments by soldiers in their correspondence home. For example, Private Charles Sabine of the 4<sup>th</sup> South Australian Imperial Bushmen wrote in a letter home to his family:

It is amusing to read the letters in the papers some fellows sent to the other side. Many of them are written by fellows who havn't [sic] seen a bit of the fun but were left in depots...or were no good. War is not such a fearful thing as they make out at all.<sup>49</sup>

Other soldiers directly asked their families not to publicise their letters in the press. Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen wrote in a letter to his mother:

Never on your hopes of happiness expose extracts from my letters to the Public Press. Nothing shames a man more out here than those stirring tales of

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<sup>48</sup> Ferguson, N, *The Pity of War*, Penguin, London, 1998, pp. 237-238.

<sup>49</sup> Sabine, C, Letter, PRG57/10, State Library of South Australia, 25 August 1900.

war then [sic] those entitled 'Our Boys at the Front' and hears he is the author. I think if one of mine appeared I should die of shame.<sup>50</sup>

Demonstrating his concern about the matter, he wrote in a later letter to his mother:

I heard from Jack Alexander who enclosed a cutting from the Courier re my being Mentioned in Despatches. I wonder who put it in for it's simply sickening and by the same token I been mentioned...I only hope to goodness you haven't been making my letters public property but that I know you would never do. You were quite right when you thought I wouldn't like them to go to print, for if you did I would simply buck out of my skin in annoyance.<sup>51</sup>

Private RJ Byers with the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent, in a letter to his sister, expressed firm annoyance at the realisation that his letters had actually been made public: 'I wish you would not allow any more to be published, as I have a decided objection to it. In fact, if I thought you were going to publish any letters of mine, I would not have written them'.<sup>52</sup>

Such malice towards the articles published in the press not only reveals clear dissatisfaction by these soldiers, but also identifies another reason why they didn't want their family and friends at home to read inaccurate or jingoistic combat stories – concern that such stories would cause their loved ones to worry. This can explain why, after mentioning the unreliable nature of press reports, Sabine stated that war was not 'fearful'. Also, soon after sending the letter of 22 July 1901 to his mother,

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<sup>50</sup> Rich, DSt.G, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 22 July 1901.

<sup>51</sup> Rich, DSt.G, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 1 March 1902.

<sup>52</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 21 August 1900.

Rich included in a letter to his father a message that began: ‘By the way tell Mother she needn’t be anxious about me getting a bullet through me’.<sup>53</sup> This can be seen as a facet of the self-censorship found in the examined soldiers’ personal records from both wars, an aspect which will be examined later in this chapter.

There are also two examples in the archives that express clear mistrust and disapproval of the press during the Boer War. Trooper Alured Kelly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Victorian Contingent wrote in his diary:

When the Third Contingent arrived at Capetown the daily paper unnecessarily published a leading article expressing their apprizement of the conduct of the Australian volunteer soldiers. When the Third Contingent heard of this rather stupid article a few of them marched to the publisher’s premises and did sufficient damage in the machine-room to prevent the publication of the journal for a day or two.<sup>54</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel Percy Ralph Ricardo of the 1<sup>st</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry wrote to his son about the potential media reaction to a recent encounter with the enemy: ‘I don’t know how it will be reported but I do know that all the press correspondents are misled’.<sup>55</sup> These records, as well as those above by Sabine, Rich and Byers, do suggest that there was some negative feeling toward the press by soldiers fighting in the Boer War.

There are also soldiers’ personal records from Vietnam in the archives that criticise the media due to simple dissatisfaction with untruthful reporting, as well as an

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<sup>53</sup> Rich, DSt.G, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 19 August 1901.

<sup>54</sup> Kelly, A, Diary, 3DRL1915, Australian War Memorial, n.d.

<sup>55</sup> Ricardo, PR, Letter, MLMSS1561, State Library of New South Wales, 5 May 1900.

attempt to reduce on the home front both concern about their safety, and disapproval of the war they were fighting. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Troop commented on soldiers' attitudes towards the press in a letter to his wife: 'Smouldering dislike and mistrust for press practically impregnated throughout the force now, as a result of the rubbish they persist in printing'.<sup>56</sup> It is significant that Murray is writing only a few months after the Tet Offensive, which massively increased press and public opposition in both Australia and the US. Other soldiers, such as Signaler Andrew Clyne of the 110 Signal Squadron, were even more frank. He wrote to his parents: 'One of the guys got a newspaper over here from Australia that said Nui Dat had now closed down and everyone had moved to the coastal resort town of Vung Tau, what a laugh, love to get my hands on that reporter'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Bombadier Peter Groves of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battery wrote in a letter home: 'I never want to tell you about these sort of things, but its better for me to tell you than for you to read about it in the papers and boy do they exaggerate! You can usually cut their story or stories in half & it's still highly exaggerated. That's a fact' [author's emphasis].<sup>58</sup> Groves' words, as well as those of 1RAR Corporal Ron Kelly to his wife, suggest also the desire to reduce worry at home: 'You don't want to take too much notice of what you read and hear, because we are not doing a great deal. We are pretty well protected by the Yanks'.<sup>59</sup> It is significant also that this was written after Kelly realised that his wife was distressed about his position in Vietnam, indicating more strongly that his words were intended to produce calm. Thus, it is possible to see disapproval of the press in the examined records as one facet of self-censorship, resulting from a deep concern for loved ones on the home front.

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<sup>56</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 9 June 1968.

<sup>57</sup> Clyne, AP, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 13 November 1971.

<sup>58</sup> Groves, P, Letter, PR86/248, Australian War Memorial, 8 June 1969.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 6 July 1965.

The existence of self-censorship has been recognised by historians of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, supporting the above findings in the examined soldiers' letters from South Africa and Vietnam, which suggest that these were edited from the battlefield to reduce home front distress. Edward M. Spiers, in *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (2004), admits the existence of self-censorship in the letters of British soldiers fighting in Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but attributes this to the need to avoid profanity and risqué subjects, such as sexual relations.<sup>60</sup> Thomas Dooley expands on this idea, maintaining that Irish soldiers in the British Army concealed from their loved ones 'the true nature of war' in letters home during the First World War, in order to protect them from worry.<sup>61</sup> John Horne also identifies the existence of self-censorship in letters sent home by French soldiers in the First World War, acknowledging that it was often prompted by official censorship, but reveals that this was not always the case. Rather, he points to the concern by soldiers to avoid tarnishing the 'material and moral well-being of loved ones', which resulted in deliberate self-censorship.<sup>62</sup> The archived personal records from the Boer and Vietnam Wars do show evidence of self-censorship with those on the home front in mind, following the assertions of Dooley and Horne, but it is clear that those writing from the later war had a much keener awareness of the need for restraint in their correspondence.

The sample of soldiers fighting in the Boer War did use consoling language in letters home, particularly those addressed to mothers, sisters and wives. Lieutenant George Harris of the South African Light Horse wrote to his 'darling mother' after being

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<sup>60</sup> Spiers, EM, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Dooley, TM, *Irishmen or English soldiers? The Times and World of a Southern Catholic Irish Man (1876-1916) Enlisting in the British Army during the First World War*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1995, p. 136.

<sup>62</sup> Horne, J, 'Soldiers, Civilians and the Warfare of Attrition: Representations of Combat in France, 1914-1918' in Coetzee, F & Shevin-Coetzee, M (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, Berghahn Books, Providence, 1995, p. 236.

wounded: 'I sent you both heaps of love and don't worry about me as I am nearly well now'.<sup>63</sup> He wrote again less than a fortnight later: 'I feel tip top again so you need not worry about me'.<sup>64</sup> Private William McDonald of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Bushmen had his parents' concern about his safety in mind when he wrote in a letter home: 'But its one in a thousand if he hits you, and then again its one in a hundred if it blots you out. No more news this time, from your loving son, Absent Minded Beggar, Bill'.<sup>65</sup> Lieutenant Douglas St George Rich wrote to his mother: 'Fond love to Father and don't worry about me for I'm as happy and as dirty as a sandboy'.<sup>66</sup> Private Stan Jones wrote to his entire family: 'Although we have a lot to put up with here, we have a good time now and again, and I can assure you that I have been getting on great so far'.<sup>67</sup> Expressions such as these are common, and occur repeatedly in the letters examined from South Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Only one soldier, however, revealed a reason for his reticence in letters home when writing to his parents: 'I don't like talking on paper about fighting but I don't think I told you...'.<sup>69</sup> Here Lieutenant Herbert Embling of the Victorian Mounted Rifles specifically points to his unwillingness to talk about actual combat, which suggests that the lack of detail regarding this aspect of active duty was not accidental and that self-censorship was employed. Supporting this are the words of Private Alan Wellington, writing to his friend Philip Thomas Teer about his family: 'I guess they will be surprised to hear of me being sick, yes & I guess they will be in a great

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<sup>63</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 2 May 1900.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 15 May 1900.

<sup>65</sup> McDonald, W, Letter, AS152, State Library of New South Wales, 3 September 1900.

<sup>66</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 22 July 1901.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 18 May 1900. See also Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 18 July 1900.

<sup>68</sup> See also Warden, AD, Letter, MS10459, State Library of Victoria, 11 March 1900; McBeth, JCJ, Letter, PR00743, Australian War Memorial, 22 January 1900, 25 January 1900, 19 February, 1900; Wentworth, F, Letter, PR01124, 1 January 1901, 20 February 1901; Cawthorn, CE, Letter, PR86/056, Australian War Memorial, 8 June 1901.

<sup>69</sup> Embling, HAA, Letter, PR90/012, Australian War Memorial, 5 April 1901.



state'.<sup>70</sup> Wellington's words show that he was aware that his actions had the potential to cause anxiety on the home front. This, as well as the numerous letters home that appeared to comfort friends and family, does support the idea that self-censorship was actively employed by some soldiers fighting in the Boer War.

Supporting this are the letters which deliberately lie about both conditions experienced while on the front, as well as the strength of the enemy, in order to comfort loved ones in Australia. Private RJ Byers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Victorian Contingent wrote to his mother: 'Do not be afraid as we are being looked after so well, in fact they could not treat us better'.<sup>71</sup> Trumpeter C. George Davis wrote to his brother Alfred: 'You will know by the letters home that I have been here just a month & I can promise you it is a good place, plenty to eat & sleep & nothing to do'.<sup>72</sup> Previous research into the Boer War, as well as the archived personal records examined, suggest that Davis' words here are untrue.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Craig Wilcox, in *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902* (2002), repeatedly mentions the poor conditions soldiers were forced to endure while in South Africa, including frequent hunger.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Private JCJ McBeth of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent wrote to his mother and sister:

I have had many good talks with soldiers who have been in several engagements with the Boers & they say that the chances of getting popped over are not very great...The Boers...have the appearance of rough farmers, & are a very mixed lot, ranging from mere boys to old white headed men.

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<sup>70</sup> Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 17 February 1902.

<sup>71</sup> Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 26 February 1900.

<sup>72</sup> Davis, CG, Letter, D5511, State Library of South Australia, 30 September 1900.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 193-195.

<sup>74</sup> Wilcox, C, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902*, Oxford University Press, Victoria, 2002, pp. 79, 93, 182.

The general opinion is that they will not last long... Hoping you are both well not worrying about me.<sup>75</sup>

McBeth is clearly underplaying the Boer skills in combat here, as from 10-17 December 1899, 'Black Week' occurred, during which thousands of British soldiers were killed. Archived personal records from the Boer War also reveal the high esteem with which Australian soldiers generally regarded Boer combat skills.<sup>76</sup> Although it is possible that in McBeth's case, he himself believed the sentiments about Boer incompetence, both he, Byers and Davis also appear to be downplaying the negative aspects of soldiering, as a part of self-censorship, in order to guard their loved ones from excessive worry.

The soldiers examined from the Vietnam War were more open about their desire to prevent anxiety among loved ones in Australia. The optimism often expressed regarding their conditions and position can be compared more so to Embling's words above, which reveal an awareness of the potentially damaging effects of negative news from the war front.<sup>77</sup> When compared with the sample of soldiers from the Boer War, those in Vietnam were more likely to use language that was specifically intended to comfort their friends and family. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Squadron, after describing his immediate surroundings to his wife, added: 'Don't be distressed by this description. I am quite safe and happy, not in any immediate danger and will look after myself with the utmost respect'.<sup>78</sup> One week later he wrote: 'So much has happened since I last wrote that it is hard to

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<sup>75</sup> McBeth, JCJ, Letter, PR00743, Australian War Memorial, December 1899.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 120-124.

<sup>77</sup> See p. 264.

<sup>78</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 27 February 1968.

know just where to begin. I have been perfectly safe of course'.<sup>79</sup> In his second letter, it is particularly clear that Murray is preoccupied with reassuring his wife about his safety, more obviously so than his counterparts in the Boer War. Similarly, 6RAR Private Len McCosker wrote to his family about his impending relocation to Vung Tau: 'Exactly what we're doing I don't know, but please don't worry too much about me or the others from home'.<sup>80</sup> Private Shayne O'Brien of 5RAR wrote to his parents about some recent mortar attacks: 'Don't worry too much about me for the present...don't get me wrong it's not always like this only some of the time, unfortunately'.<sup>81</sup>

Some soldiers were a little more blatant in their concern for those at home. Private Reg Yates of 1RAR, after discussing the deaths of his comrades, made a promise to his parents: 'Please don't worry. I'm O.K. and I'll stay that way'.<sup>82</sup> Army Aviation Corps Sergeant Richard Yielding wrote to his Nanna, Aunt and Uncle: 'Nanna is not to worry when she hears Radio Broadcasts. The only war I am fighting is a paper one' [author's emphasis].<sup>83</sup> Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Francis Moriarty wrote to his 'darling Margaret':

Ref things like being shot, we are pretty safe all things considered, and I usually don't even know about that sort of thing until next time I go to the mess for a brew, so it's not very exciting or dangerous. Don't worry

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<sup>79</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 2 March 1968.

<sup>80</sup> McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 12 June 1966.

<sup>81</sup> O'Brien, S, Letter, PR86/361, Australian War Memorial, n.d. See also O'Sullivan, B, Letter, PR86/285, Australian War Memorial, 28 January 1968; Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, n.d.; Moriarty, LF, Letter, Australian War Memorial, 13 April 1969, 9 July 1969.

<sup>82</sup> Yates, R, Letter, PR91/187, Australian War Memorial, 16 May 1968.

<sup>83</sup> Yielding, R, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 20 September 1970. See also Yielding, R, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 31 May 1970.

overmuch about me my love, I'll be there on 13<sup>th</sup> October with all my bits and pieces and rarin' to go.<sup>84</sup>

Yates, Yielding and Moriarty were all combat soldiers fighting in Vietnam and, as such, these comments were clearly placed in their letters with the same intentions as those by Byers, Davis and McBeth above, from the Boer War. Armourer Andrew Treffry of 5RAR was even more transparent in his intention to comfort 'Eileen' while he was in Vietnam: 'This is a real rush letter so don't expect much, at least I'm thinking of you, and trying to write occasionally so that you'll not worry'.<sup>85</sup> It is evident here that, for Treffry at least, letter writing was a deliberate method used to reduce concern among loved ones on the home front. It is noteworthy also that although the soldiers examined from Vietnam did often assure their loved ones at home of their safety, there was more of an effort from those fighting in South Africa to deliberately make conditions on the battlefield appear more comfortable than they were. This may be explained by the increase in communication by the 1960s, as well as the fact that the well-publicised First and Second World Wars had been fought between the Boer and Vietnam Wars, so civilians were more aware of what day-to-day battle front life entailed. This meant that soldiers were less able to exaggerate in their correspondence home.

However, self-censorship can also occur for a reason other than the desire to prevent worry among friends and family. David Gerber, in *Authors of their Lives: Personal Correspondence in the Experience of Nineteenth Century British Immigrants to North America* (2005), maintains that those writing to family and friends from a different country, particularly in the case of immigrants, but applicable also to

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<sup>84</sup> Moriarty, LF, Letter, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 9 July 1969.

<sup>85</sup> Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 3 May 1969.

soldiers in combat overseas, can never be completely certain that letters written would not be shown to many others in the community.<sup>86</sup> So, soldiers will not openly reveal feelings of opposition to a war they are fighting if they know the war is popular at home. On the other hand, soldiers who support a war that they know is intensely unpopular may not reveal their approval willingly, and be generally less likely to mention their attitudes towards the war at all. Thus, self-censorship occurs when mentioning their behaviour and attitudes. When applied to the archived personal records from the Vietnam War in particular, it is possible to see that this reticence in expression could not only be caused by soldiers' concern for the home front, but could also be a direct reaction to public attitudes towards an unpopular war.

Members of the Australian public who opposed the war were often scathing towards veterans, both during and after the war. After the first draft of soldiers completed their twelve-month 'tour' and returned to Australia, the first examples of public resentment towards those who had participated in the war began. Jeffrey Streimer and Christopher Tennant maintain that the public support of draft evaders and public abuse towards the actions of Vietnam veterans in Australia is significant in explaining feelings of rejection and depression in this latter group, feelings which filtered back to soldiers still in Vietnam.<sup>87</sup> This is demonstrated by the words of Private Douglas Bishop of 5RAR, who wrote to his parents on the last day of his tour: 'When I get home I don't expect to be treated like a hero, but if I'm not there'll be trouble'.<sup>88</sup> Here, Bishop displays the expectation of a hostile reaction by the

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<sup>86</sup> Gerber, D, *Authors of their Lives: Personal Correspondence in the Experience of Nineteenth Century British Immigrants to North America*, New York University Press, New York, 2005, p. 189.

<sup>87</sup> Streimer, J & Tennant, C, 'Psychiatric Effects of the Vietnam War: The Effect on Combatants' in Maddock, K & Wright, B (eds.), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, Harper and Row Publishers, Sydney, 1987, p. 238.

<sup>88</sup> Bishop, D, Letter, PR 91/018, Australian War Memorial, 25 April 1967.

public toward Australian soldiers in Vietnam, a reaction he greatly resented. This was also demonstrated by Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Moriarty's words earlier in this chapter that referred to 'what the anti's may try to put over our gullible public'.<sup>89</sup> Thus, it is possible that these soldiers' reactions to the public perception of the war were the reason why the extent of negativity expected in the archived letters cannot be found. Andrew Carroll, in his analysis of wartime letters, contends that those in combat are intensely defensive when it comes to their military service.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps, then, these soldiers in Vietnam were attempting to legitimise their position in Vietnam, both to themselves, and to those whom they were writing, by limiting direct negativity about the war itself in their letters. Also, perhaps these soldiers feared that their actions would be criticised by the increasingly anti-war home front, so they reduced positive comments about the war in their letters. Despite the limited sample size of solely archived personal records used in this thesis, these findings indicate that this might have been the case. A more extensive study focussing specifically on one or other of the wars, incorporating a larger variety of primary sources, including oral sources, could refine these concepts more clearly. Still, this finding is a significant one, and one that has not yet been discovered for Australian soldiers in either of these wars.

Comparing the archived letters by soldiers in Vietnam with those from South Africa strengthens this point. As mentioned, the soldiers examined from the earlier war commonly included both positive and negative comments about the war itself in their letters. In contrast to the later Vietnam years, the situation on the home front in Australia ranged more evenly between positive reactions, indifference and small, but significant, anti-war groups. Thus soldiers were more freely able to express

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<sup>89</sup> Moriarty, LF, Letter, PRO1545, Australian War Memorial, 30 April 1969.

<sup>90</sup> Carroll, A (ed.), *Behind the Lines: Powerful and Revealing American and Foreign War Letters – and One Man's Search to Find Them*, Scribner, New York, 2005, p. 16.

satisfaction in fighting and still command respect, as they did not have a malicious population to fear at home. For example, Lieutenant George Harris of the South African Light Horse wrote to his mother: 'This is a fine life and the best of it is there is always some excitement each day'.<sup>91</sup> It is unlikely that a soldier in Vietnam would include mention of the 'excitement' of the possibility of killing or being killed in battle. This is particularly true, given the fact that the archived personal records of Australians in Vietnam contain significantly less positive references to combat, and that the environment on the Australian home front was one in which the morality of war was constantly being questioned.<sup>92</sup> By implication this further illustrates the defensive impulse by the sample of soldiers writing from Vietnam. Surely these men wished to avoid being associated with the often bloodthirsty image of Vietnam soldiers existing in the minds of many anti-war Australians.

The close interrelation between the civilian and battle fronts during the Vietnam War intensified this effect, as increased technology and the media in the late twentieth century brought civilians closer than ever to the front lines. Henry Durant, in his 1941 article 'Morale and its Measurement', maintains that this close proximity of home front opinion and its consequences, depending on the support or rejection of the war by civilians, directly affects a soldier's morale.<sup>93</sup> Where, during the Boer War, soldiers were far more separate from those at home and news between the two 'fronts' took a significant amount of time moving from one to the other, the relationship between those at home and on the war front was far less powerful. Thus the desire to prevent unnecessary worry to their families through self-censorship

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<sup>91</sup> Harris, G, Letter, 3DRL 7472, Australian War Memorial, 25 April 1900.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 119-121.

<sup>93</sup> Durant, H, 'Morale and Its Measurement', *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 47, no. 3, November 1941, pp. 406-407.

would certainly have been less intense for soldiers in this war. On the other hand, those in Vietnam would have felt more pressure to prove their worth by limiting negativity about the war in their personal records, as the friends and family members with whom they communicated frequently were living in a more markedly anti-war society from which they had little chance of concealing actions on the war front.

So, when comparing the content of publicly archived letters and diaries by Vietnam War soldiers with those from the Boer War, it is possible to see that there are many more emotional reactions expressed towards the war itself by those examined from South Africa. Although these predominantly record dissent, many do show approval of their position in the war. However, the sample of letters from soldiers in Vietnam, both those who volunteered and those who were conscripted, were less likely to express any direct reaction at all to their position – either positive or negative - in the war. This is unexpected for a variety of reasons – including the fact that home front opinion during Vietnam was, particularly after 1968, predominantly against the war, as mentioned. Also, those fighting in the Boer War had all volunteered for service, whereas conscription was in place during Vietnam, suggesting that those fighting in the earlier war had more of a genuine desire to be in South Africa, as opposed to those in Vietnam, who were not all there out of choice. In addition, the Vietnam War was fought in a very different time, when notions of heroism and sacrifice in war had altered irrevocably, and the concept of ‘loyalty’ was not as socially binding as it was during the war in South Africa.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, it is significant that for the earlier war, during which the general population was reported to be predominantly jingoistic and there was no want of combat volunteers, many men in the sample were more likely to communicate open dissatisfaction when writing home – whereas, for those

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<sup>94</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 96-97; Chapter Six, pp. 186-187.



examined from Vietnam, such expressions were muted to a greater extent. Moreover, when they occurred, such comments from the Boer War were written with more emotion and sentimentality than those from Vietnam. This could be attributed to the slightly smaller sample size of those from Vietnam compared with those in South Africa, but it is still clear that some soldiers in these wars did react in these ways.

When comparing Australian soldiers in South Africa and Vietnam, in the letters and diaries examined, more dissatisfaction with the former war is related to the character of the physical conflict itself, despite the open longing for home found in some cases. Sergeant Charles Frederick Pegler, of the Natal Field Force, confided to his sister: 'I have seen a good deal of the horrors of war this time and shall be glad to see the finish of this'.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Trooper Fred Stocks, of Bethune's Mounted Infantry, wrote to his parents: 'I expect you will wonder how I like soldering [sic] well to tell you the truth. Never again my boy never again; no one that has not been in it knows what it is'.<sup>96</sup> Private William Hamline Glasson of the Bushveldt Carbineers wrote to his mother: 'I have only got three weeks more to serve and then my time will be up & I can't say I'm sorry as I don't like soldiering too much'.<sup>97</sup> Private Harry Victor Roberts of the Scottish Horse F Squadron also expressed his disenchantment by discouraging his friend 'Chas' to enlist: 'Col. Craigh left us at Machododorp and has gone back to Victoria to raise another 250 men I suppose he will not have much trouble but my advice to you is DON'T COME' [author's emphasis].<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 18 March 1900.

<sup>96</sup> Stocks FW, Letter, MS11729, State Library of Victoria, 14 June 1901.

<sup>97</sup> Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 10 October 1901.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts, HV, Letter, MS9882, State Library of Victoria, n.d.

Some soldiers directly connected their desire to return home with war front conditions.<sup>99</sup> Private Stan Jones of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent wrote to his sister:

Of course nearly everybody is wishing that the war was ended...The Australians are just about used to soldiering by this time, but some of them found things a bit unpleasant at first, but the arrangements are better now than when we came here first. The washing of clothes puzzled us as our clothes got so dirty before we had an opportunity to wash them, and no doubt it would have made some of Australia's fair creatures smile if they had seen the unsuccessful attempts that some of them made.<sup>100</sup>

Jones wrote in a later letter to his sister: 'We are rather tired of South Africa'.<sup>101</sup> Thus, his desire to leave can be directly related to conditions on the battlefield. Lieutenant Douglas St. George Rich of the 6<sup>th</sup> Queensland Imperial Bushmen wrote home:

We have now been seven months in South Africa so there will be another five months good to go and you know I think the time will be hailed with joy, for there's no doubt about it this sort of game uses up men and I can quite understand them now saying that at the end of twelve months men are used up...If I could get a staff billet inside I would jump at it for this trekking and fighting nearly every day does kind of get on the nerves.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> For more details of Boer War soldier dissatisfaction with living conditions, see Chapter Five, pp. 152-159.

<sup>100</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 27 January 1900.

<sup>101</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 10 August 1900.

<sup>102</sup> Rich, DStG, Letter, PR01964, Australian War Memorial, 26 November 1901.

Other letters contain similar expressions of dissatisfaction with the war conditions, but with little mention of patriotism or ideology in their objection. Even the most fervent dissatisfaction with the war is related to particular events, not the war itself. This can be seen in a letter written by ‘Warring William Watson’, a Gunner in the 2<sup>nd</sup> New South Wales Contingent, to the Beale family that declares: ‘Tis not war now but murder’.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the traditional view of soldiers eagerly taking part in battle to support the cause of the British Empire espoused by the press of the time and in studies since the war’s end can clearly be questioned, even if in the case of these soldiers alone.

It is obvious that many of those in the sample fighting in South Africa did wish for the war to be over, a wish no doubt compounded by the original underestimation of the Boers by the British and Australian military forces. It is significant that in the body of personal records examined from the Boer War, the majority of comments on this fact are expressed more in terms of the desire for an end to the war itself. For example, Private Edward Windeyer of the 1<sup>st</sup> New South Wales Mounted Rifles wrote in a letter to his mother: ‘Here we are still chasing Boers, and wishing one and all that the War was over’.<sup>104</sup> Private Stan Jones also writes: ‘I am not going to write you much about the War and the fighting this time, everybody is sick of the war here and you must be sick of reading about it by now...but the worst of it is that it is not over yet’.<sup>105</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Percy Ralph Ricardo of the 1<sup>st</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry adopts a slightly more desperate tone in a letter to his son: ‘We have almost given up all hope of the war ever being ended’.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Watson, W, Letter, PR01087, Australian War Memorial, 12 December 1900.

<sup>104</sup> Windeyer, E, Letter, AW77/16, State Library of New South Wales, 3 July 1900.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 18 July 1900.

<sup>106</sup> Ricardo, PR, Letter, MLMSS1561, State Library of New South Wales, 18 August 1900. See also Holme, CB, FM4/2210, State Library of New South Wales, 18 November 1900; Davis, CG, Letter, D5511, State Library of South Australia, 30 September 1900; Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State

In addition to the numerous examples in the sample of Boer War soldiers bemoaning the war's length, there are also many references by these soldiers to rumours or hearsay that the war was almost over, especially in comparison to those in Vietnam. Although this can be attributed partly to the fact that most Boer War soldiers had chosen to serve until the end of the war, whereas men fighting in the Vietnam War had a set twelve month-long tour, this also indicates a keen desire to see the war ended.<sup>107</sup> Private Stan Jones wrote to his brother: 'Most of them think that the war won't last much longer and that we will soon be able to pull old Kruger's whiskers'.<sup>108</sup> Major Frank Valentine Weir of the New South Wales Bushmen Contingent wrote in his diary: 'The latest news is that us troops are to go home...we are all to leave here in November for Australia'.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Private Alexander McQueen reported to his parents: 'There is a rumour here, that the war will soon be over'.<sup>110</sup> He wrote again almost a month later: 'We hear all sorts of rumours about going home early, hope they are true, but then there are all sorts of rumours flying about'.<sup>111</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that these comments – and most such expressions found in the archived records – were made in the months of and following the three successive British victories in Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking, when the war was thought all but won by both the British and Australian soldiers, as well as by the general public.

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Library of South Australia, 22 December 1901, 19 January 1902; Ricardo, PR, Letter, MLMSS1561, State Library of New South Wales, 29 August 1900, 23 October 1900; McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 27 April 1900; Byers, RJ, Letter, MS9691, State Library of Victoria, 6 May 1900; Wentworth, F, Letter, PR01124, Australian War Memorial, 1 January 1901, 8 February 1901; Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 1 July 1900.

<sup>107</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 145-146.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, S, Letter, D6427(L), State Library of South Australia, 12 May 1900.

<sup>109</sup> Weir, V, Diary, MLMSS1024, State Library of New South Wales, 10 October 1900.

<sup>110</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 18-19 May 1900.

<sup>111</sup> McQueen, A, Letter, MS9662, State Library of Victoria, 13 June 1900. See also Wellington, A, Letter, D7334(L), State Library of South Australia, 21 March 1901; Farquhar, FR, Letter, MLDOC3408, State Library of New South Wales, n.d.; Steel, WA, Diary, MLMSS2105, State Library of New South Wales, 2 June 1900; Glasson, WH, Letter, MLMSS3858, State Library of New South Wales, 14 February 1902; Pegler, CF, Letter, PRG1108, State Library of South Australia, 23 July 1900; Howland, FH, Diary, PRG248, State Library of South Australia, 23 October 1900.

On the other hand, the examined letters by soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War were more stoic, rather than overwhelmingly positive or negative. This is not altogether synonymous with the obvious disapproval for the war conveyed by many of the Australian public, especially in the years after 1968. Any despair connected with the war was usually expressed in terms of a longing to see loved ones they had left back in Australia. For example, Bombardier Jason Neville with the 105 Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery, wrote to his brother Henry: 'I have been looking forward to returning home, after being two months in this rotten country and I haven't seen my girl friend for 16 months and she is looking forward to my return as well as I am (5 month 4 days to go)'.<sup>112</sup> Likewise, infantryman David Keating, in his fifth month of service, related his emotions in letters home to the desire to see his girlfriend and family: 'I wrote home to Sue, I miss her more than anything. I will be glad to get home to see her & get engaged & settle down for good. Be good to see the rest of my mates to [sic]. & especially my family'.<sup>113</sup> In a letter by Lance Corporal Dallas Lyle Burrage less than three months into his service with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment: 'I miss Mary so terribly much, and it seems so bloody futile at the moment, she is still 231 days away, and it seems so darned long'.<sup>114</sup> Private Len McCosker of 6RAR was particularly blunt: 'I'm not too bad, missing home like buggary [sic]'.<sup>115</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray of the 547 Signal Troop, too, clearly missed the normality of Australia: 'Ah...how I long for peace, burning toast and a casserole!'.<sup>116</sup> Other letters by the sample of soldiers in Vietnam echo this desire for home, with men revealing

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<sup>112</sup> Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 10 April 1966. See also Neville, J, Letter, PR91/069, Australian War Memorial, 26 September 1965, 20 February 1966, 19 September 1966.

<sup>113</sup> Keating, D, Letter, PR00330, Australian War Memorial, 27 June 1969.

<sup>114</sup> Burrage, DL, Letter, PR91/177, Australian War Memorial, 14 April 1971.

<sup>115</sup> McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 21 December 1966. See also McCosker, L, Letter, PR86/362, Australian War Memorial, 28 April 1967.

<sup>116</sup> Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 9 June 1968. See also Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 23 June 1968.

discomfort with their current position, while not directly blaming the war itself for their uneasiness.<sup>117</sup>

In summary, the distinct differences between the archived letters sent home by Australian soldiers in South Africa and Vietnam are quite surprising, especially because the popular view of soldier opinion in each war conflicts significantly with the actual contents of the relevant personal records. As mentioned, general understanding of each war places public opinion at opposite extremes. Although these broad opinions are often attributed to the soldiers fighting in each of the wars, further examination shows that the examined first-hand accounts more frequently displayed an opposite view. A comparison of a select sample of Australian soldiers' personal records from each war reveals that there are many more direct expressions of emotion, of both dissent and approval, by soldiers in South Africa than by those in Vietnam. Although it is doubtful that all men in Vietnam approved of their role in the war - negative statements about daily actions in Vietnam appear, which shows that this was not the case - according to the archived personal records examined, articulation of their feelings about the war was differently based, and less frequently expressed, than those of men in South Africa.

Although both groups of men spoke longingly of returning home from the war, the soldiers examined in Vietnam expressed this more in terms of a simple yearning for loved ones they had left at home. Those in South Africa often demonstrated the same

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<sup>117</sup> See also Groves, P, Letter, PR86/248, Australian War Memorial, 16 February 1969, 1 March 1969, 11 March 1969; Smith, NC, Letter, PR87/157, Australian War Memorial, 24 December 1969; Kelly, R, Letter, PR87/195, Australian War Memorial, 12 June 1965, 7 August 1965, 14 October 1965, 9 February 1966, 12 February 1966; Yielding, RA, Letter, PR00334, Australian War Memorial, 25 October 1970; Bohn, MW, Letter, PR00745, Australian War Memorial, 7 June 1970; Clyne, A, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 13 August 1971.

feelings, but their wish to return home was more commonly related to their surroundings and the conditions they were living under - namely, the war itself.

Such a variation in expression does not necessarily indicate that soldiers approved of conditions in Vietnam - many personal reminiscences since the war have argued the opposite. Pat Searson, a Qantas Chief Steward on the Sydney to Saigon flight from 1968-1969, confirms this by saying: 'I never met anybody who would say they had a great time in Saigon...The ordinary boy never spoke to me in those terms about how proud he was'.<sup>118</sup> In addition, there are examples in the sample of soldiers expressing both disapproval for the war and their position in it, but this is simply less frequent than from those fighting in the Boer War.<sup>119</sup> Much of this seeming reticence can possibly be due to the fact that men fighting in Vietnam knew the length of their tour, and thus had less cause to speculate about the war's end or their departure from Vietnam. Lieutenant Barry Langham Smith, working in the Civil Affairs Unit, wrote in his diary: 'If the war were to finish tomorrow I would be very happy'.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Signaler Andrew Clyne wrote to his father: 'I can't think of much to say other [than] "Dad you can come and take my place any time"'.<sup>121</sup> Expressions such as these are rare in the archived records from the later war, as most negative comments about the war itself are tied in with open longing for Australia, and their loved ones. As revealed earlier, this could be attributable to both self-censorship caused by the desire to protect loved ones from worry, as well as a defensive reaction to the fact that they were fighting an unprecedentedly unpopular war.

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<sup>118</sup> Searson, P, in McKay, G, *Bullets, Beans and Bandages: Australians at War in Viet Nam*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p. 69.

<sup>119</sup> See Treffry, A, Letter, PR00032, Australian War Memorial, 12 May 1969; Murray, P, Letter, PR89/104, Australian War Memorial, 7 April 1968.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, BL, Diary, PR00331, Australian War Memorial, 7 August 1969.

<sup>121</sup> Clyne, A, Letter, PR84/166, Australian War Memorial, 12 July 1970.

There are additional possible reasons why this was not expressed in many of the archived letters from Vietnam, and why these men appeared to be much less preoccupied with their feelings about war than those in South Africa, despite the prevalence of open civilian dissent. The differences in personal expression by the Boer and Vietnam War soldiers in the sample could also be attributed to the transformation of Australia's military tradition between the wars. By the beginning of the Vietnam War in the early 1960s, Australia had defined itself militarily through involvement in the First and Second World Wars. In addition, Anzac Day had established itself over the years as a momentous day, and a worthy celebration of generations before who had gone to war for Australia and the British Empire. Thus, those who volunteered or were drafted to leave for Vietnam could not avoid having a clearer idea of war already established in their minds than Boer War soldiers, either through direct contact with veterans or the general celebration of the Australian army tradition. Tobey Herzog, in *Vietnam War Stories*, claims that older generations who go to war create a legend of war based on their own battle experiences which, in turn, fuels the sense of adventure experienced by those newly going to war.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Lewis agrees that the ideas with which young men go to war arise from a common belief system, which is a product of their culture.<sup>123</sup> Thus, men on their way to Vietnam would often have the weight of decades of proud military tradition on their shoulders, which would prompt them to continue this tradition and avoid humiliating themselves by disappointing their friends, family and country.

Letters, as a direct method of communication between soldiers and the 'home front', would surely then indicate such a desire. This would limit complaints about the war itself and discourage mention of the soldier's position on the war, so as to project a

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<sup>122</sup> Herzog, *Vietnam War Stories*, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, *The Tainted War*, 10.



more assured, positive impression of circumstances in Vietnam. Therefore, the fact that most negative comments in the letters examined from these men were related to homesickness, or a yearning for those whom they have left back at home, can be assigned greater significance.

The soldiers in the sample rarely included ideological reasons in their letters for their objection to or approval of the war they were involved in. However, it is necessary to consider the differing ways such ideas were presented to Australians, both on the home and battle fronts during each war. It is clear that, whether accurate or not, ideological factors were broadcast much more readily to Australians during the latter war, including to soldiers. Despite this, some of the men examined who were serving in Vietnam openly admitted that they were unsure of the reasons for the war, even when actually fighting. Even men who attempted to explain the situation in their letters were still repeating many of the false ideas the Australian Army and government were transmitting to the Australian public. For example, HMAS Brisbane Chief Radio Supervisor Leonard Francis Moriarty, in a 1969 letter, attempted to explain to his partner the current position of the Australian army with regard to the North Vietnamese communists, with constant references to the ‘fact’ that the US and Australian side was winning the war.<sup>124</sup> From 1968 especially, and the disaster of the Tet Offensive early that year, it became quite obvious that the war was not only being lost at the time, but it was rapidly proving itself to be unwinnable. The occurrence of soldiers following accounts such as these makes it more believable that the alleged reasons for involvement in the war, the fight against international communism, would have also been accepted. Part of military training for the Vietnam War was the dehumanisation of the enemy, an aspect of military

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<sup>124</sup> Moriarty, LF, Letter, PR01545, Australian War Memorial, 3 August 1969.

training that can be seen in all wars. Streimer and Tennant maintain that this facet of Australian military training was so severe before the Vietnam War that it caused men to see all Vietnamese as a deadly threat.<sup>125</sup>

Although it is true that a similar animalisation of the enemy occurred during the Boer War, the Australian colonial and, later state, armies at the time were too inexperienced to concentrate officially on such matters. It is fitting that it is a letter published in the *Border Watch*, a popular country newspaper, that provides an example of this. Private Duncan MacArthur of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Australian Contingent, writing to his father, declares: ‘The enemy are as cunning as foxes. Some of them are very treacherous looking dogs’.<sup>126</sup> In fact, in the early months of the Boer War, the Victorian newspaper *The Argus* almost each week included an article about Boer ‘inhumanity’ and their lack of ‘manners’. This technique of ‘demonising’ the enemy is standard practice, particularly as a way to prompt soldiers to kill the enemy. However, during the war in South Africa, it was not linked with the ‘ultimate’ evil of communism, as part of the dreaded Cold War. Rather, the British Empire was threatened. Although many in Australia saw themselves as an integral part of the Empire, others disregarded this war as a little affair that was not primarily any of Australia’s concern. Men who volunteered went to the earlier war due to such reasons as their financial situation, caused, for many, by the drought and economic crisis at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or a wish for adventure, or the opportunity to be among the first soldiers representing Australia overseas. Thus, variations in soldier perception of the wars themselves could have contributed to the different degree of approval or rejection of the war itself observed in the archived personal records from both Vietnam and South Africa. The limited concentration on ideological factors

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<sup>125</sup> Steimer & Tennant, ‘Psychiatric Effects of the Vietnam War’, 234.

<sup>126</sup> MacArthur, D, ‘The South Australian Soldiers in South Africa: Letters from Members of the Contingent’, *Border Watch*, 10 January 1900, p. 3.

included in pre-Vietnam military training as opposed to its almost complete absence before South Africa would certainly have influenced the level of opposition in soldiers. This would surely then be demonstrated in letters sent to loved ones in Australia.

Factors such as these, namely, the difference in distance between the home and war fronts, as well as soldier knowledge of ideological reasons for the wars, appeared to have contributed to the shift in views observed in the sample of soldiers writing from each war. There are, in addition, less significant factors in each war that may explain the contrast in letter content, such as the differences in physical conditions between the two wars, including the length of the imposed 'tour' on soldiers, which would cause letters from soldiers in each war to differ. A large majority of the publicly archived letters sent from men travelling to, or in South Africa, complained of the conditions they were living under.<sup>127</sup> Such conditions would surely cause even the most fervent fighter to feel some disenchantment with their surroundings, if not with the war itself. The examined letters written by soldiers in Vietnam rarely contain such complaints, due to the generally superior living conditions experienced by these soldiers. Camp pubs, often called 'boozers', were accessible almost every night to soldiers not out on patrol.<sup>128</sup> In addition, regular R&R trips were available for soldiers, to locations such as Hong Kong and Bangkok.

Also, as discussed earlier, the Australian army in the Vietnam War imposed a maximum twelve month 'tour' on soldiers, which was also, in theory, earlier extended to those who fought in South Africa, but only after numerous complaints by

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<sup>127</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 194-195.

<sup>128</sup> McKay, *Bullets, Beans and Bandages*, 28.

soldiers after they realised that the war was not going to end quickly.<sup>129</sup> Thus, many of the examined letters by Boer soldiers expressing repulsion towards the war itself, or the hope that it will end soon, or a desire to return home – or any combination of these - may be the result of their facing an extended stay in South Africa. By contrast, soldiers in Vietnam knew exactly when they were due to return home. In fact, a large number of the archived soldiers' letters from this war contain a record of the time remaining till their tour ends.<sup>130</sup> This can also explain why so few of the archived letters from Vietnam contain a longing for home caused by an aversion to the war itself, such as can be found in many of the soldiers' letters examined that were sent from South Africa.

It is noteworthy, then, that the factors that determined a soldier's form of expression in the sample of letters sent home appeared to be based markedly on their impressions of the home front, where their loved ones were located. Public support or opposition to the war in question, cultural traditions connected to military performance, as well as the personal desire not to worry their family and friends, or the desire to protect their own reputations, seemed to alter the content of this first-hand contact between battle and home fronts. Although reactions to the situation on the battlefield are found in the letters examined, it is each soldier's understanding of the home front that appeared to determine their content to a much larger degree. One of these wars experienced significant home opposition, while the other was predominantly supported, despite growing indifference. The evidence presented in these letters suggests that a highly anti-war population, such as that during Vietnam, will cause soldiers to become more defensive of their own actions and less likely to express opinions on the war they are fighting. On the other hand, an initially

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapter Five, 145-146.

<sup>130</sup> See pp. 277-278.

supportive, then uninterested, population, as seen during the Boer War, will reduce soldier concern about public criticism for openly conveying their desire for an end to the war and the chance to return home. It is essential to test these theories using a broader range of evidence – namely, oral evidence or soldiers’ reminiscences. In a comparative study such as this one, doing so would be difficult, particularly because interviews cannot physically be carried out with Boer War veterans. However, taking into account all of the potential difficulties involved in using numerous types of sources within the same study may make it possible to support or reject the findings of this thesis, as well as analyse the influence of external factors on content and soldier expression in primary sources that have not been publicly archived.

The Vietnam War period altered the content of the examined soldiers’ personal records in a singular way, due to the closer technological proximity of the war and home fronts, as well as the existence of a specifically Australian military tradition that was absent during the earlier war. The former increased criticism in letters home of press accounts from the war front in letters home, whereas the latter caused soldiers to become more defensive of their military service, particularly given the large, significant anti-Vietnam War movement that was in existence. Thus, the result is a notable difference in the personal expressions of the sample of soldiers in each war. Those in Vietnam were less likely to openly communicate a desire for the war’s end - not necessarily because they wanted to be on the war front any more than Boer War soldiers, but because the above factors on the home front increased their reluctance to admit dissatisfaction with their position. Instead, they were more likely to express their yearning for home in terms of what Australia contained for them, such as family, friends and comfort, rather than the specific failing of the war front to satisfy their personal needs. Naturally, other factors such as the level of pre-war

ideological training, as well as the difference in physical conditions between the two war fronts, did also appear to affect these soldiers' sentiments, but it is clear that although reactions to the situation on the battlefield are found in the archived letters, effects of the home front determine their content to a much larger degree.

## Chapter Nine

# Conclusions

The experiences of the sample of Australian soldiers fighting in the Boer and Vietnam Wars have supported past scholarly findings that emphasize the ties between battle and home fronts during war. The similarities and differences in sentiment found in the archived letters and diaries of soldiers during these wars can largely be explained by looking to official policy and changing home front attitudes towards war and society in general. While government and military decisions regarding the wars, including terms of service, training techniques and the conditions under which soldiers fought did significantly affect the words of these men, it was the civilian population on the home front, and society's attitudes towards warfare during the wars that had the most profound effect on their personal expressions of support or disapproval of the war and their place within it. However, the extent to which individual factors on the home front influenced soldiers did vary, due to the inevitable changes within Australian society in the decades between the wars. Thus, it can be concluded that although the selected sample of soldiers reacted similarly to various aspects of military service in South Africa and Vietnam, there are also noteworthy differences, of which most, if not all, originate in some way from the Australian home front.

The methods employed in this thesis – namely, the concentration on archived personal records written by soldiers while actually on the war front, and the

application of these to 20<sup>th</sup> century research carried out on soldiering – were chosen to gain as close as possible a representation of soldier feeling at the time of each war. It is without doubt that the use of oral histories or written reminiscences by veterans are both effective sources of information on the attitudes of soldiers, and would be invaluable if used in a project that focused on one war alone, or both if living veterans existed for both wars – so that the same researcher could carry out interviews with all soldiers. Although the impact of cultural memory and the imperfect nature of human memory can sometimes taint such accounts, these would still provide useful information. The acknowledged problems when using oral sources do not necessarily mean that they are not useful in a historical context, but, rather, suggest that they alone are not as valuable to the historical record as perhaps their combined use with primary sources from each war. This rationale can, of course, also be applied to personal written records from the battlefield that are used to indicate soldier attitudes. However, since living veterans do not exist for both wars under consideration here, using comparable oral sources from each war is impossible. So, in this particular study, only archived personal records are used. The value of using such records as an indication of soldier attitudes on the war front only highlights the potential worth in the future of conducting separate research on these wars that analyses primary sources from both the battlefield and post-war years.<sup>1</sup>

This study has also raised questions that concern home front attitudes towards the Boer War, in particular. Since the selected Australian soldiers fighting in South Africa appeared to make the decision to enlist based on what had influenced them from within their own country, it is also possible to attribute some of their attitudes to civilians on the Australian home front. Conversely, there is evidence - in the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Chapter 1, pp. 25-29.



archived letters and diaries written by soldiers in South Africa - that dissatisfaction with the war was occasionally communicated to loved ones in Australia. Although past studies of soldiers' personal records highlight both soldier approval and disapproval of the war, these often do so without analysing different types of sources separately, or by comparing the war in South Africa with later conflicts. This is almost certainly due to the frequent assumption that the war met, predominantly, with approval in Australian society. But the extent to which the Australian public adopted more negative opinion, aligned with the tone of some soldiers' reactions, is still largely uncharted. However, indications do exist which suggest that even those on the home front had tired of the war in its latter years. Both Chris Connolly and Barbara Penny, in their more 'revisionist' accounts of public reactions to the war, openly state that the war's later stages were marked by a lack of interest among Australian civilians.<sup>2</sup> Given the relatively small number of Australian men who actually fought in South Africa, this is more likely due to war-weariness than to negative sentiments in letters sent home, but it does underline the need for a more comprehensive investigation into Australian home front attitudes during the war.

More knowledge about home front opinion during both wars is necessary, but particularly for the earlier war, of which studies focusing on military aspects have far outnumbered accounts of the war from a social history perspective. As mentioned, historians have often neglected lower class civilians in Australia, instead basing their studies on those in the middle to upper classes who made their views on the war public. In contrast, Richard Price's study on British home front attitudes towards the Boer War has broadened knowledge of the social history of the war, encompassing attitudes from the working classes, as well as from those with a higher social

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<sup>2</sup> Connolly, C, 'Clan, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71, October 1978, p. 232; Penny, BR, 'Australia's Reactions to the Boer War – A Study in Colonial Imperialism', *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, November 1967, p. 127.

standing.<sup>3</sup> Such an examination has not yet been carried out on the Australian experience of the war. The broad attitudinal basis of the mainly lower class Australians fighting in the Boer War, however, raises questions regarding their contemporaries on the home front. Although clearly beyond the scope of this thesis, the necessity of an in-depth study of working class attitudes on the Australian home front is now more apparent.

Many more examinations of the Australian home front during the Vietnam War exist - due, to a large extent, to the high level of anti-war sentiment it provoked. However, the perspective of soldiers is one that has been neglected for this war, particularly given the high prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among its veterans. It is evident that further research into the men that actually fought in the war needs to be carried out, using a range of primary sources – namely, letters and diaries in concert with oral interviews. This will highlight differences between the two methods, which will allow historians to pinpoint to a larger extent the potential problems in the use of each type of source. In addition, it will provide wider knowledge of the soldiers themselves, as well as give a stronger sense of civilian feeling at the time since, after all, the fighting men originated from – and survivors returned to - civilian society.

In general, the sample of soldiers from the Boer War was more open in their opinions about the war they were fighting. If one of the examined soldiers encountered difficulties while fighting, it seemed more likely that he would express negativity towards the war. Similarly, these men openly communicated their support for the war and its cause, although this occurred to a far lesser extent. On the other hand, those in

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 42-43.

the sample who were fighting in Vietnam were much more reticent in their correspondence and diaries written while on the front, particularly concerning the war itself. Although those examined are only a very small percentage of the total number of men who fought, the differences even in this sample cannot be discounted, and must be acknowledged. The shift in expression can be explained in several different ways, and expressed views appeared to change with individual facets of war. Generally, however, it is possible to partly attribute the difference between Australians in each war by referring to the concepts of self-censorship and self-defence. The sample, as well as scholarly opinion on soldiering, suggests that if the civilian population is predominantly supportive of a war their country is engaging in, it is more likely that soldiers fighting in that war will not feel reluctant about expressing their attitudes towards it, whether positive or negative. Thus, if a war is not supported on the home front it then appears to follow that a soldier will become intensely defensive of his war service, so as to legitimize the sacrifice he is making both to himself, and to his civilian counterparts. This extends to soldiers' positive comments about the war, which – following the sample – to prevent public criticism, also seem to decrease as populations turn against the war being fought. This then often leads to self-censorship, by which a soldier will restrict negativity about the war he is fighting so as to protect loved ones on the home front from unnecessary worry. However, this variation between the sample of Boer and Vietnam War soldiers did not apply to all facets of the wars, although it can be seen as a general pattern of expression for the men fighting in both wars, but particularly those in Vietnam.

The appearance of clear defensiveness in soldiers' archived personal records occurred throughout their war service. The examined soldiers in Vietnam were less

likely to mention their reasons for joining the war. Although this can be attributed to the fact that many of these men did not enlist by choice - a result of the National Service scheme in existence from late 1964 - it is also possible to see it as a consequence of their fighting in an unpopular war. As such, it appears less likely that a soldier will freely admit to enlisting in war if they will be denounced for their decision. Self-defence is also apparent throughout the war service of the selected soldiers, particularly when comparing the number of negative expressions towards the war in the archived letters of those from the Boer War and those in Vietnam. Those examined who were fighting in the earlier war were more likely to criticize the war they were fighting in, and wish for its end, despite the fact that the war was openly supported by a large percentage of the Australian population. On the other hand, Vietnam War soldiers' archived letters and diaries contain significantly less evidence of disapproval for the war, despite the fact that Australian society – where these soldiers had been born and raised – was, after 1968, predominantly against the war's continuation. The shock of the Tet Offensive, after US and Australian government claims of near victory, caused a gradual conversion in Australia from a largely hawkish society to one that saw opposition from not only those disposed against war in general, but also increasing numbers of the general public.<sup>4</sup> This disparity suggests that these soldiers did not openly convey any disapproval of the war because of a defensive impulse, confirming Carroll's analysis of soldiers' letters that emphasizes this reaction by soldiers concerning their wartime service.<sup>5</sup>

This can be tied to the changing norms of society and resulting changes in attitudes towards war, both of which caused the content of these soldiers' personal records to

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<sup>4</sup> Goot, M & Tiffen, R, 'Public Opinion and the Politics of the Polls' in King, P (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Carroll, A (ed.), *Behind the Lines: Powerful and Revealing American and Foreign War Letters – and One Man's Search to Find Them*, Scribner, New York, 2005, p. 16.

alter considerably between the two wars. Between the end of the Boer War, in 1902, and the Vietnam years, from the early 1960s, a significant sea change occurred in the relationship between the civilian front and battlefield during war. The interdependence between these two locations increased in both its sheer intensity, as well as its strength of flow both ways. This was partly caused by the impact of the ‘new’ media – a result aided by the increase in literacy, prompting readership of a wider kind, as well as by technology, especially television. Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard comment on the impact of television on war, particularly on Vietnam, during which civilians saw with their own eyes atrocities being committed, thus increasing the public revulsion towards warfare.<sup>6</sup> This was also accentuated by post-Second World War thinking, influenced by both the mass nature of war, as well as the exposure to the use of nuclear weapons which, combined with the technological closeness of the home and war fronts, brought the human race closer to the extremities of warfare, thus truly globalizing warfare.<sup>7</sup> These factors contributed directly to the vast difference in public reactions to the Boer and Vietnam Wars.

It is noteworthy, however, that although opposition to the Vietnam War was much more apparent on the home front, and Australian discussions during the Boer War often emphasized ‘loyalty’ and criticized those who failed to exhibit it, some of the examined soldiers in both wars did question their morality. It is also important that, although this occurred far more during the earlier war, the sample of soldiers fighting in South Africa seemed more likely to revert to what they termed their ‘duty’ in explaining their actions, whereas those examined who were fighting in Vietnam – who were from a society with a wider range of opinion towards the justness of war -

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<sup>6</sup> Calvocoressi, P, Wint, G & Pritchard, P, *Total War: the Causes and Courses of the Second World War, Volume 1: The Western Hemisphere* [1972], Penguin, London, 1989, p. xli.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Barkawi, T, *Globalization and War*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2006. Also, Chapter One, pp. 3-5.

did not seem to have such an ingrained notion of duty as a primary instigator in war. However, admissions of fear in combat, as well as the importance of mere survival over heroism in war, were much more apparent in the archived personal records from the later war, undoubtedly caused by this altered awareness of duty, as well as sacrifice. The sample of soldiers fighting in Vietnam were much more open about their genuine fear of combat, as well as their evident attitude that merely surviving the war was a clear priority over the display of courage.

It was not only perspectives on warfare and its effects that altered so markedly between the two wars. Military understanding of the effect of combat duty on soldiers also increased as a result of the two world wars that occurred between Australian involvement in the Boer and Vietnam Wars. Evidence of this visibly filtered down to the examined soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. The archived personal records from the later war do reveal soldier knowledge of the factors contributing to morale. Both positive and negative aspects of soldiering were often related by these soldiers in Vietnam to their resultant effect on morale, an effect of advancements in military training. Specific factors affecting them on the war front, such as poor conditions, regular mail from home, as well as the positive psychological effects of humour, were all directly tied to morale, whether positive or negative, in the archived personal records of those fighting in Vietnam. Although the selected Boer War soldiers mentioned all of these aspects of warfare, it seems that their understanding of the relationship between warfare and morale was not as well developed as for those in the later war. In addition, the unprecedented amount of psychological damage resulting from the First and Second World Wars was widely publicized after 1945, alerting future soldiers to this possibility in warfare. This increased research into the psychological consequences of combat after the world

wars reduced the need for a sense of shame in soldiers who experienced such ill effects. The sample of soldiers from the Boer War never mentioned intense psychological stress from battle, whereas, during Vietnam, the examined men were more likely to mention its occurrence in other soldiers and admit that it was also a possibility for themselves. Such expressions were likely influenced by changes in attitudes towards warfare that originated on the home front, both in wider society and in the military itself.

Military research into soldiering during the 20<sup>th</sup> century also confirmed that strong ties exist between morale and soldiers' physical conditions. During the Boer War, soldiers had to endure very poor standards of living when on active combat duty, whereas men in Vietnam were allowed more home comforts such as leisure time (in the form of regular R&R), as well as an alcohol allowance, to maintain morale and reduce the possibility of mutiny, 'fragging' or desertion. The archived personal records, particularly from the Boer War, reveal that living conditions did appear to often determine men's attitudes towards the wider military structure, including both officers in command and allied troops. Dissatisfaction with decisions concerning their lives made by military leaders was more marked when these soldiers were not satisfied with their everyday living arrangements. In contrast, the archived personal records from Vietnam contain less dissatisfaction with leadership, and fewer complaints about soldiers' standards of living. Despite this, the sample of soldiers in Vietnam did appear to have higher expectations of their day-to-day conditions, shown by the frequent connections made between physical comfort and the preservation of morale. The altered state of physical conditions in war, and resultant opinion of the military itself by soldiers, can again be possibly attributed to decisions made on the home front by both the military and governments, as a result of the

increased knowledge of warfare's severity and the desire of those in power to ensure that soldiers remain on the battlefield for their entire period of service. This again demonstrates that forces on the home front, at least in the case of this particular sample of soldiers, have a serious influence on soldier opinion towards the particular war being fought.

It does seem, however, that the largest factor influencing the content of the archived soldiers' letters and diaries from war was their concern for family and friends on the home front - expressed in the form of self-censorship. Personal records from both wars reveal omissions or untruths, with the intended aim likely to have been the desire to ensure that those to whom they were writing did not unnecessarily worry about their welfare. In addition, many of the examined soldiers from both wars expressed disgust towards the press and openly told their families to disregard newspaper and television reports from the war. This was done both because they honestly believed that their families were being lied to and, particularly during Vietnam when the media gave more candid, graphic reports from the war front, because of the fear that these would cause their families to become anxious for their safety. This may also have been marked during the Vietnam War as a result of the rapidly expanding anti-war movement throughout the years. But although the war's protesters did appear to cause some in the sample of soldiers to become overly defensive of their military service and, thus, limit negativity towards the war in their personal records, as shown earlier, others were reluctant to express any approval of the war in their letters and diaries, likely for fear of home front criticism. It is also possible to attribute the reduced negativity towards war in the archived letters and diaries from Vietnam to other factors. For example, the Australian military tradition established in the years since the Boer War, which would have reduced soldier



willingness to tarnish the public image of Australian soldiers in war, and even the increased intensity of ideological training before Vietnam War service, particularly given the concentration of the Cold War emphasis on communism as a world evil, did seem to discourage open criticism by these soldiers.

Finally, it is important to note that although increased pessimism appears in soldiers' archived letters and diaries during the Boer War, this does not indicate conclusively that those in the sample who were fighting in Vietnam approved of the war they were fighting and their role within it. Although those fighting in the later war appeared more guarded in expressing their precise feelings, both positive and negative, towards the war in their letters and diaries, the reasons above – namely, the desire to protect loved ones from worry, avoid criticism from home front opponents of the war and ensure that wider opinion of Australian soldiers was not tainted by their words – did seem to considerably affect what they wrote. This research thus suggests that the connection between the home and war fronts is significant when focusing on the impact of the Australian home front on this selected sample of soldiers who fought in South Africa and Vietnam. This confirms that additional research needs to be carried out on these as well as other wars, so as to determine the accuracy of this possible conclusion. It is apparent, however, that for any assessment of soldier attitudes toward and behavior during any conflict to be effective, it must also contain a simultaneous account of individual influences deriving from the front.

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