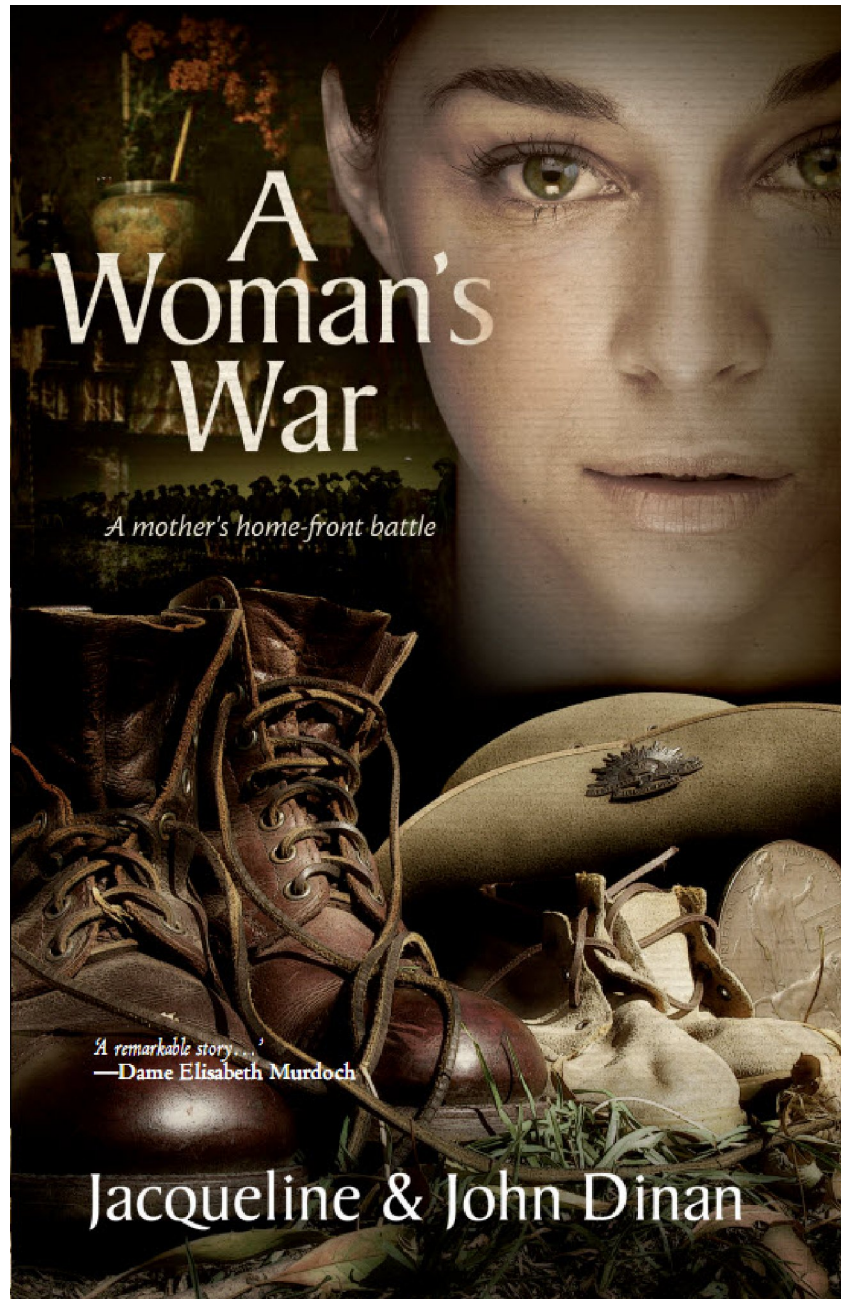


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## Teacher's Notes

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## COMMENTARY

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In much of what has been published in these genres, the realities of the home front keepers, have been generally applied as an addendum to the praise of men who were directly involved in the war. 'A Woman's War' turns inwards to uniquely explore what it was like for women to live through a war. The story of a mother, who helplessly witnesses twin sons embark, highlights the battle on the home front - the personal and community aspects surrounded by the societal and political exterior of the 1914-1918 war years.

The focus is on Rosie, who in her mid to late thirties exemplifies a woman's role of life giver, maker of home and cultivator of community, which is redefined by world scale events. Her story is an account of instinctive aptitude to 'get on with it'; invisibly holding friends and family together and taking on of responsibilities to maintain neighbourhood connectivity and essential factory output.



While she waits for letters from lands never before considered, Rosie shoulders her share of responsibility by walking at a peace rally, working in a factory and participating in a Red Cross parcel drive. At the drive women are working as one in action, yet they do not share the same mindset. Here the evocation of the division between the realities of war and the prevailing ideas for women of the period are marvellously played out, providing a sense of veracity on how the Great War impacted those who were left to uphold things at home.

Thoroughly researched, this novel vividly explores how women harnessed the states of apprehension, sorrow, fear, loneliness and anger into a life force to deal with the loss and deprivation of war and influence the way Australians then reacted to their countries involvement in a global affair. The 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative is poignant and the plot is simply and seamlessly weaved over a factual base, allowing the story to be understood by women of all walks of life. Though 'A Woman's War' is an historical story, it is also a book for today as women from all cultures continue to cope with present challenges. With its unique presentation of Australian and social history, this very readable novel is ideal for enhancing secondary and tertiary curricula.

## Review Comments

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*A remarkable story...I heartily endorse the book as means of raising awareness of the chronological events of WW1...*

**Dame Elisabeth Murdoch**

*'As there are so few books written about war from the point of view of women, this timely and wide ranging record is going to contribute greatly to the long neglected female perspective on wars, invariably started by men'*

**Dr Jonathan King, Military Historian**

*'A story that touches every woman's heart and encapsulates the ANZAC spirit portrayed by the women of WW1, qualities we can all reflect on in facing today's hardships'*

**Andrea Coote, MP**

*'I would thoroughly recommend it to be read in Secondary Schools and by all women...and I will be passing it to my daughters and granddaughters to read'*

**Joan Spence OAM, President, RSL Womens' Council**

*'An emotional journey for elderly readers and a great history lesson for everyone else*

**Herald Sun**

*'It is rare to read a woman's account in fiction form...this book offers a timely account of the heart-rendering story of a mother's loss in war'*

**The Weekly Times**

*'...this is a mythbuster''*

**Country Style Magazine**

*'...an excellent addition to the reading lists for Australian history'*

**Agora, Feb**

*'...thoroughly researched and rich in detail...non-fiction wrapped in a fictional cover.'*

**Fiction Focus, Vol 24**

*'Akin to 'My Brother Jack' and 'Fly Away Peter', 'A Woman's War' presents themes and historical information, allowing it to marry learning between English and History classes*

**HTAV Bulletin**

*'Earthy and insightful...good to find a book that tells the story from a woman's perspective.'*

**Elizabeth Trudgeon, Ballarat Historical Society**

*'An excellent publication to be put as a "must read" in our high school curriculum.'*

**Gill Coughlan, State Secretary, RSL Womens' Council**

*'The book explores community spirit, class structure and contemporary politics in early twentieth century Melbourne.'*

**Marion Dewar, Editor, The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc**

## **GENRE**

This novel explores many aspects of history in respect to - Australian, World War One, social, political and women's.

In gathering all of the areas of history together as the foundation for the story's backdrop, this work of fiction puts the spotlight on what women did on the home front during 1914-1918. Four years of chronological events subtly underline the fictional plot, allowing the reader to be entertained and educated inconspicuously. The material is an extraordinary marriage between the exterior political and the internal social and community aspects of the 1914-18 war years in Australia.

*A Woman's War* presents as a beautifully developed and researched and entirely readable manuscript of a family's involvement in the 1914-18 war. It is a community based and personal history that is vividly explored and of great human interest.

## GENRE ANALYSIS

### Australian Books

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#### Fiction novels re A.I.F. or A.F.C. based on WW1

<b>Fly Away Peter</b>	<b>1915</b>
By David Malouf	By Roger McDonald
Penguin, 1981	Random House, 1979

#### Fiction novels re A.I.F. or A.F.C. based on WW2

<b>My Brother Jack</b>	<b>Poor Man's Orange</b>
By George Johnston	By Ruth Park
Collins, Australia 1964	Angus & Robertson, 1949

#### Autobiographical/biographical novels re A.I.F. & A.F.C. based on WW1

<b>Gallipoli: Our Last Man Standing (The Extraordinary Life of Alec Campbell)</b>	<b>Soldier Boy: The True Story of Jim Martin The Youngest Anzac</b>	<b>Somme Mud; The war experiences of an Australian infantryman in France 1916-1919</b>
By Jonathan King	By Anthony Hill	By Will Davies
John Wiley, Australia 2004	Penguin, Australia 2002	Random House, Australia 2006

<b>Young Digger</b>	<b>A Fortunate Life</b>	<b>Voices from the Trenches: Letters to Home</b>
By Anthony Hill	By Albert Facey	By Noel Carthew
Penguin, Australia 2002	Penguin, Australia, 1981	New Holland, Australia 2002

<b>Pompey Elliott</b>	<b>An Anzac's Story (Ron Kyle)</b>	<b>Bride of an Anzac; My Life Story</b>
By Ross McMullin	By Bryce Courtney	By Queenie Sunderland
Scribe, Australia 2002	Viking, Australia 2005	Gary Allen, Australia 1996

#### **The Ghost at the Wedding**

By Shirley Walker  
Penguin, 2009

#### Reference books in story format re A.I.F. & A.F.C. in WW1

*The Anzacs*  
By Patsy Adam Smith  
Penguin Australia 1991

**Fiction novels about women in Australia in the era of WW1**

*Out of the Silence*

Wendy James

Random House Australia 2005

**The Other ANZACS**

By Peter Rees

Allen & Unwin, 2008

**The Wing of Night**

By Brenda Walker

Penguin Viking, 2005

## International Books

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### Fiction novels re infantry/air force from O/S based on WW1

#### **All Quiet on the Western Front**

By Erich Remarque

Germany 1928

Fawcett Crest, U.S.A. 1958,1975

Balintine Books, U.S.A. 1982

#### **Goshawk Squadron**

By Derek Robinson

Heinemann Ltd, England 1971

Cassell & Co, England 2000

(Robinson also published

*Hornet's Sting & War Story*)

#### **A Killing for the Hawks**

By Frederick Smith

Mackay, U.S.A 1967

#### **Birdsong**

By Sebastian Faulks

Random House, UK, 1993

#### *Regeneration (trilogy)*

By Pat Barker

Penguin, UK, 1992

#### *A Long, Long Way*

By Sebastian Barry

Faber & Faber London, 2005

Viking New York, 2005

### Autobiographical/biographical novels re infantry/air force from O/S based on WW1

#### **Sagittarius Rising**

By Cecil Lewis

1<sup>st</sup> Published 1936

Greenhill Books, U.K. 2003

#### **No Parachute**

By Arthur Gould Lee

Jarrols Publishers, U.K. 1968

#### **Flying Fury**

By James McCudden, V.C.

Greenhill Books, U.K. 1918

#### **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**

By Neil Hanson

Doubleday, Britain 2005

### Fiction novels about women set overseas in the era of WW1

As The Night Ends

Audrey Howard

Hodder & Stoughton 2005



## Australian Movies & Mini Series

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### ***1915***

1982, Directed by Chris Thomson and Di Drew (based on the novel by Roger McDonald)

### ***ANZACS***

1985, Directed by PINO AMENTA (based on the novel by Patsy Adam Smith)

### ***Gallipoli***

1981, Directed by Peter Weir

### ***Forty Thousand Horsemen***

1940, Directed by Charles Chauvel

### ***The Lighthorsemen***

1988, Directed by Simon Wincer

### ***The Sullivan's***

1976-1982, Directed by Simon Wincer, Rod Hardy, John Barningham (NB: WW2)

### ***Pozieres***

2000, Directed by Wain Fimeri

### ***Beneath Hill 60***

2010, Directed by Jeremy Sims

## International Movies & Mini Series

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***Blue Max***

1966, Directed by John Guillerman

***Aces High***

1976, Directed by Jack Gold

***All Quiet On The Western Front***

1979, Directed by Lewis Milestone

***A Very Long Engagement***

2004, Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet

***Hells Angels***

1931, Directed by Howard Hughes

***Flyboys***

2006, Directed by Tony Bill

## STRUCTURE & STYLE

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Told in first person and present tense '*A Woman's War*', is a story as seen through the eyes of a mother who has twin boys enlist in the Australian Army and later embark without the notion of what lay ahead. This present tense, deliberately chosen, provides a sense of immediacy and highlights how people of the times lived day by day for information.

It follows the war from declaration in August 1914 to armistice in November 1918, through the focus of Rosie on her sons and her reactions to their involvement in a world-scale event that was referred to as the Great War. Her voice is the main narrator and uses the simple language of a woman and it does not require bolstering from further education and dictionary terms. The prose is poignant and never intaglio. The story speaks from Rosie's heart, but it is one that will be understood by readers and especially women, from all walks of life.

Her first person narrating is balanced with letters from the Western Front, which provide a change of atmosphere to the story and source of information.

## SYNOPSIS

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Told through the eyes of Rosie, *A Woman's War* explores the harsh realities she endures and the array of emotions she experiences from the home front, while her twin sons are away fighting in the War (1914-1918). It is set in working class Collingwood, against a background of historical events. Beginning with the declaration of the war, the novel reveals Rosie's reactions to the fast paced announcements and her sons enlisting at the end of 1915. During the following years, Rosie is one of many women who come together to help each other and Australia through these unprecedented times.

Rosie, is indicative of women, who for four long years helplessly witness their husbands, boyfriends, brothers and even fathers swayed by the relentless pull of 'mateship' to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The novel demonstrates how women, like Rosie who is only in her mid to late thirties, attempt to maintain home and industry, contribute to the war effort, and sustain relationships with men who have embarked.

The reader is provided with an insight into the horror of trench warfare and air battles principally by means of the heart-rending and graphic letters Albert, one of Rosie's sons, writes from The Western Front (France) during 1916 and 1917. Letters from other men to women complement the central theme of communication between Albert and Rosie.

The novel focuses particularly on two events—the Battle of Pozzières, where Australians suffer their greatest casualty rate, and the battle of Messine Ridge, where miners take on the unthinkable task of tunnelling under the German trenches and blowing them up from underground. Albert, after witnessing the death of his twin brother Tom at Pozzières, escapes the depressing, disease-ridden and muddy trenches and transfers to the air force, witnessing the Messine Ridge explosion from the sky.

*A Woman's War* concludes with Albert receiving belated news that he has fathered a baby in Scotland and Rosie nursing Albert of his post war injuries. Germany has surrendered—the war is over, but while her son's fate is fickle, Rosie knows that the devastation and repercussions of this event will be something with which she will continue to battle.

## CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SUMMARY

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1914

### *The Sun is Setting on Happy Days*

It is August 1914 and the declaration of War cascades through Europe; inevitably its effects are felt in Australia. Troops and ships are committed and persons of German and Austrian origin are interned. Rosie and her husband Reggie do not feel personally threatened as their twin sons Albert and Tom are only sixteen and the war is rumoured to be over by Christmas. Rosie discusses with her best friend and neighbour Agnes, the feeling of trepidation creeping into life in Collingwood.

### *Is this a Time to Celebrate?*

Shortly prior to Christmas, Albert and Tom and their mates, Eddie and Ron, eagerly go to see the first commitment of troops off and return intoxicated. Rosie realises they are growing up and reminisces on their childhood in Collingwood. The future is uncertain, so with their close group of friends, Rosie and Reggie celebrate the twin's seventeenth birthday and the engagement of Agnes' daughter, Jean to Ron.

1915

### *Marriage & Mayhem*

The famous Foy & Gibson's of Smith Street is abuzz with activity, when Rosie and Agnes shop there in preparation for the wedding between Jean and Ron. Agnes tells Rosie that Ron is eager to enlist and she is aware that Albert her son is too. Reggie attempts to get Rosie to empathise with Albert's enthusiasm and busily keeps the family abreast of newspaper reports on Gallipoli.

### *Enlistment & Training*

Albert, Tom and their mates Ron and Eddie enlist and commence training at Seymour where they meet other fellow new enlistees. Those left at home in Collingwood, take the steam train to Seymour to visit the boys at the training facilities. George the father of Eddie announces that he has enlisted in time to join his son in his battalion. George's daughter Molly has secured employment as a housekeeper for a wealthy family in Kew, headed by a senior army official.

1916

### ***Embarkation***

Rosie, Reggie, Agnes, Jean and Molly gather at Port Melbourne to see their respective boys off together. The farewell leaves Rosie feeling helpless and empty. Afterwards they visit the stunning Block Arcade. At a time when war is intensifying with news of the death of British War Head, Lord Kitchener, Rosie wants to 'do her bit' by commencing part time work with Agnes and Jean at a local hat factory making slouch hats for the troops.

### ***Lions at Pozières***

The battle of Somme on The Western Front is headline news. Those on the home front proudly read about the courageous reputation that Australian soldiers are earning for themselves. Reggie reads about the nearby battles of Fromelles and later Pozières.

### ***The Boy on the Bike***

Alarmingly the boy on the bike who delivers telegrams arrives at the neighbouring homes of Rosie and Agnes. Ron has had his leg amputated and Eddie and Tom have been killed.

### ***Heaven & Hell***

Letters from Albert and Eddie, which were written before the deaths and injuries, arrive home, telling of their goings-on in a beautiful French town and describing the reserve trenches. Rosie receives a later letter from Albert in which he describes the battlefield at Pozières as hell.

### ***Day & Night***

Rosie and Agnes are labouring over the washing copper when Reggie brings home devastating news that Albert has been injured by gas, yet is in a condition that he will survive. Letters Albert had sent home prior to his accident arrive home, giving a first hand account of the Australians capturing Pozières' Ridge and the risks of night patrol.

### ***A Woman's War***

In an attempt to keep herself occupied while mourning Tom's loss, Rosie is encouraged by Agnes and Jean to join in at a Red Cross parcel drive for the troops at Collingwood Town Hall. Women at the gathering discuss anti-conscription reasoning. Rosie battles with this alongside the increasing amount of anti and pro conscription propaganda appearing in the streets in the lead up to the referendum. Letters from George and Albert arrive home, detailing the situation in which Tom and Eddie were killed.

The results of the first conscription referendum are announced and Rosie and her friends attend a Women's Peace Rally in the city. Rosie receives news from Albert that he is recovering.

### ***Rosie's Place***

Ron has returned and although he has had a leg amputated he settles relatively well back into a simplistic life in Collingwood. He provides those on the home front, a first hand insight in to experiences in the trenches.

1917

### ***Telling Eyes***

Albert surprises his family and friends with news that his is extending his recuperation in Edinburgh with a Scottish nurse, Maggie, who cared for him in the convalescent hospital in England. The women back home continue their war effort with knitting and sewing. Les, a fellow troop who lost a limb along with Ron, visits Reggie and Rosie's home and his romance with Molly ignites.

### ***Skies above the Western Front***

Albert joins the air force and much to his mother's horror, writes home telling of his initial escapades in the skies above the Western Front. Reggie and Ron find his escapades exciting, but Rosie is horrified.

### ***Messine Ridge***

Reggie reads about the miraculous explosion at Messine Ridge. Rosie receives a letter from Albert, which contains accounts of further flying adventures and news of the new aircraft recently attained by the British air force.

### ***Shot Down***

Albert writes home to tell of the spectacular explosion of Messine Ridge he witnessed from the air. As his comrades are fighting below in the battle of Passchendaele, Albert is injured when shot in an air fight. After recuperation he is to be sent home, yet in the meantime, letters revealing his terrifying accounts of dogfights, arrive home.

### ***Ghost Gum***

At the Port Melbourne docks Rosie struggles to recognise her dilapidated son Albert. He is definitely a changed man, from the boy she saw off to war. He intrigues family and friends with first hand stories of air battles. Reggie, Rosie and Albert plant a gum tree in memory of Tom.

### ***New Soul***

The second Australian referendum results in a stronger sway against conscription. Due to the hurdles the war presents to communication and transport, Albert receives belated news from Maggie that he's fathered her baby.

### **1918**

#### ***New Tracks***

Albert and Reggie read the papers to keep abreast of the ANZACs in the Battles of Hamel, Amiens and Montbrehain and then on leave towards the end of 1918. The soldiers who have to date returned are all rebuilding new paths for the future, however Rosie is still concerned over Albert's fragile health. Ron and Jean are leaving Melbourne to set up life in Ballarat.



***The War is finished; will the conflict cease?***

November 11 marks the day of Germany's armistice with the Allies. Like all people, Rosie is elated, yet her focus is on the future of Albert's health and his drive to live for his love for his daughter on the other side of the world.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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### *Australian Women on the Home Front during WW1*

World War 1 advanced women politically and economically and enhanced their independence. There were increased opportunities in the paid labour market with alternatives to domestic service, as well as higher wages and better conditions.

Women's contribution to the workforce rose from 24 per cent of the total in 1914 to 37 per cent in 1918. The increase tended was in traditional areas of women's work - clothing and footwear, food and printing sectors. There was some increase also in the clerical, shop assistant and teaching areas.

Female workers had been less unionised than their male counterparts. This was because they tended to do part-time work and to work in smaller firms. World War 1 forced unions to deal with the issue of women's work.

The war did not inflate women's wages. Employers circumvented wartime equal pay regulations by employing several women to replace one man, or by dividing skilled tasks into several less skilled stages. In these ways, women could be employed at a lower wage and not said to be 'replacing' a man directly. Also, contracts of employment during World War One had been based on collective agreements between trade unions and employers, which decreed that women would only be employed 'for the duration of the war'.

Many women became involved in war-related activities - such as cooks, stretcher bearers, motor car drivers, interpreters, and munitions workers - but the government did not allow this participation. Many women were also actively involved in encouraging men to enlist, and were often used in recruiting and pro- and anti-conscription propaganda leaflets.

Anxiety for their menfolk in war, the pressures of employment, combined with the need to perform housework in straitened circumstances and the inadequacy of social services exacted a heavy toll. Many joined a number of women's organisations - including Australian Women's National League, Australian Red Cross, Country Women's Association, Voluntary Aid Detachment, Australian Women's Service Corps, Women's Christian Temperance Union and Women's Peace Army.

### ***Why did the World go to War in 1914?***

The catalyst for the First World War (1914-1918) occurred in June 1914 when Arch Duke Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria, was assassinated by Serbian nationalists who were trying to gain independence for their country from Austria.

Prior to this in the mid 1800s, the German empire was invading other countries and aggressively expanding its borders. Germany went about protecting its strong position by aligning itself with certain other countries. Other European countries began to protect themselves by aligning either with or against Germany, and any treaty a country signed had to be honoured in the event of an attack on any member state of the alliance.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the nations of Europe were very suspicious and wary of each other. Tensions broke out into conflict when a group of Serbian Nationalists assassinated Arch Duke Ferdinand. The Austro-Hungarian Empire issued an ultimatum to the Serbian Government to hand over those responsible by a certain date. Serbia did not comply with their demand as an act of defiance. Austria-Hungary therefore declared war on Serbia, and this ignited further unrest in Europe. The dominos began to fall.

Russia, a staunch supporter of Serbia, moved its troops towards Austria, which caused Germany to mobilise its army. Germany's initial move was to invade Russia's main ally, France. In doing so, it took its army through Belgium, which was neutral, and in response to this act of aggression, Britain declared war on Germany. Britain's declaration brought in countries from its Empire: Australia, Canada, South Africa, India and New Zealand. Japan was aligned with Britain so it dutifully declared war on Germany also. The British Empire, France, Russia and Japan were known as the Allies, whereas Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were referred to as the Central Powers. In 1915 Italy also aligned with the Allies, followed, in 1917, by the United States of America.

The War lasted for four years and was the most destructive in terms of men and material than any war previously. This war was predominately fought in trenches, and millions of lives were lost with little ground gained by either side. In early 1918, the Central Powers finally made a break in the stalemate and it looked to have the war won. The Allies however stopped the advance and slowly gained control to the point that Germany and its allies were a spent force by November and sought an armistice, which was signed on 11 of November 1918 effective at 11 a.m.

### ***Battle of Pozières***

The Battle of Pozières was part of the Somme offensive and was launched on 23 July, 1916. Overall, it went for five weeks and comprised three parts: the capture of the Pozières town; the capture of the Pozières ridge; and the subsequent push for the German strongholds at Thiepval and Mouquet Farm. The first ANZAC Corps comprising the survivors of Gallipoli and new reinforcements, led the entire battle.

The town of Pozières was strategically important as it lay on high ground and its capture would give the Allies access to the defence systems of the Germans. The Australians succeeded in capturing the town in twenty-four hours. This was the Germans' first blow in the Somme battle and, as they could not afford to lose such a strategic hold, they retaliated with a fierce artillery barrage in an attempt to remove the Australians. The barrage from the Germans was said to be the worst of the war until that point. Despite that they had suffered high casualties, the Australians withstood it. The town of Pozières ceased to exist.

The Australians then mounted an assault on the Pozières ridge, which was a mere 200 metres from the town. The Germans were well dug in but the Australians captured the ridge in two weeks of fierce fighting.

The Allied High Command decided that the momentum should be used to push on from the ridge and try to take the German-held positions at Thiepval and Mouquet Farm. The Australians tried to take these positions for three weeks but were not successful.

The Australians had delivered significant blows to the German armies by taking the town and ridge, even though they were not successful in taking Thiepval and Mouquet Farm. Huge numbers of Australian men—28,000—were killed or wounded in the Battle of Pozières and it remains Australia's costliest battle in terms of ground won for men killed.

The total number of casualties at the Battle of Pozières and an earlier battle at Fromelles, were around 33,000 in the Australian's first six weeks on the Western Front. To put this in perspective, it is worth noting that in the Gallipoli campaign, there were 33,600 Australian casualties over a period of eight months.

### ***Messine Ridge***

The Germans held Messine Ridge, situated near Ypres, from late 1914. It was a strategically important stronghold as it gave the occupier a good view of the surrounding area. Although the Germans had command of Messine Ridge, from 1915 a stalemate developed with both sides entrenched in a small area.

The British army realised that a drastic move was required to break this impasse, so they employed miners to construct twenty-two tunnels from the British trenches to an area under the German trenches, where they dug out massive caverns and packed them full of high explosives. The Germans were also tunnelling towards the British trenches with the same objective. At one point, the German and British tunnellers met as their respective tunnels converged and dreadful underground hand-to-hand combat occurred.

The secret mine explosion was scheduled for 7 June. To pre-empt it and confuse the Germans, the British conducted a relentless artillery barrage, on 23 May. Some 2,500 heavy guns were used and millions of shells were fired. The Germans were well entrenched in heavily fortified positions and rode out the barrage. Suddenly, at 2.50 a.m. on 7 June, everything went quiet. The Germans, expecting an infantry attack, which usually followed such an artillery barrage, rushed from their fortified positions into their front-line trenches to man the machine guns. Little did they know that they had fallen into a well-laid trap, as the mines were positioned directly below the front-line trenches.

Twenty minutes later, at 3.10 a.m. the mines were detonated. The explosion was heard as far away as Dublin. The British Prime Minister heard it clearly from his Downing Street office. It is estimated that, in the blink of an eye, 10,000 German soldiers were vaporised. Over 600 tons of explosives were used. The British then advanced with the infantry and took the positions they required.

It is interesting to note that two mines did not explode and their locations were lost over time. One exploded in 1955 due to a lightning strike and the other is still where it was laid in 1917, much to the local residents' discomfort.

### ***Air battles over the Western Front during 1917***

Victory in the air, alternated from one side to another depending on factors such as aircraft quality and the numbers and training competence of pilots. Around April-May 1917, the German Air Force dominated the air, because they had aircraft far superior to those of the Allies, so it was not a good time to be a fighter pilot for the Allies on the Western Front.

The worst month for the Allies in the history of air battles was April 1917. Losses were so high that it was named 'Bloody April'. A new pilot at the front had a life expectancy of twenty-four hours. Poorly trained and flying obsolete aircraft, they were no match for the German pilots. Later, in 1917, this turnaround as the Allies brought into battle two new aircraft; the Sopwith Camel and SE5a, which outclassed the German 'Scouts'.

In addition, the Royal Flying Corp (R.F.C), had policies which did not raise a pilot's life expectancy. The first policy was that their pilots were expected to cross the enemy lines and attack the Germans on their side of the line, whereas the Germans would not cross the line and only flew to defend their positions.

Secondly, the Allies had a policy of 'no empty chairs'. This meant that squadron numbers were to be constantly replenished with new pilots. Some pilots were being thrown into battle with as little as five hours' flying time.

Thirdly, Allied pilots were not issued parachutes, as these were seen as an option a pilot would take rather than fight on tenaciously or to avoid hurtling to earth in a burning aircraft

## CHARACTERS

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### **Rosie Lynch**

Rosie is the storyteller, who gives us an insight into herself and her life during WW1. She is the mother of twins Albert and Tom. With Irish origins, she was born and raised in Collingwood. Her features though not traditionally Irish, are black hair, green eyes and a medium build. Throughout the period of the book, she would be mid to late thirties.

She exercises a strong, yet relaxed mothering style, though as for most women of her time, she consults her husband over issues and decisions. Tactful and reflective, she listens to others and cares for them. Though she life is part of working-class, inner-city Melbourne, she is down-to-earth, yet not rough. At outbreak of war she is shocked and confused. When her boys enlist she is angry, helpless and frustrated. On news of early battles she is naïve, but her realism is shown relative to Agnes' ignorance. By end of war she is anti & pacifist, but realistically understands that her boys couldn't have stayed home due to the lack of self-pride and social disapproval they would have had to endure.

### **Reggie**

Reggie, as Rosie's easy going and devoted husband, is her support and source of explanation and sensibility. He is handsome and athletic, yet a man who enjoys a simple life - a home-cooked meal and a beer at a local pub. He brings a sense of reason and humour to his basic life, which involves work in a boot factory in Collingwood. Originally from the bush, he moved to Collingwood where he takes pleasure in a smoke and reading newspapers. It is from his reading of the newspapers that Rosie is able to receive and then present most of the factual information in the story.

At the outbreak of war he is matter of fact, believing and realistic that decisions have been made. He doesn't give opinion; because he knows that it won't change the course of events, which are inevitably been played out. When the boys enlist he is pragmatic and subtly passionate. As he endures horrific news he is frightened and by end of war he is, like many, angry and sick of it, nevertheless proud of his boys. He expresses himself as anti-conscription because of the senseless waste of life and also because of his loyalty to the Irish in the wake of the Irish rebellions in 1916, yet feels that enlistment was the only real option for his sons, but wishes that he could he have gone instead

**Albert**

Albert is Rosie's son and twin to Tom. He is described as looking like his dad, with Rosie's green eyes. The simplest way to describe him is 'gung ho', fun loving, confident and possessing leadership qualities. He is a troublesome in a likeable way. At the end of the war, it is with Albert that Rosie conveys her pain and joys. Together with Reggie, they must adjust to the life challenges that the war has imposed upon them.

**Agnes**

As Rosie's best friend and long-term neighbour, Agnes brings some humour and frivolity to the homes and wider community. She possesses a strong and matter-of-fact aptitude towards her life which hasn't presented too much good fortune to her. She is a much needed character in a time of severe life adjustment.



## SETTING

The opener storyline is set on the events leading to the twin sons enlisting in the war. This sets the point of view for the story firmly around the home and local society of working class Collingwood. The effects on the community, friends and neighbours form the backdrop for the action and dialogue.

*A Woman's War* is told outwards from Rosie's home where she spends most of her week. The story shows how local women on the home front conducted their washing and cooking at home. There is a range of local vistas and activities external to the house, which highlight the fabric of the community, including shopping in Smith Street Collingwood, participation in a Red Cross parcel drive at the Collingwood Town Hall and leisure time at Dight's Falls. Mentions of other places important in and around Melbourne at the time, such as, the Docks, the Block Arcade, Ballarat and the Seymour Training Camp add wide-ranging perspectives.

The story uses historical settings and events to set the big picture, but the focus is on those who remain at its core – in the home and how women, such as Rosie, lived through the War.

## THEMES & ISSUES

<i>Issues present in the novel</i>	<i>Theme highlighted by this issue</i>
Men fighting at the front	Fear, loss, mateship
Employment in factories	Impact on gender roles, life adjustment
Conscription	Political, social and religious pressure
Long waits for and lack of detailed information	Loneliness, the unknown
Shortage of male suitors after of the war	Impact on gender roles
Unable to relate to what their men experienced	Helplessness, empathy, confusion

### **The ANZAC Spirit: Fear & Loss/The Advancement of Women**

On first consideration, one might think that women left at home, would be fairly helpless to the war effort, but it actually was on the contrary. Women during World War 1 (1914-1918) faced the devastation of their men embarking and the irreversible impact of a world war on this country. As our nation embarked on its first experience at war, women harnessed the states of apprehension, sorrow, fear, loneliness and anger into a life-force to deal with the loss and deprivation of war and influence the way Australians then reacted to their country's involvement in a global affair. World War 1 advanced women politically, socially and economically. These home front pioneers exemplified the ANZAC spirit, adapting their lives and contending with controversial social and political issues. They set precedence by; continuing factory output, participating in fund raising and parcel drives, maintaining neighbourhood connectivity, responding to the conscription debate, raising children, and running business and farms.

### **Life Adjustment**

Ask any woman what it really meant – no, ask them what it means - to live through a war and you will be transported to a quite different place in the grand story of marching, valorous, uniformed war history. That is possibly why so few historians have ever asked.

This is a question though still very relevant to many women today, especially those from other cultures who have immigrated to Australia. Refugee women arrive on our shores in search of employment, social acceptance and community spirit. This is an historical story, but it is also a story for today. It is about how women coped and has implications for how they continue to cope.

### **Women on the Home front during war**

'A Woman's War' is a term applied to the realities of the home front keepers. It is generally and historically applied as a little piece of addendum to the praise of men who were directly involved in war. Much is written about the very real contribution and the extraordinary efforts of men in war. Women's power changed after this period and how women influenced the thinking of their men and each other towards war. A woman's world view

and her role as giver of life, fosterer of home and family, keeper of community was shattered and reformed in the First World War. This story looks at the invisible mending, the holding together, the taking-on and the shouldering of responsibilities. This is the story about how these pioneering women in the war years were altered and how women's work unpicked, patched, reconfigured and held together the overall social patterning of Australian society. It shows readers how women divided against the nonsense and hot air of war and how they came together against the waste and the loss and the deprivation that the war brought. Along the way readers are given a deep understanding of that contained horror, the forbearance and humility and the life force which women can and do harness in *extremis*.

### **Helplessness**

The story shows us in chapter after chapter, how Rosie as an icon of all women, grapples with knowledge of the realities of war. There is a marvellous evocation of this division between the facts of war and the realities for women, because of the lack of detailed information available to all at the time. This is story that explores what it feels like to be impotent; too far away to do more than wait and hope... *'the hardest part's the wait'*

### **Mateship & Brotherhood**

Men enlisted with their brothers, cousins, fathers, uncles and friends. Often this was done in groups from the same geographical area. Men felt that it was their duty to do their bit and accompany each other to war. Their women held mixed views.

### **Political, Religious & Social Issues**

Mid way through the story, the backdrop of the Red Cross parcel drive in the Collingwood Town Hall brings into play a range of political diatribe and prevailing ideas of the period. Between the pots of tea and the grinding work the notion of Australia's place in the war is threshed out by the women gathered there.

The underlying implication here is that whilst these women are brought together and are working as one in action, it is not to be assumed that they share the same mind set. Between the tea stirring and the soap-box discussion and the shadows of the church and the chapel pulpit, there is dissension about war and also about Australian's involvement in the war. The still small voice of far more basic reason is also in play. It is in these exchanges that the narrative shows readers how mind-sets were formed and how they were altered. It is this aspect that imparts such a sense of veracity and a unique view. This scene shows how the women who contended with the events of the 1914-18 war were changed and how they contended with and slowly changed the way Australian society considered our involvement in that war and beyond.

The growing apprehensions in Australia were brought to a head with conscription referendums and peace rallies. The portrayals of these personal and political events of the 1914-18 War carry the reader into the character's lives. We can read the strategies and the political facts in a plethora of history books, but through Rosie and her letters from her twin sons this story shows readers how the trenches were and how women's lives were challenged by political, religious and social turmoil.

In summary, the Labour party was anti-conscription in order to protect its workers. The catholic Church was also anti-conscription as an act of solidarity to the Catholic Irish in conflict with Britain in 1916, culminating in 'Bloody Sunday'. Non-Catholics were generally pro-conscription, in support of the 'motherland'.

### **Conscription Debate – a synopsis**

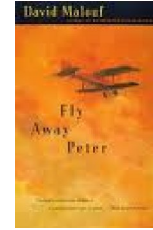
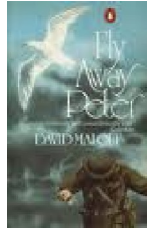
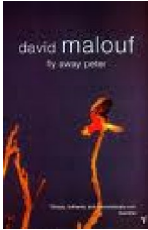
The highly debatable and controversial topic of conscription 'blew up' in Australia, after Britain suffered huge losses on The Somme and called throughout its Commonwealth for more men. The Prime Minister of Australia at the time, William (Billy) Hughes, known as 'The Little Digger', in wanting to support the call of the 'Motherland', created a split in the Labour Party. He was able under the Defence Act, to conscript men, but only for service in Australia, not overseas. The current constitution already gave the government the power to introduce conscription, but Hughes wanted a national opinion poll on the issue.

In the lead up to the 1st referendum, he introduced under the War Precautions Act a ruling against anti conscription material. Lobbying strongly for a 'No' vote were the Trade Unions and the Catholic Archbishop, Dr Daniel Mannix.

Hughes held the first referendum, trusting the result would sway members of the Senate, however on October 28, 1916 Australian's voted 51% against the introduction of compulsory service. At a second referendum, on December 11, 1917, Hughes when expected the nation would take a difference stance, 54% of Australians at home and those fighting in the trenches voted against conscription.

## REFLECTIONS ON *FLY WAY PETER* by David Malouf

*Fly Away Peter* is also a work of Australian Historical fiction set during WW1. In his writing, David Malouf, highlights many binary opposites. *A Woman's War* can be studied in a comparative way.



### Peace vs Destruction

Both novels contrast peace and destruction. In *Fly Way Peter*, there are the visualisations of the peaceful swamp and farmland versus the noise, horror and stench of battlefield. In *A Woman's War*, the tranquility and respite of Rosie's kitchen is literally 'miles away' from the dreadfulness expressed in letters from 'The Front'.

### Nature vs Unnaturalness

Natural urges, exhibited by animals and people are exemplified in both novels. For the main character in *Fly Away Peter*, Jim Saddler, the natural occurrence of bird migration, tides and the moon, conflict with the invasion of machinery on the battlefield. In *A Woman's War*, the natural urge and force of maternal instinct is demonstrated in how women yearn to love, protect and care, distinct to many accounts of men fighting over land and politics.

### Innocence vs Experience

In both books, the innocence that Australians held as they stepped to the line, participating in their first war as a nation is demonstrated. Innocence demands experience and experience erodes innocence. Jim seems to have led a rather sheltered existence, yet he becomes more 'worldly' as he learns about interacting with people. In *A Woman's War*, Rosie's boys flourish on meeting new mates and are recipients of the discipline regime of the army. When she visits them at the training camps, seeing them in their uniforms, they seem far more grown up.

### Men vs Women – Gender Roles.

During WW1, as seen in both novels, it was only men who enlisted as soldiers. Women operated as nurses, Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) and Red Cross volunteers. On the home front the roles and responsibilities for women had to change. Many had to commence employment for the first time or change the nature of the work they did. They moved into roles traditionally granted to men – teaching, clerical and banking. Women also worked in factories maintaining production of items required by the war effort. Some women also had to run a family business or farm, both during and after the war. Others were busy giving birth and raising children by themselves and maintaining community connectivity.

### **Individuality vs Group 'Mateship'**

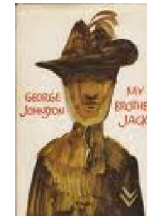
In *Fly Away Peter*, Jim is over-awed by the transitional nature of birds migrating in flocks. In comparison, there are scores of men swayed by the relentless pull of 'mateship', who enlist and 'go over the top' as a group. This is evident in both works of Australian historical war fiction.

### **Status Quo vs Challenge**

Both *Fly Away Peter* and *A Woman's War*, highlight how life requires a journey and the quest for achievement, despite the risks. During the Great War, men from Australia embarked to foreign lands that many would not have otherwise had the means to visit. The migration of the birds demonstrates how they too adventure against the hazards as they fly to foreign lands. Rosie identifies that her boys need to 'spread their wings', but queries that their first trip abroad need be to a battlefield. She too challenges herself on her own home front journey, by reentering the work force and contributing to the collective voice at a peace rally.

## REFLECTIONS ON *MY BROTHER JACK*, by George Johnston

Though *My Brother Jack* is set during WW2, and *A Woman's War* is set during WW1, many themes evident in George Johnston's work are also portrayed in the novel by Jacqueline and John Dinan. Both works of Australian historical fiction are about a family during war time and both are set in Melbourne.



### Brotherhood & Mateship

In *My Brother Jack*, David and his older brother Jack have diverse natures and interests and their individual responses to the outbreak of war are very different. Jack eagerly asks David to use his influence to get him enlisted, but David does not go out of his way to do a favour for his brother. In comparison, the brothers in *A Woman's War*, Albert and Tom, grow up inseparably, then enlist and fight together. Though twins, they are boys with dissimilar personalities, however they still blend as great mates as well as brothers.

### Functionality of Families

The father in *My Brother Jack*, personally suffers dreadful ramifications from WW1. As a result, David and Jack grow up in a house where alcohol and violence is evident and love is devoid. David later has difficulty loving others. Albert and Tom are reared with open communication and have a close relationship with their parents and other people, such as neighbours. Their father supports their enlistment. We also see the characters in *A Woman's War* look out for each other during difficult times.

### Working & Middle Class

In *My Brother Jack*, the father is a tram-driver and in *A Woman's War*, the father is a factory worker. The simplistic lives of both families are indicative of the working class of that era. Despite his origins, David takes a different path and is educated as a journalist and acquires an 'office job', transpiring himself into the 'middle-class'. In *A Woman's War*, the setting of the suburb Collingwood, where poverty was apparent, allows for comparisons to the more-affluent suburb of Kew on the hills above. A female character finds domestic employment in a house in Kew and reports of luxuries such as gas mains to the copper.



## SAMPLE ESSAY TOPIC

*'The hardest part's the wait...'*

Rosie had many challenges to face, many of which new Australian women of today contend with in their lives. Discuss the similarities between Rosie's life and that of a refugee woman assimilating into a life in Australia.

It is almost one hundred years since women endured four horrific years on the home front. We cannot bear to imagine how they withstood farewelling their sons to war, then enduring the agonising wait for often news (often tragic), while responding to the call to also contribute to the war effort. This was an extreme period of life adjustment to which women of generations that followed used as a great example of personal strength and community spirit. Women of today, such as refugees who immigrate to Australia, face their own challenges and they too can draw inspiration from these home front pioneers.

During the 1914-18 war years, women had to adjust their lives, starting with their daily routines and tasks. Up until the war they had been concerned with raising children, household chores and shopping. In general, a married woman was not employed. When the war broke out and men embarked for foreign shores, employment for women rose from 24% to 37% in the later years of the conflict. Demand even took them into work areas traditionally held by men, such as clerical and teaching. Today, life adjustment is also a pivotal point for refugee women when they arrive on our shores. The women might find that the type of work that they undertook in their homeland may not be available in the same capacity in this country, so they have to develop new skills. Many also need to search for employment and the main challenge is language barriers and fitting in to Australian work environments and cultures.

Both at and away from work, establishing group acceptance and a sense of community is also necessary for a person's social, mental and emotional health. When they first arrive, many refugees converge in a geographic area and socialise amongst themselves, however the multicultural nature of our society necessitates that they are in contact with many other cultures. There are services such as neighbourhood houses, mother groups and sporting clubs, which avail them to social interaction for mothers. Back in 1914 though, women were really too preoccupied with more essential chores and the need to address them was achieved in environments that also satisfied some social requirements for women. We see in *A Woman's War* that community service groups such as the Women's Peace Army and the Red Cross both rallied women together for their cause. The Red Cross in Australia is recorded as having 82,000 women involved during the course of the war and their duties included nursing soldiers, packaging comfort parcels and raising funds. Such activities brought women together with activities as simple as knitting groups and this would have been a much needed platform for company during those long weeks of wait between letters.

Communication back in 1914 was slow. Letters from the Western Front took four to six weeks and telegrams, though relatively quick, were brief and impersonal. Majority of people did not have household telephones and the main source of public information was the morning and evening newspapers. Regardless of what communication was available, there were many instances of the army simply not having any more to report than, 'missing in action', due to the sheer immensity of battles and the chaos about them. Many refugees have fled here to escape war-torn countries and anarchy. Communication and social organisation in their 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries may too mean that they have difficulty keeping in touch with friends and family. Mail may not even get through. Though the internet is a 'given' here in Australia, it may not be available back in the countries from which they originated. Refugees are often dependent on embassies and government agencies, so communication would be impersonal and restricted.

Judgement was something experienced by the Australian women on the home front during WW1 and also by refugee women today. During the 'Great War' as it was originally referred to, women who had a son not enlisted, were given a white feather as a symbol of cowardice, yet those with a son away fighting were given a ribbon, which was like a badge of honour. Refugee women today are judged, though in a very different way. The colour of their skin, dress and diet is so diverse to the anglo-saxon Australia that judgement, assimilation and trust is more reliant on understanding and accepting their differences.

Australia is a very different place to what it was almost one hundred years ago and our immigrants have played large part in its progression. Life today for all women can be challenging, but by looking back at the life adjustment that our home front pioneers endured during the 1914-1918 war years, we can better understand and help tackle the hardships that refugee women face when they arrive in Australia.

## SUGGESTED CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. Read pages 137-142 where various women give their views on conscription. Stage a debate between students about the pros and cons of the introduction of compulsory service.
2. Research various aspects of Pozieres, northern France – both today and in 1916. Perhaps email a school there (or the ‘Tommy Cafe/Museum’)
  - location and topography
  - industry and the rebuilding of the economy and infrastructure in Europe
  - population
  - battle statistics and the significance of this battle to the stalemate on the Western Front
3. Read pages 13-14 about Rosie’s reaction towards her son’s racing off to the docks to see the first troops embark. Discuss her feeling of helplessness and how the relationship between parents and children evolves.
4. Make a propaganda poster on either side of the debate
5. Have students work in pairs to explore a service record of someone in their family who served in WW1. If this is not applicable, select a name of a former student of the school or a name from a local monument. It would also be interesting if a student had a family member who fought for Turkey or Germany.
6. Have students prepare a presentation about a member of the A.I.F. who was awarded a medal of valour such as Victoria Cross or a Military Medal.
7. Encourage students to ask their grandmothers to explain the process of washing clothes in a ‘copper’.
8. Visit the local R.S.L. for a Q&A session. Offer to volunteer time in anyway.
9. Discuss the challenges faced by various groups during the war; soldiers, fathers, leaders of countries, mothers, wives, primary and secondary producers, siblings, children etc.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

### **Jacqueline Dinan**

Currently, Jacqueline is primarily raising her three sons. In 1999, Jacqueline started up her own public relations consultancy, Eventive, specialising in media relations and event management. Her range of clients has always presented her with an array of projects, thus giving Jacqueline the opportunity to research and write about different topics. Before setting up her own business, Jacqueline was employed by a corporate public relations consultancy. Prior to that, she worked in the human resources department of a multinational company.

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### **John Dinan**

For decades John has read about the two world wars. John has developed an immense knowledge of and respect for WW1 history and is particularly interested in the air war above northern France. He draws personal inspiration from the courage and tenacity shown by the men involved. Courage and tenacity were traits he displayed in competing in athletics, culminating in winning the prestigious Stawell Gift in 1980 and representing Australia in the 1986 Commonwealth Games, as well as at several other international track meets. Professionally, John is employed in the financial services industry.