# An attitude of australian men to war

# Australian men had been brought up to believe that men should be willing to die for their country

**To what extent is this true?**

World War I is a key event in the developing of Australia and its people. Although known as ' The War to End All Wars', the conflict was far from this idealistic view of the tragedies that unfolded over a long four year period from 1914-1918. The nation was drawn into the global conflicts due to its still strong ties with the mother country and the feeling of responsibility to defend her. Enlisting was not compulsory for the people of Australia (as conscription had been rejected twice in referendums), which makes the numbers of men who volunteered even more remarkable. Compared to the rest of the world, Australia contributed far more men per capita than anywhere else on the globe. Out of a population of fewer than five million, Australia initially supplied 416 809 men, over 156, 000 were reported wounded, gassed or taken prisoner, and over 60, 000 men sacrificed their lives for their country. Men walked into battle, men fell, some returned. But why did men go to World War I when they had the choice to stay back? While the statement that ' Australian men had been brought up to believe that they should be willing to die for one's country' is largely true, it is much more complex than that, as there are numerous other reasons that men went to join World War I. Not only were men brought up this way, but in addition to this, war was portrayed in a distorted and romanticised manner, men conformed and were influenced, and others felt obliged to support the mother country.

Before World War I, Australian men were brought up to believe that men should be willing to die for one's country. Many men went to war because they believed that by doing this and possibly sacrificing themselves, they were protecting their families from harm, and doing what they could to stop the war from reaching out to where their families were and effecting them directly. It was also a widely believed fact that going to war was the way to prove one's strength, bravery and unselfishness. Enlisting for war showed one's loyalty to the nation and willingness to go to any measure for its people. The reasons why men were brought up to believe this way are complex and there are many possible causes, but the most obvious relates to Federation. The nation had only been federated to become The Commonwealth of Australia for 14 years when World War I began, and showing support and loyalty for the nation was very important to its people as it was key to the country's emerging identity at the time. Although Australia was now officially united, it must be united in spirit for the new nation to be peaceful within itself, and avoid any internal disagreement. Other smaller reasons behind the belief men had been brought up with are related to what people believed one could gain from the experience of war, to teach unselfishness and sacrifice, and what parents wanted for their children. Regardless of why the belief existed, we know for certain from accounts of people who went to war as well as others who had experiences related to war, that one of the reasons many men joined World War I was because they had been brought up with the belief that it was noble to fight for one's country, and that one should be willing to die for it.

A lot of men joined World War I because the view of war at the time was distorted and romanticised, and they did not fully understand what they were getting themselves into. Before World War I, it was believed that war was a glorious and noble thing, which all mem should experience. War was expected to be a grand adventure, an incredible experience – a chance to escape the boredom of everyday jobs and for some, country life, and stake out on a mission of the highest moral value. However, the Australian people were naïve not only about what the weather and climate conditions would be at war, but also the actual fighting. The climate of the western front and throughout most of Europe at the time was very different to that of Australia. Where Australian land was hot and dry in summer, and somewhat wet but mild in winter, European summer was far from scorching, and their winters were not only sopping wet and constantly muddy and dreary, but also freezing cold and sometimes snowy. Furthermore, Australians misunderstood the reality of war when it came to the actual fighting side of things. World War I brought the introduction of many new battle techniques, as well as new weapons and machinery which changed the nature of war to become the idea of modern war known today. Soldiers who enlisted with the belief that war was a glorious prospect, and gave them the chance to come home proven as heroes, overlooked the conditions that awaited them on the battlefronts. Blood spattered memories, traumatising experiences of watching their comrades' die, pain, torture, constant mud, bad sanitation, piercing hunger and thirst, lice and rat infested trenches, shellshock, disease, constant fear, and loneliness awaited men who enlisted for World War I, but they would not know this until the first lot of men begin to send

their words home. The romanticised views of what war was imagined to be was out ruled by the truth as soldiers began to keep diaries and write stories and letters about their experiences, and some of them were sent on home to their families and friends. Also, images and writing from official war correspondents and photographers began to enter the papers and magazines, along with the lists of names of reported deaths and casualties. The flow of men from Australia soon slowed as war began to look less noble and glorious, and more muddy and horrific. Before World War I, for Australians in particular, the common idea and view of war was distorted and romanticised, and many men enlisted because they didn't comprehend the stark reality of what they were going to face.

Many men joined World War I because they were influenced by others and went in order to keep their reputation intact. While some conformed willingly into the throngs of men marching out to the war that raged in Europe, others took some convincing. Most Australian men at the time felt that war was the most purposeful thing that they could put their mind and soul into, but some just felt that they were wasting their time that could be better spent at home, or that the war was rather pointless and did not concern Australians. Convincing these men to channel their energies and young minds and bodies to the war effort happened in many ways. Firstly, some men were peer pressured into enlisting by their friends and sometimes even family. If they didn't go, their reputation would be as good as dead, which would make staying back at home miserable anyway. They would be scorned upon and sidelined by society for their weakness, and always labelled as that man who didn't turn up to help his Aussie mates on the front. Secondly, many men

were forced into volunteering through fear. There was always the fear of the white feather that hung in the air around a young and perfectly fit man who didn't go to war. It was the most dreaded and earmarking sign of cowardice. Young women who looked down on men who didn't enlist would send it, other men would send it, and mothers with their own young men on the front would send it. Word would soon spread that somebody had received one, and the poor fellow didn't stand a chance to escape the blabbering tongue of the town's gossipiest women, or the despising eyes of the little children passing in the streets. Finally, there was the propaganda. Propaganda was possibly the most influential tool used throughout war. People's minds worldwide were indoctrinated with the government's propaganda that gave the view of the war heavily in favour of one's own nation. When it came to subscription for war however, Australian government especially utilised this powerful tool, and propaganda posters and ads began to fill the streets, magazines, shop windows, and newspapers. Propaganda used persuasive techniques to appeal to not only the young men, but to many different groups, in such a way that it would effectively be speaking to the young men. Propaganda targeted at young men only just of enlisting age was often an appeal to one's sense of responsibility and loyalty, portraying enlistment as a call from the motherland, or form Australian government for their support, whereas pieces more targeted towards fathers and older middle aged men were often an appeal to the conscience and duty to protect one's own family. As they saw the faces of their young children smiling back at them in the posters, how could they think of not protecting them? Some propaganda even target women and children, using catching images and

deep messages that were usually more emotive appeals. Older women and children were enticed by propaganda to persuade men (usually fathers) to enlist to the war because of the effects it would have back on those households if they didn't. Younger women were often appealed to by propaganda to beg their loved ones to go (on behalf of the government), and made the prospect seem attractive and meaningful to themselves in hope that it would in turn become meaningful to the young men. All these techniques of persuasion and influence collectively contributed a very large number of Australian men to World War I.

Some Australian men went to war because they felt obliged to support the mother country. Loyalty and mutual nationalism was an important value of the times, and many young and middle aged men felt it their duty to not only protect themselves, their families, and Australia, but also to defend the mother of the empire, Britain. The government's use of propaganda taglines, ' Your country needs YOU,' and ' Help the motherland,' likely played a hearty role in the appeal to one's patriotism that caused so many men to march into the raging war. Older men especially, but elderly people in general who had already fought in wars of the past were quick to step in and remind the youngsters that supporting the war was ' Every man's duty'. Another motive for the government and defence forces especially wanting and trying to get so many men to ' support the mother nation', was so that Australia would hopefully get support back from her in the future as the country went on to fight its own battles.

Australia's contribution and losses during the war is not to be forgotten. Soon after the aftermath of the tragic battles fought along the western front and other smaller battle sites began to settle, commemorations for those who were lost, and celebrations for those who made it through began to resound throughout the nation. The country and its people had been heavily affected and were changed by the events that had occurred both on the front lines and back at home during those long four years. Australia's host of 416 809 men who enlisted in the First World War went for a whole list of reasons. Many were brought up to believe that men should be willing to die for one's country, while some went because their idea of what war was going to be was distorted and romanticised, some men were influenced and pressured into going in order to protect their reputations, and finally, some went because they felt obliged to support the mother nation, whom Australia's ties with were still quite strong at the time. World War I has caused Australia tremendous loss, but as a nation it is every man's responsibility to gain from the experiences too, and learn from the men who chose out of the goodness of their hearts to sacrifice their lives, and for some just their limbs, to fight in a War which was debatably not even theirs.