THE SERVICE, DEATH AND MEMORIALIZATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER ON THE WESTERN FRONT, 1916: AN INTERPRETATION

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This thesis is presented for the Honours degree of History at Murdoch University, 2013. I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution, including Murdoch.

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ABSTRACT

Charles Snell left Western Australia to work in New South Wales and, while there, enlisted in the AIF to fight and die in the Great War. He was an ordinary soldier who served King and country by means of intense physical effort and who made the most of every situation. He and his family left an extensive written record of his service and death, and the family’s subsequent journey through grief. This record will be examined in the broader context of the Great War in order to illustrate the experience of the ‘other ranks’. It will challenge the notion that the narrative of the wartime experience of the ordinary soldier can only be told through the lens of horror and bloodshed. It will also demonstrate that the story of the work of the ordinary soldier has much to tell us about interactions within the military and cultural environments of the time. The thesis will examine the identity of the soldier, his war service, his wounding, death and burial and the process of memorialization. In so doing it will provide a portrait of the soldier, his family and his community and will disprove the statement that ‘averages are too colourless … to represent concrete experience’.¹

ABBREVIATIONS

AJS  Alfred James Snell, father
CAS  Caroline Amelia Snell, mother
C.S  Charles Snell
AIF  Australian Infantry Forces
AWM  Australian War Memorial
FAB  Field Artillery Battery
IWM  Imperial War Museum
KIA  Killed in action
NAA  National Archives of Australia
POB  Place of birth
RTA  Returned to Australia
TMB  Trench Mortar Battery
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‘We should of all things like to know ... how Charlie met his death and where ... if you could ... gather any particulars of the circumstances attending his injuries – and death – I should be exceedingly grateful.

Alfred J. Snell, 1916

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis will explore the service and death of an Australian Soldier, 3911 Charles Snell, on the Western Front in 1916 and the consequences for family and friends. Private Charles Snell is characterized by a strong sense of family, community and duty. Family and community relationships enabled him to go to fight and die, whilst family and community were left to endure the loss together. It is the study of a man and his family, typical of their era who espoused a sense of duty, love of country, idealism and service to God; and of their motivation to fight the battles of a distant ‘home’ country.

The themes of this study are - an Australian of British origin and his life prior to enlistment - the sequence of events from his enlistment to his injury, death and burial - the receipt and dissemination of information regarding his death - memorializing of the soldier.

It is a story of loss: the loss of an individual and loss to a family and community. Focusing on the individual can assist us to identify what was lost by the community
as a result of his death.\textsuperscript{2} Letters and other supporting documents which depict the life and death of Charles Snell reflect universal themes: the individual and the family, their daily cares, interests and aspirations, community, duty, honour and faith in God. Luckins has stated that ‘\textit{the Great War is best understood ... as a matter of shared experience and human relationships ...}’ and we can apply this concept to an examination of the service and death in war of our subject. \textsuperscript{3}

Charles Snell was an Australian citizen of British origin with close family ties to Britain and firm religious beliefs. He had a strong sense of family and community despite its wide dispersal. He was a member of communities in Bunbury and Harvey WA; Glen Innes and Sydney, NSW, and the United Kingdom. He formed part of the military community through his enlistment in the Australian Infantry Force which became an element in the British Expeditionary Force.

Snell was a typical soldier in the sense that he was like his fellows in a significant number of ways: although he was born neither in Australia nor in the UK, he was of British stock, he was absent from his home state at the time of his enlistment, and he was a loyal subject of the King. He was religious and literate, and he enlisted for reasons which were typical of the reasons why Australian men joined the forces. Snell had a dual identity: he was British by family ties, and Australian by the qualities his life experience had reinforced in him. However, a British person would have recognized his human values.\textsuperscript{4} In seeking to further identify Snell’s personal characteristics, we will look at his siblings and associates for clues as to what he might have become had he survived the war.

\textsuperscript{p. 12}


The fact that both Bunbury and Glen Innes were rural centres at the time makes Snell a rural inhabitant. Compared with Britain, Australia was, to quote Bean, at heart rural. Bunbury, where Snell spent his formative years, despite having a mayor, had a population of only 2,500. This would have been considered a village in England at the time, and it enabled Snell and his fellow Australians to identify closely with the French country people, as we shall see. The setting, therefore, is broadly geographic. Many places were integral to the life of Charles Snell, in locations ranging from Western Australia to New South Wales, England, Siam, Egypt and France.

The aim of the present work is to tell the story the soldier was unable to tell and to examine what this man’s experience has to tell us of the war service of other Australians. By analyzing the text of a previously unexamined set of primary sources on the war on the Western Front, we can place them in a broader context and integrate them with existing literature on the subject.

World War 1 has been exhaustively described, analysed, justified and condemned. It has been examined from all possible perspectives: historical, political, economic, technological, medical, psychological, sociological, cultural, literary and ethical. Subjects examined include the political background, chronology, the nature of the individual combatants and the belligerent powers, the organizational procedures, changing technology, death, injury and medicine, women, the home front, mourning and memory. Memoirs of privates, nurses, politicians and generals in addition to the innumerable official records held in archives help to illuminate the narrative.

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General studies use the surviving documents of ordinary individuals and groups to tell the battle stories, the contribution of various units and the Australian contribution to the war. The complete physical experience of the individual has also been reconstructed from an exhaustive search of available evidence.\(^7\) Whilst memoirs of individuals abound, there is less evidence of ‘reconstructed’ experience in the form of third person narratives of individuals.

The Snell family had an incomplete account of their son’s service and death in his letters, official communication and witness statements.\(^8\) They wanted a complete account. It would have been beyond the resources available at the time to construct such an account: they could only have pieced together a story based on newspaper reports and the reports of acquaintances, and request that officialdom fill in the remainder, but these official agencies, too, had limited resources. Rudyard Kipling sought to locate his missing son: he had resources and immediate access to people, places and records, yet even he was unable to account for his son’s death and thereby find his remains.\(^9\)

The work is an attempt to reconstruct in detail the experience of an individual soldier who, although he wrote home regularly, reassuring his family and himself that he would survive, and retaining his focus on his future, he concealed, both voluntarily and involuntarily, the full truth of his situation. The physical evidence would have immediately made some of the hidden truths evident to his family, yet it is apparent that Snell would not have wanted the family to know all the details of the conditions he was enduring whilst in France. The focus here, therefore, will be on


the ‘work’ that he did, and his experiences in the military and French communities, and on his final days and hours, of which he himself left no written record.

Although at the time, details were unavailable to the family, the many forms of documentary evidence which were kept indicate a willingness by the authorities for the truth to be known, and acknowledgement by the Australian government that history was being made and that people would want to know the story of their family member’s service.

In order to answer some of the questions that were unanswerable at the time an interpretation of the service and death of this soldier has been constructed from the now readily available sources, whilst seeking to protect the family’s belief that their son’s death and their sacrifice were worthwhile.

1.2 A Note on Methodology

Taking the letters and documents of an Australian soldier and using them to create a retrospective account of his war enables us to view the life and death of one soldier as a representative of the 60,000 or so Australian soldiers who died in World War 1. By exploring some of the literature of the war, from the general accounts of the causes and conduct of the war, to personal accounts of the participants, focusing on the ‘ordinary’ soldier, we can create a modern interpretation of the war as it was experienced by one man and his family.

Holmes, in the introduction to ‘The Foljambe Family and the Great War,’ wrote: ‘the generation that endured the Great War was strikingly literate.’ He added: ‘the use of unit war diaries helps put individual stories into collective perspective.’ Plumb suggests that with skillful editing, the life of the man can be recreated in his own

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words. However, although Snell’s own words have been used, it is more accurate to say that what follows is a recreation of the life from a modern perspective.\textsuperscript{11}

Biographies of the great and famous abound, of the generals, Haig, Rawlinson White, and Gough, Monash, Birdwood and to the more humble, yet heroic such as the clergy and individuals who won medals for their actions. Birmingham’s bringing to life of the story of Humphrey Francis Humphreys through his letters, Jackson’s telling of the Foljambe family’s wartime experience and Fiennes’ narrative of his grandfather’s life at war all use letters and diaries to tell the story of a family or an individual at war; that is, to take available evidence and to put it in a broader context. Tuchman, the biographer, suggests that even the ‘average’ person can be sufficiently non-typical to be distinctive and memorable.\textsuperscript{12}

Snell’s story is that of a man who set out to do his duty. He followed orders and was law abiding, yet he appreciated those who were not like him. He was from a typically loving family who shared the wartime anxieties of other community members, to the extent that his mother had been taken to hospital on the day that news of his death arrived, possibly already sensing his loss.

Personal stories of individuals and families and their daily struggles retain their interest and their ability to enrich the lives of others. As well as those who can identify directly with the subject, this subject relates to life and death on the Western Front and life on the Home Front. The focus is on the interpretation of events on the Western Front for an individual as a component of the Australian experience of the war, which has relevance for the present time because it sheds light on a significant aspect of Australia’s past.


Despite his close ties with Britain, Snell exhibited Australian attitudes and personal characteristics, so the perspective of the present study is Australian. Australians went to war generally united in their belief that they had a duty to support the mother country in her hour of need, and it was in the pursuit of this belief that Charles Snell died. It is not the purpose of this work to criticise the causes or conduct of the war, to write a military history or to use Snell’s life to construct some sort of Australian national identity. The aim is rather to bring to life the story of a man, who, long after his death, remained a presence in the life of his family.

Chapter 2 will explore the identity of the soldier; Chapter 3 will examine his war service in France; Chapter 4 will look at his wounding, death and burial; Chapter 5 will detail the notification of the family and their search for confirmation of his death; and Chapter 6 will examine the way in which condolence letters act as a memorial to the soldier. In so doing we will have created a narrative of the service and death of a typical Australian soldier.

Numbers are rounded and Imperial measures are used throughout this thesis.

1.3 Literature Review

In order to place the service and death of Charles Snell in its military context, it has been necessary to examine World War 1 at various levels, from the general, to the more specific: the part played by the Australians on the Western Front, the effects on the soldiers themselves, and the consequences for the Australian community. Personal documents, both official and unofficial help to create a full account of the consequences of the war for one soldier and his family.


Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory, P. 14
1.3.1 Primary Sources

Primary sources for Private Charles Snell and his associates are supplemented by official records and unit diaries in the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives of Australia, and the Imperial War Museum in Britain. Local and regional organizations which hold records include the Australind Family History Society, the Battye Library of Western Australia, the Bunbury Museum and Library and the Harvey and Glen Innes Historical Societies.

The Charles Snell Archive contains papers and letters from Glen Innes and Sydney NSW, and from Egypt and the Western Front in France. The archive includes letters from friends and family in Western Australia, New South Wales, New Zealand, Siam, England and Scotland.14

Charles Snell’s Service Record contains all sources generated by the AIF from the time of his enlistment in Armidale, NSW and continues until all requirements for the notification of death and issue of medals are complete.15 The Red Cross Wounded and Missing File for Snell contains medical records, letters of enquiry and witness statements.16 These records are in some aspects more extensive than the Service Record and include a statement from the chaplain in attendance at the Casualty Clearing Station 44.17 The National Archives of Australia contain the service records of all servicemen and assist in in the construction of a picture of the men with whom


16 (1916-1917). Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-18 War, 1DRL/0428, 3911 Private Charles Snell, 4th Battalion. Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files. London. 1DRL/0428: 19

Snell served. First Brigade AIF, 4th Battalion and Signal Company diaries have helped to recreate the official context of Snell’s service.

First hand accounts of service on the Western Front expand on the information contained in Snell’s letters. Battalion histories such as Belford’s history of the 11th Battalion, is an anecdotal account by a former battalion member, which details the action in France and provides information on some of Snell’s friends.18 The history of the 4th Battalion, written relatively recently is a much more general account, but nevertheless is a useful reference for the movements of Snell’s own battalion.

Hartnett and Lynch, both ordinary Australian soldiers, kept diaries which were later edited and published.19 Both describe life in the trenches and behind the lines, providing further elucidation of Snell’s wartime activities. Maze, a Frenchman who worked for General Gough provides a unique view of the Australians and fills in gaps left by Snell.20

The memoir of a Medical officer who served as a medical practitioner in a casualty clearing station on the Western Front and the diary of Casualty Clearing Station 44 assist in evaluating Snell’s medical records.21

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1.3.2 Secondary Sources: General Texts

General texts provide the military context for Snell’s actions, and the following books have been useful in this regard.

Gilbert provides a chronological overview of the war, including the Western Front and places the rôle of the Australians in the broader context of the war.\(^{22}\) Sheffield gives a detailed account of the sequence of the events, the motivations and planning for the Somme offensive, while Bennett explores the motivations for and the planning and execution of the Battle of Pozières from an Australia perspective.\(^{23}\)

Bean’s official history of the Australian contribution the war gives a detailed account of the preparation for the Battle of Pozières in which Snell was killed and continues where he left off his writing.\(^{24}\) Bean and Gullett’s photographic record provides a visual perspective on Snell’s written evidence, while Pedersen’s battlefront guidebook enables the location of places mentioned by Snell’s diary and official diaries.\(^{25}\) Robson provides some statistics on those who enlisted in the AIF, which enables us to place Snell into the broader context of all those who served.\(^{26}\)

Van Bergen seeks to document everything that could happen to a soldier from embarkation to death and burial and enables a reconstruction of Snell’s final hours.


and death. Wilson’s article shows how soldiers developed ways of coping with the task of burying the dead and provides some reassurance that, where possible, a man was suitably honoured at his burial.

1.3.3 Historiography of the War

Winter identifies three overlapping periods of writing about the war, from the initial focus on the experience of elites, to the later inclusion of ordinary people, followed by a more recent move into the realm of traumatic memory. An examination of all three stages has been useful in reconstructing the life and death of an individual soldier.

1.3.4 Recent Assessments of the Western Front Battles

These books offer a different perspective on the war from those of the earlier post-war years, suggesting that the war was part of a necessary sequence of events.

Ferguson introduces his work by referring to his unknown grandfather who died in World War 1 and explores the causes, conduct and consequences of the war, highlighting the pain of losing a child. Sheffield argues that allied victory in WW1 was essential to later peace. In providing a clear picture of why the war was fought


he negates the argument that the war was a waste of human life and achieved nothing. Philpott provides a modern reassessment of the Battle of the Somme and places it as an essential component of the final victory of the Allies on the Western Front.  

1.3.5 Grief and Mourning

Secondary sources which document the anguish of uncertainty and the search for clues to their relative’s fate have parallels in the family of Charles Snell. The subject of grief and memory has been examined extensively in both Australia and Britain, and many sources explore the notion of universal bereavement, themes which are relevant to the Snell family.

Le Naour examines the search for the identity of a French amnesiac following WW1, providing a detailed example of the effects that grief and loss can have. Cannadine and Jalland, in their studies of death in British society, explore how the trauma of World War 1 changed attitudes to death and mourning, where home burial and a proper farewell were impossible. In the condolence letters, forms of consolation were belief in God, time, memory and sympathy, and for many, the belief in happy family reunion ‘on the other side’. In the Australian context, Crotty and Larsson, Damousi and Luckins all use personal accounts of death and mourning to explore the social and cultural effects of losses of Australians in World War 1.

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In the introduction to the *History of the Irish Guards in the Great War*, an article describes how Kipling had used his influence to enable his son to enlist in the Army, and then spent years investigating his loss, thus illustrating the anxiety of grieving relatives to know details of their loved one’s death and burial.  

### 1.3.6 West Australian History

Two books which have helped to create a picture of the prewar community life of the Snell family in Western Australia are Adams’ biography of Newton Moore, a West Australian who grew up in Bunbury, served as state Premier and then moved to London and became a significant figure for Australian troops in Britain; and Caddy’s biography of a Harvey man who knew Snell prior to his departure for NSW and supports Snell’s own accounts of their meetings in France.

### 1.3.7 Methodology Sources

Meyer’s and Bridgewater’s analyses of the letters and diaries of servicemen provide a framework for examining the Snell archive and for exploring the various communities of which he and his family were members and the military context for his activities. Fiennes based his writing on papers and memories of his grandfather who had been an army chaplain in France in a modern, though limited,

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36 Kipling, (1923), *The Irish Guards in the Great War*,


No page numbers are given in this document.


reconstruction of the service of a member of the Allied forces. Williamson also discusses how he recreated the short military career of a family member, providing another model for the recreation stories of family members who participated in the war.

Durey examined changing In Memoriam notices inserted by a war widow over a period of several decades, and put them in the context of the stages of grief and his subject’s perceptions of the changing world. The article provides a useful model for the study of the lesser known players in history, while Ziino discusses the publication of memoirs of World War 1, which were initially prompted by the desire to create a memorial to the fallen, and later, by the recognition of the necessity of capturing the memories of fading lives for descendants and future generations.

Having examined the literature relevant to the recreation of the service and death of an Australian soldier, we will now apply this to our subject in order to answer the questions of his grieving family.

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39 Fiennes, (2011), To War with God.


2 WHO WAS THE SOLDIER?

In examining the question ‘who was the soldier’ we must come to the conclusion that Charles Snell was typical in almost every way, the exception being his place of birth. We will see that this affected him in that he was naturally drawn to others of foreign birth, especially English. He also came to serve in the AIF for reasons that were representative of his times. Having enlisted, the scene was then set for his death. He was to be one of 295 000 Australians who fought, and the 46 000 who died on the Western Front.\(^\text{43}\)

Charles Snell had grown up in a warm social environment which was later enhanced by the drawing together of the community around those who departed to serve and die for their God, king and country. He was intelligent, principled, lively and ‘strikingly’ literate, and his death in war was an irreparable loss to many\(^\text{44}\). His

\(^{43}\) dvamedia@dva.gov.au, 19.10.2013

\(^{44}\) Prof. Richard Holmes in the introduction to The Foljambe Family and the Great War states: ‘the generation that endured the Great War was strikingly literate.’ P. 6
writings offer acute observations of landscapes, people and social situations and reflect the themes identified by Meyer in her study *Men of War*.  

2.1 Family and Early Life

Although Charles Snell’s family was English, he was born in Singapore, where his father, Alfred James Snell, served as Superintendent of Railways in the Malay States from 1889 until 1894. He, with his parents and brother, and later a sister, then moved via New Zealand to Bunbury, Western Australia, where Mr Snell senior was Superintendent of Railways, before finally moving to Harvey in 1912, where they remained until their deaths in 1935 and 1936. Snell was five years old when he arrived in Australia.

The family maintained close links with the family in Britain, and there exists correspondence from Snell’s grandparents and an aunt in Britain (with whom Snell

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46 *Snell Collection.*
later developed a constant correspondence), a cousin in Newton Abbot, a family friend in Scotland and various others: the Jeffersons, Sir Newton Moore and a childhood friend, Wedd Tuxford, who all returned to England for extended periods. Snell’s letters make frequent reference to his expectation of a visit ‘home’, to Britain during or after the war.\(^{47}\) It is noticeable, too, when examining details of men whom Snell mentions in his letters, that the majority are British born.

In 1914, at the age of 22, Snell moved to Sydney and later Glen Innes NSW to work as an orchardist and lecturer at the Experiment Farm there.\(^{48}\) There he enjoyed a lively social life and was ‘adopted’ by the local community.

He became unofficially engaged to Gladys Whatham who had been born in Glen Innes but had moved with her mother to Sydney by the time Snell was in training there. Although he believed that marriage prior to the war was inadvisable, his father having advised him not to rush into marriage, he clearly intended to marry her on his return. He was critical of those who rushed into marriage before going to war, and believed he should have an income of 200 pounds a year and a home to offer a wife, demonstrating Meyer’s concept of the economic provider as a means of boosting morale and maintaining links to the identities the men had left behind.\(^{49}\). Snell’s letters make clear that there were several women who were romantically interested in him.\(^{50}\) Gladys later married a returned soldier known to Snell.\(^{51}\)

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\(^{47}\) Austin, R. (2007). *The Fighting Fourth: Sydney’s Fourth Battalion* Melbourne, Australia, Slouch Hat Publications. P. 53. ‘Britain was still home to many Australians’

\(^{48}\) Now the Glen Innes Agricultural Research and Advisory Station www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/research/centres/glen-innes/history

\(^{49}\) Meyer, *Men of War*, Pp. 38, 45

\(^{50}\) Snell Collection, Letter home 14.2.1915


; Snell’s mother and sister, had visited Gladys Whatham in Sydney
2.2 Enlistment in the A.I.F.

Austin lists enlistment in the AIF as a means of travel, a source of adventure, escape from dreary lives and the possibility of secure employment, as well as patriotism and duty.\textsuperscript{52} Snell’s life at the time was sufficiently exciting and interesting, so his principal reasons for enlisting, on 12\textsuperscript{th} August 1915 at the Armidale Recruiting Depot, were a sense of duty and fear of bringing censure on himself or his family.\textsuperscript{53} He was initially placed in the 6\textsuperscript{th} Battalion but transferred to the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion on arrival in Sydney.\textsuperscript{54} Since the Snell family had close ties with family in Britain, Snell clearly thought of himself as English, so it was logical for him to enlist to fight for the mother country.

Snell was one of the 13% of Australians who enlisted and one of the 98% who were of English, Scottish or Irish descent.\textsuperscript{55}

Robson summarizes the statistics for those who enlisted in the First AIF.\textsuperscript{56} When he enlisted Snell was one of 3% who had been born in a place other than Britain or Australia, although he could have been British born since his elder brother had been born in Britain prior to their father going to work in the Malay States.\textsuperscript{57} Austin states that 60% of the original 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion were British born, and the commanding officer, Lt Col. McNaghton, himself born in India and British educated, had established the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion pipe band because of the numerous Scots and Irish in the Battalion.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{52} Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P. 11
\textsuperscript{53} Snell Collection, Letter to family, 24.7.1915
\textsuperscript{54} Snell Collection, Letter to family, 28.9.1915
\textsuperscript{56} Bennett, (2012), Pozières, the Anzac Story, Pp. 46,49.
\textsuperscript{57} Robson, (1973), The Origin and Character of the First AIF, 1914 – 1918, P. 740
\textsuperscript{58} Their mother was said to have given their father an ultimatum that he should return to London, or bring the family to join him, and Charlie was born after the family was reunited in Singapore. Nancy Sherwood (Snell), personal communication, Snell Collection, Birth Certificate; Robson, (1973), The Origin and Character of the First AIF, 1914 – 1918, P. 740
\textsuperscript{59} Lt Col. C.M McNaghton CMG, perhaps one of the less ‘average’ Australian soldiers, wounded at Gallipoli, rose to be Camp Commandant, Tel-el-Kebir, before being repatriated to Australia for health reasons, and re-enlisting as a private under a different name, (although the army soon discovered his deception) rising to the rank of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant.
http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macnaghten-charles-melville-7426,
On attestation Snell gave his religion as Presbyterian, although the family were Anglican, his sister devoutly so, making him one of 14% of enlistments, or 47% if he had stated that his religion was Anglican.\(^{59}\) It is possible that he became Presbyterian during his time in Glen Innes, under its Scottish influence.\(^{60}\)

He gave his occupation as orchardist, making him one of Robson’s 17% primary workers (excluding mining). This is interesting in that at the time he left Harvey, horticulture was struggling, and it was while he was in Glenn Innes that irrigation was brought to Harvey, boosting orchard production.\(^{61}\)

At 24, his age made him one of 38% in the 20-24 year old age group, which was significant in that the government had initially hoped to recruit men old enough to have had significant training in the citizen forces, as had Snell with his three years compulsory military training.\(^{62}\)

Snell enlisted in NSW, making him one of 37% of enlistments, although, again, this is ambiguous in his case because his home state was WA. Anecdotal evidence suggests

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\(^{60}\) http://www.gleninnestourism.com/pages/history/


; *Snell Collection*, Snell keenly observed irrigation practices whilst in Egypt

that there was significant movement between states at this time, and many soldiers gave the address of next of kin in another state from where they enlisted.

His date of enlistment makes him one of the second wave of enlistments identified by Robson as 50% of total enlistments, as Snell delayed his enlistment while he considered his duties. Robson states that a significant number of his sample were NCOs at some time during their service, Snell being Acting Corporal whilst he was in the reinforcements in Sydney and Egypt, reverting to private when they joined the main force. Although he had given his occupation as ‘orchardist’, it is clear from his letters that he was acting as lecturer at the Experimental Farm, which, if noted, could have resulted in him being offered a commission. During Snell’s time as acting corporal he passed the corporal’s examinations, was in charge of 16 men, (out of 15000 in camp) and commented that he was ‘trying to keep (his) stripes’. However, he noted that a ‘devil of a lot of influence is used to get promotion’. Despite this there was ‘no reason for being down hearted, (among these) rough and ready jovial good fellows’.64

Robson discusses Bean’s ‘bush’ motif, of which Snell was a representative, working as he was on the Experimental Farm at Glen Innes at the time of his enlistment. Bean emphasised the qualities and assumptions that the rural men took with them into the AIF. Letters written by both Snell and his brother make this clear, and it is clear too, that besides being expert shots they were also fine horsemen.

The lives of Snell’s brother Alf, and Alf’s own son, Charlie suggest what Snell might have become: both were avid naturalists, and Alf went on to become the ‘expert’ (mechanic) for a shearing team roaming the outback, and when he wasn’t at work,
spent his time hunting for rock specimens, animals, insects and aquatic life. In his retirement, Alf spent his days polishing his rock specimens, organizing his collections, corresponding with experts on marine worms, native bees and lampreys, and making galvanized iron trunks for shearsers, capable of being thrown on and off the vehicles without risk of damage. Both father and son were respected in their various fields, and it is certain that Snell, too, would have found an interesting and productive path through life, and had he retained something of the frame of mind in which he wrote his letters, would have delighted in sharing his wartime experiences with family and friends.

Both of Snell’s siblings spoke with English accents, as did Snell’s sister-in-law and her brothers, so we can assume that Snell too would have sounded English, and the friends he named were almost all of British birth.

Robson discusses Bean’s depiction of the inquisitive nature of the men and keen awareness of their surroundings. Snell’s letters make it abundantly evident that he exemplified this, with his intense interest in everything that he saw and his desire to talk to as many people as possible, whether still in Australia, en route or in Egypt and France. Bean’s (quoted by Robson) description of men crowding around downed aircraft to inspect their workings is echoed by Snell’s depiction of a visit to an aerodrome to inspect the ‘planes’, as ‘a sight worth seeing’ and he details the 8 cylinder engines, the 100 horsepower motors made by Daimler and Austin, and the cost of up to 900 pounds.

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67 Alf Snell had insects and a blind shrimp named after him; The West Australian: Charles Snell junior had a snake named after him; he was responsible for the very significant tree plantings in Mt Newman; he was an initiated member of one of the aboriginal skin groups and assisted as interpreter in the highly publicised trial of an Aboriginal death in custody; Their sister exemplified the English lady, having been accustomed to having servants whilst living in Bangkok.

68 The author is in possession of a collection of the correspondence of Alf Snell, which includes letters to and from the major universities and museums in Australia, and a reference to some of his specimens being sent to Harvard University.

69 Robson, The Origin and Character of the First A.I.F., 746

2.3 Attitude to the War

Snell’s attitude to the war combines excited anticipation and cautious preparation with an element of ambivalence towards his fellow servicemen.

Although he was ‘anxious to get into the business part of it’ and would ‘rather be here than letting someone else fight my battles’, he knew that he had ‘a good name to keep up and (I) intend doing it’. He expressed pride in being in the firing party for a funeral and in leading a procession through the crowds in Sydney.71 He expressed his sense of excitement in his lament that he ‘didn’t have a few hours longer with Dad and Alf’ in Fremantle - he had ‘so much more to tell them’.

Snell took the precaution of making a will and discussed the details with his father, noting that the solicitors refused to take money from the men who were going off to fight on their behalf. He consciously made the best of his time while in Sydney prior to embarkation, in preparation for not having such opportunities after sailing, but he felt that luck was with him.72 He described how he was uninjured while in a train crash involving 600 men returning from Sydney, although, as we will see, he later cautioned his brother against wishing to be with him in France.73

In applying to join the Australian Medical Corps and, later, the signal company, Snell appeared to be trying to avoid fighting. Later still he applied for the position of motor ambulance driver.74 However, he cannot be accused of cowardice since these tasks were in themselves highly dangerous. He did serve some time with the signal

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72 Snell Collection, Letter home 31.10.1915
73 On 14th - 15th December a train carrying 600 troops returning from Sydney crashed through the barrier at Liverpool Station. Although the incident itself was serious, no deaths were reported. The Adelaide Advertiser http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/8669531(1915). Train Crashes into Dead-end, 600 Soldiers Aboard. Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide.
74 Snell Collection, C.S. diary 9.7.1916, since he had obtained a motor driving license whilst in Sydney.
company, but withdrew his application for the AMC because he had ‘seen enough of their carrying on to do me’. 75 He encountered a Bunbury friend in Sydney and noted that they ‘talked for three hours’. Higgins had been at the front and it ‘wasn’t too bad’. 76

About his fellow soldiers, though, he expresses some reservations, notwithstanding his earlier comment. He described their as trench digging ‘poor work, a lot will fall into the trenches with lump of lead in them’, ‘this camp is ruining many a good man’, and after a tour of picquet duty to Sydney to round up drunken men, among a party of men who were ‘close to 6 feet’, he commented on ‘a soldier’s temptations... (I) could write a book’. 77

So here, we have drawn a picture of the ‘ordinary’, yet not so ordinary, Australian who was going to France to do his duty for his country and meet his death in war.

3 WAR SERVICE

The aim in describing Snell’s war service is to establish the degree of risk to which he was exposed and the inevitability of him being wounded or killed. Training aimed to teach him to kill as many of the enemy as possible rather than protecting his own life. Trenches enabled the killing of the enemy while offering a degree of protection. Entering no man’s land and digging new trenches immediately exposed the men to the risk of death. Signallers and stretcher-bearers themselves had high mortality rates, and Snell served in both these rôles. 78
Snell, in D Company of the 4th Battalion, 1st Brigade, was one of 42000 troops in the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, while those two divisions were in the north of France and a further 47000 in 4th and 5th divisions which came later. The British already had 50 divisions in France at that time. Although the Australians were initially in a relatively quiet sector, there were periods of sharp fighting, shelling and some heavy raids. Between early April and the end of June over 600 men had been killed. Of the nearly four months that Snell was to spend in France until the time of his death, he and his fellow members of the 4th battalion were to spend much of their time training behind the lines and nearly one month in the firing line and in the support trenches.

Snell embarked on TS Medic in Sydney on 7th January 1916, arriving Fremantle 16th. After seeing his father and brother in Fremantle, his convoy left Fremantle and crossed the Indian Ocean, depositing the men in Alexandria on 17th February.

The original 4th Battalion had taken part in the Anzac landing on 25th April 1915 and had served at Gallipoli. On their return to Egypt reinforcements were taken on, among them Acting Corporal Snell, a member of the 12th Reinforcements, under the command of Lt, later Captain, Percy Hay. On joining the larger force, Snell reverted to the rank of private.

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82 Snell Collection, Diary, 4.2.1916
84 Snell Collection, Diary, n.d.
85 As did Dugald Leitch of the 11th Battalion, a fellow resident of Harvey, WA, whom Snell was to meet in France.
During their six weeks in Egypt until the end of March 1916, the men underwent arduous training and soon, the first deaths were occurring, due to illness.  

On their arrival in France, the Australians were based in the northern sector of the Western Front, holding a ten-mile section of the line from Fromelles in the south to Armentières and the River Lys in the north, in what was known as the Nursery Sector.  

(See maps 1 and 2 on the following page.) During Snell’s time there the action increased considerably and the men were immediately made aware of their proximity to the front line, where ‘*wonderful things were happening*’, by the sound and vibration of the big guns.

### 3.1 Behind the Lines

Much of the time in the area around Armentières was spent behind the lines, the principal activities being training, route marches, fatigues (duties) and trench digging, always under fire. The men quickly learnt to identify whether its direction was a source of danger to them. Snell provided his family with a detailed account of his time behind the lines however, in the present work it will be necessary to focus on the military aspects of his communication.

The area where the Australians spent their first three months in France is shown on maps 1 and 2.

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86 *Snell Collection, letters*

87 Pedersen, (2012), *ANZACS on the Western Front*, P. 1


89 Lynch, (2006), *Somme Mud*, P. 95
Map 1. 1 ANZAC spent their first three months in France in the area immediately to the south west of Armentières.¹⁰

Map 2. The area where the Australians spent their first three months in France is bounded by the towns of Hazebrouck in the north west, Bailleul, Fleurbaix, Estaires and Morbeque. There are many small villages and hamlets within this area which were named by Snell, but do not appear here.¹¹

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¹⁰ Bean, (1938), The AIF in France, 1916, P. 84
¹¹ http://www.weather-forecast.com/locations/Fleurbaix
3.1.1 Billets

Large bare sheds, such as barns and outhouses, housed the men.\(^{92}\) Billets were often clearly visible to the enemy and could be subject to heavy enemy fire, causing significant risk to the occupants.\(^{93}\) Snell noted tiles being knocked off the roof of his billet during a card game, resulting in orders to dig shelter trenches outside the billets.\(^{94}\) He also described the frequent relocation of billets as troops were rotated through the lines.\(^{95}\)

3.1.2 Training

As well as performing the various duties described, training continued. Bennett suggests that the constant interruption of training by fatigues rendered the training inadequate.\(^{96}\) Schools for officers and other ranks provided training in grenade handling, bayonet drill and rapid loading practice, cleaning and oiling ammunition, physical drill and company drill.\(^{97}\) Much of this activity was visible to the Germans on Aubers Ridge and could provoke shelling.\(^{98}\)

3.1.3 Route marches

Regular route marches of 10 to 12 miles, carrying a full pack weighing about 70 lbs, were designed to build up fitness and improve discipline. They also gave the keenly observant Snell the opportunity to survey the local landscape. On 10\(^{th}\) April, Snell described being ‘thoroughly knocked out’ after a march. This march was immediately followed by another march to his assigned guard duty. Two days later he reported

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\(^{92}\) Belford, (1940, 1992), *Legs-eleven*, P. 255
\(^{93}\) Austin, (2007), *The Fighting Fourth*, P. 103
\(^{94}\) Snell Collection diary, 10.6.1916
\(^{95}\) 4\(^{th}\) Battalion Diary, AWM
\(^{96}\) Bennett, (2012), *Pozieres: the ANZAC Story*, P. 13
\(^{97}\) Snell Collection, Diary, 21.6, 23.6, 10.7, 12.7.
\(^{98}\) Belford, (1940, 1992), *Legs-eleven*, P. 225
for sick parade, complaining of ‘headache and pain in the kidneys’. The ‘light duties’ assigned him were served as guard duty, and followed, shortly after, by 36 hours continuous duty. He referred to a march on 10th July as a ‘Human Endurance Test, the officer, needless to say, was on horseback’. Later, however, in the context of the march to the Somme front, Snell does acknowledge that he was the fittest he had ever been.

3.1.4 Trench work

It soon became apparent to the men that there was more actual work to be done than fighting. Since the ground in Flanders was marshy and low lying, framed sandbag parapets and parados were constructed for the trenches, which were in constant need of repair. Rain could add to the problem and Snell noted ‘mud and slush from last night’s rain’, and, since trench work was usually carried out at night, a rum issue at 4 am enabled a good three hours sleep. Lt Percy Hay, Snell’s commanding officer, noted that one shell burst could keep twelve men busy for a week. Birdwood praised the digging skills of the Australians as being so ‘neat and clean, you could eat off them.’ One consequence of the trench digging was the constant danger of shelling, and deaths of 100 men a month in such working parties were common. Snell, therefore was, from the time of his arrival in France, immediately exposed to risk of death or injury.

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99 Snell Collection, diary, 12.4.1916
100 Snell Collection, letter home, 12.7.1916
101 Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P. 102
102 Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, Pp. 100, 102; Snell Collection, Diary, 13.4.1916; Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 65
103 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story, P. 156
104 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story, P. 156
105 Van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 20
3.1.5 General duties

‘Fatigues’, or general duties, could involve many tasks. Moving equipment and ammunition with the associated loading and unloading of vehicles in preparation for the removal of the brigade from Sailly to new headquarters in Fleurbaix was a typical activity.\textsuperscript{106} Snell’s diary noted: \textit{June 21\textsuperscript{st} went to Fleurbaix, work behind firing line, 22\textsuperscript{nd}, various duties, June 23\textsuperscript{rd}, working in communication trench, June 18\textsuperscript{th}, ammunition taken from Elbow Farm to Chappelle Farm, 19\textsuperscript{th} various duties’}.

3.2 Off Duty

Snell provided a detailed account of his off-duty time in his letters and diary, but here it will be possible to provide only a brief account.

3.2.1 Snell’s writing: letters and diary

Meyer’s ‘\textit{Men of War}’ provides a basis for analysing the content and tone of Snell’s letters, and identifying change as he moved towards the Somme front. In this respect, Snell again personifies the average soldier. He was a prolific letter writer and we will now briefly explore some of the themes expressed in his letters and diary.

Myer states that since the diaries kept by the men were not subject to censorship, they tended to be more open about events and their reactions to them, however this is not so evident in Snell’s diary.\textsuperscript{107} Although it contained a more detailed account of his activities than his letters, it appears designed to enable him to give his family a full account of his experiences on his return home. Snell’s letters are lively and often humorous and he used his letters as an opportunity to comment on some

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} Snell Collection, diary, 19.4.1916
\item \textsuperscript{107} Snell Collection, Diary; Meyer, (2009), \textit{Men of War}, P. 47
\end{itemize}
of the events he had noted in his diary. In his diary, he gave a daily report on the weather, his health, ‘pain in the kidneys’,\(^{108}\) and ‘feeling off colour, stayed in bed’, ‘first full nights sleep in over a fortnight’,\(^{109}\) baths,\(^{110}\) the location and intensity of shelling, the possibility of gas attack and the arrival of the 11\(^{th}\) Battalion containing many friends from Western Australia.

Shortly after his arrival in France, Snell began using his aunt in London as a conduit for letters, a task she understandably took to heart.\(^{111}\) It is clear from the letters that Snell’s mother had sent photographs of her son in uniform to widely dispersed acquaintances to inform them of his enlistment.

The tone of the letters, though fearful of the censor’s pencil, is usually positive and often ironic: ‘one ‘sees thing,’ and by mid – April, ‘generally speaking all going well’. He expressed his fear of danger by means of euphemisms: the enemy were ‘our friends’, their shelling was ‘free fireworks’, and guns were ‘talking’.\(^{112}\) Heavy bombing created some ‘hot corners’, and the enemy was sending a ‘good supply of shrapnel and high explosive shells over’. Flares looked ‘pretty’ at night.\(^{113}\)

This is also a means of reassuring the family that he would remain safe from harm.\(^{114}\) The occurrence of a near miss by a shell or a sniper bullet was an opportunity for humour: he had ‘had some close shaves, but so far have dodged being hit’ by a sniper, but ‘unfortunately couldn’t locate the ----’.\(^{115}\) ‘Close shaves are nothing’, but he was satisfied that he had ‘put a couple of Germans out of action’.\(^{116}\)

\(^{108}\) Snell Collection, diary, 12-14 April, 1916

\(^{109}\) Snell Collection, diary, 24.4.1916; Meyer, (2009), P. 49,

\(^{110}\) Snell Collection, diary, 23.5.1916: ‘bath and change of underwear, the first in three weeks, a proper reviver’.

\(^{111}\) Snell Collection, diary, 12.7.1916

\(^{112}\) Snell Collection, diary; Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 53

\(^{113}\) Snell Collection, diary: 10.7, 30.4, 16.5, 21.4.1916

\(^{114}\) Meyer,(2009), Men of War, P. 16

\(^{115}\) Snell Collection, diary 11.5.16

\(^{116}\) Snell Collection, letter to family 14.7.1916
With a touch of bravado, he assured the family that ‘everything is A1’, referring to himself as ‘this chicken’, and ‘this kid’.\(^{117}\) To his mother, in his penultimate letter, he wrote: ‘leave the war to us! Everything going well’ - the war would soon be over.\(^{118}\)

Although the tone of his letters became more sombre as Snell moved south towards the Somme front, the only reference to death was ‘my friend Smithy shot and killed 8pm’ soon after arrival in France.\(^{119}\) However, when his brother expressed a desire to be with him, his response became less guarded and more honest: ‘take a fool’s advice and stay away, enough said’.\(^{120}\) He added that he was sorry about the Gibbs boys not passing for military service, but their mother had already lost one son and he did not think they ‘could stand it’.\(^{121}\) ‘I didn’t think I could stand what we have had, but am fitter now than I ever was in my life, feed me on kerosene and chips and I’ll be a fine perpetual motion machine’, and ‘everything going first rate, even the Germans’.

This is consistent with Meyer’s theme of enthusiasm for the great experience of war: a terrible but ultimately worthwhile adventure that shaped men’s identities through the experience of discomfort and danger and provided an environment for the development of the masculine identity.\(^{122}\)

**3.2.2 France and the French**

The Australians immediately took the French and the ‘pleasant village life’ to heart.\(^{123}\) Noticing the absence of able-bodied men and women working the railways

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\(^{117}\) Snell Collection, diary 7.5.1916  
\(^{118}\) Snell Collection, diary 14.7.1916  
\(^{119}\) Snell Collection, diary 12.4.1916  
\(^{120}\) Snell Collection, diary 14.7 12.7.1916  
\(^{121}\) Snell Collection, diary 12.7.1916  
\(^{122}\) Meyer, (2009), *Men of War*, P. 18 – 25;  
and the farms they began to help the locals with farm chores.\textsuperscript{124} As noted earlier, Snell took a keen interest the landscape through which he was passing and, while in the north, he noted the crops grown, the farming activities and the condition of the stock.\textsuperscript{125} He often described the lovely avenues of trees, and whilst in the firing line, noted the contradiction of larks singing.\textsuperscript{126} Snell enjoyed the company of the little French ‘kiddies’ as each attempted to speak the others’ languages, and a French ‘lady friend’ obliged him by posting mail for him.\textsuperscript{127}

The move south to the Somme Front provided opportunities for observing new landscapes and for new interactions with the French.

Snell’s last words on France were that it was ‘always interesting and instructive’, and that he would ‘love to see it in peacetime’. He was sorry to have been unable to keep his camera with him, but he planned make a trip after the war.\textsuperscript{128} The extensive photographic record now available would enable a pictorial reconstruction of Snell’s war service.\textsuperscript{129}

3.2.3 Social life

As a gregarious person, Snell enjoyed a range of social activities such as visits to the local village for a meal, to purchase food and souvenirs or to visit the local YMCA.\textsuperscript{130} Estaminets offered welcome relief after time spent in the firing line: ‘a couple of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Snell Collection, diary 8.7.1916; Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 221, 263; Bennett, (2012), Pozières: The ANZAC Story, P. 217.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Snell Collection, diary 22.5, 24.5, 7.7.1916
\item \textsuperscript{126} Snell Collection, diary 28.5.1916
\item Snell Collection, diary 10.7; Henriette Laurin, Au Bourg Saily la Lys, Pas de Calais, France, AJS; Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs eleven, P 255; Snell Collection, diary 24.4.1916; Bean and Gullett, (1939), Photographic Record of the War, P177 – AWM EZ 110.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Snell Collection diary 12.7.1916
\item \textsuperscript{129} Bean and Gullett, (1939), Photographic Record of the War.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Snell Collection, diary 28.5.1916; Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 227-8
\end{itemize}
bottles of “Bock” … put new life in us’. When nothing else was on offer, Snell enjoyed wandering the country roads, perhaps strawberry picking with his friends from the 11th Battalion. Snell was an avid bridge player and took every opportunity for a game, especially whilst among like-minded men in the Signals Company, and enjoyed a visit to friends at Vieux Berguin Divisional Ammunition Park.

The men were able to meet with friends from other units, and Snell made frequent mention of these occasions. He named friends within his battalion and many former friends in the 11th Battalion whom he had known since childhood, either in Bunbury, WA, prior to 1910, or Harvey, where the men mentioned were often former rifle club rivals. The personal details and war service records of these men, many of them officers, further illuminate the image of the ‘average’ Australian soldier and provide an interesting array of details, from the former neurasthenic who later won the Military Medal, to the bombers and snipers, the likely mutilés volontaires, the absconders and the victims of VD. Among them were medal recipients, the wounded or killed in action, amputees, the blinded and those who survived the war. Their names feature among the later writers of condolence letters and they merit a study in their own right.

Snell was also able, at Maud Dunlop’s request, to locate her ‘naughty cousin Norrie’, Norman Dunlop.

The men were anxious to hear news of the war and were encouraged by positive reports of the first week of the Somme Offensive. News of the Battle of Jutland,
reported by Maud Dunlop in Edinburgh; and Lord Kitchener’s death on 5\textsuperscript{th} June, was also noted.\textsuperscript{136} 

### 3.2.4 The home front

In an attempt to maintain a sense of continuing domesticity,\textsuperscript{137} Snell tried hard to keep up with day-to-day events at home and to interact with his family in a normal way by commenting on events mentioned in the letters from home. He reflected on the doings of his siblings, the arrival of the telephone, the development of irrigation in Harvey and his father’s venture into potato growing.\textsuperscript{138} He was reassured that his Glen Innes employers would keep position for him on his return.\textsuperscript{139} He also followed the romantic affairs of family friends but disapproved of the men who married prior to leaving for the war and was ‘not building castles too high’ in his expectations of Gladys Whatham.\textsuperscript{140} He expressed hopes that the Zeppelin raids had not affected his relatives in London and lamented that his mother’s ‘new help’ was unsuitable.

Parcels received from family and friends were a further reminder of the home front. ‘Comforts’ came from, among others, his fiancée, Gladys Whatham and Maud Dunlop in Scotland.\textsuperscript{141} Insecticide was sometimes included, with unfortunate consequences\textsuperscript{142} and Snell’s mother sent a sandbag, which did ‘good service at front’.\textsuperscript{143}

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\textsuperscript{136} Miles, W. (1938). \textit{Military operations in France and Belgium, 1916, July to December.} London, Imperial War Museum. P. 14, The Battle of Jutland had been fought on the 31\textsuperscript{st} May and 1\textsuperscript{st} June; Kitchener died on June 2\textsuperscript{nd} when the HMS Hampshire, which had been one of the escort ships for Snell’s convoy from Fremantle to Egypt, was sunk on a voyage to Russia.

\textsuperscript{137} Meyer, (2009), \textit{Men of War}, P. 36

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Snell Collection}, Letters home 16.7, 28.9.1916

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Snell Collection}, diary 10.7.1916

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Snell Collection}, letter home 12.5.1916

\textsuperscript{141} Maud Dunlop was the daughter of Scottish parents living in Bangkok. The families had met in South East Asia. Maud had returned to Scotland ‘for her health’ and Mrs Snell had sent her a photograph of Charlie in uniform. Maud wrote several letters expressing her delight in the fact that her old friend was now fighting in France and reminiscing over holidays she had spent with the family in Harvey as a child; \textit{Snell Collection}, letters from Maud Dunlop, 27.5.1916, 31.5.1916, 8.7.1916

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Snell Collection}, diary 26.4.1916

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Snell Collection}, letter home 8.12.1915, refers to mother’s ‘sandbag business’ and ‘sandbag afternoons’.
3.3 Firing Line - Signal Company

On 20\textsuperscript{th} April, five days after he had volunteered for service in the Signal Company, Snell began a two-month period of signal service, some of which was served in the support trenches and some in the front line.\textsuperscript{144} Signallers were selected from among the brightest of the troops and filled many rôles including laying, patrolling and repairing communication wires, signaling and telegraph instruction, buzzer and semaphore ‘key and station’ drills, memorizing and delivering messages, and escort work, usually under fire.\textsuperscript{145} The Signal Company records for April and May report ‘Communications kept in good working order - Necessary repairs effected - Lines patrolled and repairs effected, all dead cable cleared out of brigade areas’.\textsuperscript{146} In May and June, extensive new cable was laid, and the company report mentioned ditches, roads and culverts crossed and records the length of trench dug from 4\textsuperscript{th} April to 24\textsuperscript{th} June as 26400 yards, and wire laid as 385000 yards.

Snell clearly relished the work and his diary meticulously recorded the training he undertook. This was a period of greater mobility and included visits to various headquarters, the Signal Station and the Trench Mortar Battery, and escort duty involved taking a sick patient to Croix Blanche.\textsuperscript{147} It also involved increased responsibility and communication with a wider variety of personnel, as, for example, when he was required to assist with the handover to the incoming 11\textsuperscript{th} Battalion.\textsuperscript{148} Snell reported that he had passed examinations allowing him to proceed from ‘Signaler C class’ to ‘B’ class, but when, on 17\textsuperscript{th} June, the size of the group had to be reduced, he, being the last on, was one who reverted to his former position.

\textsuperscript{144} Snell left the Signal Company on June 17\textsuperscript{th} when numbers were reduced.
\textsuperscript{145} Snell Collection, diary 30.5, 2.6, 8.7.1916; Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, P. 99.
\textsuperscript{146} (1916). 1st Australian DIvision Signals Company Diaries. First World War Diaries - AWM4, Sub-class 22/11. Canberra, AWM.
\textsuperscript{147} Snell Collection, diary 6.5, 9.5 10.5, 15.5.1916
\textsuperscript{148} Snell Collection, diary 17-18.5.1916
The periods which Snell spent in the support trenches and the firing line are as follows: May 3rd to 6th in the firing line, 10th to 23rd June to support the firing line near Fleurbaix, and 24th June to 5/6th July in the firing line.\footnote{Snell Collection, diary}

In early May the 4th Battalion spent a few days in the firing line and the support trenches, during which time the men lived in billets, in the Petillon sector near Fromelles. In the few days from May 1st there was occasional heavy shelling in which Captain Judge was wounded.\footnote{Snell Collection, diary; (1916). 1st Infantry Brigade Diary. Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries. Canberra, Australian War Memorial. First World War Diaries - AWM 4 Class 23/1. ; Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P.100.} It was the first time in the line for most and in his diary, Snell recorded the frequency and duration of the shelling.\footnote{Belford, (1940, 1992) Legs-eleven, P. 234} While in the front line, Snell reported 8-12 hours on duty at a stretch, during which time he could observe the repulsion of a nearby attack, the cutting of the communication wire under bombardment, the laying of barbed wire over the parapets and the shelling of a signal station, a natural target for the Germans.

Even prior to entering the lines, attack by the Germans had become more likely and on 19th April the men had been ordered to restrict daytime movement.\footnote{Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 233-4.} Experience quickly taught them not to look over the parapets and anxiety and fear became an element in their lives.\footnote{Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 240.} The ‘evening hate’ involving the exchange of trench mortars and grenades.\footnote{Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 241.} Gas attacks were a possibility and the men anxiously watched the wind vanes to assess their likelihood. There was now a constant flow of wounded.\footnote{}

In mid May, nightly patrols were sent out to explore no man’s land and routine duties consisted of repairing and improving trenches, and the moving of equipment, ammunition and supplies. On 30th April a practice raid by the Australians provoked a
heavy counter-attack. Snell was aware of this and the intensity of the shelling was recorded in his diary. The area was again relatively quiet until May 30th when Snell reported the ‘heaviest gunfire yet’, with Cellar Farm communication trench being destroyed. This was the men’s first experience of a raid by the Germans, with shelling worse than that experienced at Gallipoli, and many previously buried British were disinterred.

Snell made only very general references to the conditions in the trenches, however, he did at this point mention that rats were seen in the trenches, increasing in numbers at dusk, and at night they were seen running over sleeping men, who developed ingenious methods for exterminating them.

We can estimate the degree of danger during this period from the fact that, during May, 47 men were killed and 71 wounded.

On 10th June, the 4th Battalion prepared to leave for new billets to support the firing line outside Fleurbaix. Changeover was a time of risk because despite attempts to remain silent, the Germans would become aware of the movement and shell the area. Raiding activity by the Australians increased over the next weeks in response to General Haig’s instructions, with associated trench mortar and artillery bombardments, and casualties mounted. Although Snell’s battalion did not take part in any of these raids, they could not avoid being aware of them or of the casualties.

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156 1st Brigade Diary, AWM.
157 Snell Collection, diary 30.5.1916
158 Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 243-4
159 1st Brigade Diary, AWM.
160 Snell Collection, diary; Bean, (1938), The AIF in France, 1916, P. 434
161 On June 12th an artillery and trench mortar bombardment was made in preparation for small raid by the 6th Battalion that evening. Eleven men had been wounded in the previous 24 hours. On June 13th, a small raid killed about 12 Germans, captured 6, leaving one Australian officer and one other rank wounded. (1st Brigade Diary) On June 14th Haig had issued orders that as many diversionary raids as possible should be carried out between 24th and 25th June, the order later modified to 20 – 30, a raid each night if possible, three per division (Bean, (1938), The AIF in France, 1916. P. 258. Constant artillery harassment of the Germans was carried out, with the aim also of blowing gaps in the enemy wire prior to the raids. This was to happen while 11
After a period behind the lines, the 4th Battalion moved to the front line: ‘June 24th orders were given to go to firing line, leaving billets at 9.45pm’, and taking over from the 2nd Battalion. On June 25th a heavy bombardment began at 11.30 pm, and it elicited a joke which he shared with Maud Dunlop: if a man was drunk when he was killed, ‘he died in good spirits’. Snell’s battalion was to remain in the firing line until 5th July.

Eleven raids were conducted over the period 25th June to 3rd July, the largest involving 250 men, incurring significant casualties, and inflicting significant, though disputed, casualties on the Germans. In one raid alone, on 29-30th June, 8000 shells and 1000 trench mortars were fired. The most successful raid, by the 9th Battalion, was meticulously planned and carried out and resulted in relatively few casualties among the Australians but may have killed as many as 53 Germans and resulted in the capture of 21 prisoners.

A gas attack by the 4th Battalion, planned for the night of June 30th – July 1st did not eventuate due to unfavourable winds. On June 30th Snell’s battalion left the firing line to go to Fleurbaix for rations, returning to the firing line from July 1st to 5th.

At the end of June, brigade casualties for the month were three officers killed, and 21 other ranks, with nine officers and 155 other ranks wounded, one missing and 100 men in hospital.

ANZAC was taking over the line from 1 ANZAC Corps. On June 16th there occurred a great artillery battle during which billets were bombed. (Belford, (1940, 1992), *Legs-eleven*, P. 252)

162 Austin, (2007), *The Fighting Fourth*, P. 102; 1st Brigade Diary, AWM; Snell Collection, diary

163 Snell Collection, Maud Dunlop to CS, 7.12.1916; Austin, (2007)), *The Fighting Fourth*, P. 102; 1st Brigade Diary, AWM; Snell Collection, diary

164 Bean, (1938), *The AIF in France, 1916*, Pp. 260-283. Intelligence gathering and maintaining pressure on the Germans to prevent them transferring troops to the Somme front, were the goal for these raids

165 1st Brigade Diary, AWM

166 Snell Collection, diary 30.6.1916

167 1st Brigade Diary, AWM.
On the night of 2/3 July, three raids were conducted. One of these involved the 11th Battalion and completely destroyed the German trenches and identified the enemy as the 21\textsuperscript{st} Bavarian RIR.\textsuperscript{168} From Snell’s perspective, this was the ‘finest display of fireworks (and death works), terrific noise, hundreds of flashes of bursting shells, bombs and hundreds of flares sent up, green star rockets and red flares sent up as signals, the heaviest bombardment yet’.\textsuperscript{169}

The following night, the Germans retaliated, with the result that forty Australians were killed and wounded and some missing under the heavy German bombardment.\textsuperscript{170} Snell would have been referring to this when he wrote: ‘rifle fire ‘pretty hot’, and the Germans were using searchlights which showed the outline of the head and shoulders of their own men’. This resulted in the ‘lads anxiously waiting to get a shot’, the light being more of an advantage to the Australians than to the Germans, and producing no Australian casualties.\textsuperscript{171}

By this time, Snell’s diary entries were highly detailed, reflecting the increasing intensity of the action, and therefore the increasing risk of him being wounded or killed.

Snell reported leaving the firing line in the hands of the 46\textsuperscript{th} (Victorian) Battalion at 12.30am, marching to Sailly along duckboards in muddy communication trenches, then wet roads, arriving at Sailly at 4.30am, where he later spent the afternoon and evening.\textsuperscript{172} In letters home he wrote that he had expected to stay in the front line for 18 days but in the event it was only eleven, and to his brother Alf he quoted ‘four weeks all but a day’ in the firing line.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{168}~Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, P. 281
\textsuperscript{169}~\textit{Snell Collection}, diary 3.7.1916
\textsuperscript{170}~Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, Pp. 303-5
\textsuperscript{171}~\textit{Snell Collection}, diary 5.7.1916
\textsuperscript{172}~\textit{Snell Collection}, letter home, 10.7.1916
\textsuperscript{173}~\textit{Snell Collection}, letters home, 10.7.1916 14.7.1916
Despite the time spent in the firing line, the men ‘haven’t had much chance to make a name yet, but hope to soon’. Snell had ‘never shot for trophies or spoons as I do here’, and he thought he had ‘accounted for a couple of (Germans)’. He was ‘still in the land of the living’, but it was difficult to write with the ‘lads whistling and singing and in good spirit - old bill will have had enough of us soon’. He was expecting peace at any time – ‘the end is near - I’d give something to know what the next 12 months will hold’. These comments echo Lynch’s observation of the difficulty of writing cheerfully when any letter may have been their last.  

It is apparent that by this time Snell would have experienced his share of discomfort and danger, death and injury, despite the bravado expressed in the letters. We can surmise that this was provoked by a combination of efforts to maintain the confidence of his family and the positive reports of the fighting he was being given. Snell’s final letters were not received until 31st August, some three weeks after the family had received notification of his death. By the time of his death, Snell was to witness the consequences of the intense fighting which was taking place to the south on the Somme front, and to experience bombardments of even greater intensity than those reported here. 

174 Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, P. 103
3.4 Moving South

Orders were received on July 11th for the 60000 men of the 1st Division to move south to the Somme battlefront in what was to be a huge logistic operation. On July 11th, reveille was called at 4.30am and at 8.55 the troops entrained at Bailleul ‘in full marching order and packed like sardines’, 40 men each in cattle trucks (‘hommes 40, chevaux 8’) which they had cleaned out themselves.

Despite this, the seven-hour journey, followed by a ten-mile march, and continuous marching during the next four days, was ‘still a very interesting trip through lovely country scenery’ with ‘trains packed with troops going in the opposite direction’. The men detrained at Feinvillers-Candas, departing at 3.40pm to march to St-Leger-le-Dormant, (8pm) and St Ouen, a total distance of 9 miles (8.45pm), where they had time to visit an estaminet and to be treated to brandy and rum by the local residents.

Like his comrades, Snell was carrying rifle, bayonet, rations, two extra bandoliers of ammunition, Mills bombs, water, two sand bags, two gas helmets, field dressing, blanket and overcoat. The men were still optimistic, believing that the Somme campaign was successful and that the firing line was continually moving forward.

Map 3. The movement south from the Armentières sector. The solid line between Bailleul and Doullens marks the journey by rail.

175 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story P. 10
176 Belford, (1949, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 259: the 11th Battalion moved south in horse carriages that had not been cleaned out.
177 Doullens according to the 4th Battalion diary
178 Snell Collection, letter home, 12.7.1916
179 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 448
180 Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P. 108
This notion was supported by the sight of the retiring British troops, who were singing and wearing German helmets, and later news of a successful British attack on July 14th.\footnote{Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 454; Sheffield, (2001), The Somme, Pp. 79-82; Rawlinson’s plan had been to capture a front of 7000 yards, which included Bazentin-le-Petit and Trônes Wood. In the event, 6000 yards of German lines were captured and 2000 prisoners taken; Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P. 106}

Reinforcements arrived and training continued. Ultimately, the men were to march the entire distance from Doullens to the front line, a distance of approximately 40 miles, in the week it took them to reach the front, with route marches on the days when they were not moving forward.

The evening of July 12th was spent at Vignacourt, which, according to Snell, was ‘practically deserted by the local inhabitants’. Vignacourt had been 1ANZAC headquarters since July 10th and was packed with thousands of Australian and British troops, further augmented by the arrival of the 13th Light Horse (Devil’s Own).\footnote{Snell Collection, letter home, 10.7.1916} The following day the men left Vignacourt at 12.15pm, marched through Flesselles, (1.35) Bertangles, (2.50), past an aerodrome, through avenues of trees, through the small village of Allonville (3.50) approximately five miles north east of Amiens, to a billet outside the village in an old farm) with the English Motor Transport and Australian Horse Transports billeted nearby.\footnote{Snell Collection, diary, 14.7.1916} For the first time since their arrival in France, the men could not hear the guns at the front, but Snell expected to soon ‘get closer to the argument’.\footnote{Snell Collection, diary, 14.7.1916}
The Australians had been allocated an east-west swathe of land from St Ouen through Berteaucourt, Herrissart, Warloy and Senlis, to Albert for rest and training.

Map 4. This map shows the course of Snell’s final movements. He detrained at Feinvillers-Candas in the north west corner of the map, marched to Vignacourt, (centre west of map) to Warloy, (centre of map), through Albert, to Pozières (centre east of map), a distance of approximately 40 miles. After being wounded and dying, he was buried at Puchevillers, near the centre of the map. The shaded area is the area allocated to the Australians for rest and training. 185

The village of Puchevillers where Snell was later to be buried was just to the north of this area. The nearby town of Amiens was little damaged by the fighting and thronged with people. 186 The fields here were more open than those in Flanders and the farmers lived in now overcrowded and dirty villages of timber-beamed buildings, with whitewashed walls of mud and straw. The area between Amiens and Albert was like a giant camp, filled with horses, tents and troops and would have resembled a

185 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 450, Map 7, portion.
186 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 448.
fair ground had it not been for the constant stream of ambulances and the vehicles of officers and administrative staff crowding the roads.\textsuperscript{187} Training on the hillsides overlooking Amiens involved lectures on the tactics of the moving barrage, entitled ‘Infantry in Attack’ and ‘Artillery Formation Drill’.\textsuperscript{188} At this point the Australians were destined either for the 4\textsuperscript{th} Army under Rawlinson or the Reserve Army under General Gough.\textsuperscript{189} In a letter to the family, Snell reported that they were now in the ‘Mobile Corps’, that they were ‘on the move nearly every day now’, and finally that ‘we have moved to where there is Somme fighting’.\textsuperscript{190}

Snell’s diary ends July 15\textsuperscript{th}. Various accounts of this stage of the fighting report that the men were still writing letters and it is possible that Snell too, continued to write, but the conditions which now ensued and the distance that he was to cover between his injury and death could account for the fact that no letters remain for the last week of his life. In his last diary entry Snell noted that he had received 24 letters and five papers in the past week and he was particularly delighted to receive ‘long and newsy’ letters from the Dunlop family in Siam and Scotland.\textsuperscript{191}

Snell’s last letter closes:

‘with all good wishes and fondest love to all, I remain, your loving Charlie’.\textsuperscript{192}

The account of the remainder of his life and his death must now be reconstructed from the writings of others.

\textsuperscript{187} Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 173; Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 449; Maze was an English-educated Frenchman was serving General Gough as observer and interpreter. An artist, he later became Churchill’s artistic mentor. He clearly enjoyed the company of the Australians.

\textsuperscript{188} Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P 452, 453-454; Snell Collection, diary, 14.7. 15.7.1916

\textsuperscript{189} Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, P. 454.

\textsuperscript{190} Snell Collection, 12.7.1916, 16.7.1916

\textsuperscript{191} Snell Collection, 1.5.1916, 21.5 19, 16.7.1916

\textsuperscript{192} Snell Collection, letter home, 16.7.1916
3.5 To the Somme Front

Snell spent his last days in the area around la Boiselle, Ovillers, Contalmaison and Pozieres, an area of intense artillery activity, thereby increasing the possibility of wounding and death. The area had been heavily fought over since the Somme Offensive had opened on July 1st. On July 6th la Boiselle had been captured after several attempts, and attacks resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded with many men left lying unburied.\(^{193}\)

The Australian assault on Pozieres over the next few weeks was to become famous for the intensity of the bombardments, the casualties suffered and the heroic endeavours of the Australians. The heavy losses suffered by the British since the July 1st opening of the Somme Offensive would have been immediately apparent to the Australians on their arrival. In their turn, the Australians were to lose nearly 7000 dead and 17000 wounded in the forthcoming attack on the village of Pozieres.\(^{194}\)

3.5.1 Landscape

Maze recorded ‘traces of the gruesome fighting that had taken place’ and the ‘shattered branches of the cypress trees that hedged the cemetery’ of la Boisselle, the graveyard itself blown to pieces.\(^{195}\) Two huge mine craters had been blown in front of la Boisselle on 1st July using 40000lbs and 60000lbs of explosives respectively.\(^{196}\) Craters were linked by subterranean tunnels and their sides were covered by rusted barbed wire and corpses dressed in khaki and grey. The villages of la Boisselle and Ovillers and nearby woods, furiously fought over, had been reduced

\(^{193}\) Gilbert, (1994, 2011), The First World War, P. 315
\(^{194}\) Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story, P. xiv; In the period between 20th-29th July, the Australians were to fire 80 000 rounds of 18lb shells, 9 000 rounds of 4.5"shells and two million rounds of small arms ammunition.
\(^{195}\) Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki. P. 154
\(^{196}\) Gilbert, (1994, 2011), The First World War, P. 309
to rubble. Contalmaison, approximately two kilometers south of Pozières, and just south of where Snell’s battalion would be based, had been repeatedly fought over, adding to the dozens of injured and dead still lying around. At Pozières, attempts to break though the line in this area attracted enfilade fire, increasing the risk of losses, which, between July 1\textsuperscript{st} and 16\textsuperscript{th}, amounted to nearly 100 000 men.

Three days of heavy rain prior to the arrival of the Australians had turned the ground into soft yellow mud that rendered the trenches almost impassable and caused vehicles to overturn. Labour battalions were remaking roads amid a constant stream of vehicles bringing in supplies and ammunition and the area was dotted with cages for prisoners of war. It was almost impossible to distinguish between the Allied and German bombardments, a significant factor when we come to consider Snell’s wounding.

Raids and attacks on surrounding areas necessitated constant movements of troops and attracted heavy retaliatory fire. Sausage Valley and Black Watch Alley were choked with corpses. Moving barrages set up by Allied field guns and howitzers resulted in shell bursts which caused multiple casualties. Some shells made craters 10 feet wide and black shrapnel, timed to explode in air, sent metal fragments in all directions. The men were in constant view of the Germans on Pozières ridge and many were killed crossing no man’s land.

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197 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 307
198 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 317
199 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 321
200 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 149
201 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story, P. 64
202 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 314 – 315
203 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P 312; Belford, (1940), Legs-eleven, P. 481
204 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 307
205 Austin, (2007), The Fighting Fourth, P. 106; Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 480
206 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 153; Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 311
The village of Pozières where the Australians were to enter the Somme fighting was skirted by a rough hedge, with vestiges of walls visible over the top.207 A double line of tree stumps lined the remains of the main street, with the base of a windmill visible at the top of the street. Continuing artillery activity in the days preceding the attack to be made on Pozières aimed to destroy every known enemy trench, stronghold and ammunition dump in the vicinity and provided a constant barrage of noise.208

An observer sent out to survey the ground for a new communication trench had to work under a hail of shell fragments and a veil of thick smoke.209 He noted endless files of men coming to dig during the night, their digging gradually burying the dead of former battles. An aerial photograph shows the area dissected by a maze of trenches.210

It was into these conditions that the Australians came. There would have been no mistaking the ferocity of the battles which had taken place and the dangers which were to ensue for the new arrivals.

3.5.2 The Australians Arrive at the Front

1 Anzac Corps, having begun to march east on 16th July, was ordered to join the Reserve Army under Gen. Gough.211 After passing through Albert, with its Hanging Madonna, they had rested for tea at the foot of Tara Hill, the last green fields Snell was to see before arriving at the battlefield.212 The 1st Brigade, of which Snell was a member, was well rested and in high spirits. Setbacks had been suppressed, and the men believed retiring troops were happy and successful, despite the evidence around

207 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 156
208 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 157
209 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 156 - 7
210 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, Plate 33
211 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 455
212 Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 472
them.\textsuperscript{213} The three battalions of the 1st Brigade were guided to positions in Sausage Valley through a stream of heavy traffic and explosions.\textsuperscript{214}

They could see the back gardens and orchards of Pozières. The unfinished British trenches in front were barely distinguishable and had to be reached by a series of tortuous communications trenches, partly constructed from old German lines.\textsuperscript{215}

‘The Australian Corps was coming to our army,’ Maze noted: ‘columns of Australian regiments moving like long snakes, ...swaying under heavy haversacks and singing tunes that...were heard everywhere they went...battalion after battalion...the whole corps arrived...and...swarmed all over the whole army area....’.\textsuperscript{216} He noted too, their ‘wild escapades’ but pointed out that they would ‘soon ... prove their worth.’ He found them a ‘glorious set of men, the last word in physique and general bearing’, ‘genial’ and helpful and ‘of course they didn’t salute’.\textsuperscript{217}

The troops were now fairly seasoned by travel and experience, but when they moved to the front line on July 19th, they were shocked at sight of the men they were relieving.\textsuperscript{218}

Gas cloud attacks were less common here because they were too dangerous for the Germans themselves, but the dangerous phosgene gas shells were used and Snell was later to share the casualty station with some of its victims.\textsuperscript{219} Owing to these attacks the men had to keep gas helmets on all day and they marched up to relief in the dark wearing the helmets.

\textsuperscript{213} Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, P. 470
\textsuperscript{214} Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, P. 473
\textsuperscript{215} Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, Pp. 475, 480
\textsuperscript{216} Maze, (1934), \textit{A Frenchman in Khaki}, P. 149
\textsuperscript{217} Maze, (1934), \textit{A Frenchman in Khaki}, P. 131
\textsuperscript{218} Belford, (1940, 1992), \textit{Legs-eleven}, P. 261, 265
\textsuperscript{219} Bean, (1938), \textit{The AIF on the Western Front}, P. 477; CCS 44 diary reported that on the day Snell was wounded, a significant number of gas cases were treated.
3.5.3 Assaults on Pozières

There had been several unsuccessful attacks on the strongly held strategic position of Pozières by the British forces, leaving the German – held village effectively on a salient and the Allied troops vulnerable to attack.\textsuperscript{220}

The attack on Pozières, ordered by Haig, was delayed by the Australians so that more effective preparations could be made.\textsuperscript{221} New jump-off trenches, within 200 yards of the German lines, were to be constructed under artillery fire which would fall on the troops during their nightly digging.\textsuperscript{222} It is worth noting here that they contained few dugouts and these had room for only one man.\textsuperscript{223} It was later reported by a witness that Snell was resting in one of these dugouts with some of his fellows when he was wounded.\textsuperscript{224}

The initial Australian bombardment of Pozières began at 2am on July 19\textsuperscript{th}, the day of Snell’s the last church parade. On this day too, the recently arrived 5th Australian Division made a diversionary attack 50 miles to the north at Fromelles, recently vacated by Snell and his comrades. This assault proved disastrous for the Australian 5\textsuperscript{th} Division; the losses suffered were the highest for all Australian engagements, with 1917 killed, 1299 with no known grave and 400 taken prisoner.\textsuperscript{225} The attack took place only three days before Snell was mortally wounded, so it is unlikely that he would have received reports of it. However, his family would have soon become aware of it and they may well have thought that Snell had been there.\textsuperscript{226}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{220} Bean, (1938), *The AIF on the Western Front*, P. 454-7, 480; Pozières had been attacked three times by July 16\textsuperscript{th}, and on the July 14\textsuperscript{th}, a British patrol had been forced out by heavy German counter bombardment, leaving dead hanging on the wire. Between 12th and 15th July, two attacking brigades had lost 1283 men between them.
  \item \textsuperscript{221} Hartnett, H. G. (2009). *Over the Top: A Digger’s Story of the Western Front*. Sydney, Allen and Unwin.
  \item \textsuperscript{222} Bennett, (2012), *Pozieres: the ANZAC Story* P. 16-17
  \item \textsuperscript{223} Belford, (1940, 1992), *Legs-eleven* P. 480-1
  \item \textsuperscript{224} Snell Collection, witness statement
  \item \textsuperscript{225} Bean, (1938), *The AIF on the Western Front*, P. 447
\end{itemize}
The commander of the 1st Division, General Walker decided to attack with the 1st and 3rd Brigades, leaving the 2nd in support, with Snell’s 1st Brigade to attack close to Albert-Bapaume road.²²⁷

Despite three months of increasing raiding activity, trench-work and training near Armentières, the men still had relatively little battle experience although they were considered nearly as well trained as the British at the time.²²⁸ During the review by Fisher and Hughes in June near Fleurbaix, the men had been reassured that their families would be looked after whatever happened to them in the coming action.²²⁹

The 1st Division, now wearing steel helmets, had pink cloth sewn on the back of their tunics for identification and officers, although permitted to keep their stripes were otherwise to go into battle dressed like their men.²³⁰ One mile from Pozières, the

Chalkpit held an ammunition dump, First Aid station and cooking area and it was from here that carrying parties moved to the front line.²³²

²²⁷ Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, Pp. 468-9
²²⁸ Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 471
²²⁹ Snell Collection, diary 1.6.1916
²³⁰ Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 472
²³¹ Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 495
²³² Bennett, (2012), Pozieres: the ANZAC Story, P. 30
The German trenches were now approximately 150 yards away, and Pozières 3-400 yards beyond, where Germans were occasionally seen moving through the ruins.\(^{233}\) The Australians own movements were lit by enemy flares, routes were heavily shelled and casualties began to occur at once as the men began to work on the unfinished jump-off trenches.\(^{234}\) On the night of 21\(^{st}\)-22\(^{nd}\) Snell was wounded under the continuing slow bombardment of Pozières and the answering enemy fire. ‘In spite of casualties’, among whom was Snell, several long straight sections of trench were provided for assembly prior to coming assault.\(^{235}\)

Having described the conditions under which Snell and his comrades were operating we can envisage the inevitability of death or at least serious injury, and in the discussion of Snell’s wounding and death which follows we will see that, despite his seeming optimism, this was indeed to be Snell’s fate.

4 WOUNDING, DEATH AND BURIAL

Having placed Snell’s war service in the context of the action of 1 ANZAC Corps in the north of France and his movement towards the Somme front, we will now examine as closely as possible the circumstances of his wounding and death in an attempt to answer his father’s question. Snell was one of thousands of anonymous soldiers who implemented the tactics and strategies of generals; however, in order to do justice to those who fought and died we must look at the individual who was wounded and died doing the work he had been instructed to do.\(^{236}\) Van Bergen’s exhaustive study of the effects of war on the human body has been used extensively to track Snell’s final hours.

\(^{233}\) Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 493
\(^{234}\) Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 479.
\(^{235}\) Bean, (1938), The AIF on the Western Front, 1916, P. 490
\(^{236}\) Van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 10
Heavy casualties were anticipated by the military hierarchy, and we have seen that the planning of campaigns involved the provision of field dressing kits to each man, of stretchers and stretcher-bearers, ambulances and first aid posts close to the front. The aim of this process was always to get as many men as possible back into service, and, for this reason too, record-keeping and roll calls were given priority, along with monthly accounts of death, illness and injury which were recorded in the battalion and brigade diaries. So Snell’s injury and its aftermath can be seen as part of a plan.

4.1 Mental Attitude

We need first to examine the mental processes which would have been occurring in the minds of the men as they moved towards a military action: in Snell’s case, the preparation for the attack on Pozières. The act of war produced an altered mental state from civilian life as men were ordered to do things which were forbidden in peace time.237 This, and the sight of men they were being sent to replace, drawn, haggard and dazed after a few days in the front line, induced a sense of gloom and sadness and a need to become callous and insensitive.238 Holmes summed it up as follows: ‘we had seen everything, mines, shells, tear gas, woodland destroyed ... the most terrible wounds and the most murderous avalanche of metal’.239 We can only surmise what Snell’s mental state must have been at this time, and although his tone remained positive to the end of his last letter, there is some hint that he was beginning to feel less confident, in the small errors which began to appear in his writing.

Although Lynch also suggested that a casual attitude protected the men from fear, it is apparent that Lynch possessed a more laconic character than Snell who presents as being something of a perfectionist.240 Snell expressed bravado in his letters, and

237 Van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight P. 215
239 Van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P, 212.
240 Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, Pp. 55, 58
no doubt did so in front of his comrades, but he may at the same time have been relying on his own inner strength and his faith in God for protection. Many ‘knew’ when they would die and fatalism was expressed by the idea of the ‘name on the bullet’, a gambling expression earlier used by Snell himself.²⁴¹ Belford reports one soldier writing to his parents: ‘when you see this, I’ll be dead – don’t worry, I did the only possible thing – I would do it again’.²⁴²

Fears were many and were increased by days and nights of shell fire: fear of looking like the dead, fear of showing fear, of aircraft carrying guns and bombs and of being buried alive by the collapse of a dugout, although shelling was main cause of death.²⁴³ This was even expressed as envy when a man was wounded badly enough to require evacuation to Britain.²⁴⁴ Snell would certainly have experienced these feelings and one can only imagine the determination it took to make his final preparations on 19th July for the days to come, in writing the following and placing it in his pocket:

‘In the event of my being wounded in the movement about to take place will the finder of this note please inform Mrs Snell, 45 Cassland Road, South Hackney, London, England’. Pte C.Snell, No 3911, D Coy, 4th Battalion.²⁴⁵

July 19th was also the day of Snell’s last church parade, accompanied by the sound of shelling.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 238; van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 213;
²⁴² Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P.797, Sgt Badger of South Australia
²⁴³ van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, Pp. 221, 225, 226
²⁴⁴ Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 267, van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 231
²⁴⁵ van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 453
²⁴⁶ 4th Battalion Diary, AWM.
4.2 Wounding

As we have seen, the preparations for the Australian attack on Pozières involved the digging of new jump-off (assembly) trenches accompanied by a heavy preliminary bombardment, which had begun several days before Snell and his fellows went into the line on July 19th. This naturally provoked a counter-bombardment by the Germans. Snell was among those assigned the task of digging jump-off trenches.\textsuperscript{247}

Map 5 has shown the location of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion in the lead-up to the offensive. Map 6 shows that while Snell was engaged in trench-digging, there was a two-way bombardment going on overhead, with shells big enough to uproot trees or to cause a dozen deaths and the possibility that 20-30 men could be lost simply in moving towards the digging area.\textsuperscript{248}

Map 6 from Brigade Diary showing position of machine guns. Heavy guns were also active, and it was in front of these that the new jump-off trenches were being dug.\textsuperscript{249}

According to van Bergen, eighty percent of wounds on the Western Front were the result of shellfire, either German or Allied ‘drop shorts’ with 51\% of wounds being to the arms and legs, and 17\% to the head.\textsuperscript{250} In this regard, Snell was one of this

\textsuperscript{247} Snell Collection, witness statement by Sgt Collins.
\textsuperscript{248} van Bergen(2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 450,452,; Belford, (1940, 1992), P. 552
\textsuperscript{249} 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Brigade Diary, AWM
‘average’ group, suffering injuries to the head, arm and leg.\textsuperscript{251} Shells, heavier and slower than bullets could cause several wounds at once, the pieces of flying metal forcing cloth into the wound, potentially causing infection.\textsuperscript{252} The medical record suggests that shellfire (GSW, multiple wounds) was the source of Snell’s injuries and that he would therefore have suffered a serious risk of infection had his injuries not been serious enough in themselves to cause his death.\textsuperscript{253}

It is likely that the shell or shells which wounded Snell exploded at some distance away from him, because, had it exploded nearby, he could have disappeared without a trace, or, at the other extreme, have died without visible bodily evidence.\textsuperscript{254} A man injured by shell fragments could have been ‘grotesquely’ mutilated or ‘mutilated beyond recognition’.\textsuperscript{255} One report says Snell was badly mutilated, while the Wounded and Missing File notes extensive lacerations to face and arm.\textsuperscript{256} These multiple wounds would have appeared very grave.\textsuperscript{257}

If, as in Snell’s case, the injuries were received whilst engaged in trench duties, rather than during an attack or raid, comrades would provide assistance by quickly applying field dressings.\textsuperscript{258} Once field dressings had been applied, proper dressings would have been applied at the battalion aid post or at the 1st Division Dressing Station at Bécourt Chateau, before his transfer to Casualty Clearing Station 44.

\textsuperscript{251} van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 167, 425; Service Record
\textsuperscript{252} van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 171
\textsuperscript{253} Red Cross Wounded and Missing File. AWM
\textsuperscript{254} van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 171
\textsuperscript{255} van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 168, 170
\textsuperscript{256} Red Cross Wounded and Missing File, AWM.
\textsuperscript{257} van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P. 317
\textsuperscript{258} At this point, it will be assumed that after Snell was wounded he was taken by stretcher to an aid post, as the official record suggests. Later accounts had him dying where he fell, but the documentary evidence refutes this. Other versions of events will be considered later; van Bergen, (2009), \textit{Before my Helpless Sight}, P 287 ff.
4.3 Conflicting Reports of Death

There are three different versions of what Snell was doing at the time he was injured and they are difficult to reconcile, although discrepancies were typical at the time. Three witnesses stated that Snell was digging a jump-off trench and was hit by a shell and wounded, one that he died before leaving the trench, and was buried where he fell, one that he died at a dressing station, indicating that the informant had no knowledge as to where he might have been buried, and another making no reference to burial.

The sergeant who sent the group out, who was not present when Snell was wounded, reported:

Mr Hay told me Snell had died before they left the trench, and had been buried where he fell.\(^{259}\)

Snell’s commanding officer, Lt Percy Hay, who had been with him since training days in Sydney, but who was writing after a period in hospital in England wrote:

I was in charge of the party that was making some assembly trenches on the night of 21\(^{st}\) July at Pozéries (sic). Private Snell was of the party. He had just finished his turn of duty and was resting in a dugout with two of his mates. A shell came through the roof … killing both his mates and wounding himself very badly. I was there when he was unearthed and could see at once that he was fatally wounded. He never regained consciousness and died shortly afterwards.\(^{260}\)

He makes no reference to burial.

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\(^{259}\) Snell Collection, Red Cross, Sydney, to Mrs J.A. Martin, Glen Innes, 25\(^{th}\) Sept, 1917, SGT J. Collins, 194, 4\(^{th}\) Battalion, ‘D’ Co., 14\(^{th}\) Platoon, No 4 Aust. General Hospital. RANDWICK; Collins, J, 194, 4\(^{th}\) Battalion, born London, gold miner, enlisted as private, 48 years old, wounded Gallipoli and Pozières, 22.7 – 27.7, GSW both knees, right arm amputated France, 13.9.17. RTA. July 1917. Like Leitch, his date of injury is vague. NAA

\(^{260}\) Snell Collection, France 8.10.16, from P.W. Hay to Mrs Snell in Hackney.
Private Hamilton of the 4th Battalion, who was not present when Snell was hit, reported:

I knew Snell well. He was hit at Pozeries (sic) on the 22nd – he and some others were sent to dig the lines for us, when we were back in the supports. He was killed by a bomb … . He was taken back to the dressing station and died there. The first thing I heard when I was up was that Snell had been killed.\textsuperscript{261}

Many were indeed killed digging the jump-off trenches and it could even have been friendly fire that wounded and killed Snell (see Map 6).\textsuperscript{262} However, official records show that he reached a Casualty Clearing Station, which indicates a belief that he might survive. If, as has been suggested, Snell had been part of a stretcher party on the day he died, he would have been familiar with the arduous nature of the journey, possibly through trenches and within range of guns throughout the journey.

One witness reported that he was buried where he fell, and two make no reference to burial, whilst official documents record him as having been admitted to a Casualty Clearing Station some considerable distance behind the lines, and having been buried nearby. These facts were later verified by the Red Cross, and we shall see that record-keeping was given sufficient priority for inspections to be made of record-keeping procedures,\textsuperscript{263} so we can have little reason to doubt the official version.\textsuperscript{264} The witness reports were made some considerable time later, by comrades who had themselves been injured and repatriated. Lt Hay had been repatriated to Britain, after which he wrote a condolence letter which contained an account of Snell’s death; and Sgt Collins and Pte Hamilton to Australia where they made their statements. Despite their good intentions, doubt can be cast on their statements.

\textsuperscript{261} Snell Collection, 15th August, 1917, Red Cross, Sydney, to Mrs J.A. Martin, GLEN INNES. INFORMANT: Hamilton, Pte. 4th Battalion, ‘D’ Co., 14th Platoon, No 4 Aust. General Hospital, RANDWICK. No further information on this soldier has been located.

\textsuperscript{262} 1st Brigade diary: 27th July there were eight reports of firing into ‘own’ trench area, one heavy gun being identified as the one responsible. P. 182

\textsuperscript{263} Snell Collection, diary, 21.7.16

\textsuperscript{264} Red Cross Wounded and Missing file, Charles Snell, AWM.
Leitch reported that Snell was on stretcher duty at some point shortly before he was wounded. While this is possible, it may be apocryphal since here is no evidence of the Snell family having become aware of it. It certainly would have made a good story: two Harvey men, from battalions formed on opposite sides of Australia, meet in no-man’s-land, one an injured sniper and the other a private on stretcher duty who applied a tourniquet, thus saving the man’s life, but failing to return as he had promised.

The timing of events is also a significant factor. Since Snell was reported to have died on 22nd July, Sgt Collins reported the trench digging duty as being on the night of 21st July and his transfer to the Casualty Clearing Station and subsequent death would have taken place during the following day. Leitch was reported to have been wounded on July 22nd, by which time Snell was already mortally wounded. In the event, Leitch lay injured in no-mans-land for at least another 24 hours, and his Service Record stating that he was wounded on (or between) 22nd-25th July while the assault on Pozières was taking place. Under these circumstances, it was all the more remarkable that Leitch was rescued at all.

If we accept the official version of events, it is evident that someone must have thought Snell might survive, as did others with seemingly horrific injuries. Van Bergen suggests that if Snell had been wounded during an assault, he may not have been taken to aid at all: the priority at this time was the supply of ammunition and reinforcements.

4.4 Evacuation

Since Snell had been seriously injured, he would then have undergone the sequence of events which had been established by the army. Despite the existence of a

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266 Leitch War Service Record, NAA; 4th Battalion Diary, AWM.
267 van Bergen, (2009), *Before my Helpless Sight*, P. 289
sophisticated system for evacuating the wounded, the journey to ambulance or hospital was arduous and dangerous, although it is likely that Snell was unconscious.\textsuperscript{268}

The battalion aid post was close to the front trenches in a dugout at Chalk Pit.\textsuperscript{269} Snell would have then passed through Sausage Gully by horse ambulance to the 1\textsuperscript{st} Division Field Ambulance at Bécourt Chateau, which received up to 800 wounded per day. From there he would have been transferred by motor ambulance to Warloy then to Casualty Clearing Station 44 at the railhead at Puchevillers, as shown in map 4.\textsuperscript{270}

### 4.5 Casualty Clearing Station

Triage is the process of determining the priority of treatment to patients and was based on likelihood of death, survival if treated immediately, or who could wait to be treated; but above all, the likelihood of a return to the front. Doctors continually made decisions, and the wounded had more chance if there was less fighting.\textsuperscript{271} Triage occurred at every location: the assessment and sorting process also aimed to maintain a steady flow of wounded. The man could have suffered the journey only to find no further effort would be spent on him and the stretcher bearers told they could have saved themselves the trouble.\textsuperscript{272}

CCS 44 had been allocated to the Australians, its six operating tables filled day and night, and staff frequently unable to help the wounded.\textsuperscript{273} Maze, when wounded and in a hospital tent, reported the steady arrival of wounded throughout the night, and noted that after having slept for 24 hours he could recognize no-one who was

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\textsuperscript{268} van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, Pp. 18, 297, 301

\textsuperscript{269} Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, Pp. 287, 288

\textsuperscript{270} Belford, (1940, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 592.

\textsuperscript{271} van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 329; v Gilbert 321-2

\textsuperscript{272} van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, Pp. 290, 296

\textsuperscript{273} Bennett, (2012), Pozieres, the ANZAC Story, Pp. 111, 170; Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 248
there when he came in.\textsuperscript{274} He, like Snell, had noticed the white trains identified with a Red Cross waiting outside for the evacuation of the wounded.

The casualty report states that Snell died of wounds received in action, details his injuries, and confirms that he was buried at Puchevillers British Cemetery. Doctors worked day and night and nurses suffered terribly from the strain, and although accounts emphasize the stress under which the staff operated, and the paucity of staff, record keeping was meticulous.\textsuperscript{275} The CCS44 dairy records an inspection of the arrangements for receiving and recording patients and method of allocation of patients to the wards and depicts the situation which prevailed when Snell was brought in.\textsuperscript{276} Attending to patients was interrupted by several inspections which pronounced favourable findings, despite the fact that it was impossible to maintain adequate sanitary standards in the badly-equipped hospitals. The report highlights the trying conditions under which staff operated and the shortage and poor quality of staff.\textsuperscript{277} On 21\textsuperscript{st} July the report noted a steady influx of cases, including 72 gas cases, produced by the ‘new’ German gas shells.

There is a tone of desperation which continued through the 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 23\textsuperscript{rd}, as attention shifts to the fighting and the arrival of wounded. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} July, Snell was one of 313 wounded admitted, and there is mention of 249 evacuated by train, but no reports of deaths.\textsuperscript{278} Maze observed surgeons in blood stained aprons smoking between operations and the German patients, as noted in the report, would have the same treatment as the Allied soldiers, but with less urgency.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{274} Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 248
\textsuperscript{275} Hayward, J. A. (1930) A Casualty Clearing Station.
\textsuperscript{276} ; van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, Pp. 167, 289, 320.
\textsuperscript{277} R.A.M.C (July, 1916). Diary of No 44 Casualty Clearing Station. London, Imperial War Museum.

\textsuperscript{278} One officer had been reduced to the ranks for incompetence, and there was no suitable person to replace him. The commanding officer requested the return of staff who were present on 2nd-3rd July for the ‘big rush of wounded’.
\textsuperscript{279} Also among them was a Lt Hopkins of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Dorset regiment who was treated for a self inflicted revolver wound to the foot, and who reported ‘without the required paperwork’.

\textsuperscript{279} Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 249
reached hospital alive had a 92% chance of surviving, so here Snell was less fortunate.\textsuperscript{280}

4.6 Death

We have seen that, by Snell’s wounding, a chain of events was set in motion. The system is exemplified by the Casuality Report, which is quite detailed, although it is apparent that records for officers were significantly more detailed than for other ranks.

CASUALTY REPORT: 12\textsuperscript{th} Reinforcement 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion.

‘Died of wounds received in action at No 44 Casualty Clearing Station, GSW base skull, foot and thigh. .... GSW face, skull, foot, thigh. .... Abrasions to face and arm. Buried at Puchevillers British Cemetery, 7 ½ miles SSE Doullins’.\textsuperscript{281}

All notes appear on the same form, but in several different hands. The date 22/7 appears several times. The Red Cross Wounded and Missing File duplicates the information, and adds that the patient was badly mutilated. How might the family have taken this – would they have been further grieved at the knowledge, or would they have been somehow comforted that his death was for the best?\textsuperscript{282} There is no record that anyone who made enquiries received this additional information. We will see that various people also received conflicting accounts of their son’s death.

From the accounts of van Bergen and others we can assume that Snell’s wounds were bound and that he was administered morphine, by then readily available.\textsuperscript{283} By 1916, saline could be given for loss of blood, but blood transfusion was still not common. With Snell’s injury to the base of skull it is likely he was unconscious from the time of his wounding to the time of his death, as was reported by one of the

\textsuperscript{280} van Bergen,(2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 285
\textsuperscript{281} War Service Records, CS, NAA. All wounds were described as ‘gun shot wounds’ regardless of whether or not they were caused by shells.
\textsuperscript{282} Red Cross Wounded and Missing File, AWM
\textsuperscript{283} van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 292.
witnesses. He was probably placed in a tent allocated to the dying, the ‘moribund’ ward, with a nurse in attendance. If he had regained consciousness he would have been reassured as best staff were able. Even the wounded who were assigned to the moribund wards were more fortunate than those who died alone in the field. They generally suffered less pain, were washed, sedated, and comforted as far as possible by female nurses who moved quietly and spoke with reassuring voices. If, as sometimes happened, a patient seemed to rally before end, a staff member may have offered to read a letter from home.

As soon as death was noted, a sister was called, pockets were emptied and effects placed in a calico bag, the patient was dressed for last time, his feet placed together and his hands crossed, and carried outside. If his clothes had been covered with blood, effects may not have been removed, but left with the body, however, the bag used for Snell’s effects was received by the family. While this was happening, those who could would have stood to attention while the body was carried out, possibly draped with a flag. If we follow the official record, we can assume that as Snell was placed in a coffin, attendant staff were standing to attention. As an ‘other rank’, Snell’s coffin would have been of unseasoned wood.

Chaplains, attached to each battalion, were in attendance at clearing stations, and one outstanding British Chaplain, Dick Sheppard, was known to have ‘knelt and prayed with every dying soldier he could find’. The knowledge of the presence of a chaplain at their son’s death would have been a comfort to him and to his family. The letter sent to Sir Newton Moore in response to his enquiry concludes:

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284 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 299
285 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 301
286 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 267, Lynch 251
287 Maze, (1934), A Frenchman in Khaki, P. 252
289 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 482
290 Fiennes, (2011), To War With God, P. 283
The above (statement) was given to us by the Church of England Chaplain attached to the Clearing Station, suggesting that a chaplain was present.

4.7 Burial

Wilson has identified a ‘war culture’ that developed around the burial of the dead, a common wartime task, as men sought to ensure a decent burial for their comrades amid the seeming chaos and the deaths almost beyond number. By 1917, bodies may only have been wrapped in a blanket or left in their uniform for burial, but the task remained one which was accompanied by reverence and sorrow, as soldiers never really came to terms with the enormity of this task. Records were carefully kept, handfuls of earth were thrown into the grave, and at the very least a final prayer read. Since medical staff at this time included significant numbers of Australians, it is reasonable to assume that men assigned to burial duty also included Australians. The Royal Army Chaplains Department organized these services, and the Book of Common Prayer was used most frequently. Although the burial ceremony would have been conducted by someone who did not know Snell, the men stood to attention as the service was read; they trod softly and spoke quietly.

If, as one account suggests that Snell was buried where he fell, burial by his friends would have provided them with a ‘sense of stability within the tumult of war’, and if not for Snell, they would have performed the duty for innumerable friends. However, if this had been the case, there was a strong possibility that his body would have been disinterred by later fighting. Officers were required to note all details of deaths and burials and Lt Hay may have been referring to such a record when he

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291 Snell Collection 3.11.1916, Vera ... Secretary, to Lieut. E.A. Boyce, A.D.C. General Sir Newton Moore. It has not been possible to identify the chaplain mentioned.
293 Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, P. 10
294 Wilson, “The Burial of the Dead”, P. 29
295 Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, P.169
wrote his condolence letter in October, although he does not mention the actual burial of Snell. Belford noted that some officers were kept back in Albert, prior to the attack on Pozières, but Lt Hay was one of the officers who went into action on 22nd July, so it is reasonable to assume that he was present in the vicinity of Snell’s wounding.

Van Bergen describes how long trenches were dug in the cemeteries for the burial of those who had died in a clearing station. In the Puchevillers burial ground adjoining the clearing station, coffins were placed next to each other in a trench dug by territorials. It would have been in one such that Snell’s body would have been placed, covered, and the plot marked with name, rank, number and date of death. He was among the more fortunate to have been buried in a grave, as Bennett notes that by mid-August unburied dead still lay around, and one Australian noted that he had not seen a body buried in ten days and there were 18000 on the Western Front who had no known grave.

The family could have taken comfort that their son was not buried by a burial party, long after death, by which time the task of removing the identity disk from the remains would have become almost unpalatable, or given no funeral at all, or carried by the Germans back to their lines for identification. They could be comforted too by the knowledge that their son was cared for by comrades and medical staff after being wounded and that he was buried in a proper grave that will be maintained in perpetuity. There is solace too in the knowledge that he did not die in mortal combat with his fellow man, and that he did not survive blinded, disfigured, maimed, or insane, haunted by ghosts, and that he was not dependent for the rest of his life on the care of others.

297 Belford, (1949, 1992), Legs-eleven, P. 493; 1st Brigade Diary, AWM, p157, appendix 1, Maj. Iven McKay
298 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 480
299 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres, the ANZAC Story, P. 174.
300 Lynch, (2006), Somme Mud, P. 52; van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 487
Snell’s injury and death have now been examined, and there is enough evidence to conclude that the official records were sufficiently accurate as to provide reassurance to the family that he did indeed receive a decent burial. We will now look at the consequences for his family and community, and will see that many others mourned his loss, and that their grieving process was like that of the many thousands of others who experienced the loss of a loved one in the war.

5 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ARE INFORMED

5.1 Notification of the Family

In this chapter we shall see that the process of notification of the death of Snell followed a predictable sequence setting in motion a chain of events that took considerable time to reach its conclusion. Snell’s father’s request for further information regarding his son’s death was equally predictable. Although a degree of acceptance is immediately evident, Snell’s father made extensive inquiries seeking confirmation of the initial advice. Both this and the period of condolence and mourning went on over a period of months, and the final winding up of Snell’s business affairs took several years.

An urgent telegram advising of Snell’s death, was received on Monday 7th August, nearly three weeks after the event.

*Please inform Mr A.J. Snell of Harvey that his son Private C Snell fourth battalion died of wounds on 22nd July and convey Defence Department’s sympathy Military Commandent (sic)*

The family was fortunate to find out so soon after his death; many searched for years. Official letters rarely gave details since it was generally believed that the

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301 Abbreviations used: AJS: Mr Alfred James Snell, CAS: Mrs Caroline Amelia Snell
302 Snell Collection, Urgent telegram 7.8.1916
303 Kipling, (1923), *The Irish Guards in the Great War,*
truth would hurt, and it will become apparent that some information was withheld from the family. We have seen that on 19th July Snell had left instructions that in the event of his being wounded, his aunt in London be notified, and this instruction was duly carried out in September, the slip of paper returned to her and information regarding his effects later received. An official card received later from the AIF enclosing a photograph of a grave and listing Snell’s details, gave the location of the grave as Puchevillers Cemetery, Plot 2, Row A, Grave 20, the nearest railway station being Puchevillers.

Luckins and others have written extensively on the effects of anxiety and grief on bereaved family members. This was recognized by one family friend who wrote to Snell’s mother:

‘I am sure all the anxiety you have been through must have been terrible’, and it is likely, too, that she had some premonition that her son had died. Mr Snell, had sent his ailing wife to hospital in Bunbury on the morning that the telegram arrived, and having notified the hospital of her imminent arrival, he was then obliged to telegram the doctor requesting that he inform his wife of their son’s death. The news came during the busiest time of the year for the family and Mr Snell begged the doctor to insist that Mrs Snell rest, fearing there would ‘soon be another calamity’.

304 van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 409
305 Snell Collection, MEMORANDUM no 11739 September 23rd 1916, A.N.Z.A.C SECTION, 3rd Echelon, General Headquarters, B.E.F. W. MacRay Captain, For A.A.G. Received 28/9/1916, CAS
306 Snell Collection, The photograph bears the inscription Z145.1.7
307 Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory
308 Snell Collection, Brereton, Melbourne, orchardist, formerly at Glen Innes. Snell expected to be given Brereton’s former position when he returned from the war.
309 Snell Collection, 7.8.1916, AJS to Nurse Brown, St Clair Hospital, Bunbury, Mrs Snell will reach you one o’clock (sic) today please have bed ready, Snell; 7.8.1916, AJS to Dr Joel, Bunbury. Mrs Snell went Nurse Browns Hospital this morning for your attention please use your discretion informing her Charlie died of wounds July 24th (sic) Snell; 7.8.1916, Dr Joel to AJS, My deepest sympathy broken news wife and Marjorie both taking it well. Joel.
310 Snell Collection, Letter AJS to Dr Joel, 7.8.1916; the citrus harvest was in progress.
Mr Snell immediately arranged for a notice to be inserted in the *Southern Times* and another newspaper:

7.8.1916: Killed in Action: On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1916 died of wounds received in action in France Charles Snell 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Beloved youngest (sic) son of Alfred and CA Snell. Inserted by his loving parents brother and sister. A Snell, Devonia Orangery Harvey.  

Expressions of grief came initially from Private Snell’s mother and brother. Mr Snell’s own feelings are described in a letter to Mrs Snell from her friend Nellie Gibbs, and later, in correspondence to those who sent expressions of sympathy.

On Tuesday, Mrs Snell wrote to her husband and son,

*My dears*

*No words, no writing can express my feelings.*

*I can’t realize my baby boy in heaven I have that one consolation.*

... *every heart knoweth its own bitterness.*

*Oh, I’ve had such a lot of visitors.*

*The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away.*

*Love to you both*  

Marjorie, then fourteen years old, focusing on practical matters, wrote:

*My dears, I am spending two or three days with Mum in the hospital and will write you tomorrow with one Mum is going to send. And you will get it on Thursday morning. Don’t come in, love from us both.*

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312 *Snell Collection*, Nellie Gibbs to CAS, 8.8.1916; AJS to various correspondents.

313 *Snell Collection*, CAS to AJS 8.8.1916

314 *Snell Collection*, Marjorie Snell to AJS, 8.8.1916
Snell’s elder brother, Alf, expressed his feelings thus:

*Dear Mum, no need to tell you how I feel about losing poor old Charlie.....Alf.*

It was to be some time before Mr Snell expressed his feelings in writing, but he was very active in trying to ascertain the cause of his son’s death. Telegrams were dispatched to family and friends in New South Wales and, probably also to the United Kingdom, although the deaths of Australians were also reported in British newspapers.

Mrs Snell’s period of recuperation was overseen by Mr Snell, Dr Simon Joel and Mr and Mrs Beigel in Bunbury who offered their hospitality to Mrs Snell. Mr Snell’s tone was one of desperation when he wrote to Dr Joel:

> *Mrs Snell tells me you are of the opinion she’s badly rundown. Since my efforts to keep her from doing unnecessary work and worrying over imaginary troubles prove unavailing I beg of you to insist upon her remaining in Bunbury for at least 6 weeks until our rush here is over.*

> *If she comes back here things will soon be as bad as ever with her. We have a really good girl in the house and want for nothing. Mrs Snell’s fears of the expense of staying away from home are unfounded.*

> *Will you please impress this upon her and make her take the long spell she so much needs? I can’t make her do it and if you can’t why there’ll soon be another calamity.*

> *If you think a sea trip anywhere would do her good only say the word and get her into a willing mind and you’ll be my very good friend ... Yours faithfully A.S.*

To Mr Beigel, he later confided his relief in finding Mrs Snell somewhat recovered, and his plans for the coming weeks: *... I was very glad to find her so much better and so cheerful. It’s madness to think of her staying here during our busy time for she will*

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315 *Snell Collection, Alf Snell to CAS, 11.8.1916*

316 *Snell Collection, AJS to Dr Joel, 8.8.16*
not steady herself a bit. So after a change in Perth and a day or so (at home) she will return to Bunbury and go into rooms where she can take her leisure, ... Miss McCallum will be able to accommodate her ...  

5.2 Uncertainty – Seeking Clarification

Despite a degree of acceptance of their son’s death, uncertainty continued with the arrival of a telegram dated July 23rd: ‘France all well’, presumably sent a few days earlier, and letters dated July 9th to 15th July were received 31st August. Bennett describes how, in a desperate search for particulars of his son’s last movements one father wrote letters seeking information until 1922, and another who had followed his son to Britain when he enlisted and then haunted hospitals speaking to the wounded trying to find someone who had been with their son when he later died. People were usually grateful for any information sent.

Mr Snell made his enquiries through the Red Cross and the YMCA.

To the Red Cross: ‘My son ... was yesterday reported as having died of wounds on July 22nd ... on the same date a cable from our relatives reported him as all well.... I beg your good offices in trying to find the actual truth for his bereaved family.’

They replied: ‘We regret very much to have to inform you that the information your son died on the 22nd July is only too true....You have the consolation, however, that your son died, as he would have liked to have died, in the defence of the honour of his country’.

Snell Collection, AJS to Red Cross 8.8.1916
Snell Collection, Red Cross to AJS, 23.8.1916

Bundled and annotated by CAS.


Van Bergen, (2009), Before my Helpless Sight, P. 410
A later enquiry to the Y.M.C.A. elicited both personal and official responses.323

‘Just a few lines to add my personal sympathies... although I do always with all soldiers everything possible under such circumstances ... any experience I have picked up whilst in charge here is freely and fully yours .... Kindest regards to Mrs Snell and Marjorie.’ John Beecham.324

Mr Snell responded: ‘The loss of our boy has broken us all up badly, but time is softening the wound, and we are hoping to soon see sunshine again.

We should of all things like to know if possible how Charlie met his death and where, that he was game right thro’ we have no doubt. If he left any little odds and ends they would be valued if they could be sent to us, but I presume the military authorities arrange this? We deeply appreciate your kind feeling and must congratulate the Y.M.C.A in having with them in yourself one who is exceptionally well fitted in uplifting sorrowing souls’.325

This is in keeping with Luckins, observation of the value of personal mementos to grieving families.326

Sir Newton Moore’s own enquiries to the Red Cross elicited a further fragment of information:

‘He was buried in the cemetery and his grave is marked with a Wooden Cross bearing his name, so that after the war is over, his friends will be able to find out where he lies. Pte C. Snell was admitted to this (44) Casualty Clearing Station on September 22nd, Wounded. He had a compound fracture of the femur, and the base of his skull was fractured, he only lived a few hours and died the same day, being unconscious

323 Snell Collection, AJS to YMCA, 25th September
324 Snell Collection, J. Beecham, YMCA to AJS 30.9.1916
325 Snell Collection, AJS to YMCA 7.10.1916
326 Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory, P. 188
the whole time’. The above was given to us by the Church of England Chaplain attached to the Clearing Station. 327

Mr Snell’s brother in London made his own enquiries to the AIF in London, and received a confirmatory letter on 14th September. 328

Evidence shows that the authorities went to considerable lengths to inform family of the death or wounding of a soldier and to return his effects. Many items were returned to the family, including personal effects and packages of letters which had been received by Snell. There were clear lines of communication between families in the UK and in Australia, but the letters also make clear the close links between the Military, the Red Cross and the YMCA in both countries. These are exemplified by the willingness of the authorities to communicate directly with the London family and with Sir Newton Moore.

Mrs Blanche Martin in Glen Innes made her own inquiries, and received two responses which she then forwarded to the Snell family. The information contained in them has been discussed elsewhere.

We enclose a copy of a statement which has been made to us by Sergeant J. Collins’, and, separately, ‘Private Hamilton, who has returned to Sydney, and which we thought you would like to see. Yours faithfully, Lancer Owen. 329

It is worth noting that different people making enquiries received different fragments of information and that the information regarding Snell’s degree of mutilation was withheld. The full record is now available.

327 Snell Collection, 3.11.1916, Vera (name obscured), Secretary, to Lieut. E.A. Boyce, A.D.C. General Sir Newton Moore
329 Snell Collection, Red Cross, Sydney, to Mrs J.A. Martin, 25.9.1917, 15.8.1917
The return of Snell’s effect to his family itself generated a significant body of correspondence to the London relatives who made enquiries, and this correspondence later found its way to Australia.

The following articles have been received in this Office for the late Private Snell: 1 Identity disc. 1 Pocket book with letters and photos, Badges, titles and buttons. 1 Knife, 1 Bible, 1 Cigarette Holder. 1 Toothbrush. 1 Pair scissors, 1 Cotton bag. These effects will be forwarded, in due course, through A.I.F. Headquarters, London, to the registered next of kin.\footnote{Snell Collection, MEMORANDUM 13011, October 4th 1916, A.N.Z.A.C. SECTION, 3rd Echelon, General Headquarters, B.E.F. W. MacRay, Capt., For A.A.G. to Mrs Snell, London.}

They were forwarded on the “Boorara”, and the London relatives notified to this effect.\footnote{Snell Collection, W.M., B.R Form No. 2., AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE, BASE RECORDS OFFICE, Victoria Barracks MELBOURNE, 7th June 1917, J. M. LEAN, Major, Officer in Charge, Base Records, to AJS, 19.6.17} The contents were noted slightly differently and there is some confusion regarding the identity of the package:

Identity Disc, Letters, Photos, Keys, Badges, Titles, Buttons, Knife, Bible, Cigarette Holder, Scissors, Diary, Leather Letter Wallet, Cotton Bag, Testament, First Aid Book, Military Book, Letter, Developing Spool. No. of Package D/S 2876 (28939).\footnote{The items described are now in the possession of a family member.}

We have seen that the process of informing family and community, and the family’s immediate and ongoing response followed a predictable pattern and now it is time to explore the community’s response to the knowledge of Snell’s demise in France. The condolence letters also follow a predictable pattern.

6 THE COMMUNITY RESPONDS: CONDOLENCE LETTERS

Meyer has described the condolence letters as a means of remembering the dead and comforting the bereaved by speaking of sacrifice, courage, patriotism and
duty. They located the individual within a network of family, friends and associates who themselves grieved for the loss, and created images of the dead, thereby reconstructing the soldier in his community setting and constructing a written memorial. Meyer further suggests that constructing the dead in an heroic image may have offered comfort but may also have reduced the individual to a simplified ideal of a soldier and man. However, the letters sent to comfort the Snell family, although following these general principles, could not be said to have simplified the ideal of the man since the ideas expressed are detailed and varied and suggest such widespread personal grief that there is no sense of his memory being ‘simplified’. Other themes which become apparent in the condolence letters are an emphasis on motherhood with its joys and sorrows, a glimpse of shared community anxiety, and condemnation of the consequences of the war, which is particularly apparent in the letters from the UK.

The condolence letters received following Snell’s death, many from people who themselves had sons at war, are intensely emotional and speak of a young man who was highly regarded by his community. Although some delayed writing because they were so upset themselves or did not know what to say, many letters were written within one day of the arrival of the news of Snell’s death, making it clear that his father immediately sent telegrams to inform friends and family of their son’s death and that the response was immediate and overwhelming. From this point Snell will usually be referred to as ‘Charlie’ since this is how his community identified him.

The majority of the letters, (60) are, as would be expected, from residents of the local region, including Harvey and Bunbury and surrounding districts, both private and official; there are fifteen from the Perth region and fifteen from Sydney and Glen Innes relatives, friends and colleagues. Wounds would have been reopened in September and October when a dozen letters were received from relatives and friends in England. There are, in addition, many telegrams and simple cards. Most

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334 Meyer, (2009), *Men of War*, Pp. 75; 161
letters were addressed to Mrs Snell, but it was Mr Snell who answered them, crossing off names as he did so from lists of correspondents compiled by Mrs Snell. He also kept carbon copies of many of his replies enabling us to reconstruct his principle themes of grief and loss, consolation and the hope of a happy reunion ‘on the other side’.

Four of the most touching letters will now be considered, followed by an analysis of the themes evident in the letters. On Wednesday August 9th, two days after the arrival of the telegram, Mrs Nellie Gibbs reiterated her sorrow, having been with Mrs Snell in Bunbury shortly after the news had been broken.335 There had been some jostling between Mrs Gibbs and another friend, Mabel Mayne, as to who should visit first.

My own dear girl, so brave, so dear, I never spent such a sad day as Monday - nothing would ease the pain in my heart for very sorrow for you - and for us. Thank God you have Marjorie, she’s such a mother’s girl just as Win is to me, and there’s Alf, so affectionate and so fond. And I know Mr Snell is just full of sorrow ... (when I returned, he) was in his office, he called me in. He asked all about you, and he spoke so splendidly of his and your terrible loss. ... Mrs Mayne was a bit upset at not seeing you, I asked her to let me go alone at first. You had seen so many and was (sic.) tired...every your loving friend, Nellie Gibbs’.

Mrs Mayne graciously waited her turn, and after her visit wrote:

Dear Mrs Snell, I was glad to see you, it did me all the good in the world. Get strong, dear, and come back soon as you can. I did not come in again, I thought I would not intrude, but my loving wishes for your recovery and speedy return I leave. Enclosed,

335 Snell Collection, Nellie Gibbs was cousin by marriage to May Gibbs, the Australian children’s writer, and had sons at front.
336 Snell Collection, Nellie Gibbs to CAS, 8.8.1916
dear, a few words of loving memory just for you. Your always affectionate, Mabel Mayne.

The ‘few words’ are a poem, seemingly written by her, on the theme of a mother’s sacrifice (see below).

Gladys Whatham, Snell’s fiancée, had written to Mrs Snell shortly before the news was received to say that a telegram and letters received from Charlie had informed her that he was well and in excellent spirits, and that he had moved up to support the firing line. She herself expressed concern for her brother. Her condolence letter expresses her disbelief and inability to accept Charlie’s death, but goes on to say that he had died doing his duty, and mentions that Glen Innes folk had written to her.

Please accept my deepest sympathy in your very sad loss, I cannot tell you how grieved I am and only wish I could comfort you in some way. It came as a great shock to me as although I knew Charlie was in the firing line I did not once think anything would happen him, and cannot yet realize the awful truth. But dear Mrs Snell he died as I am sure he would wish to die doing his duty and fighting for those he loved. I had a letter from him only last week, in which he sent me a little bunch of flowers, I am enclosing half for you. I have had several very nice letters from Glen Innes friends and they are all very sad, he was a favourite everywhere. I have the address of Cpl Field, he was Charlie’s friend in camp here and I am writing to him as they were together in France I think. I only pray that he did not have to suffer long.

I hope you are well and being brave for his sake. Give my kindest wishes to Mr Snell, your son (Alf) and dear little Marjorie, and love to your dear self. I remain, Yours lovingly, Gladys Whatham

337 Snell Collection, Mabel Mayne to CAS, ‘Sunday’ – 13.8.1916
338 Snell Collection, Gladys Whatham to CAS 5.8.1916. The letter would have been received after the telegram of notification, further adding to the uncertainty which occurred.
339 Snell Collection, Gladys Whatham to CAS, 16.8.1916
340 It has not been possible to identify this soldier.
The most touching letter from a male friend was from Wedd Tuxford, then resident in the U.K. He wrote from Sheffield October 22nd:

*I have a sad task before me, expressing my sympathy to you in the loss of poor old Charlo (sic)...I can’t think of anything else but the years and years of happy outings...with Charlie and Alf...can’t imagine I’ll never see him again. He was the only real mate I had up to the time I met the wife, as you know. ... Believe me, my regret is that I was not with him at the last. I remain your foster son (as you used to say).*

Letters usually addressed a range of themes as correspondents sought, sometimes painfully, to express their own sense of loss, and sympathy for the family.

*‘it seems so cold to write’, *(I have been) sitting with a sheet of paper for half an hour’, *if I wrote reams I could not say very much’, ‘I will write a proper letter when I can collect my thoughts,’ and ‘this letter is only a poor poor (sic) expression of what I really feel.’*

They poignantly expressed their own grief: *‘I have a splitting headache, you must too, it’s awful when it comes near’,* and *‘my heart has been rudely lacerated’.*

General themes will now be categorized according to Meyer’s analysis.

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341 A childhood friend, he had figured in a photograph which includes Mrs Snell and Marjorie, Reg Hemmingway and the Moore girls. In Bunbury Museum Collection, files 107, 435.  
342 *Snell Collection*, Alison Moir to CAS 8.8.1916  
343 *Snell Collection*, H. Beigel to AJS, 8.8.1916  
344 *Snell Collection*, Steve Snell to AJS, 15.9.1916  
345 *Snell Collection*, Lorrie Clark to CAS, 9.8.1916  
346 *Snell Collection*, Rosa Myatt to CAS, 10.8.1916  
348 *Snell Collection*, H. Beigel to AJS 8.8.1916
6.1 Communities of Mourning

Meyer describes the development of ‘communities of mourning’ where correspondents justify their grief by laying claim to connection with the dead. 349

‘Your old Bunbury friends feel greatly for you’. 350 There was ‘universal grief in Harvey’, 351 ‘the day the news came it caused quite a gloom around Harvey, and many had a weep over it’, said Emily Daddrus, adding that she had had a chat with Charlie the day before he left for Sydney. 352 Adding the perspective of parents, we read: ‘how many hundreds of parents in your position, mourning dear sons, fathers, husbands and relatives … sadness and bereavement for one and all,’ 353 and ‘we can sympathize with each other’ - ‘doesn’t all the trouble make us look back on their childhood days?’ 355

In the Sydney and Glen Innes communities, there was a similar sense of community loss. ‘Miss Tonkin, a friend of Charlie’s has just come in to condole, and we had a letter … (from) Glen Innes and everyone is so sorry. He was a favourite wherever he went’, 356 and ‘we have his photo in a corner among our soldier friends’. 357

The grief extended to the U.K.: Stephen Snell, 358 wrote ‘... our fears for dear Charley (sic) were correct ... we missed the dear boy’s letters and feared that something had happened’, 359 and Mrs Jefferson: ‘my husband ... had corresponded for the last three

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349 Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 75
350 Snell Collection, Geo. Reading to AJS, 8.8.1916
351 Snell Collection, Mollie Hurst, the rector’s wife, to CAS, 17.8.1916
352 Snell Collection, Emily Daddrus to CAS, 17.8.1916
353 Snell Collection, Mary Newell, Mt Lawley, to CAS, 14.8.1916
354 Snell Collection, Alicia O’Connor to CAS, 10.9.1916
355 Snell Collection, Mrs Paisley to CAS, 9.8.1916
356 Snell Collection, Rebecca Whatham to CAS, 9.8.1916
357 Snell Collection, AP Cameron, the manse, Glen Innes to CAS, 13.8.1916
358 Snell Collection, Steve Snell, brother of AJS, Hackney, London, to AJS, 15.9.1916
359 Snell Collection, Pollie Snell to CAS, 15.9.1916
years’. Tuxford’s grief had been transmitted back to his parents in Claremont, whom Charlie had seen during his brief stay in Fremantle en route to Egypt. They also wrote and suggested a ‘pilgrimage to Charlie’s ‘resting place’.

6.2 Mothers

The maternal theme is prominent among the condolence letters: the majority of the condolence letters were written to Mrs Snell and suggest a very close relationship between Charlie and his mother: ‘she was simply wrapped up in him’, and ‘how he adored his mother’.

The predominant theme here is that of the ‘sacrificial mother’, a phrase used often during the Great War, emphasising the anxiety of sending a son to war. It is epitomized in the letters to Mrs Snell, beginning with a simple phrase such as: ‘any mother might be proud to own him’, and becoming more expansive in ‘you know every mother will feel for you…. (he was) so much more than many sons’, or, ‘you are so brave you dear woman that I can only admire and wonder and pray’.

Some were more matter of fact and instructive: ‘your dearly loved Charlie is dead oh my own poor darling friend, how my heart aches for you. How proud you were of your handsome good boy … only (think) of his worth and how all honoured him’.

[References]

360 Snell Collection, Mrs Jefferson, Exmouth, Devonshire, to CAS, 15.10.1916
361 Snell Collection, Diary, 18.1.1916
362 Snell Collection, Tuxford, Claremont, 7.11.1916
363 Snell Collection, Gibbs daughter to CAS, 9.8.1916
364 Snell Collection, Marion Johnson to CAS, 9.8.1916
365 Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory, P. 59
366 Snell Collection, AP Cameron, the manse, Glen Innes, to CAS, 13.8.1916
367 Snell Collection, H. Beigel to AIS, 8.8.1916
368 Snell Collection, Rosa Myatt to CAS, 10.8.1916
369 Snell Collection, Lorrie Clark to CAS, 9.8.1916
and, ‘the whole world of mothers must indeed be suffering (but) they are safe from any more pain and horror’.  

Cousin Susie, who knew her bible well, wrote: ...yours is indeed a sacrifice ... words - and heart - fail me ... (I can only) commend you to God ... who can and does heal the broken hearted ...as one whom his mother comforted, so will I comfort you.

One friend was moved to write poetry on the theme of a mother’s sacrifice.

*In Memory of a Beloved Son (abridged)*

Hail beloved, splendid son of a beloved mother ... Thy life grandly yielded, great evils to smother

...Triumphantly thy manhood rose in arms ..There are wrongs to right, Mother,

Yet did the gods demand of thee thy all... Greater love hath no Man,

Fearlessly with heart and courage high For love of Mother home, your duty clear

Now faced the foe to do your part and die.

But in your Mother’s heart, fragrant and sweet ... In deathless memory, your love lives yet

...Spirit shall Spirit greet ... Sweet natured, gentle, honourable, Beloved of all,

To thee, Pure in Heart, comes clear and sweet ‘The Call’. To his dear Mother.

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370 Snell Collection, Bessie Lambert, Hampstead, to CAS, 3.10.1916
371 Snell Collection, Cousin Susie, Newton Abbott, to CAS, 24.10.1916. This letters is one of the few letters which is not completely literate, the other two appearing to have been written by native German speakers due to spelling and expression which tend towards the German practices.
373 Snell Collection, Mabel to CAS, 13.8.1916. Enquiries have failed to locate the source of this poem, so it must be assumed that Mrs Mayne herself wrote it within days of hearing the news.
6.3 Resignation and Acceptance

Mrs Snell was advised to resign herself to the reality of her situation and count her blessings: ‘(he) has given you a wonderful gift - your endless pride in him’,374 ‘comfort yourselves in remembering ... (that you were) the mother of such a brave good son’,375 and ‘try and be brave for the sake of the others’.376

Mrs Gibbs’ daughter, having recently prepared an elaborate parcel for Charlie, quickly accepted the situation and resolved to send the parcel to Alf Gray in the UK instead.377 Siblings were a source of consolation, but they must have felt some consternation at the following admonition – ‘Alf must try to fill his shoes...brace up and come over dear old girl’.378

6.4 Identity – Personal

The letters show how the identity of the deceased was retrospectively constructed by community members as a means of memorializing him.379 In recreating his character, Snell was variously described as ‘a model of model sons, honoured by all who had the privilege of knowing him’,380 ‘a boy in a million’,381 ‘the dear old boy’,382 a ‘fine manly boy’,383 and a ‘clean souled young man’.384 From England, Mrs Jefferson wrote: ‘... your dear son was a noble young man, who trusted and hoped in

374 Snell Collection, Elise Clarke to CAS, 14.8.1916
375 Snell Collection, Emily Dadruess to CAS, 17.8.1916
376 Snell Collection, Mrs Snell’s cousin Pollie, Sydney, to CAS, 8.8.1916
377 Snell Collection, Unnamed incomplete letter, from a daughter of Mrs Gibbs, to her mother, 9.8.16; Alf Gray has not been identified.
378 Snell Collection, Nora Snell, London, to CAS, 12.10.1916. Alf was three years older than Charlie.
379 Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 74
380 Snell Collection, H. Beigel to AJS, 8.8.1916
381 Snell Collection, Alison Moir to CAS, 8.8.1916
382 Snell Collection, M Hymus to CAS, 9.8.1916
383 Snell Collection, Alma Shenton to AJS, 7.8.1916
384 Snell Collection, Alfred Goss from Goldfields Club hotel, to AJS, 10.8.1916
God. I ...should love to send you his last letter, but my husband will not part with it’.  

The identity of the deceased was further recreated in letters from employers and teachers as they spoke of the promise of a future cut short. Letters were also received from organizations to which family members belonged, such as the Harvey Citrus Society, the Harvey Lodge and the Harvey Rifle Club. While the Town Clerk, on behalf of the local town council referred to ‘your most illustrious son’, others were less effusive in their praise, but expressed sincere regret at the loss of such a fine young man and a ‘bright young promising life’. Snell’s teachers wrote of a ‘beautiful life cut off so early, ... he stood out from among his school mates, (when I)... saw him again in later years I found the promise of his boyhood fulfilled’. Thomas Paisley wrote, ‘how well we all remember him, I always looked on him as a good and promising lad’. ‘As you know I was very fond of your dear boy’, wrote a music teacher who lamented ... ‘bright young lives lost to us forever for the sake of one man’s ambition’.  

Snell’s employers, too, wrote heartfelt messages: the manager of the Experimental Farm at Glen Innes, spoke of ‘trustworthiness, efficiency and honourable conduct,’ while his wife referred to a letter she had received from Charlie as being ‘full of life and bright, good and true’... (he was a)... ‘splendid character’. W.J. Allen wrote of a ‘most promising junior officer, enthusiastic, energetic and painstaking... (he) conducted himself well,... would have soon ... filled one of the best positions in the branch. (He was) highly thought of by officers, workmen and students alike. We did
not like to let him go, but he felt it was his duty, (and it would) not be right to raise any objection ... We have lost one of the most promising officers and you the best of sons. 394

On his future, two other comments reflect those of teachers and work colleagues: ‘Charlie gave everyone the impression he would go far’395 and Mrs Whatham wrote: ‘he was a loyal character and I saw in him a great future if God had spared him’.396

6.5 Identity – Masculine

Meyer affirms that masculine identity was defined by participation in the war and this theme too is echoed in the condolences, although it is clear that in the case of Snell, his masculinity had been one of his defining characteristics for those who had known him.397 This is expressed as: ‘he did his duty right manfully’,398 ‘fighting for his country as any man should’399 and ‘a man grown he felt he must do a man’s work’.400

Another wrote: ‘none (displayed) ...a cleaner and truer manhood than your dear lad,’401 and, with reference to a letter from Snell, ‘it was such a fine, manly letter ... full of hope and cheerfulness’,402

394 Snell Collection, W.J. Allen, at the Department of Agriculture in Sydney, 4.9.1916
395 Snell Collection, R.M. Milson to CAS, 7.8.1916
396 Snell Collection, R. Whatham, 9.8.1916. She herself ran a hospital, so she clearly recognized business talent in Charlie.
397 Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 1
398 Snell Collection, R.M. Milson to CAS, 7.8.1916
399 Snell Collection, R. Whatham, 9.8.1916. She herself ran a hospital, so she clearly recognized business talent in Charlie.
400 Snell Collection, Rosa Myatt 10.8
401 Snell Collection, Dr W.I. Dermer to AJS, 11.8.1916
402 Snell Collection, Thomas Paisley to CAS, 13.8.1916
403 Snell Collection, A.P. Cameron, the manse, Glen Innes, 13.8.1916
404 Snell Collection, Mrs Jefferson, Devonshire, 15.10.1916
6.6 Expressions of Grief

In expressing grief, the focus was on duty and patriotism, the worth of the cause and Christianity.\textsuperscript{403} It has been shown that many correspondents felt their own grief at Snell’s death while they sought to offer sympathy and consolation to the family.

Recalling duty and patriotism was a means of reassuring the bereaved that their son had not died in vain: ‘your hero son, (doing his) duty (will wear a) ... crown of glory’.\textsuperscript{404} Kyle Hymus, a childhood friend, referred to often in Charlie’s correspondence, was consoled by the idea of duty and Empire,\textsuperscript{405} as were Mrs Whatham: ‘but you must try console yourself in the thought that your son gave his life fighting for freedom under a banner of justice and died a glorious death,’\textsuperscript{406} and others: ‘that darling boy of yours who passed away doing his duty’,\textsuperscript{407} and ‘he died for his country on the field of honour’,\textsuperscript{408} (doing) his duty so gloriously.\textsuperscript{409}

Others found solace in the worth of the cause: (he was fighting for) Australia and the great cause of humanity,\textsuperscript{410} and, with a hint of propaganda, Snell was ‘preserving our honour and the purity of our womanhood,\textsuperscript{411} and ‘(saving) our loved ones being trampled on by the vicious hordes ... (a) letter from France told of the horror of the Huns’ destruction of property and life’.\textsuperscript{412} In London, pride was also an element: ‘the dear lad was a hero ... he died for his country ... we were so proud of having nephew fighting, from the colonies, for us.’\textsuperscript{413}

\textsuperscript{403} Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 80
\textsuperscript{404} Snell Collection, Buchanan to CAS, 9.2.1916
\textsuperscript{405} Snell Collection, Kyle Hymus to CAS, 11.8.1916
\textsuperscript{406} Snell Collection, Mrs Whatham to CAS, 9.8.1916
\textsuperscript{407} Snell Collection, From sister, Nora Snell, London, 12.10, 1916
\textsuperscript{408} Snell Collection, Alfred Goss from Goldfields Club Hotel, to AJS, 10.8.1916
\textsuperscript{409} Snell Collection, Roy Hayward, business man, to AJS, 7.8.1916
\textsuperscript{410} Snell Collection, Elise Clarke to CAS, 14.8.1916
\textsuperscript{411} Snell Collection, W Robinson to AJS, 3.6.1917
\textsuperscript{412} Snell Collection, Rupert surname undecipherable, to AJS, 10.8.1916. The almost illegible handwriting recalls the old German script which was still in use at that time. There is a postcard among Snell’s effects which used this script.
\textsuperscript{413} Snell Collection, Steve Snell, Pollie’s husband to CAS, 15.9.1916
Christianity was frequently a source of comfort: Mrs Blanche Martin of Glen Innes reassured Mrs Snell that ‘those whom God loves die young... (we are) the better for having known... and loved him’.\(^{414}\) Mrs Jefferson reminisced about a man ‘who trusted and hoped in God and he will surely get his reward’. ‘(They) laid down their lives for God and Empire, in this awful sacrifice, none (possessed) a cleaner and truer manhood than your dear lad’\(^{415}\) and the wife of a minister wrote: ‘the widespread roof of the father’s home overshadows your boy, ... ‘be still my soul......we shall meet at last’\(^{416}\).

In contrast to these, Dr Dermer commented privately to Mr Snell that he hoped that Mrs Snell would find strength in her religion – ‘personally I cannot take it, but I quite recognize its good as a comfort to a woman’\(^{417}\).

### 6.7 Letters from Comrades

Witness statements and letters from military colleagues were a source of information on the circumstances of a soldier’s death, consolation and pride for the bereaved, as well as providing reassurance that he had been courageous and cheerful in his duty and was liked by his colleagues.\(^{418}\) Lynch described how as a friend died his comrades were already imagining what they would write to the family: ‘I knew... well... ’ and considering whether or not they would tell the truth about his death.\(^{419}\) A nurse writing home after a soldier’s death might try to reassure the family that he was comfortable and had had every possible assistance.\(^{420}\)

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\(^{414}\) Snell Collection, Blanche Martin to CAS, 8.8.1916. Mrs Martin wrote of her son enlisting. John James Martin, 4335, acting corporal, left Australia November 1916, bombing school, UK, France, KIA, July 1917, Polygon Wood. She too had to deal with uncertainty as to his burial place: ‘buried nearby’. NAA War Service Record.

\(^{415}\) Snell Collection, Mrs Jefferson to CAS, 15.10.1916

\(^{416}\) Snell Collection, A.P. Cameron, the manse, Glen Innes, to CAS, quoting the words of an English hymn. 13.8.1916

\(^{417}\) Snell Collection, Dr W.I. Dermer to AJS, 11.8.1916

\(^{418}\) Meyer,(2009), *Men of War,* Pp. 82 – 88, 


\(^{420}\) Bennett, (2012), *Pozières, the ANZAC Story,* P. 164
Witness statements on the circumstances of Snell’s death have been discussed elsewhere, so here the focus will be on comrades’ affirmation of the fine qualities of the deceased. Private Hamilton wrote: *I knew Snell well—he was of a quiet disposition, very popular*, Hamilton, Pte. 4th Battalion. 421

The letter of Lieutenant Hay, Snell’s commanding officer, to the family is echoed by the letter of one Angus Allen to a Mrs Mulholland in describing how he had recommended her son for the Military Medal for gallantry, and that he had died ‘on or about’ 6th May in a shell burst, that he had revived and asked Allen to write home, concluding with Allen offering any help in his power.422 After trying unsuccessfully to locate the address of Snell’s family in Australia, Lt Hay wrote to Snell’s aunt in London.

‘It is with the deepest regret that I write concerning the death of Pte Snell but as he enlisted in my company in Australia, came over to Egypt with me and did quite a lot of service under my immediate control I feel in duty bound to write you concerning the end of your nephew. ... (he describes the circumstances of Snell’s death)... During the time I knew Pte Snell he was always formost (sic) in matters of duty, his character was exemplary, his disposition was such as to make him a favourite among his friends and I always looked upon him as one who would receive promotion when the opportunity arose. He did all a soldier possibly could for King and Country. I regret having to open what must be a most painful wound, still it is respect to your nephew or son that it is done.’423

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421 Snell Collection, Red Cross, Sydney. 15.8.1917, To Mrs J.A. Martin, GLEN INNES. By this time, Mrs Martin had lost her own son.

422 Austin, (2007), *The Fighting Fourth*, P. 147; Bennett, (2012), *Pozières, the ANZAC Story*, P. 162

423 Snell Collection, P Hay to Mrs Snell, Snell’s aunt in Hackney, 8.10.1916. Hay, P.W, mining student, twice wounded in the neck, hospital in the UK, MC April 1917, returned to Australia 1919. *War Service Record*, NAA.
6.8 Comments on the War

English correspondents were unanimous in their dismay at the costs of the war, Australians less so. This difference reflects the proximity of the English to the fighting: it has already been noted that London was the subject of Zeppelin raids, the sounds of the Somme Offensive could be heard in parts of London, firing in the Battle of Jutland was heard in Edinburgh, and England was receiving a steady stream of wounded. Although Snell had spoken to a returned soldier in Sydney and telegrams and newspapers quickly brought (heavily censored, and highly coloured) news of the war, the theme is considerably less evident in the letters of Australian correspondents.

Among English correspondents, each one had a general comment to make: ‘this awful war’, ‘this war is so very cruel’, what a wicked war and no end to it, Cecil’s a perfect wreck, ‘how very dreadful this war is, ... young good lives lost, ‘it is hard to realize the awfulness of this shocking war’, ‘the men simply can’t speak of (the battlefields), it is so awful to see their dearest friends falling in the most terrible agony’. With the benefit of her husband’s professional opinion, Lady Moore wrote: ‘at last we have them beaten but it will be some time before it is all over’.

From Australian correspondents, comments on the war were not common, but those which were made were a result of the writers having sons at the front. Mrs Paisley

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424 Bosridge, M. (2013) Vera Brittain - a Testament to War and Peace. [Link](http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-collections/category/history/)
425 Snell Collection, for example: the Glen Innes Guardian, 10.8.1916, which contains several news items on the fighting.
426 Snell Collection, Bessie Lambert, Hampstead, to CAS, 13.10.1916
427 Snell Collection, Cousin Susie, Newton Abbott, to CAS, 24.10.1916
428 Snell Collection, Nora Snell, London, to CAS, 12.10.1916
429 Snell Collection, Lily Port to CAS, 8.6.1916
430 Snell Collection, Mrs Jefferson to CAS, 15.10.1916
431 Snell Collection, Bessie Lambert Hampstead to CAS, 3.10.1916
432 Snell Collection, Lady Isobel Moore, wife of Sir Newton Moore, to CAS.
who had two sons in France, wrote of ‘all this fearful fighting’, another wrote: ‘I wonder (when this) dreadful war will end which...has taken so many of our young and able men’. Male friends of Mr Snell wrote: ‘from one who, like yourself has the cloud of sorrow hovering thro’ this awful crime of war ... (we are) brothers and sisters in one common grief’, and one who had been there referred to ‘the inferno that is the Western Front’.

6.9 Families at War

While the principal purpose of the correspondence was to offer sympathy and consolation, the letters offer an intimate glimpse of the life unfolding within the grieving community as correspondents who themselves had sons at the front were writing against a background of their own anxiety. Among them were Dr Dermer, who had a son in Mesopotamia, and the Paisleys who had Selwyn ‘still in the midst of all this fearful fighting’. Both parents noted their son Cyril’s delight in meeting Charlie in the trenches, and the probability that ‘our own dear boy could not have been far away’ when Charlie died. Mrs Paisley reported that ‘Mrs Bythe (lost) another son, ... they were such strong big men’. Mrs Whatham reported that ‘we have not heard from my son for some time and feel very anxious’, and Ethel Smith commented ‘my son if alive is fighting in France’. Nora Snell in London was concerned that ‘they have sent my Charlie to Salonika, not very fit after his skull being cracked in two places’. George Goss, writing to Mr Snell, spoke of a mutual

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433 Snell Collection, Mrs Paisley, to CAS, 13.8.1916
434 Snell Collection, F. Dannell to CAS, 20.8.1916
435 Snell Collection, George, Public Works, Claremont, to AJS, 12.8.1916
436 Snell Collection, W Robinson to AJS, 22.8.1916
437 Snell Collection, Dr WI Dermer to AJS, 11.8.1916
438 Snell Collection, Thomas Paisley to CAS, 13.81916
439 Snell Collection, Mrs Paisley to CAS, 13.8.1916. Snell reported meeting a Bythe in France.
440 Snell Collection, R Whatham to Mrs Snell, 9.8.1916. Whatham, Duncan Leslie, labourer, 10th FAB, driver, gunner, Gallipoli, France, June 1916, 39 days in hospital with VD, crime in Paris Plage, without a valid pass, suffered severe haemorrhoids, scabies, boils. RTA 24. 9.18. NAA War Service Record.
441 Snell Collection, Snell had commented in a letter that his friend ‘Smithy’ had died.
442 Snell Collection, Nora Snell London to CAS, 12.10.1916
friend in London having lost two sons out of four, how the loss of his sons had aged him, and how a third son was now going to the front. Another's son had been in France since 3rd June and his wife and daughter were in Fremantle watching and waiting for his return.443

We have seen how the community responded to the knowledge of the death of one of their own, and we can now examine how the Snell family responded to this outpouring of sympathy.

6.10 Replies to Condolence Letters

It was invariably Mr Snell who responded to the condolences, and although each letter is different, his replies reflect the themes of the letters themselves: the immediate pain of loss, the consolation of knowing that their son had done his duty, a sense of recovery and assurance of a spiritual homecoming.444

To Doctor Dermer,445 he wrote: ‘your few words of sympathy ... came at a time when we were tasting the full bitterness of the first death in the family. Letters sent show that the loss is not ours alone,446 (and help) to ease our sore hearts... we are greatly cut up ... 447 we only had one Charlie, the great hope we had for our boy (is) so suddenly and completely wrecked. Even now we can hardly realize we will never see him again this side’, and, interestingly, ‘I never credited myself with so much sentiment.’448

443 Snell Collection, Robinson to AJS, 22.8.1916 His son’s date of arrival in France suggests that he would have been among those who fought at Fromelles
444 Meyer, (2009), Men of War, P. 81

447 Snell Collection, AJS to Dr Dermer, 2.9.1916
448 Snell Collection, AJS to Geo. Goss, 11.8.1916
448 Snell Collection, AJS to Robinson, 7.10.1916
Many offered practical support as this letter from Mr Snell shows: ‘But for the exceeding goodness of Mrs Beigel and your own good self and the very kind offices of so many others, I feel convinced I should now be mourning for more than one.’ ‘(We) could hardly have wished for a more noble life – or death – for he was as much to us as Kitchener was to the nation’. 449

‘After the knowledge that our boy had lived and died as a man should do, the one thing more than another that gave us the greatest consolation was the amount of fellow feeling shown by so many friends, many of whom had themselves sore hearts from a similar cause’. 450

‘Time is bringing its consolation and I am hopeful that the sun will soon be shining again’. 451 ‘The worst now is over and kindly time bringing its influence to bear; I hope we shall all have a fresh lease of life’. 452 ‘When my own time comes it will be eased by the thought that Charlie is waiting’. 453

There was comfort in the celebration of Snell’s life by the community, and the continuation of the lives of his siblings who founded families of their own and perpetuated the memory of their brother.

Once again, we can see that in almost every respect, the Snell family was little different from the thousands of other grieving families in Australia, as was their son who was an ‘ordinary’ soldier. They too, were an ‘ordinary’ family among many others in the Australian community who suffered loss, yet had to somehow continue with their lives.

449 Snell Collection, AJS to Harcourt Ward, 11.8.1916
450 Snell Collection, AJS to Dr Dermer, 7.9.1916
451 Snell Collection, AJS to Dr Dermer, 7.9.1916

453 Snell Collection, AJS to Geo Goss, 11.8.1916
6.11 The Soldier was Memorialized

Medals were issued and the files closed, but it was several years before all official matters relating to Charles Snell’s death were finalized.

Memorials to the Australian fallen are a prominent feature of the former battlefields of northern France. Among them, the memorial to 1st Division dead at Pozières Windmill site commemorates ‘Australian troops who fell more thickly on this ridge than on any other battlefield of the war.’ In 1918 the Bishop of Amiens had promised that the graves of the Australians would be ‘piously kept’.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains the war cemeteries in perpetuity in honour of the Australian sacrifice on French soil and in anticipation of family members wishing to visit the graves of their war dead. Snell’s name is on the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and on war memorials in Glen Innes and Bunbury. His mother selected a gravestone to be erected in the Bunbury Cemetery in order to provide a tangible symbol of his death.

A request must have come from the Australian War Memorial for diaries and letters, ‘manuscripts’, of the men who had served in the AIF to be donated to the War Memorial as a means of augmenting the official records of the war with personal stories. Luckins describes how such personal effects had come to represent the absent son or husband and many people were reluctant to part with the letters. Mr Snell apparently resisted this request and organized the papers into bundles, some of which were annotated by Mrs Snell, which were kept in the trunk sent by Snell from Sydney prior to his departure for overseas. Mr Snell’s instruction was that the papers were to go to the eldest son of the eldest son - however, they have found their way to his eldest great-granddaughter, after spending many years in the work

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454 Bennett, (2012), Pozieres, the ANZAC Story, Pp. 311, 312
455 Winter, (1995), Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning.
shed of Snell’s brother, and some years roaming the goldfields on the back of a utility.\textsuperscript{458}

It is said that Snell’s parents never recovered from the loss of their younger son, and the present writer was witness to the sadness that the siblings carried for the remainder of their lives.

7 CONCLUSION

Luckins has stated that the letters and diaries of Australian service men and women have been used by historians to ‘validate masculine identity and create a national history’. However, she believes that the Great War is best understood ‘not as a matter of (the Australian) identity…but as a matter of shared experience and human relationships’.\textsuperscript{459} In the present work, the writer has tried to recreate the story of an individual, focusing on the shared experience; to ‘critically reconstitute him within a historical narrative’ as ‘part of the process of generational transmission of memory’.\textsuperscript{460}

An attempt has been made to maintain the tone of the writing, whether Snell’s or his father’s or that of the community surrounding them. In reading the letters and diaries, the overall impression is that Snell was one of the ‘lost generation’ in the sense that his words show evidence of potential for a highly productive working life and the potential to weave his personal qualities into the lives of others.\textsuperscript{461}

\textsuperscript{458} Luckins,(2004), The Gates of Memory, p. 233. Women became the custodians of the soldier’s personal effects. In the Snell family, the personal effects, other than letters, have gone to the daughter in law of Snell’s sister, Marjorie.

\textsuperscript{459} Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory, P. 14

\textsuperscript{460} Luckins, (2004), The Gates of Memory, P 241

The story of an individual soldier and his community in Australia, France and England has been placed in the context of a much broader picture, as he became part of a military landscape. He was one small individual moving in a sea of activity that was above, around and below him, comprising people of all ranks, animals, the machinery of war and noise.

The broad research question was: *what were the consequences of the war for one man and his family?* The narrow research questions which formed the basis of this investigation relate to the individual, his family and the community and how he became part of Australia’s commitment to the war. His death was examined, as was the part played by the community in helping the family accept his loss. The immediate question of his father: ‘*how did he meet his death?’* has also been answered.

These questions have been answered by looking at Snell’s war service, as part of a major action involving more than one million men in a small area of France, a major event which had profound and long-lasting effects on the Australian people, including Snell’s family.

The research puts a face on one of the faceless men who was in France for nearly four months prior to his death, initially as part of a front line where only sporadic activity was occurring, whose goal was to find intelligence on the enemy, to keep them occupied, and to prevent them moving resources to the Somme. We have seen how he moved south to become part of that offensive, being killed in the preparation for the Australians’ first engagement on the Somme and escaping the disastrous action at Fromelles. We have described the conditions in which he fulfilled his orders.

We have seen that the Snell family was like all those who suffered uncertainty over the death of a loved one in a war far from home. Death in war was no longer
glorious, but they were forced to cling to the notion that their son or brother or friend had died fighting for a cause that the community believed in sufficiently to allow them to go off to fight.

Snell was a typical Australian for his time in his values and expectations, although he may have been a little more proper than many. He enlisted rather reluctantly, but for reasons which were normal for his time. His family was typical in that they were loving, god-fearing and community-minded. They were as anxious as any to find out details of their son’s death. His service was representative of the many thousands of others on the Western Front. He followed orders and enjoyed the camaraderie of his mates, and although highly disciplined, he was tolerant and slightly amused by the irreverence of his comrades. He was less typical in that he died after only a short period of service and he did not experience the extreme hardships caused by the seasonal weather pattern in France, in particular the worst winter in modern memory and the horrific battles in which his fellow Australians later participated.

Like many others there are some questions over his death, and we have seen that this caused lingering doubts in the mind of his father who must have spent many hours in his search for certainty. However, this search clearly offered him a welcome opportunity to reconnect with male friends, in an emotional environment that was dominated by women.

The work provides a model for the reconstruction of a personal narrative that does more than simply recount and rephrase the letters and diary. With the assistance of the available documents it provides another picture of an Australian who enlisted to do his duty for his country and puts another human face on the names on war memorials. The design of the research was dictated by the primary sources and is a microhistory which shows how an individual, however average he may be, has a human face that can be placed in the context of family and community.

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462 As was done by Fiennes in To War With God (2011).
Much remains to be done with the sources of Charles Snell in exploring the other themes suggested: the communities of Bunbury, Harvey and Glen Innes, the rôles of women and the relationships between men and women at that time, the soldier as traveller in the search for adventure, the French perspective on the Australians, exploring the stories of individuals and families mentioned in Snell’s letters; and his training in Sydney and Egypt. This would create a biography of a man whose world encompassed Australia, England, Scotland and France.

In the end, what is left is the collection of letters, the memories, the memorials and the lingering sadness, which lasted until the death of Snell’s brother at the age of 82, and his sister at the age of 99. At last she could look forward to the happy reunion with her beloved brother, lost so many years before. Some of the names mentioned here – Harrington, Hymus, Paisley – were uttered by Martha, Snell’s sister in law, who, by her marriage, inherited many of the community relationships which sustained the Snell family after his death.463

It seems appropriate to reiterate here the words of Lt Hay, witness to Snell’s last days, words which could only have provided comfort to his grieving family:

… he was always formost (sic) in matters of duty, his character was exemplary, his disposition was such as to make him a favourite among his friends .... he did all a soldier possibly could for King and Country...

463 Martha Jane Snell, née Baggs, grandmother of the present writer.
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