



WITH BOTH PEN AND SWORD: THE LIFE OF SIR HENRY (HARRY) GULLETT

1878 - 1940

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

The centenary commemorations of the First World War (1914-1918) have inevitably brought with them a re-evaluation of the conflict and its enduring impact. It has also stimulated further investigation into the means by which societies have come to understand the war, a process characterised by Samuel Hynes as a ‘war imagined’.¹ This ‘imagining’ is not synonymous with the creation of a falsehood; it merely emphasises that a view of war is socio-culturally situated. Competing views, as Hynes observed, are merely different versions of the same reality. This biography of Sir Henry Somer Gullett (1878-1940) explores the extent to which pre-war conceptions of a powerful Australia within a powerful Empire within a powerful Anglo-Saxondom shaped both his ‘imagining’ of the war and his subsequent contribution to the creation of a national identity that ‘transmuted the unpleasant particulars of modern combat into an epic model of national achievement’.² For in one sense, though Gullett *worked* as a journalist, war correspondent, military historian, and politician, the roles did not define the man. He is better understood as an immigration propagandist who had very fixed ideas on how conditions in Australia had created a self-reliant, egalitarian society connected to the Empire by bonds of blood and culture. Though his career coincided with World War One and the opening months of World War Two, these momentous events wrought little impact on Gullett’s world view, let alone acted as catalysts. They legitimised a commitment to immigration which bordered on an obsession. To understand Gullett, one must ask how his views on immigration informed his imagining of the war rather than the reverse. Biography is a methodology well able to answer that question.

¹ S Hynes (1991) *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum).

² R Gerster (1987) *Big-noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press), p. 15.

Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Martin Charles Kerby except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

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| AIF | Australian Imperial Force |
| ANU | Australian National University |
| ANZAC | Australian New Zealand Army Corps |
| AWM | Australian War Memorial |
| BEF | British Expeditionary Force |
| CPD | Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates |
| GHQ | General Headquarters |
| GOC | General Officer Commanding |
| NAA | National Archives of Australia |
| NLA | National Library of Australia |
| OIC | Officer in Charge |
| UAP | United Australia Party |
| USQ | University of Southern Queensland |

Introduction

On the evening of 14 August 1940, the senior officer of a British tactical school in Cairo welcomed an Australian sergeant into his office and invited him to sit. Perhaps possessing an unsympathetic nature, or perhaps painfully aware that as soldiers they were both bit players in an enormous tragedy in which millions would strut and fret their hour upon the stage and then be heard no more, the officer delivered his message with a brusque formality:

I have a message from your General Blamey to say that I am to inform you that your father was killed in an air accident yesterday near Canberra. You are to be granted home leave. You will fly to Australia. The Australian trade commissioner's office in Cairo will arrange your tickets and passport tomorrow. You will need civilian clothing. You may overdraw your pay if you wish. I am sorry about this sergeant. I think that is all.¹

Sergeant Jo Gullett of the 2/6th Battalion, 2nd Australian Imperial Force (AIF) accepted the officer's proffered hand, stood up, saluted, and marched out. At a distance of almost 80 years the exchange seems a parody of the stiff upper lip demanded of those who had taken the King's shilling, but Gullett was a man of his times, as indeed his father had been. His autobiographical writing was generally open and frank, yet on the subject of his father's death he was reserved, almost detached. He acknowledged that his father had suffered numerous bouts of serious ill health, but he was such a 'vigorous, active man, always making plans for the future, that I had not considered our family life without him'. It was a 'shock' but 'life had to go on'.² Jo's return home by flying boat, perhaps a courtesy extended because of Prime Minister Robert Menzies' friendship with his parents and a recognition of his father's long service to the nation in war and peace, carried him from the Nile to the Sea of Galilee, Basra, Karachi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Singapore, and then finally to Darwin. Other than the observation that during the early part of the journey he flew over the battlefields of

¹ HB Gullett (1992) *Good Company: Horseman, Soldier, Politician* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. 127.

² Gullett, *Good Company*, pp. 127-8.

the First World War where his father had served a quarter of a century earlier with the Light Horse, there was no insight into the grief that accompanied this homecoming.

By his own admission, Jo Gullett had ‘a good war’.³ Enlisting as a private and ending as a major, Jo served in North Africa, Greece, Papua New Guinea (where he was awarded the Military Medal), and France. In June 1944 he was the first Australian-born soldier to land at Normandy. Yet it is his father, Sir Henry (Harry) Gullett, whose influence on Australia is more readily discernible through his work as a correspondent, a historian, and finally as a politician. In both life and death, the elder Gullett left his mark on Australian public life: in word in the form of *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine 1914-1918*, Volume VII of the official history; in stone, in the form of the Australian War Memorial and in a more abstract fashion by contributing in a small but significant way to the shaping of the Australian national sense of self. Although the imagining of the First World War for Australian audiences is dominated by Charles Bean, Gullett nevertheless played a noteworthy though secondary role in creating and then perpetuating the Anzac legend. Indeed, Bean rated Gullett’s contribution to the official history as the most readable and the most read of the 12 volumes. It is his story that concerns us here.

Harry Gullett was born in Toolamba in 1878 on a rural property 180 kilometres north of Melbourne. He left school at the age of 12 and after writing on agricultural issues for the *Geelong Advertiser* he migrated to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1900. He became the editor of the latter paper’s agricultural page in 1906 before moving to London in 1908 where he worked as a freelance journalist and on immigration matters for the Australian High Commission. Gullett was subsequently one of the first Australians in 1914 to report on the war on the Western Front, albeit from a controlled distance. In 1916 he returned to Australia where he conducted a series of very popular lectures on his experiences. Gullett then enlisted and returned to the United Kingdom in early 1917, where at Bean’s prompting he was commissioned and co-opted into his work as the official historian. After a few weeks on the Western Front he travelled to the Middle East to lay the groundwork for the history of the Light Horse, although he also later acted as an official war correspondent. In the immediate post-war years he was part of the Australian delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference. After returning to Australia he served as Director of the Australian War Museum and for a

³ Gullett, *Good Company*, p. 133.

short but tumultuous period he was Director of Commonwealth Immigration. Gullett was elected as a Nationalist for Henty in 1925, a federal seat he held for the rest of his life. In addition, he held a variety of posts, including minister for trade and customs, deputy leader of his party and of the Opposition, and member of the War Cabinet. He was killed in 1940 in an aircraft accident which robbed Menzies of three of his senior ministers at a time of national crisis. However, these details are the bare bones of a life lived. They give the reader no sense of who Gullett was, what temperament or quirks of character he possessed, or even the extent to which he was influenced by broader socio-political forces. These are gaps that this biography seeks to fill.

In his biography of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud argued that biographers are fixated on their heroes. Gullett did not exert an influence on me anywhere near as pervasive as the one envisioned by the founding father of psychoanalysis. In fact, my first choice of subject had been Baroness Emma Orczy, author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, but the release of a biography of her coincided with the opening months of my research. A book sourced from my late grandfather's collection twenty years before had introduced me to the English war correspondent Sir Philip Gibbs, the subject of my first full length biography. Through his written work I was re-acquainted with Orczy and Gullett, for he had known them both. When it was obvious that I was late to the party with Orczy, a closer look at Gullett revealed him to be equally worthy as a biographical subject.

Though I found in Gullett far less nuance than Gibbs (in my short reading Orczy appeared to have less again), there was an inconsistency that made him a very attractive subject. Loyalty was his creed but he openly conspired against his political allies. He saw Australian security as reliant on her membership of the Empire but his was an aggressive, sometimes petulant dependence. He was a fervent advocate for the working class yet never stood for election as a Labor candidate. He favoured peaceful political and social evolution through the democratic process but in a discussion with Charles Bean rejected the very notion of a President as the head of the British Empire. He dismissed the King as a colourless individual and the monarchy as the 'last centre and home of feudal ideals and snobbery', yet saw in its independence a capacity to stand for something above party politics.⁴ Democratic freedoms were sacred, but he saw no need to extend them to Australian communists or those he suspected of being in sympathy with them. He was a man of considerable courage but his fear

⁴ Charles Bean, Diary, Australian War Memorial (AWM) 38 3DRL 606/87/1, Aug. 1917, p. 55.

of invasion and racial decline pervaded almost everything he said or did in public life. He saw the need for Australian engagement with Asia and the Pacific but pursued trade policies that could have had no other effect than to alienate Japan and the United States. He battled against censorship as a journalist but was an unapologetically fierce censor during the Second World War. As a journalist and politician he was fearless in pursuit of his goals, but he was not an innovator and instead subscribed to widely held beliefs about White Australia, the Empire and the role of the bush in creating a unique Australian identity. He could be hard and cynical in his pursuit of his various agendas, yet his letters to his wife Penelope are pervaded by a tenderness and affection that are almost entirely missing from his public pronouncements. He possessed a great gift for friendship but he knew how to hate and was skilled at it. Though I almost certainly would have found some of these inconsistencies frustrating in the real world, in a literary sense they were compelling.

My interest in two war correspondents who died before I was born stemmed in part from my fascination with the Belgian city of Ypres. On a number of occasions I have used it as a base to explore the battlefields of the First World War, most notably and perhaps inexplicably on my honeymoon in 1992. The playing of the Last Post beneath the arches of the Menin Gate on which are inscribed the names of 54 000 of the missing has never failed to move me. Like Will Longstaff, whose painting *Menin Gate at Midnight* is now considered a national icon, I have strolled around the gate at night and been enveloped by the history and moved by the loss that it commemorates. Only at Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the Holocaust, have I felt a similar sense of encounter. A visit to Gallipoli, arranged and made in haste, failed to generate the same response. Perhaps the mythological conventions that have come to dominate its exploration in modern Australia or the televised images of 'pilgrims' wearing Australian flags as capes as they wait for dawn to break on yet another 25 April, have robbed it of some of its gravitas. In any case, it was the Western Front that called me when I sought to walk the ground over which my countrymen fought a century ago.

Unlike Gibbs who spent most of the war on the Western Front, Gullett's wartime service in France and Belgium extended to only a few months. His writing about the war there is now long forgotten. Yet the fact that Gullett has not attracted the attention of a biographer until now is surprising, particularly during the centenary commemorations of World War One when it would seem that few areas of Australia's wartime history have remained undisturbed. The circumstances of his death attracted two separate books in 2013 alone, but as Gullett died

with nine other people, two of whom were also government ministers, he was not central to either. I had come to him almost reluctantly, but as Richard Holmes suggested when discussing how a biographer chooses his or her subject, I came to feel that I had been drawn into a pursuit of Gullett, a tracking of him through the past, a following in his footsteps. I am painfully aware, however, of the fallibility of biography and the gaps in the record that can leave even the most seasoned biographer despairing of ever really getting to the heart of their subject. Biographers who claim to share a posthumous bond with their subject leave me suspicious about any analysis or speculation that they offer. I cannot claim to have ‘met’ Gullett in Ypres, either literally or figuratively. I do feel, however, that I may have glimpsed for a moment his world and understood, even a little, what it must have meant when he saw it consumed by fire.

In the deepening twilight one evening in March 1915 Gullett and Philip Gibbs moved carefully through the shattered streets of Ypres. They carried no weapons, bearing with them only a bottle of Cointreau and a cake as a sure means to gain admission to any British outpost that might offer the comfort of companionship and the safety of a trench. Five years later, by then free from the constraints of censorship, Gibbs recalled standing in the Grande Place, beneath the ‘last flame feathers of the sinking sun’ and being placed under a spell by the ‘frightful beauty of the ruins’. The Cloth Hall, once a symbol of the town’s status as a great commercial centre, was now a skeleton with ‘immense, gaunt ribs,’ a ‘carcass’ stripped of its ‘former majesty’. As German artillery fire began to rake the ruins a flare illuminated the whole shape of the Salient. In that instant it appeared to the now thoroughly unnerved correspondent as though a great army of ghosts had appeared, a spectral record of the ‘spirits of all those who had died on this ground’.⁵ Gullett was less emotive and more factual in his description of the devastation. He recalled the indiscriminate gunfire that had left ‘one of the architectural glories of Europe a stately pile of large dimensions and close behind it is the Cathedral. Both are now in ruins’.⁶

Harry Gullett and Philip Gibbs would both witness further calamities on the Western Front. Both would bow to the dictates of censorship, although it would be Gibbs who would face the most entrenched criticism for his participation in a propaganda war. Both were knighted, Gibbs for his wartime work, while Gullett would be recognised for his post-war political

⁵ P Gibbs (1936) *The Realities of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd), p. 97.

⁶ *Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga Advocate*, 5 July 1915, p. 4.

career. The participation of both in the reportage of war illuminated both their individual characters and the wartime experiences and expectations of their countrymen. Somewhere in the fog of war, between granite and rainbow, lies the 'real' Harry Gullett.

Chapter 1 - Methodology

The challenges that confront biographers when they seek to record and explain the actions of another person, and in doing so illuminate their character and the workings of their inner life, are significant. Using whatever material is available, some of it contradictory, all of it incomplete, they attempt to ‘breathe life into a few handfuls of ashes’.¹ Some characterise the writing of a biography as an opportunity in a literary sense to play God.² In reality, however, a biographer is anything but omnipotent, for he or she does not enjoy either the freedoms afforded the novelist nor the methodological framework of the historian. Biographers are therefore, in Virginia Woolf’s view, doomed in their attempt to capture the ‘rainbow-like intangibility’ of a person’s inner life amidst the ‘granite-like solidity’ of the facts.³ Though unnecessarily pessimistic, she is nevertheless quite correct in suggesting that the balancing of these two binary opposites is the central task of the biographer.

The biographer cannot, however, remain a disinterested observer. Michael Holroyd argues that in researching and writing a life, the biographer becomes a participant rather than merely an observer, one who ‘stretches out a hand to his subject and invites him, invites her, to write one more work, posthumously and in collaboration’.⁴ Graham Robb dismisses this as ‘fantasy’ and ‘at best a rhetorical device and a marketing ploy; at worst, it turns the biography into a narcissist’s wedding’. He characterises the task of the biographer in dangerously simplistic terms. It is simply to tell the truth.⁵ Yet even if Robb is correct and Holroyd’s ambition smacks of an exaggerated sense of self-importance, when attempting to tell this truth biographers inevitably both ‘portray - and betray - themselves when they write’.⁶ Far better to explicitly identify one’s own background and potential bias ‘rather than leaving this

¹ P Mariani (1986) ‘Reassembling the Dust’. In S Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Art* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 104.

² T Arklay (2006) ‘Political Biography: Its Contribution to Political Science’. In T Arklay J Nethercote and J Wanna (eds) *Australian Political Lives: Chronicling Political Careers and Administrative Histories* (Canberra: Australian National University), p. 14.

³ V Woolf (1967) *The New Biography: Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth Press), p. 229.

⁴ R Scurr (2015) John Aubrey and our Golden Age of Life Writing, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/28/john-aubrey-and-our-golden-age-life-writing-biography>, Date retrieved 18 September 2016.

⁵ G Robb (2012) ‘A Narcissist’s Wedding’. In M Bostridge (ed) *Lives for Sale: Biographers’ Tales* (London: Continuum), p. 12.

⁶ J Haffenden (1998) ‘Life Over Literature; or Whatever Happened to Critical Biography?’ In W Gould and T Stanley (eds) *Writing the Lives of Writers* (New York: St Martin’s Press), p. 35.

information to seep out, as it will, unwittingly'.⁷ This biography of Harry Gullett begins, therefore, not with the subject, but with the biographer.

Sir Philip Gibbs, the subject of my first PhD, and Sir Henry (Harry) Gullett, the subject of my second, were not surprising choices. An early exposure to Cecil Blanche Woodham-Smith's *The Reason Why: The Story of the Fatal Charge of the Light Brigade* (1953) and Corelli Barnett's *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (1963) highlighted the appeal of history explained, informed, and enriched by biographical understanding.⁸ If not quite Carlyle's great men, the subjects of Woodham-Smith and Barnett's attention are very real, almost tangible in their flawed humanity. It was not until 2008 when I was awarded a scholarship to attend the Australian Government National Summer School for Teachers of History hosted by the Australian National University (ANU) that I acted on this interest and committed to writing a biography. My PhD *Watching from the Wings: The Life of Sir Philip Gibbs* was the result (later published by Palgrave Macmillan as *Sir Philip Gibbs and English Journalism in War and Peace*). The satisfaction of recording a life in all its complexities, my disenchantment with classroom teaching and the inducement of an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) led to my enrolment at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) to begin *With Both Pen and Sword: The Life of Sir Henry (Harry) Gullett*.

Despite my determination to tell the 'truth' of Gibbs' life, eventually I came to identify with him too closely to remain an objective observer, though I stopped well short of those biographers who find it difficult to distinguish themselves from their subjects. Gibbs lived long enough to become an anachronism, or as one critic derided him, a voice crying in the wilderness.⁹ I subconsciously came to sympathise with his predicament as my understanding of his struggle was subtly informed, perhaps at times even subsumed by my struggle for relevance in the modern classroom. This perceived connection with a man who died five years before I was born facilitated the creation of a sympathetic, humanised portrayal of Gibbs. The question of whether it was an accurate one came to inform the entire process, compelling me as it did to address the possibility that my construct of Gibbs had, in effect, become an amalgam of subject and author. My supervisor, Professor Paul Pickering,

⁷ I Grundy (1998) 'Acquainted with all the Modes of Life: The Difficulty of Biography'. In W Gould and T Stanley (eds) *Writing the Lives of Writers* (New York: St Martin's Press), p. 107.

⁸ CB Woodham-Smith (1953) *The Reason Why: The Story of the Fatal Charge of the Light Brigade* (London: Constable); Corelli Barnett *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode).

⁹ M Kerby (2016) *Sir Philip Gibbs and English Journalism in War and Peace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 218.

encouraged me to be more critical, to move beyond the issue of whether Gibbs was a good man and to hold him accountable for what he wrote and what he chose not to write. Though I made some rather half-hearted criticisms in the PhD and a few more vigorous ones when it was published in book form, this was, from beginning to end, a challenge that was never quite resolved.

Ben Pilmott describes those who are similarly reticent to interrogate the lives they document as nothing more than ‘valets to the famous’.¹⁰ Driven by admiration, familial pressure or authorial gratitude, but mainly out of an ingrained centuries old habit of mind, these biographers ‘take it for granted that their task is to portray their subjects as more worthy than she or he might otherwise be thought to be’.¹¹ What they subsequently write, according to Rhodes, is not ‘proper history’.¹² The proprietary nature of that assertion aside, during my first foray into biographical writing the desire to emphasise the many fine qualities of character and mind that my subject possessed was indeed particularly strong. The historical waters were further muddied when I met his grandson. In addition to quite a striking physical resemblance to his grandfather, he also shared the same gentle and dignified manner that I had come to associate with my ‘imagining’ of Gibbs.

Though Gullett’s more robust personality made criticism of him seem less contentious, his biography was, from the outset, informed by the similarities and differences between him and Gibbs. Initially I saw Gullett’s romanticised treatment of rural life as little different from Gibbs’ similarly romanticised attachment to Victorian England. Without conscious intent, I used my understanding of Gibbs as a template to understand Gullett, but over time I came to conceive of them as very different men. Gibbs was an idealist with a limited capacity for truly effective action in the real world, one I had characterised as a thoroughly decent man forever compelled to watch from the wings. By contrast, Gullett was a man of the world, for though he may have romanticised the bush, he was a realist who forged an onstage role for himself almost by force of will. I was eventually able to cast a more critical eye over Gullett’s propensity to work as a propagandist but in my own history of St Joseph’s Nudgee College, the day and boarding school I taught at in Brisbane, I too had mined history for its

¹⁰ B Pilmott (1994) ‘The Future of Political Biography’. In B Pilmott (ed) *Frustrate their Knavish Tricks: Writings on Biography, History and Politics* (London: Harper Collins), p. 159.

¹¹ Pilmott, ‘Political Biography’, p. 157.

¹² RAW Rhodes (2012) ‘Theory, Method and British Political Life History’, *Political Studies Review*, vol. 10, p. 162.

myths. Acting simultaneously as an historian and as an employee of the College, the subsequent publication occupied an uncertain place between interrogation and hagiography.¹³

As Gibbs never moved beyond the world of journalism and literature, it appeared an easy matter to forgive his errors by contextualising them as sins of omission. The impact of the gaps in his reports or of his language choices are much harder to quantify than the profit and loss of a battle that was poorly planned and executed. Gibbs also exerted a significant posthumous influence on the structure of the biography and the tone of the language I used. He wrote four autobiographies and much of his literary output drew on his own experiences. When I came to assess ‘the disparate and contingent beliefs and actions’ by which he ‘constructed his world’, I echoed them rather than interrogated them.¹⁴ If he was as the critics derided him, a mouthpiece for the army and government, I was equally guilty of acting on his behalf in a similar role.

In contrast, Gullett was a journalist, a soldier, a writer, a historian and a politician. I felt less pressure to forgive his shortcomings, not because I felt I knew him better than I did Gibbs but because I did not know him as well. He left no significant autobiographical writing, so it was through the eyes of others that my construct of Gullett would take shape. A reliance, however, on ‘objective’ records and documents, which were relatively numerous given Gullett’s 15 year political career, and the diaries and memoirs of his contemporaries, proved to be problematic. Like any text, they are social constructions that create their version of the subject and as such needed to be treated with care.¹⁵ As Gullett wrote so little about himself, his voice did not exert so pervasive an influence on my construct of him. His actions came to play a more significant role than his words. This was the opposite of the situation I confronted when writing about Gibbs.

Biographical Writing

The generally accepted understanding of biography is that it is an account of someone's life written by someone else. This straightforward description belies the complexity of it as a methodology and the contested nature of any assessment of its cultural and historical value. This is particularly evident in the number of writers who have achieved fame and fortune

¹³ Martin Kerby (2014) *Nudgee: A Biography* (Brisbane: St Joseph’s Nudgee College).

¹⁴ Rhodes, ‘Theory, Method and British Political Life History’, p. 167.

¹⁵ B Roberts (2002) *Biographical Research* (Buckingham: Open University Press).

plying this ‘lowly trade’ yet who regularly preface their defence of it with a roll call of critics who have deemed it an unworthy pursuit.¹⁶ Though many of these skeptics might stop short of George Eliot’s dismissal of it as a disease of English literature or Oscar Wilde’s quip that every man has his disciples and it is always Judas who writes the biography, as a methodology it has attracted the disdain of a wide variety of writers.¹⁷ The critics include W.H. Auden who dismisses it as ‘always superfluous’ and ‘usually in bad taste’, Vladimir Nabokov, who characterises it as ‘psycho-plagiarism’, John Updike, who believes that biographies ‘are just novels with indexes’, and Stanley Fish who condemns modern biography as little more than ‘minutiae without meaning’ in which the biographer is ‘left with little more than a collection of random incidents, and the only truth being told is the truth of contingency, of events succeeding one another in a universe of accident and chance’.¹⁸

Biography has also suffered at the hands of critics in the academic world. Only recently has it attracted any degree of serious academic attention, a situation not helped by the propensity of biographers to take a perverse and ill-concealed delight in characterising life history as life without theory.¹⁹ Before the 1970s, even biography’s most notable adherents eschewed theory or engaged with it reluctantly or in limited depth. Political scientists who write life histories also do not usually engage in debates about biographical method and they are not alone in declining to do so.²⁰ Robert Blake suggests that this disinclination to engage with methodological discussion or to even consider the best way of pursuing it may benefit biographical writing rather than detract from it.²¹ Even when writers do think about method, it often takes the form of extended reflections on how they did it rather than a sustained investigation of the methodology. As Robert Skidelsky observed, ‘biographers write biography, they rarely spend much time thinking about how they ought to be writing it’.²²

¹⁶ M Amis (1993) ‘Don Juan in Hull’, *New Yorker*, vol. 69, no. 11, p. 74.

¹⁷ N Henry (2012) *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons); O Wilde (1891) *The Critic as Artist*, <http://www.online-literature.com/wilde/1305/>, Date retrieved 23 March 2015.

¹⁸ W Auden (1971) *A Certain World* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 2; J Sutherland (1987) ‘Very Nasty’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 9, no. 10, p. 19; R Holmes (2002) ‘The Proper Study’. In P France and W St Clair (eds) *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 8; S Fish (1999, 17 September). ‘Just Published. Minutiae without Meaning’. *New York Times*, p. 19.

¹⁹ D Marquand (2009) ‘Biography’. In M Flinders A Gamble C Hay and M Kenny (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁰ Rhodes, ‘Theory, Method and British Political Life History’.

²¹ R Blake (1988) ‘The Art of Biography’. In E Homberger and J Charmley (eds) *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London, Macmillan), p. 75.

²² R Skidelsky (1988) ‘Only Connect: Biography and Truth’. In E Homberger and J Charmley (eds) *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London, Macmillan), p.14.

This absence of a methodological framework is not a new phenomenon. Samuel Johnson, whose work in the middle of the 18th century is the foundation on which modern biographical scholarship is anchored declined even to outline a theory. He preferred to concentrate on identifying which details were important in documenting a life and which should be dismissed as ‘trifling’.²³ Over the next two centuries it would be an approach adopted by many of his disciples. They bequeathed to their followers an intellectual inheritance that leaves biography a ‘curious anomaly’, one which is yet ‘to win its intellectual spurs’ or to be taken ‘seriously as literature, as history, or as a cogent intellectual enterprise’.²⁴ What is true of biography is equally if not more true of political biography. The definition of political biography is again deceptively simple. As a literary form it is the means by which ‘writers breathe life into archival documents such as letters and diaries, birth, death and marriage certificates, Hansard and official records, to assist in the re-creation of a life’.²⁵ Its value lies in its capacity to provide an alternative narrative of events:

[It] contributes the views of political actors – sometimes in a contemporary context, sometimes with the benefit of hindsight. It can reinforce existing accounts of events or produce new accounts. It can add new perspectives and insights to existing accounts. It provides a medium through which the personal ‘take’ on politics is able to be ‘written into conventional accounts ... We regard them as essential reading to give depth and flavour to political actors, or to provide a sense of urgency or poignancy to political events.’²⁶

Despite having a history that stretches as far back as the Roman historian Suetonius, as a genre political biography has a reputation no better than biography as a whole. It remains ‘under-appreciated and controversial – sometimes evoking palpable hostility among intellectuals who have argued that the form may be literary, but that it is not history’. Critics make particular note of the ‘marginal impact of most individuals on big events’.²⁷ It is particularly suspect in a modern context ‘because it carries with it a whiff of the great man in

²³ R Monk (2007) ‘Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding’, *Poetics Today*, vol. 28, no. 3, p. 529. Johnson is now arguably best remembered for being the subject of a biography by James Boswell which is considered the first modern biography in English literature.

²⁴ Homberger and Charmley, *Troubled Face of Biography*, p. ix; Skidelsky, as cited in Homberger and Charmley, *Troubled Face of Biography*, p. 2.

²⁵ Arklay, ‘Political Biography’, p.14.

²⁶ Arklay Nethercote and Wanna, *Australian Political Lives*, p. xiii.

²⁷ Arklay, ‘Political Biography’, pp. 13-14.

history heresy'.²⁸ Equally damning is the fact that the great man is often the great Anglo-Saxon Protestant man.

The lack of a methodological tradition with which to defend their work leaves political biographers, already a minority working within a minority methodology, engaged in an enterprise that in the eyes of many 'lacks standing'.²⁹ 'Real intellectuals', as Geoffrey Bolton observes ironically, 'do not do political biography'.³⁰ One academic's response to the decision to write a full length biography of Gullett as a doctoral thesis betrayed a less than sympathetic understanding of its promise. Her view was that both Gullett's life and biography as a methodology might be better interrogated through the medium of a novel or another type of 'creative project'. It was as though the methodology had strayed so far from fact that, as Macbeth observed, 'I am in blood Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er'. The journey back to 'history', presumably, would be no less difficult than producing an unashamedly fictionalised account of Gullett's life. One must hope that Ruth Scurr is not being overly optimistic when she observes that 'like many an unloved child coming of age, biography has excelled itself and those embarrassed parents are revising their views'.³¹ Not everyone, however, has found a place for biography in the academic world:

Political biography sometimes sits uncomfortably with the more conventional writing and scholarship on politics and political science. It is often regarded as 'less academic', overly subjective, and too partial. It does not appear 'explanatory' in orientation or theoretical in approach; it does not articulate a rigorous methodology shared by likeminded scholars. It is sometimes not even regarded as quite kosher; its standing as proper scholarship may even be suspect. Some biographers are not regarded as part of the 'academic club' or belong only at the margins.³²

This reputation is as ill-deserved as it is confusing given that 'serious' historians, whether they are prepared to acknowledge it or not, have always used life stories as an integral part of

²⁸ G Bolton (2006) 'The Art of Australian Political Biography'. In T Arklay J Nethercote and J Wanna (eds) *Australian Political Lives: Chronicling Political Careers and Administrative Histories* (Canberra: Australian National University), p. 1.

²⁹ Rhodes, 'Theory, Method and British Political Life History', p. 163.

³⁰ Bolton, 'The Art of Australian Political Biography', p. 1.

³¹ Scurr, 'John Aubrey'.

³² Arklay, Nethercote and Wanna, *Australian Political Lives*, p. xiii.

their work. Regardless of their ‘subject matter, time-frame, geographical location or context, people appear in their frames of reference’.³³ Life history, as Rhodes reminds us, is storytelling.³⁴ David Barber likewise observes that ‘politics is politicians; there is no way to understand it without understanding them’.³⁵

Even when biographers have engaged in discussions of methodology, they have been hampered by a number of false starts, all stemming from the fundamental problem of how to establish a narrative form that fits the subject’s life:

The first golden age was defined by Dr Johnson’s *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1774) and James Boswell’s *The Life of Dr Johnson* (1791); the second by Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1912); the third by Michael Holroyd’s *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* (1967-8) and Richard Holmes’s *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974). But that brings us up to golden age No 4 already, not counting all the other biographical highlights and innovations since 1974. Golden ages are supposed to be rare, if not unique; more like comets than buses.³⁶

The golden age that purportedly followed Johnson’s work was in fact marked by the paucity of theoretical discussion. In fact, it took widespread and intense dissatisfaction with the state of biographical writing during the Victorian era to eventually prompt both the critics and the practitioners of biography to ask fundamental questions about the methodology.³⁷ Waldo Dunn, for example, saw much to criticise in the dry hagiographic efforts of the Victorians. There was no reason, in his view, that biographers could not balance the skills of the archivist with at least some of the flair of the novelist.³⁸ It was Lytton Strachey, however, who ushered in the ‘new biography’ by delivering the eulogy for its Victorian incarnation by characterising it as ‘two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead ... with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design’.

³³ T Evans and R Reynolds (2012) ‘Introduction to this Special Issue on Biography and Life-Writing’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 1.

³⁴ Rhodes, ‘Theory, Method and British Political Life History’.

³⁵ J Walter (1980) *The Leader: A Political Biography of Gough Whitlam* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), xviii.

³⁶ Scurr, ‘John Aubrey’.

³⁷ Monk, ‘Life without Theory’, p. 535.

³⁸ Monk, ‘Life without Theory’.

Though Strachey declined to outline a theory, he did lay the groundwork for future theoretical discussion by emphasising that it is not the biographer's 'business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them ... dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions'.³⁹ Though committed to laying bare the facts, Strachey had no sympathy for the positivists whose philosophy was most famously articulated by Leopold Von Ranke as simply 'to show how it really was'.⁴⁰ Their stress on documentation reflected a belief that history could be rendered value free, in contrast to literature, whose practitioners were even then beginning to promote it as an 'autonomous field of writing that was either an alternative to or a rival for historians' claims to truth'. Nevertheless, history and literary scholarship 'learned to live in mutual peace – each respected the other's sovereignty and did not make any open territorial claims'.⁴¹ This was consistent with Strachey's vision of a narrative form that balanced respect for both facts and literary value.

This peace was shattered in the 1970s by theorists such as Hayden White who were part of the most 'important and central debate in the philosophy of history since the 1960s: the extent to which the discipline of history is essentially a narrative mode of knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past'.⁴² In his view, life is better understood as a sequence of events without a narrative structure until one is constructed. This view is far removed from post-structuralists such as Ira Nadel who suggest a new approach to life writing 'where the value of biography derives from the appraisal and presentation, rather than the accumulation and accuracy of facts'.⁴³ In fact, Ray Monk identifies this tension between accuracy and presentation as a fault line running throughout much of the theoretical literature on biography written during the last 20 years.⁴⁴ Fault line or not, there is considerable value in acknowledging that biographers impose a narrative structure on a life that reflects their own choices rather than those of their subjects. The benefits outweigh the potential dangers of drifting into a false coherence for it allows a biographer to work within the parameters of a

³⁹ L. Strachey (1931) *Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt), p. 10.

⁴⁰ E Carr (1964) *What is History?* (Middlesex: Penguin), pp. 8-9.

⁴¹ K Korhonen (ed) (2006) *Tropes for the past: Hayden White and the history/literature debate*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi), p.10.

⁴² Korhonen, *Tropes for the past*, p. 10.

⁴³ I Nadel (1984) *Biography: fiction, fact, and form* (New York: St. Martin's Press), pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Monk, 'Life without Theory'.

methodology that is inevitably a ‘discursive reconstruction, or speculative attempt to impose an orderliness, a shape, on a life which is essentially irrecoverable’.⁴⁵

The decision to impose a narrative order on Gullett’s life by organising it under role descriptions reflected the pragmatic need to structure the writing while remaining cognisant that another biographer might well choose another equally justified (or equally unjustified) framework. By characterising them as potential elements of a story, historical events, as opposed to historical writing, are rendered ‘value-neutral’ and ‘whether they find their place finally in a story that is tragic, comic, romantic, or ironic ... depends upon the historian’s decision to configure them according to the imperatives of one plot structure or mythos rather than another’.⁴⁶ The very coherence that my structure provides is an illusion for in most cases the roles merged with each other or were held concurrently. I have imposed them for practical reasons as well as a response to the cultural imperative that holds that a life should have coherence.⁴⁷

Illusion or not, to attempt a biography without imposing a structure would leave the biographer (and his or her readers) with an incoherent and undigested mass of details. The biographer must exert control over the material by ‘absorbing facts ... stating them, and a point of view’, all of which need a structure that is inevitably imposed by the biographer rather than the subject.⁴⁸ As Strachey concedes, history and by extension biography, is ‘not a science [or] an accumulation of facts, but the relation of them’. Collecting facts without an artistic sensibility was to Strachey ‘no more History than butter, eggs, salt and herbs are an omelet’.⁴⁹ Likewise, White understands that ‘historical discourse is not the mere collection of facts, but rather is intimately linked to the interpretation ... of past events by means of narration’.⁵⁰ It is here that the roles of the historian and the imaginative writer can ‘overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other’.⁵¹ It is the dangers rather than the opportunities offered by this overlap that the critics of biography, to their cost, have fixed their gaze.

⁴⁵ W Hollway and T Jefferson (2003) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method* (London: Sage), p. 166.

⁴⁶ H White (1978) *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 83.

⁴⁷ NK Denzin (1989) *Interpretive Biography* (London: Sage), p. 61.

⁴⁸ L Strachey (1948) *Eminent Victorians* (Penguin: Harmondsworth), p. 93.

⁴⁹ Strachey, *Portraits*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ Korhonen, *Tropes for the past*, p. 12.

⁵¹ White, *Tropics*, p. 121.

Strachey's 'new biography' initiated a flowering of biographical theory dominated by Virginia Woolf, Andre Maurois and Harold Nicolson. It was the liveliest discussion of biography in half a century.⁵² Of the three, it was Woolf who made the most significant contribution to the literature since Johnson. The Victorian biographers, Woolf believed, had allowed real life to 'slip by' because of their obsession with external facts, while 'the new biographers' were drawn inexorably toward fiction because facts are external and life is essentially internal.⁵³ Her contribution, however, has not been met with universal approbation:

Woolf, for all her brilliance as a biographical practitioner and innovator, did the genre a great disservice in suggesting that it would never draw level with poetry and fiction. In 1939, she argued that the biographer is a craftsman, not an artist. Biographers are tied to facts, but novelists are free. Biographers, Woolf thought, work at 'a lower level' assembling 'authentic information' that might refresh the imagination of the novelist.⁵⁴

In spite of Woolf's concerns, which writers such as Scurr rightly challenge, the biographer need not be trapped between granite and rainbow, compelled to dwell in a no man's land between history and literature, accepted by neither, yet inescapably wedded to both. The biographer can instead embrace a third way by balancing what Holmes refers to as the two primal identities of the biographer, that of scholar and storyteller. Holmes concedes that these 'bipolar forces' are located on 'tricky terrain'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless it is possible, as Scurr contends, to 'uphold the distinction between fact and fiction while admitting that biography can be a creative art form'.⁵⁶ White saw this as possible not only for biography, but for the discipline of history as a whole:

History as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of appearing scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal. By drawing historiography back once more to an intimate connection with its literary basis, we should not only be putting ourselves on guard against merely

⁵² L Edel (1957) *Literary Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

⁵³ Monk, 'Life without Theory', p. 542.

⁵⁴ Scurr, 'John Aubery'.

⁵⁵ Holmes, 'The Proper Study', p. 17.

⁵⁶ Scurr, 'John Aubery'.

ideological distortions; we should be arriving at that ‘theory’ of history without which it cannot pass for a ‘discipline’ at all.⁵⁷

The reality, as Tanya Evans and Robert Reynolds see it, is that a critically successful biography ‘rests on a bedrock of historical research, interpretation, authorial self-reflection, and good writing’.⁵⁸ It should not escape a critic’s notice that these characteristics are not only compatible with good history, they are central to it. Holroyd offers a note of caution, for though a successful biographer himself, he argues that his colleagues overstate the legitimacy of the methodology:

Between history and the novel stands biography, their unwanted offspring, which has brought a great embarrassment to them both. Yet biographers claim to have thrived on their outcast state. While so much history has been respectably academicised, and even the novel fenced off behind academic theory, the biographer is still free to roam wherever his instinct takes him. A vital literature needs cross-border trading. But what I have pointed to is cross-border hostilities seen from the enemy side. From such a perspective, biographers appear to have greatly exaggerated their power and significance. They are little more than guerrilla bands, with some small successes perhaps, but no chance of matching the major branches of writing.⁵⁹

As Rhodes observes, the absence of a methodological framework might easily be ameliorated by making reference to feminist, Marxist, post-structuralist, cultural studies and personality theories.⁶⁰ Yet Gullett would have despaired at the thought that his life might be told in this manner, proof again of how the subject can exert a posthumous influence on the choices made by the biographer. He was far too straightforward a man to sympathise with a biography that was anything other than a ‘true’ record of his experiences in the context of the world in which he lived. For a short but fruitful time Professor Chris Lee supervised this doctorate. In his correction of a rather convoluted sentence, he made the observation that clear and uncomplicated language would best reflect the life that Gullett lived. In keeping with that advice I have constructed a narrative of Gullett’s life that is faithful to the grand portrait tradition of biography that starts with birth and ends with death. It is fitting that

⁵⁷ White, *Tropics*, p. 99.

⁵⁸ Evans and Reynolds, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Scurr, ‘John Aubery’.

⁶⁰ Rhodes, ‘Theory, Method and British Political Life History’.

Gullett's life is told in what has always been the dominant mode of Australian biographical writing. It is a genre that for all the academic scruples that warn of biography's failings has flowered since the 1980s. I have put my faith, therefore, in the extended chronological narrative and the power of a good story to seduce the reader.⁶¹ Gullett's life is nothing if not a good story and one worth telling.

The grand portrait approach is described by John Colmer as a sociographic impulse, one that has seen Australian biographic writing develop into a veritable 'Aubusson carpet where complex patternings, intersections and designs emerge; these work their way through individual lives but are characteristic of wider social, cultural and historical patterns'.⁶² It also reflects the conservative nature of biography, one that it is generally 'competent and orthodox' rather than 'innovative and cutting edge'.⁶³ In order to challenge this conservatism, I have sought to identify and then explore Gullett's life myth that he, like all people, created for himself against the backdrop of inherited beliefs and practices.⁶⁴ It is a means by which individuals give coherence to their lives and in turn how biographers seek to give coherence to their subjects. This approach ensured that I could remain faithful to both granite and rainbow for biography is never just the story of one life. It must balance the political and social implications of that life while simultaneously satisfying the 'perennial fascination with character' that is at the core of biography's continuing popularity amongst the reading public.⁶⁵ Despite Rhodes' assertion that there are no grand narratives, no unified lives, only life myths, the use of the life myth and the more traditional organisational structure provided by the grand portrait approach more accurately reflects the dualism inherent in the role of the biographer.⁶⁶

Gullett's life myth was firmly grounded in his experience of growing up in what Australians describe as the bush or the outback. He saw in the harshness of this life the elemental forces which shaped him as an individual and created a national character worthy of an 'extraordinary people'.⁶⁷ The relationship between the bush and national character that is at

⁶¹ G Whitlock (2000) 'From Biography to Autobiography'. In: E Webby (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 236.

⁶² J Colmer (1989) *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), p. 154.

⁶³ D Munro (2012) 'Biographies of Historians – or the Cliographer's Craft', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Rhodes, *Theory, Method and British Political Life History*, p. 168.

⁶⁵ J Roe (2012) 'Biography Today: A Commentary', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 117.

⁶⁶ Rhodes, 'Theory, Method and British Political Life History', p. 168.

⁶⁷ Harry Gullett (HG) – Penelope Gullett (PG), 27 Nov. 1917, Gullett MSS, NLA 3078 3078/5/34.

the core of this myth subsequently acted as the background to Gullett's beliefs and actions. As he confronted new circumstances such as war or economic distress, he either sustained, adapted or discarded these life myths. For example, his views on national identity, White Australia and immigration appeared to him to be legitimised by the war. The same cataclysm, however, prompted him to transfer his political allegiance from the Labor Party to the Conservatives while maintaining the life myth that he was instinctively on the side of the working class.

The Relationship between Biographer and Subject

Though a biography must explore a subject's life myths, it is still possible for a good biography to tell the truth and to enlighten and encourage. For in spite of methodological limitations, both real and imagined, it is an art form, one grounded in human understanding and one which celebrates human nature in all its diversity.⁶⁸ Frank Vandiver describes this celebration as an 'evocation of character' which is nothing short of the 'highest biographical art', an art elusive enough to also warrant the additional judgement that it is 'witchery'. Despite the reference to the supernatural, Vandiver does not believe that it happens by magic but rather by hard work and a preparedness to 'live with a subject until he or she becomes real, until the writer shares a life'.⁶⁹ This is not a license to fictionalise a life. Whatever the sense of connection, it must be animated by 'feeling brought under control, feeling become will, feeling refined by purpose'.⁷⁰ However, Barbara Tuchman reminds biographers uncertain of anything that suggests a less than total commitment to the truth that though they do need distance, there is no value in a total separation between biographer and subject.⁷¹ In her biography of Susan Glaspell, Barbara Ozieblo likewise highlights the value of this balanced approach to one's subject. She tried to cast herself into the world of her subject and heed Strachey's advice to write dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior motive. For

⁶⁸ R Holmes (1995) 'Biography: Inventing the Truth'. In J Batchelor (ed) *The Art of Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 25.

⁶⁹ FE Vandiver (1986) 'Biography as an Agent of Humanism'. In S Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Art* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 51.

⁷⁰ P Kendall (1985) *The Art of Biography* (London: W.W Norton & Company), pp. 148-149.

⁷¹ BW Tuchman (1979) 'Biography as a Prism of History'. In M Pachter (ed) *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art* (Washington: New Republic Books).

like a Brechtian actor, she denied herself ‘the easy satisfaction of full identification with my character/biographee, while yet keeping very close to her’.⁷²

By contrast, biographers such as Richard Hutch, who see in the connection between biographer and subject the potential for a life changing experience, one that Nadel believes will permit a ‘rewriting of the biographer’s own life’, exaggerate its value and appropriateness. It is impossible, however, for the historian or the biographer to ‘eliminate the personal equation [for] regardless of whatever acts of purification [he] may perform, he yet remains human, a creature of time, place, circumstance, interests, predilections, culture’.⁷³ For as Ken Robinson quite rightly observes, it would be ‘odd’ if any modern biographer had ambitions to ‘see the subject’s life as in itself it really was’. To him there is no ‘intellectual credibility’ in any ‘naive conception of objectivity’.⁷⁴ Ethnographers are well aware of the mirage of objectivity, for they give full rein to their ‘desire for stories based on the truth and urgency of witnessing’.⁷⁵ They welcome the opportunity to convert their research into memorable, perhaps even beautiful writing. There are echoes, however, of a disquiet at theory becoming an end in itself for as Ruth Behar opines, long after the any particular theory, what survives will be the:

chronicle they offer of a society observed – a given historical moment; and the fictions they unwittingly embrace, the fiction of who the ethnographer thought she or he was in the field, the fiction of how that society was constructed by the ethnographer, whether harmoniously or conflictively, depending on the nuances of the ethnographer’s sensibility and the historical moment in which the ethnographer happened to be present as an observer.⁷⁶

Narrative inquiry also offers some insight to a biographer in search of a methodology. It too is ‘set in human stories’ but it does not claim to be ‘an objective reconstruction of life’ nor

⁷² B Ozieblo (2003) ‘The Devils and Dilemmas of Feminist Biography: Writing the Life of Susan Glaspell’. In C Manuel and P Derrick (eds) *Nor Shall Diamond Die: American Studies in Honor of Javier Coy*. (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia), p. 394.

⁷³ W Dray (1964) *Philosophy of History* (New York: Prentice Hall Inc), p. 22.

⁷⁴ K Robinson (1995) ‘John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: An Author in Search of Character’. In J Batchelor (ed) *The Art of Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 101.

⁷⁵ R Behar (2003) ‘Ethnography and the Book that was Lost’. *Ethnography*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Behar, ‘Ethnography’, p. 19.

allow itself to be hamstrung by its failure to be so. Instead it is a 'rendition of how life is perceived'.⁷⁷

As biography is partially a matter of interpretation, it possesses an inherent 'incompleteness'. Dunn's understanding of biography as the 'faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life' is as valid an observation today as it was when he made it. Yet his sense of 'hopelessness at ever really getting at the heart of a man' shows that he did not fully embrace the interpretative possibilities of the genre.⁷⁸ Biography, as Tracey Arklay warns us, 'should never be viewed as a tool by which to make universal sense of a subject. It is a subjective and highly interpretative method, one in which seeking the compassionate truth should never be underplayed'.⁷⁹ Andre Maurois would have well understood her concern, for he found humans dangerous enigmas:

It is impossible to foresee their actions; ideas seem to come to them, and then fly away with confusing rapidity; amidst such disorder the intellect has great difficulty in finding its way. As we stand before our friends or our enemies, it is as though we stand watching a drama of infinite complexity of which we know not, of which we never shall know, the end.⁸⁰

Mark Schorer understands the implications of this incompleteness, for he like many of his fellow biographers sees himself as an artist with more than one role:

We have gone beyond the drudge, who must accumulate, to the critic who must analyse, and who is perceptive enough to see what is basically there in the work ... Now we need a third man ... He must be an artist, not only the man who can bring shape out of the mass but more especially, the man who can give it living shape; and I do not mean only that he must make his subject live, but also that he must make him live in the re-animated history of his time, make him live in a living world.⁸¹

⁷⁷ L Webster and P Mertova (2007) *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching* (Abingdon: Routledge), p. 3.

⁷⁸ Monk, *Life without Theory*, p. 537.

⁷⁹ Arklay, 'Political Biography', p.14.

⁸⁰ A Maurois (1986) 'Biography as a Work of Art'. In S Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Art* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 4.

⁸¹ M Schorer (1986) 'The Burdens of Biography'. In S Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Art* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 87.

The biographer knows all too well ‘the fallibility of himself and his materials, and what he engages to tell is the best truth, but the genuine biographer believes that maimed truth is better than ... outright invention’.⁸²

The Biographer as Scholar and Artist

A biographer who avoids offering a point of view, who seeks truth only in facts that are left to speak for themselves, is abdicating from his central task.⁸³ This narrow ‘biographer as scholar’ approach recognises only ‘the supremacy of facts and the accumulation of facts, no matter what kind, as the highest god [and confuses] research – the ferreting out of facts – with scholarship, the understanding of them’.⁸⁴ Biography cannot stop at the accumulation of facts for ‘instinctively it must move on to explanation and interpretation’.⁸⁵ In doing so, biographers weld the art and the science together.⁸⁶

The desire for facts is viewed by Kendall as little more than biography being compelled to ‘wash its grubby little hands before joining the company’. History, in his view, demands that the historian ‘frames a cosmos of happenings in which men are included only as event producers or event sufferers’.⁸⁷ By contrast, the biographer ‘explores the cosmos of a single being’ and seeks to discover what Leon Edel describes as the figure under the carpet or the life myth of a given mask.⁸⁸ Yet Kendall is still able to concede that there exists an inner tension that is peculiar to biography, one that stems from the ‘relation between the biographer and his subject and out of the conflict between the demands of simulation and the implacability of fact’.⁸⁹ There are dangers on both sides of the ideological divide, not just in the worship of facts:

The biographer brings to her task her own essential but dangerous imagination.
Without imagination and intuition her portrait will be lifeless, but she should be

⁸²P Kendall (1986) ‘Walking the Boundaries’. In S Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Art* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 126.

⁸³ Blake, ‘The Art of Biography’.

⁸⁴ Kendall, *Art of Biography*, pp. 119-120.

⁸⁵ Updike as cited in A Shelston (1977) *Biography*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd), p. 13.

⁸⁶ Arklay, *Political Biography*, p.13.

⁸⁷ Kendall, ‘Walking the Boundaries’, p. 32.

⁸⁸ Kendall, *The Art of Biography*, p. 118; Edel, *Literary Biography*.

⁸⁹ Kendall, ‘Walking the Boundaries’, p. 40.

careful not to novelise unintentionally, and not project her own personality, unknowingly onto her subject, in an act of identification.⁹⁰

In the wrong hands, biography is a dangerous art, particularly for those who feel such a connection with their subject that they claim to know what the person feels.⁹¹ Edel, himself a proponent of biographers simultaneously balancing detachment while penetrating through the facts to the personality of the subject, warns that while on the 'quest for the life myth we tread on dangerous speculative and inferential ground, ground that requires all of our attention, all of our accumulated resources'.⁹² Like the war correspondents, who struggled to balance the role of participant and observer, the biographer must also play what Edel characterises as a contradictory role.⁹³ As a participant, the biographer must interpret and explain the world in which his or her subject moved but must also maintain the detachment of an observer in order to distinguish between fact and fiction.

In order to explore the life of their subject and to better understand the strengths and potential weaknesses of their chosen methodology, a biographer should consider adapting the approach used by portrait painters. Their 'clean mastery' and ability to 'read only the lines in the face, the settled mouth, the colour of the cheeks, the brush strokes and pencil marks of time' offer a methodological approach that is entirely compatible with 'real history'. The biographer can then 'pick out the essential qualities in the whole subject which he is contemplating. By such a choice, if he can make the choice without weakening the whole, he is very precisely performing the artist's function'.⁹⁴ In reality though, there are limitations, because the biographer must act as though he or she is an 'artist under oath'.⁹⁵ Though 'he writes in chains' he has access to life stories 'that may well go far beyond the inventions of imagination'.⁹⁶ This is an opportunity rather than a barrier, for biographers should recognise that 'one of the pleasures of writing biography is that one doesn't have to choose, in any sense, between life and literature. One can have them both'.⁹⁷ Scurr goes even a step further,

⁹⁰ V Glendinning (1988) 'Lies and Silences'. In E Homberger and J Charmley (eds) *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London, Macmillan), p. 53.

⁹¹ Tridgell, cited in Arklay, 'Political Biography', p. 15.

⁹² Edel, *Literary Biography*, p. 24.

⁹³ SA Leckie (2004) 'Biography Matters: Why Historians Need Well Crafted Biographies More Than Ever'. In LE Ambrosius (ed) *Writing Biography: Historians & Their Craft* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

⁹⁴ Maurois, 'Biography as a Work of Art', p. 7.

⁹⁵ Oates, *Biography as High Adventure*, p. ix.

⁹⁶ Schorer, 'The Burdens of Biography', p. 78.

⁹⁷ A Thwaites (1988) 'Writing Lives'. In E Homberger and J Charmley (eds) *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London, Macmillan), p. 17.

and argues that as an art form, biography is open to constant experimentation. ‘Instead of forcing lives into conventional books’, she believed that it is possible to ‘find a form – or invent one – to suit the life in question’.⁹⁸

Beyond the methodological divide between history and fiction a biography of Gullett must also contend with two major currents in Australian historiography. The Anzac story, and those writers such as Gullett who contributed to it, are in fraught territory, a territory beset with unresolved tensions between history and memory, reality and mythology, and reason and emotion. As Crotty and Spittel suggest:

Historians have exposed many of the silences, contradictions and misrepresentations with Anzac memorialisation, and have lamented that their own, more accurate and verifiable work has made little impact on the public consciousness. Those attached to the mythology, on the other hand, have looked askance at the meddling hands of academics who have asked for less reverence and more criticism and questioning.⁹⁹

Crotty and Spittel view the modern interrogation of the Anzac mythology as a battleground, one on which the historians and the mythologists snipe at each other from entrenched positions. War commemoration and writing history have become, as Marilyn Lake observes, ‘conflated [and] joined in a grand narrative about the seminal role of Australian military engagements and the Anzac spirit in shaping the nation’.¹⁰⁰ Even after the passing of a century and profound alterations in the nature of Australian society, the mythology created in the years between 1915 and 1918 continues to shape perceptions of national identity. Biographers dealing with the individual’s place in this grand narrative must grapple both with the intangibles of human nature and a mythology that is ‘subtle and elusive’.¹⁰¹ However, in recent years there has been some evidence of a more productive engagement, though one inevitably beset with its own challenges:

⁹⁸ Scurr, ‘John Aubery’.

⁹⁹ M Crotty and C Spittel (2012) ‘The One Day of the Year and All That: Anzac between History and Memory’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 58, no. 1, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ M Lake (2010) ‘How do school children learn about Anzac?’ In M Lake H Reynolds M McKenna and J Damousi (eds) *What’s Wrong with Anzac: The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), p. 137.

¹⁰¹ J Beaumont (2013) *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), p. 149.

The rise of memory studies, the insatiable public demand for more Anzac history and the passing of the Returned and Services League (RSL) as the major guardian of Anzac memory have opened up possibilities for memory and history to come together, truce like, and at least look at what the other has to offer. Boundaries have become increasingly blurred as popular writers have drawn heavily from academic studies, while historians have sought to understand and illuminate the sentimental side of Anzac mythology rather than simply sneering at it, dismissing and condemning it as factually inaccurate.¹⁰²

This is the same journey that biography and history must take if they are to complement rather than oppose each other. This doctorate, therefore, is an attempt to find a spot between granite and rainbow, one that falls short as all biographies must, but one that nevertheless takes the reader close to the heart of Harry Gullett and the world in which he lived.

¹⁰² Crotty and Spittel, 'One Day of the Year', p. 124.

Chapter 2 - Childhood

Any attempt to describe the bare facts of Gullett's childhood, let alone to identify seminal moments that shaped his world view, is inevitably hampered by the lack of material. Indeed, the only significant source from the period between his birth in 1878 and the outbreak of war in 1914 is a single chapter Gullett wrote in *The Opportunity in Australia* a book which at times is little more than an extended advertisement for immigration. It was in this chapter, however, written as it was in the shadow of a world war, that Gullett revealed a world view that drew its inspiration from an unapologetically romanticised memory of his upbringing in rural Victoria. Gullett did not romanticise his childhood in spite of the hardship; the hardship was instead an integral component of a construct of Australian rural life that celebrated the bush as a catalyst in the creation of a uniquely Australian identity. Though Gullett was hardly alone in this view, unlike many of its greatest proponents, he was *of* the bush himself. This gave his romanticism a dual, almost contradictory quality, for it existed comfortably side by side with a hard pragmatic edge, a combination that later became one of the defining characteristics of his wartime writing. Hazlehurst saw this flirtation with autobiography as a disclosure of the 'elemental forces' that had shaped Gullett during his formative years.¹ If he uses the term to indicate that the bush was at the core of a remarkably resilient outlook, he is on the money. If he is also looking to suggest a lack of nuance in Gullett's philosophy, perhaps hinting that it was a starkly simple, basic, or at times even primitive belief system, he is no less justified.

Gullett observed with considerable regret that by the time he was born on 26 March 1878 in Toolamba West, 180 kilometres north of Melbourne, 'the worst of the pioneering was finished' for 'the green bush was vanishing, and the loneliness which made the pioneering so rough on the women folk was past'. The town had been surveyed in 1874 shortly after the pastoral runs had been subdivided for farm selections. On one of these properties his parents, Charles William Gullett and Rose Mary Somer carved 'a home' out of 320 acres of 'wilderness'.² In retrospect, Gullett conceded it was 'rough and harsh enough,' but he was nevertheless seduced by the romantic views of his neighbours who spoke of the 'old days'

¹ C Hazlehurst (2013) *Ten Journeys to Cameron's Farm* (Canberra: ANU Press), p. 239.

² HS Gullett (1914) *The Opportunity in Australia* (London: The Field & Queen), p. 1.

with ‘an affection touched with sadness’.³ Later, after he had ‘taken to the soft life of the cities’, Gullett was able to articulate this sense of longing for the past. For he was too late to see ‘the selection covered with a green eucalyptus forest untouched by the axe, too late to ride in shadow ... and choose the site for the homestead on the little sand hill in the north east corner, or to set about the ring barking and the clearing’.⁴ There were some amenities, however, for at the time of Gullett’s birth there were two primary schools (by 1890 there were five), five hotels, several stores, a rail line (1880), followed shortly after by the first irrigation project (circa 1887). In 1903 the population had reached 144 with a further 250 in the surrounding district.

This nostalgia was not unique to Gullett. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s this yearning for a more primitive and isolated frontier life pervaded Australian art, melodrama, literature, travellers accounts, reminiscences and the press. Like the painters of the Heidelberg School, Gullett yearned for what he imagined was a lost society that had been marked by egalitarianism, independence and economic self-sufficiency.⁵ Gullett’s vivid recall of his earliest memory, a night-time burning of trees on his parents’ property, offers an insight into his understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the land and the people. The Australian bush was revered as a creative force that shaped him as it had also shaped a national character. In contrast, city life offered no such benefit, completely eroding the masculine qualities that were, in Gullett’s view, the natural product of the harshness of rural living. Gullett had clearly embraced some of the literary pre-occupations of the age. Poets such as Henry Lawson and Andrew Barton (Banjo) Paterson and the journalists who wrote for the *Bulletin* characterized the bush and the city as separate moral universes.⁶ Gullett may not have quite gone that far but he would have well understood those who did.

Gullett was a product of his times in a far more specific way than just the reverence he felt for rural life. His father’s death when he was three years old may well have emphasised the importance of self-reliance in the sphere of family life, but if it did not, much was happening outside the boundaries of the family property to make the point with sufficient force. The waves of strikes, lockouts, unemployment, a shrinking economy and successive years of

³ Gullett, *Opportunity*, pp. 2-3.

⁴ Gullett, *Opportunity*, pp. 1-2.

⁵ R Waterhouse (2000) Australian Legends: representations of the Bush, 1813-1913. *Australian Historical Studies* 31(15), pp. 201-221.

⁶ G Davison (1978) Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian legend. *Historical Studies* 18(71), pp. 191-209.

drought that characterised the decade before Federation made it appear to one historian that the horsemen of the apocalypse were trampling any hope for continued progress.⁷ Even if one chooses to avoid the biblical imagery, it was without doubt a period of considerable financial trial for large sections of the community. Unlike Gullett, who believed that his community was too engrossed in frontier living to care about class or creed, John Docker saw the middle class of the period threatened by ‘various fears of the new labour movements, of socialism and anarchism, of the volcano like abyss of the poor in their debased urban breeding grounds, their rookeries’.⁸

Though Gullett’s rural idyll was physically and ideologically quite distant from Docker’s rookeries, it was not without tragedy. Six years before the death of his father from cardiac failure at the age of 38, his parents lost two children – Mary and Anna Isabel, who died at seven weeks of age in August 1875. This pattern of mortality would follow Gullett into adulthood. His brother Charles died of peritonitis in 1900 in his mid-twenties, Harry himself, four years his brother’s junior, would die in a plane crash in 1940, and Anna, or Alma, born in 1879, died in 1932 when she became lost and disoriented while walking in the Blue Mountains. Only his sister Isabel, born in 1882 and who died in 1961, and Gullett’s mother Rose, who predeceased her son by only two years, were able to avoid a premature or unconventional departure.

Gullett’s memories of childhood were framed by the rituals of rural life. He recalled milking the herd in the mornings before ‘trudging’ to the little bush school two and a half miles away; memories bathed in the soft light of nostalgia:

At the ploughing and harvesting we worked long days from as soon as we were able to pitch a sheaf or steer a team of horses as they pulled the harrows. What climbs we had up those kindly great plough horses’ legs to ride home from the paddocks at night! What blisters on our tender little feet! What appetites for the cold mutton which month in and out, awaited us for our tea! What depth of unbroken sleep and what rubbing of eyes when awakened in the darkness of those winter mornings!⁹

⁷ S Macintyre (1999) *A Concise History of Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

⁸ J Docker (1991) *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), p. xvii.

⁹ Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 2.

The spartan conditions were softened somewhat by seemingly endless opportunities for sport, horse riding, agricultural shows, concerts, bazaars, travelling theatrical companies and eventually the cinematograph. In contrast to the appeal of rural living, both real and imagined, the hours spent in the little wooden school house seemed empty and colourless. Gullett would later be self-conscious about the fact that his formal education finished when he was 12, but as his son Jo observed, he read and travelled widely. It was not this informal education, however, that shaped his world view:

Such a man comes under many influences; but nothing affected my father so much as growing up in the bush when Australia was still young, and then going to war when he was middle aged with men who were often the sons or younger brothers of his contemporaries. These young men, he thought, had shown the world what Australians were like and what Australia could do.¹⁰

The only positive memory Gullett shared of his schooling was the immediate and tangible reward offered by the Municipal Council. To keep rabbit and sparrow numbers in check the Council offered two pence for scalps and heads and a penny for eggs. As Charles Bean observed in 1916, Gullett was less a hunter of sparrows than a breeder, one who nursed the eggs carefully until they hatched and who then collected the more lucrative bounty. It was a story he appeared to enjoy telling, because Bean added that ‘Gullett can tell you all and keep you in fits for an evening’. The journey to school became such a protracted affair that the practice was eventually prohibited. It was fortunate that at even this early age Gullett was aware of the value of diversification, for he also sold hair pulled from the tails of the farm horses until they ‘scarcely complied with the demands of decency’. When he tried the same on his uncles’ horses, he received what Bean described as a ‘soul satisfying hiding’.¹¹

When irrigation arrived in the Goulburn Valley Gullett’s family planted ten acres of fruit trees and ten acres of vines. A fruit cannery was built in the 1880s but the absence of an export market consigned the experiment to failure, although they enjoyed the addition of fruit to their diet. Though in 1914 he characterised their methods as ‘crude’ he added that ‘there never was wine like that stuff we first brewed in the old straw-covered granary adjoining the stable on the selection’.¹² In time, four more rooms were added to the homestead,

¹⁰ Gullett, *Good Company*, p. 2.

¹¹ Bean, *Diary*, AWM 38 3DRL 606/37/1, Jan-Feb. 1916, p. 32.

¹² Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 3.

refrigeration arrived and an export market was developed. There were other successes in the community. A neighbour became a Minister of the Crown, some sold up and became squatters in New South Wales while others sent their boys to university. ‘Occasionally’ Gullett conceded, ‘there was a failure, but none failed before they had gone far with their pioneering and so failure is scarcely the right word to use ... the young Australian nation and the whole British Empire owes a debt [to them] which cannot be measured’.¹³

This frontier life also offered Gullett seemingly irrefutable evidence that the bush had created a self-reliant, egalitarian Australia connected to the Empire by bonds of blood and culture. His community was ‘all British’. There was ‘no foreign blood’ and no religious or class divide, for it was the land that defined the people.¹⁴ This belief system was the single greatest influence on his approach to war reporting and his work as official historian. For like Charles Bean and John Masefield and many soldier authors, Gullett used a traditional rhetoric that drew strong connections between the battlefields and the landscape of the frontier.¹⁵ Those who viewed the outbreak of war in 1914 as a purifying agent that would transform an urbanised Britain weakened by bitterness and class division found a ready disciple in Gullett. In his version of this construct, war would imitate the effect of rural living. It had made Australians ‘an active and virile race’ and would do the same for the men and women of the Old World.¹⁶ In 1916, after spending part of the previous year in France working as a war correspondent, Gullett emphasised that for all the valor of the ‘Tommy’, a British migrant had not been forged in the fires of the Australian outback. He urged his Australian readers to remember that ‘they have been brought up under entirely different conditions. They are of the same stock from which we all came, and if they are given a few months under the grand conditions here they will become one with us’.¹⁷ Beyond this need to see the land as a great unifier, Gullett was also intent on emphasising that threats to the new Commonwealth did not emanate from within. They were external and posed a mortal threat to Australian labour, industry, and her racial and moral purity. In short, they threatened the very survival of the nation.

¹³ Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 5.

¹⁵ See PH Hoffenberg (2001) ‘Landscape, Memory and the Australian War Experience 1915-18’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36(1).

¹⁶ Official History, 1914-1918 War: Records of Henry S Gullett. AWM 40. Undated article probably written in the second half of 1914.

¹⁷ *Argus*, 17 March 1916, p. 8.

Chapter 3 - Journalist and Publicist

Gullett began his journalistic career writing on agricultural matters in the *Geelong Advertiser* before joining his uncle Henry and cousin-in-law Thomas Heney¹ at the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1900. Journalism was something of a family trade, given that another two uncles, Sidney and Phillip, were the proprietors of the *Mercury* in Hobart. Henry Gullett Sr., a native of South Devon, had migrated to Australia in 1853 in search of gold. He later worked as a journalist for the *Argus* and then as editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. During his time at the *Daily Telegraph* the newspaper took an interest in a rising political figure by the name of William Morris Hughes. It was the beginning of long association between the Gullett family and one of the most colourful figures in Australian political history. Henry was also very involved in politics, being an influential advocate for Federation, White Australia, better treatment of Aborigines and an expansion of public works. These interests would culminate in him being nominated to the New South Wales Legislative Council as a Liberal in 1908. Beyond these shared pre-occupations and the example he provided of a journalist using his occupation as a springboard into politics, he was content to let his ambitious nephew find his own way. Nevertheless, the family connection could not have helped but open some doors.

When he arrived in Sydney at the dawn of the new century, Gullett cast himself eagerly into the social and political discussions of the time. The emergence of Labour parties following the depression of the 1890s had given a new direction and tone to political life, one matched by a new vitality in art and literature. Had Gullett moved to Melbourne instead of Sydney he would have confronted a cultural establishment dominated by men who had arrived in Australia around the time of the gold rushes and who now sought to promote 'culture' as a means of civilising a materialistic democracy with which they appeared to have little sympathy. The younger generation of writers and artists, more likely to be Australian born and prepared to promote an indigenous culture, gravitated to Sydney where their views were expressed chiefly in the *Bulletin*, a publication regularly eulogised as the 'Bushman's Bible'.² Like Gullett, most of the *Bulletin's* regular writers and occasional correspondents lived in

¹ Thomas William Heney (1862–1928) was married to Amy Gullett, his cousin and the eldest daughter of his uncle Henry.

² R White (1981) *Inventing Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin).

either Sydney or Melbourne, but had grown up elsewhere. They too had arrived in one of those two cities lone, impressionable, ambitious young men.³ They needed to be ambitious, for even in what Davison characterised as the best of times, as indeed the 1880s had been, ‘a journalist’s apprenticeship was hard and the long hours, low pay and drudgery of police rounds weeded out all but the most determined’. The lifestyle served to weaken ‘domestic influences’ which in the view of some contemporaries contributed to tastes that were decidedly bohemian.⁴ Many of these would be writers and journalists lived alone in lodgings, as indeed was probably the case with Gullett given that the 1901 census lists him as residing in Blues Point Road in North Sydney in a household of six.⁵ It is difficult, however, to believe that Gullett was even mild convert to any lifestyle that might be considered bohemian, though this may help explain why as an unmarried thirty year old he was able to move to London free from any impediments.

The exploration of national identity that ensued during the years either side of Federation, one firmly rooted in the rural pretensions of a rapidly urbanising society, attracted the attention of writers and artists such as Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson, Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton. They rejected the poverty and squalor of urban living which they saw as the hallmarks of a derivative civilisation. Instead they applied their not inconsiderable talents to portraying an idealised interior, an ideological pre-occupation shared by Gullett. He would almost certainly have been a nominal adherent to the subsequent installing of the itinerant rural worker to the status of national archetype, a process later explored by Russel Ward in *The Australian Legend*.⁶ It was grounded in a national mythology that no longer celebrated rural Australia as ‘a tranquil Arcadia’. Instead, where once the green tones of the pastoral romance held sway, there was now the brown of the bush; the squatter and the homestead were replaced by the shearer, the boundary rider and other itinerant bush workers.⁷ The dissemination of this imagining of Australian identity through the trade union movement and the *Bulletin* was pervasive enough to justify the claim that the ‘creed of the itinerant bush workers became the catechism of a nation’.⁸ Yet Gullett’s own imagining of Australian identity owes more to what John Hirst characterised as the

³ Davison, *Sydney and the Bush*, p. 192.

⁴ Davison, *Sydney and the Bush*, p. 193.

⁵ The 1905 electoral roll still has him listed as residing at 179 Gipps Street East Melbourne with his mother and sister Isabel.

⁶ R Ward (1965) *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press).

⁷ MacIntyre, *A Short History*, p. 131.

⁸ White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 201.

‘Pioneer Legend’, a nationalist construct that celebrated the people who first settled the land, whether as pastoralists or farmers, rather than their employees. It was conservative rather than radical, encouraged a reverence for the past, celebrated individual rather than collective or state enterprise and was grounded in a belief in a classless society. This better reflected Gullett’s formative experiences in Toolamba and his belief that the pioneers did not labour merely for themselves, but for subsequent generations and, in his view, for the greater good of the Empire.⁹ Later in the official history Gullett would celebrate the light horsemen and their New Zealand allies as citizen soldiers who possessed all of the qualities one would expect of a pioneering people. For his was an adaptable vision of Australian manhood, one easily transformed into an ideal soldier and in turn into a national archetype. Through the efforts of men such as Bean and Gullett, popular myth would be given the imprimatur of official history.¹⁰

For men like Gullett, however, Australian identity was not just about qualities of character. The nation was haunted by the external threat of invasion and equally deep seated concerns about its internal racial makeup. While Britain focussed its attention in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914 on the deteriorating political situation in Europe, it was Japan that dominated Australia’s external concerns. The British alliance with Japan in 1902 made her an ally, but even a guarded support for her in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 evaporated in the face of her humbling of a European power and Britain’s withdrawal of ships from the Pacific to counter the German naval build-up. As Gullett was no doubt aware, these were difficult years for Australia-Japanese relations and it was no surprise therefore that from the very beginning of his journalistic career, the issue of population growth was as much about defence as it was about economic development. By 1918 he believed even more strongly that national sovereignty rested on military might, industrial capacity and a population prepared to wield them. For though he saw the potential for markets in Asia – as a pragmatic thinker he could hardly have ignored them – he believed that ‘the Australian people have more cause for anxiety than for congratulation through their proximity to the great countries of the East’.¹¹

Gullett’s anxieties were symptomatic of a widely held view that Australia was being closely scrutinised by its Asian neighbours, in particular Japan. A failure to populate the vast interior

⁹ J Hirst (1978) *The Pioneer Legend*. *Historical Studies* 18 (71), pp. 316-337.

¹⁰ A Caesar (1998) ‘National Myths of Manhood: Anzacs and Others’. In B Bennett and J Strauss (eds) *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), p. 132.

¹¹ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 21 Feb. 1912, p. 2.

and to develop the land would, it was believed, have serious repercussions. For those searching for a sense of what that might entail, the plight of indigenous Australians was a particularly sobering example. This was reflected in the entire fabric of Australian government, for as Richard White observed while casting his eye over the legislative achievements of the early Australian parliaments, many were unashamedly defensive and protective. White Australia, an Australian navy, compulsory military training, tariffs, and arbitration were all geared to protecting the new nation's sovereignty, her racial unity and her living standards. The more positive notions such as economic and social development remained state prerogatives just as the national focus began to shift towards federal parliament. Nationhood was almost inevitably defined therefore by what it defended against rather than what it stood for.¹² The same observation might be made of Gullett.

In January 1906 Gullett was appointed editor of 'On the Land', the *Sydney Morning Herald's* agricultural page. In front of thirty staff gathered at the Empire Hotel to farewell his predecessor, the subeditor of the paper, A.P Cooper, described Gullett as a 'young man possessed of singular literary ability'. In his response, Gullett noted that he had come straight from the farm and was glad that he was working in an area consistent with the 'predilections of his youth'.¹³ It was also consistent with his background, for as his granddaughter Penny Hackforth-Jones recalled, the Gulletts followed either journalism or farming. Regardless of the chosen vocation the two interests remained; those who chose the land were said to go through life 'Shakespeare in one hand and the plough in the other'.¹⁴ Despite Gullett's relative lack of education and training, Frederic Cutlack described him during this period as 'an ideal journalist', one held in such regard that his contemporaries 'would probably have named him as the first among them for facility in his work, versatility in its range, and knowledge of men and affairs'.¹⁵ Gullett was indeed a very skilful journalist, though he would never have laid claim to being a brilliant writer. He had a wide though not always deep understanding of the events on which he commented but from the very beginning of his career, he was acutely aware of the power of the press to shape public opinion.

¹² White, *Inventing Australia*.

¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 Jan. 1906, p. 11. Frederic Morley Cutlack (1886-1967) was a journalist, soldier, war correspondent, and war historian. He wrote the volume in the Official History on the Australian Flying Corps. Before the war he also worked as a journalist in London and on publicity for the Australian High Commission.

¹⁴ P Hackforth-Jones (1989) *Barbara Baynton: Between Two Worlds* (New York: Penguin), p. 113.

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Aug. 1940, p. 6.

Cutlack's assessment of Gullett's qualities as a journalist, which was part of the obituary he wrote in 1940, provides one of the few records of his time in Sydney before leaving for London in 1908. In it, Gullett was characterised as a man of strong opinions, one who possessed 'some Irish mixture in his blood [that] made him of quick sympathies, hot in any cause that touched him'. The causes that touched him now went well beyond agricultural matters, for 'as gallery writers did in those days, he entered into all the great political fights of the first years of Federation [and] knew intimately the chief combatants in the arena'.¹⁶ In particular, Gullett admired John Christian Watson, the first federal leader of the Australian Labor Party whose *raison d'être* was the protection of workers' interests. In the course of the next few years the Party helped secure what was, relatively speaking, a working man's paradise.¹⁷ Yet this creation did not, as Robert Manne and Chris Feik observed, provide material suitable for a national myth of origin. Military sacrifice rather than social and economic development would eventually provide more appropriate source material.¹⁸

The rights of workers was not, however, the only cause that laid claim to Gullett's loyalty. In an article he wrote just prior to embarking for war service in early 1917, Gullett penned a character profile of Andrew Fisher who had just succeeded George Reid as High Commissioner in London. He made it clear that for all the sincerity of his commitment to the cause of the working man, patriotism and Empire remained the more sacred creed:

If such a thing could be measured by increased wages, shorter hours and happier lives, Mr Fisher and half a dozen other Labour leaders in Australia have done more for British workers than any other six or seven men in the Empire. They have warred ceaselessly against capital: they have ever urged that Australian flesh and blood was more precious to the State than gold and silver; that good wages should come before high dividends, and that an industry which cannot or will not permit good conditions for the workers must be closed down. But they have fought without bitterness: they have with all their partisanship always insisted that the British Empire must be maintained leaving themselves open to the charge

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Aug. 1940, p. 6.

¹⁷ F Welsh (2004) *Great Southern Land: A New History of Australia* (London: Allen Lane), p. 343.

¹⁸ R Manne and C Feik (2012) *The Words That Made Australia: How a nation came to know itself* (Collingwood, Victoria: Black Inc. Agenda).

of being advocates of Imperialism ... Mr Fisher stands for Australia and Imperialism and Labour in that order.¹⁹

If Gullett's interests had expanded after his arrival in Sydney, so too had his ambitions. In 1908, the same year that his uncle became a member of the NSW Legislative Council, Gullett joined the ranks of the first generation of expatriate artists, writers, singers and musicians who made their way to London between 1890 and 1914. It was a journey that took them from the periphery of Empire to its heart. For an ambitious journalist such as Gullett, the imperial capital was both the forge and measuring rod of success.²⁰ As he would quickly learn, it was not a life for the faint hearted, for success there was particularly hard won. This was balanced by the scale of the opportunities on offer. By 1900 there were well over 2000 monthly and weekly titles on the news-stands jostling for space with more than a dozen daily newspapers, some of which boasted circulations in the millions. This created an enormous demand for non-news material supplied by a veritable army of free lancers.

Just before departing for England, *The Lone Hand*, the sister magazine to the *Bulletin*, and modelled on the *London Strand*, published Gullett's short story 'The Boy and the Boss'. *The Lone Hand* suited both his politics and his writing style, emphasising as it did democratic themes, mateship, and White Australia. Gullett also contributed a short story entitled 'The Passing of Dickie' to a publication with the rather quaint title *The Red Kangaroo and Other Australian Short Stories*. It was a conventional story concerning the approaching death of a country town patriarch and the machinations of his family as they jostled for the inheritance. It displayed a light touch but was entirely unremarkable. Given the paucity of his output, fiction was clearly not Gullett's forte, though Bean believed that he was such a bright vivid writer that he had it in him to write a book about Australia which only Dorothea McKellar might rival, but 'for some reason he hasn't done so'.²¹

In October 1907 Gullett was farewelled by his confreres at the *Sydney Morning Herald* who presented him with a parting gift 'testifying to his ability and sterling qualities'. Thomas Heney, his editor, 'eulogised him for the excellent work he had done during his term of service'.²² Family lore has it that he journeyed to the docks in July 1908 with six gold

¹⁹ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 13 Jan. 1917, p. 6.

²⁰ P Morton (2009) 'Australia's England, 1880-1950'. In P Pierce (ed) *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 257.

²¹ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL 606/37/1, Jan.-Feb. 1916, p. 31.

²² *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 9 Oct. 1907, p. 15.

sovereigns in his pocket. By midnight he had lost it all playing poker. He went and sat in the next room, wrapped a cold towel around his head and no doubt contemplated the extent of his foolishness. Re-entering the game, he managed to win his money back and sail as he had planned the next day. Gullett left Australia in the same year that a rather timid bespectacled redhead joined the *Sydney Morning Herald* after having struggled as a barrister and then as a freelance journalist. He shared with Gullett a fascination with the impact of rural life on the development of a distinctly Australian national character, one which was nothing less than the Briton re-born.²³ Charles Bean, one of the most influential writers in Australian history, ensured Gullett a literary immortality of his own by recommending him for the role of correspondent with the Australian Light Horse and inviting him to write Volume VII of the official history.

Although it is speculative to search for broader reasons beyond career aspirations and a desire to travel that motivated Gullett's shift to London, there are a number of circumstances that provide some insight. Gullett's father had called London home and the familial ties to the city would have been reinforced by the romantic mythology of the British Empire prevalent at the turn of the century, one which served to engender an emotional attachment to London rather than England or the United Kingdom as a whole. In addition, as a committed imperialist, Gullett would have been drawn by a cityscape where even the architecture stood in mute celebration of 'British heroism on the battlefield, British sovereignty over foreign lands, British wealth and power, in short, British imperialism'.²⁴ Though he was in his early thirties by the time he arrived, the immensity of the city and the power it revealed did not leave him untouched, as a description of the Londoners of the 60th Division in 1923 reveals:

Meanwhile the Londoner, if less bold in his outlook than the Scot, and more conventional in his respect for everything that was stamped with authority, was far ahead of all other English troops in his multiplicity of interests, the breadth and warmth of his sympathies, and his cheeriness under all sorts of hard and depressing conditions; while he was second to none in his sense of humour, in his pugnacious, self-sacrificing courage, his liking for the use of the bayonet — the supreme test of infantry — and his insistence. The Londoner lived and fought in the war as though moved by the consciousness that he was a citizen of the strong

²³ P Rees (2015) *Bearing Witness: The Remarkable Life of Charles Bean, Australian's greatest war correspondent* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin).

²⁴ J Schneer (2001) *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (London: Yale University Press), p. 7.

heart of the Empire, where most of Britain's great Imperial qualities have their spring; and he proudly lived up to his heritage. Weight for weight, the little Cockney was one of the greatest infantrymen of the whole war. His work at Sheria, in Judea, at Amman and Shunet Nimrin will never grow old in the memory of the Australian Light Horse.²⁵

Cutlack did not explore any of Gullett's deeper motivations in the obituary and instead confined himself to the observation that 'like other Australian journalists in the years before the last war, he went to London to try his fortune, and those days were for some of us who survive him, as certainly for himself, some of the happiest in our lives'.²⁶ In 1916, by then beginning to make his name as a war correspondent, Gullett encouraged any aspiring journalist to spend a year or two in London in order to gain experience before returning to Australia to reap the benefits. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the conditions for all except the most successful free-lancers were 'hard and exacting, and the pay poor'.²⁷ Newspaper proprietor Claude McKay recalled that on his return to Australia Gullett had conceded to him that despite his best efforts, however fast he made the journey home after submitting articles to editors, the rejection letters would invariably be waiting for him. Though most likely told with humorous intent, Gullett claimed that his years in London had left him with barely enough for the return fare.²⁸

As a newcomer to London, Gullett found himself drawn to the daily theatre of the city, for the 'streets are a moving comedy, or, rather, you can take it as you like ... Provided you keep out of the way, London would not care a rap if you went about without your head. That's the charm of it'.²⁹ Yet Gullett would see more in London than just proof of imperial greatness and career opportunities. There was evidence of a darker side where there was 'wealth that passes you on its rubber tires going to its mansions in the West' existing side by side with 'the poor that trudges East on broken soles'.³⁰ In his ground breaking sociological study *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1891-1903), completed five years before Gullett's arrival, Charles Booth estimated that over 30 percent of Londoners were living in poverty. Five percent of the populace were paupers, twenty percent were malnourished and the

²⁵ HS Gullett (1923) *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine, 1914-1918. The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18 Vol. VII* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), p. 535.

²⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Aug. 1940, p. 6.

²⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 23 March 1916, p. 11.

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 Dec. 1961, p. 74.

²⁹ *Mercury*, 6 March 1909, p. 8.

³⁰ *Mercury*, 6 March 1909, p. 8.

majority led ‘a life of monotonous and incessant toil, with no prospect in old age but penury and parochial support’.³¹ In effect, one third of the nation was being starved by the other two thirds.³² Although some of the very worst conditions in London had improved by the time Gullett arrived, in the preceding decades London was the site where ‘real social conflict, the war of all against all actually existed’.³³

Beyond the social ills, Gullett would have also witnessed the profound political challenges of the time: potential revolution in English factories, disorder in Ireland, militant suffragettes, political upheaval in Britain and increasing instability in Europe.³⁴ He contrasted this tumult with the holiday atmosphere in Sydney on a Saturday afternoon when a stranger could not help but think that ‘there was surely never such a happy, careless, pleasure and nature loving people as these Australians on Port Jackson’. In this new world in Australia, ‘which everywhere gladdens the heart of the student of Empire’, there was a ‘magic’ that strengthened the ‘frail bodies’ of men from the old world. Having been reborn they could then re-join the battle of the ‘congested North’. Such a lyrical turn reflected Gullett’s vision of a future in which Australia would enjoy both ‘power and plenty’.³⁵ Though he was no doubt sincere, no-one could accuse him of subtlety. Residents of an urban slum or a depressed rural area could hardly fail to see Gullett’s intent, living as they did in an age marked by ‘monstrous inequalities of fortune’ which even at a century’s distance appear ‘grotesque’.³⁶

While living in London Gullett contributed articles to the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* and *Sun* and the *United Empire*, the official organ of the Royal Colonial Institute. He wrote with a clear objective in mind, one which would become his literary and political obsession. In seeking to advertise Australia as a destination for migrants and investment capital he aggressively blurred the lines between journalism and propaganda. It would prove to be a

³¹ G Craig (1966) *Europe since 1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p. 317.

³² S Hynes (1968) *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico). Other studies followed: Seebohm Rowntree’s *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (1901), L.G Chiozza Money’s *Riches and Poverty* (1905), Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s *Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission* (1909), and Philip Snowden’s *The Living Wage* (1912).

³³ P Ackroyd (2001) *London: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus), p. 603.

³⁴ Though Dangerfield’s *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1966 [1935]) was one of the most influential accounts of the pre-war period, later research indicates that he was overly pessimistic. These crises occurred concurrently, but ‘their timetables were their own. They coincided only by coincidence. They did not run together’ (D Read (1982) ‘Introduction: Crisis Age or Golden Age?’ In D Read (ed) *Edwardian England* (London: Croom Helm), p. 23.

³⁵ *Strand*, July 1909, p. 128.

³⁶ CFG Masterman (1909) *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co), p. 25; AN Wilson (2005) *After the Victorians 1901-1953* (London: Hutchinson), p. 52.

valuable apprenticeship for his wartime correspondence. Gullett was also quite prepared to welcome his countrymen to Britain and made a habit of hosting regular Sunday evening gatherings of fellow expatriates. In this self-appointed role he met artists and writers such as Tom Roberts, Will Dyson and Vance Palmer. He was also friends with Charles Bean, who as correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* was technically a competitor, but who openly acknowledged that he ‘could not wish any man better luck than to have so loyal a rival’.³⁷ Gullett’s membership of this expatriate community also brought with it an unintended benefit. Tom Roberts had been engaged to paint a portrait of Elizabeth Penelope Frater, the daughter of Alexander Frater and Barbara Baynton.³⁸ It was in the artist’s studio that Gullett met Penelope, and though there is no record of whether it was an immediate attraction, they subsequently married in October 1912 in a civil ceremony in Marylebone, London.

Gullett and Penelope were a good match but their attraction was certainly not the result of a literary connection. As Penelope later conceded she was not at all inclined in that direction, noting that her own literary efforts did not extend beyond writing cheques. The same could not be said of Gullett’s mother-in-law. After being abandoned by her first husband and Penelope’s father, Baynton remarried an elderly doctor, a happier union which gave her the financial security to raise her three children and to pursue her literary ambitions. After her second husband’s death in 1904 she and Penelope spent much of their time in London. Though her literary output was for many years forgotten, in time it would enjoy a posthumous reassessment that ensured the survival of six brilliant and quite distinctive short stories. Like her future son-in-law, Baynton also spoke her mind freely without regard for the consequences, possessing as she did a limited capacity to suffer fools, gladly or otherwise. ‘Rash, clever, impulsive, generous ... quick to anger, liable to be unjust’, she was nevertheless ‘always ready to forgive and to make friends’.³⁹ Her charm and wit papered over her less amusing qualities. Without doubt, though, she was a formidable woman.

Though Gullett shared his mother-in-law’s literary bent and some quirks of temperament, there were some key differences. Ambitious and placing great value on the connections she had made in London, Gullett was not the match that Baynton sought for her daughter. He had grown up in rural Victoria, a world far removed from London, the society pages and the

³⁷ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL 606/37/1, Jan.-Feb. 1916, p. 31

³⁸ Barbara Jane Baynton (1857–1929) was an Australian author. After an eventful life she lived in a home in Toorak next door to Gullett.

³⁹ S Krimmer and A Lawson (eds) (1980) *The Portable Barbara Baynton* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. xviii.

Parisian ballet school that a 20-year-old Penelope had attended. Baynton was not one to hide her feelings and took great pleasure in pointing out his inadequacies. In this instance she misjudged her adversary, for her censure, which might have intimidated lesser men, left Gullett well and truly unmoved. Baynton's disdain for Gullett's background was not because it was different from her own but rather because she saw in it an all too familiar environment, one for which she felt no affection. Baynton had 'reimagined' her humble origins and the anguish of her early married life whereas Gullett boasted about his rural upbringing. This difference was particularly evident in their literary treatment of the bush. To Gullett, it might be harsh, but it was a place of romance that had shaped a national character. To Baynton, it was a lonely and hostile environment that brutalised its human inhabitants. Again, unlike Gullett, she assiduously ignored the traditional values of mateship, hospitality and compassion and saw the bush as 'grotesque and actively malevolent, inhabited by sinister and predatory creatures both male and female'.⁴⁰

Gullett and Baynton later found some common ground in their view of the Australian soldier. Baynton spent the entire war in Britain and allowed both her home in London and her country house in Essex to be used as open houses for soldiers. Though both her sons were wounded while serving with the British Army, she was as proud of her countrymen as Gullett. In *The Australian Soldier: An Appreciation and a Tribute*, one of two idealised portraits of the Australian soldier that she wrote during the war, she argued that there was not a nation involved in the war which did not acknowledge that 'the Australian soldier for bravery, initiative, endurance, and great tenderness, has no equal'. There was no room for the brutality that pervaded her short stories. These men, who placed the 'welfare of the Empire, and its necessity, above their own' were but innocent 'bush born boys, shy and untamed as the wild birds of their own country'. She tried to disabuse the reader of any notions of the 'lawlessness' of Australians seeing in it nothing less than their 'brave contempt for danger and death'.⁴¹ In her short stories her characters were almost always malicious, stupid or drunken.⁴² For them, there could be no redemption. Yet in war she saw men being promoted from the ranks by virtue of brains and brawn, which was in stark contrast to their English counterparts who were drawn from 'the mentally unfit of the aristocracy'. The Tommies were

⁴⁰ Krimmer and Lawson, *Barbara Baynton*, p. xxiii; S Walker (1988) 'Perceptions of Australia 1855-1915'. In L Hergenhan and B Bennett (eds) *The Penguin New Literary History* (Ringwood: Penguin), p. 170.

⁴¹ B Baynton (1980) 'The Australian Soldier: An Appreciation and a Tribute'. In Krimmer and Lawson, *Barbara Baynton*, pp. 323-25.

⁴² C Hadgraft, (1960) *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955* (London, Heineman), p. 95.

‘dogged heroes’ but God’s work in creating them had been undone by the effect of ‘mechanical abnegation’. She even quoted Gullett, who in a letter to her had characterised the AIF as ‘old wine in new bottles’ for only ‘a new free country could have bred these heroes’.⁴³ At least in this, they were of a like mind.

Gullett’s independence and presumably his career advancement would in time win over his mother-in-law. She had initially looked to dominate him, dismissively referring to him as ‘the old man’ because of the seven year age gap between the newly-weds. It might have intimidated a more sensitive man, but Gullett would have none of it:

Close proximity to two of the most difficult Australians of the day – Billy Hughes and Barbara Baynton – each of whom acknowledged the other as troublesome, is testament to his character ... He remained calmly indifferent to her moods, could beat her in an argument and was able to handle the crises that marriage to her daughter inevitably brought.⁴⁴

For all the fact that Gullett’s suit initially appeared to have little to recommend it, Baynton’s connections would have certainly helped to cement his place in the Australian expatriate community. George Reid, the Australian High Commissioner who would write the foreword to her book *Cobbers*, employed Gullett to write immigration propaganda. When the invitation for an Australian correspondent to visit the Western Front was discussed in 1915, Gullett was suitably placed to fill the role. Billy Hughes, who would prove a valuable patron for Gullett in 1919, was a friend who considered her a remarkable woman. She sat for portraits painted by Sir John Longstaff and Spencer Pryse, corresponded with Sir Samuel Griffith, Federal Chief Justice, and sent an inscribed copy of *Bush Studies* to the Governor General Lord Tennyson, son of the great poet. Like Gullett, her life might have started with fixed horizons, but they did not remain so. When she died in 1929 her estate, augmented by her foray into antiques, was valued at £160 000 (\$12 000 000 in 2016).

The arrival in 1910 of Sir George Reid, Australia’s fourth prime minister, as the inaugural High Commissioner in London, provided Gullett with his first opportunity for government work. Reid had made a significant contribution to the move toward Federation and had been a

⁴³ Baynton, ‘The Australian Soldier’, pp. 323-25.

⁴⁴ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 128.

popular guest in London during a visit in 1897 for the Diamond Jubilee.⁴⁵ As High Commissioner his presence alone did much to improve Australia's image in the United Kingdom. As ease with people from any background, Reid was a witty and fluent speaker who exuded a 'genial bonhomie'. Just as importantly, he was also considered 'eminently clubbable'.⁴⁶ Though sometimes guilty of speaking too simplistically on issues, he was a skilful and shrewd politician. In a meeting with the editors of the leading financial papers and later in an article for the *Financial Review of Reviews* he helped restore the confidence of investors in the Commonwealth. Showing that he understood the power of a good slogan, Reid made it clear on his arrival in Britain that it was 'Publicity, Publicity, Publicity' that would be the 'beginning and the end of Australia's need in every part of the world'.⁴⁷ In particular, Reid sought to promote Australia as a destination for migrants, a place for investment and a source of primary products and minerals for the British and European markets.

The emigration scheme that Reid championed was described by one Australian newspaper as being on a 'bigger, broader, and more comprehensive scale than was ever possible before the Commonwealth'. It was lauded as a means by which 'the landless men of the Old World' would populate the 'lands of the new'.⁴⁸ Both the cause and the language used to advertise it would have resonated deeply with Gullett, as would the fact that it was underpinned by a strategic imperative. Reid had also announced that he would place a Naval Loan on the London market to fund the construction of the first fleet to be owned, manned and controlled by any one of the Overseas Dominions, though it would remain part of the Empire's Fleet. This was not the vanity of a new nation. Having sought and failed to engage Britain more deeply in the Pacific, the Australian government took steps to provide for its own defence against a potential southward thrust by Japan. From 1909 the Commonwealth government introduced compulsory military training for youths and young men, committed itself to completing a national rail system, began building naval bases, built arms factories and even

⁴⁵ LF Crisp (1979) *George Houstoun Reid: Federation Father. Federal Failure?* (Canberra: Australian National University Press), p. 4.

⁴⁶ N Meaney (2010) 'The first high commissioners: George Reid and Andrew Fisher'. In C Bridge F Bongiorno and D Lee (eds) *The High Commissioners: Australian Representations in the United Kingdom 1910-2010* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), p. 40.

⁴⁷ J Thompson (1972) *The Australian High Commission in London: its Origin and Early History 1901-1916* (Unpublished PhD) (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia), p. 142; 188.

⁴⁸ *West Gippsland Gazette*, 24 May 1910, p. 6.

established an air force.⁴⁹ The battlecruiser *Australia* was the most public of these developments. Though the issue of who manned and controlled the Australian ‘fleet’ would prove rather less clear cut, it was a significant moment.

Gullett commenced work on immigration propaganda with the Australian High Commission in 1910, a role that would come to define his time in the United Kingdom. Against the background of a growing fear of Japan, a deteriorating international situation in Europe and a complex political environment in Australia, the immigration program that he advertised struggled to attract the unconditional support it required. Even after Federation there was a dispersal of effort and a state parochialism which reflected poorly on the new Commonwealth and the politicians and public figures who represented it. This was hardly surprising given that Federation was at one level driven by the self-interested manoeuvring of colonies that remained deeply suspicious of each other. This is evident in the reality that the states retained control over important areas of government that would have otherwise appeared to be more logically within the purview of the Commonwealth. In contrast to these competing agendas, the desire to close Australia’s borders to coloured migrants enjoyed almost universal support. *The Immigration Restriction Act* (1901) was the first passed by the new parliament, and for the next half century the preservation of a white Australia remained one of the core aims of the nation’s defence and foreign policies.⁵⁰ However offensive it may sound to modern ears, the White Australia Policy as it became known, appeared entirely reasonable to a population with ingrained attitudes to race. Politicians did not even feel the need to employ euphemism or subtlety when discussing restriction. Edmund Barton, Australia’s first prime minister, was in no doubt that the ‘doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman ... Nothing we can do by cultivation, by refinement, or by anything else will make some races equal to others’.⁵¹ The attorney-general and future prime minister Alfred Deakin, explained the clear link between a white Australia and national sovereignty when he introduced the immigration restriction legislation in

⁴⁹ N Meaney (1999) *Towards a New Vision: Australia & Japan through 100 Years* (East Roseville, NSW: Kangaroo Press).

⁵⁰ D Day (2000) ‘The White Australia Policy’ [online]. In: C Bridge and B Attard *Between Empire and Nation: Australia's External Relations from Federation to the Second World War* (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing).

<http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=772490815360094;res=IELHSS>, Date retrieved 29 May 2017.

⁵¹ Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), 26 Sept. 1901.

Parliament in 1901. To him, the ‘unity of Australia is nothing, if it does not imply a united race’.⁵²

Like most Australians of the time, Gullett’s support for racial exclusion was entirely consistent with a vision of a powerful and populated Australia existing within a powerful Empire within a powerful Anglo-Saxondom. To make this a reality, however, this ‘provocative policy of a palisade against the unwanted’ needed to be bolstered by strenuous efforts to increase the number of white settlers.⁵³ Despite attempts to centralise immigration activities, before 1914 the Commonwealth concerned itself with the exclusion of those considered to be undesirable and the states took responsibility for encouraging the right type of settler. Keeping people out was by far the easier task, but nevertheless, there were some successes. The Premiers’ Conference in 1906 saw agreement for the federal government to sponsor immigration advertising in Britain, while in the following year Prime Minister Alfred Deakin made the Australian government’s support for immigration clear at the Colonial Conference in London. By the time Gullett found employment with the Office of the High Commissioner there was a growing support for immigration among the individual states, as is evident in the fact that within two years 92 000 immigrants had made the journey, ninety percent British and approximately half with government assistance. In 1912 the Premiers’ Conference set the maximum assistance at £6, which equated to half of the fare, with the target demographic being farmworkers and domestic servants. By 1913 the advertising campaign had a budget of £50 000 with a further £150 000 available to subsidise migrants.

The piecemeal efforts to attract migrants and capital and to counter the negative reports appearing in British newspapers were hampered by the inconsistent nature of Australian representation in London before Reid’s arrival and even for a period afterward. This ensured a dispersal of effort that left the British people woefully ill-informed or entirely ignorant of Australia and Australian issues.⁵⁴ A temporary Commonwealth Office had been established in 1906 but the long delay exacerbated the concern already generated by the instability of Commonwealth politics and the reputation for anti-British nationalism that dogged some Australian politicians, particularly Labor members. While in England Deakin had been

⁵² CPD, 12 Sept. 1901.

⁵³ G Greenwood (1955) ‘National Development and Social Experimentation 1901-1914’. In G Greenwood (ed) *Australia: A Social and Political History* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson), p. 247.

⁵⁴ O Pryke (2005) ‘Australia House: A Little Australia in London’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 84.

‘disgusted with the little pigeonholes that did duty as the headquarters of the Australian States. He had only succeeded in finding two of these little cribs, and he was ashamed of them’.⁵⁵ Even two years after Reid’s arrival the central challenge of advertising Australia remained, as another journalist could attest:

Thousands of Australians even now have no idea how poorly Australia is outwardly projected in London ... To such it will still come as a surprise to be told that Australia in London does not exist, save in the personality of the High Commissioner and the work of his staff, while both he and they are accommodated in premises that are unknown to the majority of Londoners.⁵⁶

In addition, Reid also had to contend with the mutual suspicion that characterised relations between the states and successive federal governments. Indeed, this was the reason for the long delay in naming a high commissioner as the relationship between any appointee and the various state government agents was in very delicate political territory. In typical fashion, the response alternated between procrastination and a series of interim measures. Nevertheless, Reid hid any concerns he may have had and was fortunate that he was not under oath when he assured the Australian press that in his first ten weeks in Britain he had found the Agents General ‘entirely friendly and willing to co-operate with him in a federal spirit on all matters affecting the interests or reputation of Australia as a whole’.⁵⁷ In the same article he announced that Gullett was temporarily assisting by supplying press paragraphs on Commonwealth matters to London and provincial journals. The advertisements were to appear in 300 country papers as well as the metropolitan press.

Now drawing a £400 annual wage to oversee immigration and advertising, Gullett’s status both as a newsman and an outsider was never likely to endear him to the various State representatives, nor would it seem, his professional colleagues in the press. Almost immediately following Gullett’s appointment, there was an accusation in a Melbourne newspaper that Reid was to oversee a department staffed by non-Australians. Another newspaper countered that there were only three new positions to be allocated to two Australians and the other to someone who had resided in Australia for many years. Politics, as Gullett would observe over ten years later, is seldom played cleanly.

⁵⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Sept. 1907, p. 10.

⁵⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Feb. 1912, p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Advertiser*, 25 May 1910, p. 6.

In time, the department that Gullett established made use of every possible opportunity to publicise the opportunities on offer in Australia, ranging from newspapers to posters at agricultural shows and the back of tram tickets. If the success of the program was not all that it might have been, that was not Gullett's fault, possessing as he did both the imagination and enthusiasm to drive such an ambitious program.⁵⁸ No similar claim could be made for subtlety. The placement of attractive photographs in railway carriages and posters and billboards on railway stations with slogans such as 'Empire Land of Promise', 'Golden Australia' and 'Land of Sunshine and Success' was not particularly sophisticated or nuanced. Yet the belief that in contrast to the decadence of Europe, Australia was a place of wholesomeness, purity and sanity was one also explored by, among others, Banjo Paterson and Arthur Streeton. Gullett's approach to advertising this purity was indicative of his belief that constant repetition was a vital characteristic of an effective propaganda campaign. It did not come cheap. In the first year expenditure on immigration propaganda doubled. By the outbreak of war in 1914 it was five times what it had been in 1909. Gullett's professional staff on arrival numbered three but by the end of the year it had swelled to 23. The results were, however, impressive. Between 1905 and 1914 390 000 people migrated to Australia; between January 1910 and July 1914 alone, Australia's net population increase from migration was six percent. To find a comparable increase one has to return to the Gold Rushes.

Despite the successes, the nature of the system ensured that the Agents General could not offer Reid their unconditional loyalty, even if they were of a mind to do so. Their state parochialism and the division and confusion that it created only served to diminish their reputation and by extension, the states and the nation they purported to represent. These difficulties should have surprised no-one. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Agents General had represented the interests of their respective colonies, and after 1901, their respective states. The scope of their role was very wide that at times they acted in a manner little different from ambassadors. It was perhaps natural that they would be protective of their position and the opportunities that it afforded them for they were presented at Court, travelled widely, gave lectures and attended exhibitions throughout Great Britain and the continent.

⁵⁸ Meaney, *The first high commissioners*, p. 40.

Even the British government and press pandered to their sense of importance by consulting them on colonial matters.⁵⁹

In response to their increasingly insecure position and conscious of the accusations of disunity, in 1905 the Agents General had formed a committee to jointly oversee matters of general Australian interest in Britain. They elected Timothy Coghlan, the Agent General for New South Wales, as the chair of the committee, a move which just served to emphasise the difficulties. Insulted by the shift in control of the immigration branch, coinciding with the instability generated by being offered a succession of short term appointments, Coghlan openly pursued his own interests in London from 1910 onwards in a manner later gently characterised as having been ‘ethically dubious’.⁶⁰ Gullett identified Coghlan as a leading antagonist in a group who from the very first ‘indulged in a series of actions so small and undignified that the detailed story of them would scarcely be credited’. It was, in Gullett’s view, a ‘disgraceful squabble’.⁶¹ At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 Gullett was even less restrained in his assessment of the government’s pre-war immigration policy:

The policy adopted [between 1906 and 1914], if such a crude, extravagant, half-hearted affair could be described as a policy, was little short of a disgrace to the country which fathered it and tolerated it. It was never in any sense national: it was the plaything of politics and politicians; it was spasmodic; it was reduced almost to a farce by State working against State and the Commonwealth clumsily interfering. It ran for a week and halted for a month. It was threatened with death at every change of government, both State and Federal. There was scarcely a politician in Australia who was not afraid to advocate immigration before his electors; there was never a Government or a Minister really interested in it.⁶²

In November 1911 a Labor member from Victoria rather belatedly asked the Minister for External Affairs in Parliament whether Gullett was representing the Commonwealth and *The Argus* simultaneously, a concern that had already been raised by the government with the

⁵⁹ Pryke O (2010) Foundations: Australia’s early representation in Great Britain. In C Bridge F Bongiorno and D Lee *The High Commissioners: Australian Representations in the United Kingdom 1910-2010* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), p. 25

⁶⁰ N Hicks (2016) ‘Coghlan, Sir Timothy Augustine (1855–1926)’. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/coghlan-sir-timothy-augustine-5708/text9651>. Date retrieved 21 Dec. 2015.

⁶¹ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 2.

⁶² HS Gullett (1919) *Unguarded Australia* (London: Roseberry Press), p. 6.

Office of the High Commissioner. Gullett had severed his official ties almost a year before after seven months employ and had returned to freelancing. The reasons motivating his decision are unclear, but in any case, Gullett was now free to travel to Canada and America with the Victorian Immigration Delegation led by Hugh McKenzie, Minister for Lands, and Elwood Mead. The latter, an American irrigation specialist later to have the reservoir behind the Boulder Dam in Colorado named in his honour, had accepted an invitation from the Victorian government in 1907 to be chairman of the State River and Water Supply Commission. Beyond the science of a field in which he was expert, Mead possessed a ‘deep-rooted agrarian idealism which had been nurtured in his boyhood experience of the disintegration of cherished rural communities’.⁶³ The agrarian idealist and the bush romantic recognised and embraced a kindred spirit.

After finishing in North America Gullett visited Australia before returning to Britain in February 1911 on the mail steamer departing from Fremantle. While in Australia he had visited the Department of External Affairs seeking to re-establish his connection with the High Commissioner’s Office. Gullett had no wish to be re-engaged as a government employee and instead sought to work as a freelancer. He subsequently met with Reid on his return to London and entered into an agreement to write articles for £3.3 per thousand words. Reid authorised payment for articles which would appear in the *Daily News*, *Mining World*, *Farm Life*, *Cold Storage*, *The Financial Times*, *Live Stock Journal*, *Coloniser* and the *Sheffield Telegraph*. An interesting condition was that Gullett was to write under very clear direction:

The High Commissioner considers that Mr Gullett might well, from time to time, as suitable occasion offers, and on authority from the Office, publish articles, to be paid for as per scale previously arranged, but that there should be no general authority given to Mr Gullett to write. He would, therefore, write when directed.⁶⁴

To what extent Gullett saw his war reporting in 1915 as writing when directed is a matter of conjecture, but one does not have to subscribe to Philip Knightley’s grand conspiracy theories of press collusion to see the parallels.

⁶³ JM Powell (2016) ‘Mead, Elwood (1858–1936)’. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mead-elwood-7543/text13159>. Date retrieved 14 July 2015.

⁶⁴ Memorandum, Department of External Affairs, 18 Jan. 1911. H.S. Gullett - Press writer London Office, National Library of Australia (NLA) A1 1911/1269.

In August 1912 Gullett took advantage of his status as a freelancer to write that a state of open war between the High Commissioner and the Agents General was imminent. He added that this ill feeling was widely known from the day of Reid's arrival:

It appeared inconceivable that a body of men occupying the important position held by the Agents General would continue a policy so small minded as that which has marked their dealings with the High Commissioner's Office. Sir George Reid seemed anxious for peace at any price and his attitude was easily understood. Doubtless he took the view that nothing could be more deplorable than a rupture, and the spectacle of Australian representatives engaged in open hostilities.⁶⁵

Gullett may have written this article at the direction of the High Commissioner, or perhaps with his tacit approval. Regardless of the extent to which it reflected an officially sanctioned view, it highlights how impatient he was with the progress of the immigration scheme to which he was so committed. He was certainly ready to assume the role of chief propagandist, noting that before Reid's arrival the 'Federal exhibition at shows was piecemeal, hole and corner competitive arrangements which was the wonder of the British people and the dismay of the Australian officials engaged in it'. In contrast, the united show was such a 'shining success' that it had led to fears that the Commonwealth might assume the responsibilities for shipping and immigration. He might also have subconsciously referred to Reid's expanding girth by adding that he 'loomed large by virtue of his unique gift of public speaking, his very interesting personality, and his big record as an Australian Statesman'.⁶⁶

Gullett was acutely aware that it was more than just a matter of battling the pettiness of Australian domestic politics. Convincing Britons not just to emigrate but to make the longer journey to Australia rather than to Canada and the United States was the central challenge. On his arrival Reid had observed that the quest for immigrants was not 'a question of comparison between one part of the Empire and another, but in friendly rivalry in the race for overseas development under the same Crown, the same flag, and in the cause of the Empire'.⁶⁷ Though he softened his own comparisons with Canada with a veneer of even handedness, Gullett was prepared to push the boundaries of friendly rivalry to their limit.

⁶⁵ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 2.

⁶⁶ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *West Gippsland Gazette*, 24 May 1910, p. 6.

Writing in 1912, he readily admitted to a prejudice against North West Canada because he was a native of a sun country:

We have in the South altogether superior opportunities for the home-seeker ...
The immensity of the prairie, comparable only to the ocean, is deeply impressive,
and yet from a home making point of view, it was desolate and uninviting ...
Anything more cheerless, more harsh, more hopeless than the home and the life
of those irrigationists it would be difficult to conceive.⁶⁸

Yet in one significant area Gullett believed the Canadians had a distinct advantage over their Australian counterparts. When travelling abroad, wealthy Australians went to ‘infinite pains to prove that the Commonwealth is no place at all for the investor and a second-rate venture for the small settler’. Fault was also found with the working class and its ‘irrational fear that wages may be injuriously affected by a healthy policy of immigration’ and the graziers who have no ‘desire to sell their lands’. By contrast, Gullett noted that the Canadians were ‘ever ready to welcome the newcomers, knowing that they help to build up the prosperity of the country. He never reveals the unpleasant side of Dominion life to the outside world’.⁶⁹ The Australian, in contrast, too often failed to show such patriotism. In an article in *United Empire*, the journal of The Royal Colonial Institute (later reprinted in Australia), Gullett showed that he was running short of patience:

When the Australian goes to Canada he discovers that there is nothing wrong with his own country. The fault, he confesses, is not in the land, it is in himself. He has lacked faith ... Canada has beaten Australia so badly at the game of adding to her citizens because of her geographical position, and, to an even greater degree, because of the patriotism and long-sightedness of her people. Where the Australians have been cliquey and selfish and foolish on the question of immigration, the Canadians have been national, unselfish, and bold.⁷⁰

Yet as an expatriate he was perhaps as Norman Lindsay derided them, only half a person.⁷¹ For though he was an avowed nationalist, in finding fault in the attitude of his countrymen,

⁶⁸ *Daily News*, 16 Nov. 1912, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Advertiser*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 18.

⁷⁰ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 Aug. 1912, p. 6.

⁷¹ S Alomes (1999) *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 12.

Gullett swam against the tide. In the literature of the period, when tragedy or defeat came, it was usually the fault of outside forces beyond the control of the individual or group.⁷² Defeat in wartime was, of course, a different matter. Gullett's preparedness to publically criticise his countrymen all but disappeared the moment they donned khaki.

Gullett was able, however, to identify Australian traits which he found more praiseworthy. Under the by-line 'In London Streets: Some casual notes' Gullett was anything but casual in his assessment of the class system. He opened with a conventional report of a Sunday evening stroll about St. Pancras and other working men's suburbs which he then expanded into an unsophisticated advertisement in which Australia was portrayed as an egalitarian land free from the class divisions of the Old World:

One becomes very conscious of the lack of close understanding between the social extremes of England. Men encumbered with riches never cease to preach to you of the total unreliability of the British labourer and of his self-inflicted misery. One misses that sympathy, human if not political, between sections of the people that runs through Australians. The only common chord here is patriotism. Beyond that the masses and the classes are as far apart as the poles.⁷³

As he would do during the war, Gullett wrote as an Australian nationalist rather than a journalist. His approach was very much in step with the brash and assertive nature of Australian nationalism at the time but it existed within set parameters. For though he characterised Australia as a land abounding in self-made men who possessed a 'strong spirit of independence, even arrogance' there was a basic social unity born of the Empire, democracy and the egalitarianism of rural life. The Australian newspaper which wrote about the lower and middle and upper classes would, in Gullett's view, 'promptly lose its circulation, and peace loving as the Australians are, might even have its windows wrecked'.⁷⁴ However, he was quick to reassure his readers that though the idea that 'Jack is as good as his master may get a little bit on the nerves of some of our visitors from the Mother Country' the Australian worker 'labours cheerfully', is 'happy in his high wages, his comfortable home,

⁷² I Turner (1976) 'The Social Setting'. In G Dutton (ed) *The Literature of Australia* (London: Penguin), p. 34.

⁷³ *Mercury*, 6 March 1909, p. 8.

⁷⁴ Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 37.

and well fed, well dressed children' and 'goes singing into his task'.⁷⁵ There was no room in this construct for the industrial and social tensions that blighted pre-war Britain.

Having tempted the British worker with promises of wealth and opportunity unrivalled by any other country, Gullett showed that any attempt to redress the imbalance between the rich and the poor at home was all but doomed. The 'London investor', a 'conscienceless individual', saw even the suggestion of doing so as 'an insult, as a declaration of war, as an attack upon British industry, as an indication of a shameless lack of patriotism'.⁷⁶ This was probably a reference to the Liberal Party's People's Budget (1909) which was tabled a month later and was the most important single piece of legislation of the Edwardian period. It was the first time in British history that a government had shown itself prepared to use taxation as a means of redistributing wealth. It also roused the Tories to a level of resistance that would end with the House of Lords stripped of its veto, thereby shifting the balance of power in English politics.⁷⁷ In spite of the fact that the House of Lords had accepted legislation in 1908-09 involving old age pensions, labour exchange boards, trade boards for sweated industries and the Children's Act providing a system of juvenile courts, Gullett would nevertheless have seen in this agitation a battle between capital and labour, one in which he was instinctively on the side of the working class. This type of class antagonism was the antithesis of what he saw as the more egalitarian nature of Australian society.

Many of his later political opponents, and a fair number of his allies, discovered that Gullett could be a hard and cynical operator who did not fear making enemies. They may not have always recognised the idealism that informed his patriotism. Frederic Cutlack, however, recognised it and understood that it had its genesis in the Australian bush. To him Gullett was a 'bright, courageous sunny hearted Australian' who from his childhood 'had followed a vision of Australia teeming with prosperous farms and pastures; dreamt of her with irrigation, colonies springing from her wasted waters, with thousands of settlers multiplying the product of her half used pastures and doubling and quadrupling the demand for builders, carpenters, workers of all sorts in secondary industries'.⁷⁸ Given that this description was part of his friend's obituary, it is perhaps not surprising that Cutlack chose not to acknowledge that Gullett's idealism existed side by side with existential fears of a coming apocalypse. Gullett

⁷⁵ Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ *Mercury*, 6 March 1909, p. 8.

⁷⁷ See Hynes, *Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ *Reveille*, Dec. 1940, p. 8.

believed that Japan was ‘more or less of a nightmare to the present generation and the generations ahead, although they will be far more numerous and powerful, will possibly have similar nightmares about China and India’. Pragmatic enough to realise that the ‘East is not only a menace; it is also a great market’, yet he also understood that the defence of Australia was ‘a hopeless task’ for four million people.⁷⁹ Though the British Navy protected Australia from ‘the unscrupulous land-hunger of the world’, if it failed, ‘at best we struggle on part owners of lands in which we are now absolute, destined to go warring through centuries with foes across a frontier’.⁸⁰ To understand Gullett, his drive, his impatience, the contradictions in his nature and his preparedness to value ends over means, one must first understand this mixed vision of Australia’s future.

Gullett’s concerns were symptomatic of a society which identified itself with ‘purity, innocence, wholesomeness, sanity’ and which was prepared to protect those qualities with a determination that bordered on a ‘pathological obsession’. Anything that was ‘threatening, divisive, unhealthy, decadent and impure’ was deemed foreign. Viewed from certain perspectives, in this context nationhood could be indistinguishable from paranoia.⁸¹ For Gullett it was a question of numbers. An increase in Australia’s population to twenty million would mean more than just national safety for it needed to be understood in an imperial context:

It would mean safety for the Mother Country, or at least a safety far greater than she can at present afford. It would mean, with a few more millions in New Zealand and elsewhere, the doubling of the white people under the British flag, and the doubling of its Dreadnought-building capacity and its strength on sea and land. It would mean safety against any conceivable combination of Powers. It would mean an extension indefinitely of British supremacy in the world, for we in Australia or Canada would not stop at twenty million. Twenty millions would give us safety against aggression, but would only represent a fleeting milestone along our march to greater strength and influence. From twenty million we should rush to forty, and on to numbers you people in this brave little Homeland would find it hard indeed to believe possible.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 21 Feb. 1912, p. 2; Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 21 Feb. 1912, p. 2.

⁸¹ White, *Inventing Australia*, pp. 115-116.

⁸² *Camperdown Chronicle*, 28 March 1912, p. 6.

This was also a period of considerable personal heartache. In late 1913 Gullett and Penelope's first child, a son christened Daniel, died in infancy. Unable to comprehend their loss, the distraught parents spoke for some time as if Daniel were still alive. Their second child, Henry, was born in December 1914 and became a politician who held his father's old seat of Henty and was later the Ambassador to Greece. Ironically, he was a vocal opponent of immigration. When he was born there was a 'brief skirmish' over his Christian name. Gullett's formidable mother-in-law insisted he must be named after a friend of hers with connections at court and a string of aristocratic family names. By the time Gullett returned from France, he was dangerously close to having a son named Herbert. He 'announced flatly' that there were no Herberts in the Gullett family and promptly drew the matter to a close, ensuring that 'the tone was thus set in the relationship ... From the first he knew when to draw the line and he did it firmly and with humour'.⁸³ Gullett's son would be equally firm willed, sometimes to his cost. His political colleague Percy Spender described him as a 'gallant, colourful and attractive young man' who possessed 'greater political qualities than his father'. However, he possessed an inability to compromise, not so much with people, but on issues of principle. As a man that is a virtue. As a politician, it is not always a strength:

He could not discipline himself to the necessities of party politics, or suffer gladly the cynicism which in some degree is inseparable from politics. He was impetuous and unpredictable ... He was an impressive speaker and should have gone far in politics. But success in politics demands many qualities, one of which is adjustment to the peculiar life of Parliament and its frustrations. He was unable, as others have been, and will be, to make this adjustment.⁸⁴

Their daughter, a girl they named Susan, was the mother of American born Australian actress Penelope Hackforth-Jones, who appeared in a number of Australian television series including *Number 96*, *Homicide*, *Cash and Company*, *A Country Practice*, *Mother and Son* as well as movies such as *Alvin Purple* and *Mao's Last Dancer*.

By August 1914, Gullett was enjoying professional and personal success. He had established a reputation as a skilled journalist, tasted the joys and frustrations of government work, and was happily married with Penelope now pregnant with their second child. The outbreak of war in August 1914 did not shatter his illusions nor did it lead to a significant alteration in the

⁸³ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 118.

⁸⁴ P Spender (1972) *Politics and a Man* (Sydney: Collins), p. 12.

world view that was born in rural Victoria and later nurtured and refined in Sydney and London. Both Gullett and his friend Charles Bean romanticised the Australian bush and emphasised its capacity to breed a particular type of Anglo Saxon male. Bean viewed the Australian soldiers as ‘fundamentally the shining products of the wide open spaces, cleansed by the burning winds and the simple strengthening lives of those spaces’.⁸⁵ Gullett had felt those same burning winds, and he too had drawn the same conclusions.

⁸⁵ D McCarthy (1983) *Gallipoli to the Somme: The Story of C.E.W Bean* (Sydney: John Ferguson), p. 95.

Chapter 4 - Unofficial Observer

Although Gullett is best remembered for his reporting from the Middle East and for writing the volume covering that theatre in the official history, he was also one of the first Australian journalists to report from the Western Front. Unlike the British correspondents such as Philip Gibbs, William Beach Thomas, Percival Phillips and Henry Nevinson, Gullett's reporting was never impugned in the post war years. The war as it was portrayed by the press quickly installed the Anzac legend as the national narrative, a development which made any type of sustained interrogation of the reports unlikely to find much traction among Australian readers. This was compounded by the fact that Gullett's short tenure in France had ended before Australian troops arrived. By the time he began reporting from the Middle East the belief that the war has revealed a distinct Australian character was widely accepted as fact. In contrast to the experience of journalists such as Gullett and Bean, the British correspondents were not shielded in the post-war years by the manner in which their countrymen 'imagined' the war. In fact, the construct of the war that took hold in the public mind after 1918 has seen the British correspondents regularly derided as the central players in what some critics regard as the most discreditable period in the history of journalism. Even that indictment does not fully satisfy Philip Knightley's penchant for hyperbole. He argues that more deliberate lies were told between 1914 and 1918 than in any other period of history and that a 'large share of the blame for this must rest with the British war correspondents'.¹

Though certainly overwrought, Knightley's criticisms are not unique, nor are they even particularly new. Beach Thomas admitted to feeling ashamed of his descriptions of the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Henry Nevinson refused a knighthood, and though no paragon of virtue himself, even David Lloyd George felt an unease about the war time performance of the British press. In his memoirs, he argued that Gibbs' sense of public duty had not prevented his 'suppressing every check or repulse, and exaggerating with unbridled extravagance every trifling advance purchased at a terrible cost'.² Though partly driven by a dispute between the two men over the government's Irish policy, it was a criticism that might

¹ P Knightley (1989) *The First Casualty* (London: Pan Books), p. 81.

² D Lloyd George (1934) *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George Vol. IV* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson), p. 2230. In 1935 while serving on the Royal Commission into the Arms Trade, Gibbs and Lloyd George spoke light heartedly of the passage, and parted amicably in a manner the ex-prime minister described as the peace of Passchendaele.

have been made of any one, or indeed all of the British correspondents. Correspondents such as Gullett and Bean who were prepared or able to leave General Headquarters (GHQ) and brave the shell fire, were nevertheless inhibited by censorship, their own support for its more logical constraints, the knowledge that they could lose their accreditation, and the pressure to maintain a regular flow of colourful stories. When Bean visited the front in January 1916 and met with the British war correspondents, he sympathised with their plight and acknowledged that their work was ‘soul cramping’.³

It was not just the censorship regime or the other systemic pressures that constrained the correspondents. Their sense of duty, patriotism, and the impact of front line bonding saw them succumb to the most ‘corrosive dictatorship of all: self-censorship’.⁴ Even Gibbs, the most famous of them all and a man who spent a lifetime defending the veracity of his reports, admitted much the same when he acknowledged that the correspondents ‘identified ourselves absolutely with the armies in the field ... there was no need of censorship of our dispatches. We were our own censors’.⁵ Bean believed that Gibbs knew more of the ‘pitiable true history’ of the Battle of Loos than anyone but they both were well aware that censorship made an honest report impossible. As if to emphasise how conflicted the correspondents were, in conversation with Bean, Gibbs questioned whether the truth would have been any more appropriate given that it would have inevitably led to ‘party fighting party over it – a lot of division and strife and internal discussion at home’.⁶ Though at times the correspondents did indeed ‘peddle fantasies’, this charge must be balanced against their belief in the cause and the sad reality that many of them, like Gibbs, were psychologically numbed by the constant exposure to total war.⁷

The censorship regime adopted by both countries reflected Britain’s pre-war commitment to a repressive approach that would make full use of her control of the world’s major telegraph lines. It was a policy that enjoyed the active support of the Australian government. An outline of the policy had been circulated to the Dominions as early as April 1904, although telegraph communications were seen as the most urgent issue. The Dominions were therefore left to develop their own plans for censoring the press. In November 1911 at a meeting of the

³ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL 606/37/1, Jan.- Feb. 1916, p. 36.

⁴ P Moorcraft and P Taylor (2008) *Shooting the Messenger – The Political Impact of Reporting* (Washington: Potomac Books), p. 43.

⁵ P Gibbs (1923) *Adventures in Journalism* (London: Harper and Brothers Publishing), p. 248.

⁶ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL 606/37/1, Jan.-Feb. 1916, p. 36.

⁷ Moorcraft and Taylor, *Shooting the Messenger*, p. 43.

Commonwealth Council of Defence in Melbourne, it was agreed that in the event of war, press censorship would be established by proclamation of the Governor General and a Chief Censor would be appointed with press censors and staff in each military district.⁸ A War Press Agency would, subject to the approval of the Australian government, select two correspondents to accompany any force dispatched for overseas service. Despite the pre-war planning, only one official Australian journalist accompanied the first convoy which left Australia on 20 October 1914. Charles Bean narrowly won an Australian Journalists' Association ballot to accompany the AIF as the official representative of the Australian Press. His expenses were shared on a pro rata basis between the newspapers. Other than the exception of the press, the broader strategy for enforcing wartime censorship had its genesis in the directives sent from Britain, although the details were later refined through a process of consultation.

Once war began there were a number of important differences in the application of censorship in Britain and Australia. The co-operation of the British press was achieved by a web of personal relationships supported by a legal framework that was very British in both conception and execution. Relying heavily though not exclusively on self-censorship rather than hierarchically imposed control, it was a method suited to the political system and public sensibilities. It was broad but unobtrusive, based as it was on a close control of the news at its source combined with a tight knit group of press lords.⁹ Newspaper owners and editors were part of a ruling elite that regularly mixed socially and professionally with leading politicians. Members of the same clubs, guests at the same dinner parties and members of the same political parties, they offered their support freely, albeit at times conditionally, without need for coercion. Their restraint and their belief in loyal opposition became identified with gentlemanliness. At times, doing the right thing became a matter of fulfilling obligations to fellow members of the club rather than meeting a professional responsibility for informing readers.

When the press barons were moved to question the official rhetoric, however, they were able to wield enormous power, as was evident in Lord Northcliffe (owner of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*) and Lord Beaverbrook's (owner of the *Daily Express*) contribution to Asquith

⁸ For a fuller account of military censorship in Australia during the First World War, see K Fewster (1980) *Expression and Suppression: Aspects of Military Censorship in Australia during the Great War*. (Unpublished PhD), University of New South Wales, Australia.

⁹ A Marquis (1978) 'Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.13, no. 3.

being replaced as prime minister by David Lloyd George in December 1916. Yet this was an opposition to the manner in which the war was being prosecuted rather than an opposition to the war itself and it certainly never extended to a broader criticism of the war or of British soldiers in the field. Winston Churchill rightly criticised Northcliffe's conduct during the war on the grounds that he 'wielded power without official responsibility, enjoyed secret knowledge without the general view, and disturbed the fortunes of national leaders without being willing to bear their burdens'.¹⁰ Hugh Cudlipp colourfully but no less accurately characterised the manner in which the press barons exerted power as merely the exercising of the traditional prerogative of the harlot.¹¹

In the general preparedness of the press to support the war effort proved insufficient there was the additional safeguard of the *Defence of the Realm Act* (1914) (DORA) which was enacted on the fourth day of the war. It granted the State unlimited power to control the dissemination of information. Any opposition to the war in any form potentially became a criminal offence. Arthur Marwick believes that the 'name conjured up in the public mind the image of a cruel and capricious maiden aunt who at the snap of her fingers could close down a newspaper, requisition a ship, or prohibit whistling for cabs'.¹² In reality, it more accurately characterised as a 'meddlesome woman' who possessed teeth but had no real need to bite.¹³ The infrastructure supporting it was dispensed with immediately after the war, partly due to questions of relevance and a concern about the power of the press barons, but also a growing moral unease.

In Australia, press censorship was immediately problematic given that it was not until the passing of the *War Precautions Act* on 28 October 1914 that the requisite legal and political framework was actually in place. The Act, modelled on DORA, became an act of parliament within the shortest possible time allowed by parliamentary procedure. This haste belied the enormous powers that it granted to the government of the day:

¹⁰ J Lee Thompson (1999) *Politicians, the Press, & Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe & the Great War, 1914-1919* (London: Kent State University), p. ix. Northcliffe was intensely patriotic and ran a considerable financial risk in attacking his own government. He was subsequently made head of the war mission to the United States, then head of propaganda in enemy countries. His brother Lord Rothermere became air minister and Lord Beaverbrook the minister of information.

¹¹ Hugh Cudlipp (1980) *The Prerogative of the Harlot: Press Barons and Power* (London: Bodley Head).

¹² A Marwick (1965) *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: The Macmillan Press), p. 36.

¹³ Moorcraft and Taylor, *Shooting the Messenger*, p. 35.

Regulation 19 made it an offence to publish, communicate or elicit any information with respect to the movements of ships or military forces, or relating to military operations, or information that might be useful to the enemy.

Regulation 28I made it an offence to publish false reports or make false statements that might cause disaffection or alarm during the war, or prejudice the recruiting, training, discipline or administration of the forces. Regulation 28AC gave the censor rights to forcibly search newspaper premises on the basis of suspicion of publication of injurious matter, and, if necessary, to destroy it. By late 1915 the Act had been amended so that it was prohibited for a newspaper to mention or illustrate that an item had been censored, and to allow the censor to require journals bound by a submission order to submit all material relating to the war.¹⁴

The Act went far beyond the British model and complaints that it enabled the government to proclaim martial law if it so desired were not far wide of the mark. By 1918 more than 100 regulations had been passed under the Act with perhaps the most concerning being the right of the government to treat naturalised citizens as aliens. For the press, it meant that articles written by Australian correspondents were subject to the dictates of the army field censor and then censored again in Australia. This dual censorship shackled the Australian press with a censorship regime stricter than that of any of her allies. In addition, in contrast to the British decision to co-opt influential newspapermen into the war effort, there was no attempt by the Australian government to either establish an official press bureau or to even discuss censorship with the press. Crucially, the system's organisation was carried out by military rather than civilian officers. A Deputy Chief Censor, responsible to the Chief Censor in London was appointed, with offices in each state and a staff that numbered between 124 and 187. A significant proportion of the senior positions were held by ex-members of the Australian Intelligence Corps. In some respects the censors were particularly suited to the task, being generally conservative in political outlook, patriotic in a conventional sense and drawn from the world of business, the professional classes and university campuses:

Their prime reason for undertaking the work appeared to be King and Country.

There was little personal prestige or profit to be gained. The censors' views, not surprisingly, were in line with the conservative ranks of Australian society. Some

¹⁴ K McCallum and P Putnis (2008) 'Media Management in Wartime', *Media History*, vol.14, no. 1, pp. 19-20.

censors delivered speeches to recruiting rallies and most were antipathetic to those who questioned Australia's involvement in the war, such as the Labor Party, radical groups and even the press.¹⁵

Yet as one journalist observed when casting a critical eye over the preponderance of serving or ex-militia officers among their ranks, it was a case of 'pitch-fork[ing them] into positions for which they have had no training and possess no aptitude'.¹⁶ Though undoubtedly sincere in their efforts, the Censors served a government that consistently failed to see the value of an informed public and initially made no effort to foster a collaborative relationship with the press. Instead, censorship increasingly became a political vehicle tasked with disseminating government policy and stifling any comment which was deemed a threat to Australia's war effort.¹⁷ It was an intrusion most keenly felt during the divisive conscription campaigns in 1916 and 1917. Prime Minister Hughes was particularly unrestrained in his use of censorship in pursuit of domestic political gain. In 1917 he stopped the printing of the Queensland Parliament's Hansard because it contained the text of an anti-conscription speech by Premier T.J Ryan. It was not until April 1918 that the government sought to establish a more collaborative relationship with the press as a means of stimulating enlistments. The newspaper editors were prepared to cast aside their concerns about the censorship system, particularly with regard to the reporting of political news, in order to embrace opportunities to work more closely with the government. This recognition that censorship was a political as well as a military tool had lasting ramifications for press government relations in Australia.¹⁸

The Australian correspondents appeared to exist in a world quite separate from these machinations and escaped public censure, both in the immediate post-war years and over subsequent decades. Despite the reward of knighthoods their British counterparts were not so fortunate. Given that Gullett was living in London when war broke out, it was actually the ebb and flow of the British Army's view of the press that decided his immediate journalistic fate rather than the desires of his own government. The relationship between the press and the British Army was far from static and in fact had three distinct stages, with Gullett present only for the first and the opening months of the second. Between August 1914 and May 1915 (with the exception of guided tours conducted in March 1915), correspondents were outlaws

¹⁵ J Hilvert (1984) *Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in World War II* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. 13.

¹⁶ *Argus*, 29 Dec. 1914, p. 4.

¹⁷ McCallum and Putnis, *Media Management*, p. 22.

¹⁸ McCallum and Putnis, *Media Management*, p. 30.

and liable to be arrested on sight. From May 1915 to April 1917 they were reluctantly granted official status but were closely controlled and hampered by sustained efforts to waste their time. From April 1917 until the Armistice the war correspondents were a vital component of a complex system of propaganda.¹⁹ Over the course of the conflict only eleven Australian journalists and two photographers covered the war on its three fronts and only the indefatigable Charles Bean was there for the duration. There were moments of ‘rebellion’ concerning censorship but ‘they were exceptional’ as ‘Australia’s relationship with the empire was all encompassing, and the Australian press proved dutiful subjects’.²⁰

Within a month of the outbreak of war a meeting took place at Wellington House in London under the direction of CFG Masterman, the recently appointed Chief of British war propaganda that made it clear just how complex and far reaching the propaganda system would become. Present were twenty five of Britain’s most respected authors, among them HG Wells, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, Ford Madox Ford, Sir Henry Newbolt, GK Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and John Buchan. Without need for coercion, and without any sense of being morally compromised, to a man they indicated their preparedness to participate in a propaganda war.²¹ As Peter Buitenhuis observed, ‘seldom in recorded history have a nation’s writers so unreservedly rallied round a national cause’.²² It also raises what Messinger saw as the ‘ancient problem of the individual thinker’s need to balance obligations to state and society against allegiance to personal perceptions of rightness and the truth’.²³

Five days later, on 7 September 1914 Masterman chaired a second meeting, which in its own way lost nothing in comparison to his gathering of writers. The list of invitees was a gathering of the most influential editors in the English speaking world. Sidley Brookes, Sir Edward Tyas Cook, Robert Donald (*Daily Chronicle*), AG Gardiner (*Daily News*), JL Garvin (*Pall Mall Gazette*), the Hon. HLW Lawson (*Daily Telegraph*), Sidney Low (*Standard*), Thomas Marlowe (*Daily Mail*), Sir William Robertson Nicoll (*British Weekly*), Geoffrey

¹⁹ M Farrar (1998) *News from the Front: War Correspondents on the Western Front* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing).

²⁰ F Anderson and R Trembath (2011) *Witness to War: The History of Australian Conflict Reporting* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press), p. 46.

²¹ Kerby, *Philip Gibbs*, p. 63.

²² P Buitenhuis (1987) *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), p. xv.

²³ G Messinger (1992) *British propaganda and the state in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 25.

Robinson (*The Times*), J Alfred Spender (*Westminster Gazette*), St Loe Strachey (*The Spectator*), Fabian Ware, AS Watt and the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Broadly speaking, the group committed themselves just as willingly as their literary counterparts. The decision that the exigencies of war required such a merging of press and politics was an open one, and one that rendered the question of official censorship and the press largely a ‘dead letter’.²⁴ When Gullett wrote his first word about the conflict he did so in the service of an organisation that had freely committed itself to co-operating with the government in a propaganda war.

The British Government also diverted from its pre-war plan to permit some journalists of the right type to cover the fighting, choosing instead to stall on the matter of accreditation. On 5 August 1914, Lord Kitchener assumed the post of Secretary of War and promptly banned war correspondents from entering a military zone around the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). This left the British public very poorly informed about developments on the continent, despite the assurance from Prime Minister Asquith that the ‘Government and the military authorities recognise to the full the strain which is placed upon the public, but more especially on the relations of those on active service, by the scarcity of information from the front. They will do all in their power to relieve the strain’.²⁵ Nevertheless, war news continued to be printed in French, Belgian and German papers a full week before it appeared in Britain.

The subsequent creation of a Press Bureau under F.E Smith²⁶ to censor news reports and then disseminate them to the domestic and international press was not indicative of any sympathy for the strain being placed upon the public by the paucity of news. The Bureau examined all press cables and issued news releases but also exerted a more pervasive influence by instructing newspaper editors on the attitude they should adopt toward important issues, what needed to be emphasised and what needed to be downplayed or ignored. Most newspapers remained committed to the war as the supreme patriotic endeavour and were quite prepared to censor themselves by suppressing reports about air raids, food riots and labour disputes and instead focus on upbeat stories that better reflected the official narrative. The Anzac legend making engaged in by Bean and Gullett among others, followed a similar though not identical journey. It was one characterised by Alistair Thomson as a ‘hegemonic’ process

²⁴ Marquis, ‘Words as Weapons,’ p. 474.

²⁵ House of Commons Hansard, 27 Aug. 1914.

²⁶ Frederick Edwin Smith (1872-1930), later 1st Earl of Birkenhead.

which made use of selection, simplification and generalisation to communicate a message, in this case an idealised version of the Anzac experience. The exclusion of variety or contradiction was not pursued with the same vigour.²⁷ Yet when faced with a choice between the truth and devotion to the Empire and the cause, both Bean and Gullett invariably chose the latter.

The British press could sometimes be roused sufficiently to make criticisms of the ‘Suppress Bureau’ but it was never part of a sustained philosophical objection to censorship. Rather it was a criticism of inconsistencies in its application or the pettiness of some of the rules. Asquith was nevertheless prepared to lend his own credibility and that of his government to the work of the Bureau by describing it as ‘the mouthpiece through which communications relative to the progress of naval and military operations are made public by the Admiralty, the War Office, and other public Departments concerned’. Less convincingly, he added that the guiding principle would be ‘that all information which can be given without prejudice to the public interest shall be given fully and given at once’. Asquith nevertheless dismissed the possibility that the government would call on the expertise of trained journalists. After discussions with the Director of the Bureau, representatives of the Admiralty and the War Office, and an official Press Committee, it was ‘unanimously agreed that it was not desirable to add such persons to the staff of the Bureau’.²⁸

These developments were merely part of a wider process of censorship intended to remove the power of the correspondents and provide the newspapers with a distraction. The 200 correspondents who defied their government, Gullett among them, and travelled to the Continent were hunted by the authorities and hampered by the lack of any clear understanding of what was happening. In the chaos of the early fighting, they struggled to provide their readers with anything beyond emotive vignettes and an enduring impression that much was being kept from them. Eventually improvements were made, but during these first months of the war the restrictions on reporting and the obsessive secrecy concerning developments denied the British people the steady stream of information that would have allowed them to put events in their correct perspective. Editors had little choice but to adopt a hopeful tone that was more patriotic than accurate.²⁹ As a result the relationship between the newspapers, their readers, the government and the high command suffered irreparable harm.

²⁷ See A Thomson (1995) *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press).

²⁸ House of Commons Hansard, 27 Aug. 1914.

²⁹ C Hazlehurst (1971) *Politicians at War: July 1914 to May 1915* (London: Jonathon Cape Ltd.), pp. 148-9.

In turn it contributed to the view that the British press, and by extension the correspondents, too often associated war with ‘glamour and adventure, masking the slaughter on the Western Front, protecting incompetent commanders, and exaggerating German atrocities’.³⁰

Either by good fortune or intent, Gullett and Penelope found themselves in Paris on holiday as the French Army mobilised in early August 1914. One journalist later observed that during this period Penelope saw ‘a lot of the fringe of the war’, although it is unlikely that either of them sought let alone achieved even that degree of proximity.³¹ There is no record of their movements, but if the experience of his fellow correspondents are anything to go by, Gullett probably saw little if anything beyond Paris, particularly given that Penelope was expecting. Gullett made at least two unofficial trips to the Continent before being invited as an official correspondent in 1915 but his time there was brief. One of the few public acknowledgements of the limitations that this lack of access imposed on journalists appeared in December 1914 in *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal*. The author, apparently resident in London, asked the question that should be at the heart of contemporary assessments of the correspondents’ reports: ‘where are all the lurid descriptions of the battles that used to come to us from the front at the Crimea, at the Indian Mutiny, at the little wars of the past?’ Left to answer his own question, the journalist offered what was essentially an indictment of the military control of the press:

The Japanese and the Boer War taught us that the work of the correspondent at the front is a disaster to the general in command. The less the correspondent knows about the wars, the better for all concerned ... The poor beggar gets as near to the front as he can, and does his level best, but he really doesn’t know as much about the war as we do in London. So he has got to fill his columns with chaff, and make his bricks without straw.³²

The same writer noted that Gullett would shortly travel to Paris (the article was written in early October) from where, ‘as far as distance is concerned, the front was quite close’, a turn of phrase indicating that there were greater impediments to reporting than mere distance. Even more pessimistically, he suggested that by the time Gullett reached Paris the French capital might well be the front. The freedom to make these criticisms suggests that the

³⁰ G Robb (2002) *British Culture and the First World War* (New York: Palgrave), pp.112-3.

³¹ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 1 April 1916, p. 1.

³² *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 8 Dec. 1914, p. 2.

Australian authorities were still feeling their way in terms of censorship and that their focus was on the major metropolitan papers. It need hardly have mattered in this particular writer's view because the reading public expected little for the profession had 'fallen on evil days'. The war correspondent, the writer observed with some sadness, 'isn't what he used to be and maybe he never was'.³³ In spite of this premature eulogy for the war correspondent, men such as Philip Gibbs were, at least in 1914, entitled to consider themselves members of what Williams characterised as an elite sub caste among newsmen. The Edwardian era had firmly installed the celebrity war correspondent as a British institution.³⁴ Nevertheless, that reverence was not much in evidence in 1914 when the government and the army discussed press access to the front.

Although Gullett brought an Australian perspective, he was not immune to the broader trends that shaped the British literary response to the war. He characterised it as a transformative experience for the 'host of young men in England living soft, easy lives'.³⁵ This approach was not unique for it was part of a broader process of nostalgia which was itself a response to an increasingly plutocratic and industrialised Britain. War, with its discomfort, its male asceticism and its sacrifice was the physical and spiritual opposite of Edwardian excess. It could both cleanse and purify, becoming in the process a cure for this condition.³⁶ Gullett possessed a deep ideological sympathy with this faith in the regenerative power of war, one that he believed would 'purify and strengthen' an English society that did 'not present a satisfactory picture'.³⁷ War, as the Australian bush had done for his countrymen, would shape

³³ *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 8 Dec. 1914, p. 2.

³⁴ J Williams (1999) *Anzacs, the Media and the Great War* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), p. 55.

³⁵ *Brisbane Courier*, 25 March 1916, p.7. This sense of a lost past is reflected in the literature of the late Victorian and early Edwardian period which possessed an 'elegiac quality about it, mourning the loss of adventure, heroism, true nobility' (Brantlinger cited in C Lee (2007) 'War is not a Christian Mission: Racial Invasion and Religious Crusade in H.S. Gullett's Official History of the Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, vol. 7, p. 89). For a sense of this as a theme in Edwardian England see C.F.G. Masterman's *The Condition of England* (1909), HG Wells *Tono-Bungay* (1909), EM Forster's *Howard's End* (1910) and E Gosse *War and Literature* (1914).

³⁶ S Hynes (1991) *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum).

³⁷ *Daily Herald*, 17 Nov. 1914, p. 6. Ten years later Philip Gibbs still believed that it was 'as though the nation had been shaken by a great wind in which the voice of God was heard' (P Gibbs (1924) *Ten Years After* (London: Hutchinson & Co.), p. 18). Rupert Brooke was equally effusive when he wrote that youth had been 'wakened ... from sleeping' and could now turn 'from a world grown old and cold and weary' (R Brooke (1915) *Peace Poetry*, p. 18). War as a regenerative force was not a view confined to literary circles. General Sir Ian Hamilton, the commander of the Gallipoli campaign, saw war as building national character. Lord Roberts, military hero and commander in chief until 1905, feared that without war 'a nation is at risk of running to seed'. (H Reynolds (2010) 'Are Nations Really Made in War?' In M Lake, H Reynolds, and J Damousi (eds) *What's Wrong with ANZAC?: The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press),

a new people, one freed from the materialism and the class and sectarian divisions that blighted pre-war Britain:

The national life had never been so artificial; in a moral and in an industrial sense perhaps never so unhealthy. Millions of people were following narrow, selfish, or sordid ways, working excessive hours at tasks in which they had no pride or even interest. When not at work they took sport by proxy; thousands looked on while professional players engaged in a struggle which was not their sport but their livelihood. At night they watched other fellows do heroic feats on the cinematograph, or listened to the piffle of the music halls ... churches were almost empty ... Never had Englishmen lived such uniform, humdrum lives.³⁸

In Gullett's view this all changed when 'hundreds of thousands of protected, unromantic, and even squalid lives [were] suddenly plunged into the supreme game of war'. An authentic England was then rediscovered. For though 'excessive militarism may brutalise', a 'grand sudden enterprise such as this cannot but elevate and ennoble'. The impact on a 'virile and active young race' such as the one resident in Australia would not be as profound, but for the British a 'new manhood will be born out of this war'. It would bring about a 'new era of Anglo-Saxon greatness, with eminence in art and literature, an increased supremacy in industry, and best of all perhaps, a swift development in every branch of social reform'. The war would unify rather than divide the country. Though Gullett recognised that much of this 'newborn love of one's fellows regardless of class or calling' would not survive the war, opposition to better conditions for the working class would be less bitter.³⁹ Gullett was to be

p. 34). Billy Hughes, later to be a political mentor to Gullett, showed he was of a like mind when he spoke on the occasion of the first Anzac Day commemoration in 1916:

Since it has evoked this pure and noble spirit who shall say that this dreadful war is wholly an evil? Into a world saturated with a lust of material things, which had elevated self into a deity, which had made wealth the standard of greatness, comes the sweet purifying breath of self-sacrifice. (G Souter (1976) *Lion and Kangaroo: Australia 1901-1919* (Sydney: Collins), p. 228).

In Australia most clergy in 1914 were equally confident that the war was 'designed by God to cleanse the country. It was about righteousness. Germans were God's enemies but we ourselves were not yet righteous in his sight' (A Atkinson (2014) *The Europeans in Australia: Volume Three: Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), p. 385). It became de rigour to characterise the war as a worldwide crusade that would renew the lives of nations and individuals. (M McKernan (2012) *Australians at Home: World War One* (Scoresby, Victoria: The Five Mile Press), p. 18).

³⁸ *Daily Herald*, 17 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

³⁹ *Daily Herald*, 17 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

disappointed even in this small hope. Ten years after the war, he despaired at the reality that there was as much class consciousness and industrial antagonism as there had been in 1914.⁴⁰

In these early months reporting unofficially from Europe and later back in London, Gullett focused on the British involvement. Given the lack of access to the front, like other writers he needed to cast the net quite widely for material and often reverted to pre-war themes. In Gullett's case, his deep attachment to rural living encouraged him to identify a causal link between the declining influence of Britain's rural areas and a national malaise, one that was now being challenged by war. In this he was clearly influenced by his Australian background, coming from a nation whose sense of self was dominated by rural rather than urban imagery. As the Australian writers of the 1890s had done before him, Gullett saw the cities and the suburbs that ringed them as a destructive influence that weakened people and nations. In contrast, the bush and the idealised past that it symbolised was a creative force, one that produced a strong and virile people.⁴¹ Some of the ideas that Gullett expressed may well have been returning to their point of origin. A 'nostalgic construction of the bush' informed by a conception of a 'virtuous rural world' which was morally superior to a corrupt urban one was much in evidence in the writings of the *Bulletin* school. This was in part inspired by English writers who were themselves mourning 'the loss of the English arcadia, and damned the Industrial Revolution and its consequences'.⁴² Gullett discovered this lost England (and he almost always used 'England' rather than 'Britain' in his correspondence) in early October 1914 when he spent a weekend in Dorset before returning to Paris. He described a highly idealised vision of a tranquil English village which for 'all the signs of war the Aisne and its thunders might have been thousands of miles away':

The little straw thatched village dozes in the warm autumn sunshine; slow moving labourers worked in the fields; an occasional sportsman passed with his gun or plied his rod by the shallow, noisy river ... In the fat meadows prime cattle slept and grazed alternately. Half Europe is bleeding and devastated while England, which has

⁴⁰ *Argus*, 16 April 1928, p. 16.

⁴¹ The perception of an industrial, urban and racial crisis in Britain had been given further impetus in the 1870s and 1880s when imperialists sought to make comparisons between the British and Roman Empires. It taught a 'terrible lesson' by providing an image of 'a great Empire, overextended, hugely wealthy and relying increasingly on native and colonial peoples to maintain its wealth ... destroyed because of decay at the centre'. Eugenics and 'corrupt forms of Darwinism' exacerbated these concerns' (A Howkins (1986) 'The Discovery of Rural England'. In R Colls and P Dodd (eds) *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Croom Helm), pp. 65-6).

⁴² Waterhouse, *Australian Legends*, p. 212.

incomparably more at stake than any of the other participants, is undisturbed, apparently almost innocent.⁴³

Here in this rural idyll was a world at peace under an English heaven just as Rupert Brooke described it. For in this corner of a field that was anything but foreign, there was proof of historical continuity. There were lines of trees planted by French prisoners during the Napoleonic wars and the remains of a Roman fort, ensuring that even the landscape was evidence that England had at one time or another fought all the ambitious armies of Europe and had emerged triumphant.

Gullett found evidence of the re-emergence of an imagined national community almost wherever he looked. As British troops journeyed to the coast there were ‘no wild demonstration of patriotism, no beer, no tears, nothing of any sort false or theatrical’. Instead, they walked away on the road to France ‘a very quiet, determined, and cheerful army’. Gullett was confident that there would be time enough to shout and wave when the army returned victorious. Yet there were developments that broke with tradition. The war was a national crusade rather than one involving small professional armies and as such Gullett needed to make room in his ‘imagining’ of it for the civilians as well as the professionals. He characterised the army as a hybrid force animated by the ‘fighting efficiency of the highly trained soldier’ and the ‘patriotism and chivalry of the civilian who fights for the safety of his own country and the honour of his race’. But the grand narrative required more than just professionalism and patriotism; it needed something far more elemental. For these virtues were merely proof that the ‘old Anglo-Saxon fighting spirits’ were now awakened.⁴⁴

Having described British troops departing for war, Gullett looked to do the same for the French. While in Paris he witnessed men ‘trooping to the call, not unwillingly, but without a semblance of enthusiasm’. They went ‘to a grim national duty’ in a war that ‘had been forced upon them’. Looking to contextualise events for an Australian audience, Gullett observed that ‘the shadow of 1870 was very deep over the land,’ a situation he believed was exacerbated by initial French doubts over the intentions of England and the readiness of Russia. He described the early fighting as ‘swift, dramatic and bloody’. When he returned to France after the Battle of the Marne, Gullett found the war entering a second phase during which the national spirit had changed completely. In meeting the ‘dread German’ France had re-found herself and had

⁴³ *Daily Herald*, 24 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Daily Herald*, 24 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

reversed the verdict of 1870. There was no hysterical rejoicing, only a confidence in the final victory. The third phase, or the Race to the Sea, had revealed the ‘real nature of the war’. The French now understood that it was more than a military campaign but was instead an ‘unprecedented struggle of nation against nation, in which every unit of the population, and every device of civilisation, were engaged’.⁴⁵

Gullett did not see the same need for a regeneration or a re-awakening of Australian youth for their environment did not, in his view, permit moral decay. The war as it was imagined by many Australians would ultimately be about birth, not regeneration. For the nation had yet to face the test that Bean, Gullett and many of their generation saw as ‘the supreme one for men fit to be free’.⁴⁶ Almost a decade after the outbreak of war and four years after the disappointments of Versailles, Gullett still believed that the war provided an opportunity for the men of a new nation striving ‘to do honour to the ashes of their fathers in a land that was old [and] to set the stamp of glory on their children in a land new and hitherto untried’.⁴⁷ He also harboured a hope that the unifying effect of war would hasten social programs. In this he was aided by the very accessibility of the Anzac myth, which though firmly rooted in a masculine and egalitarian outlook, was itself a great unifier:

Whether he was a bushman, a ‘dag’, a natural aristocrat, or working class hero, whether he was a private school chum, or a crusader sporting the cross of St George, a Homeric warrior or laconic humourist, these various images of the Australian soldier collapsed into the single significant ‘Anzac’ which in time became part of the nation’s idea of itself.⁴⁸

Yet the war, as opposed to the mythological conventions it reinforced, was anything but a unifying force, let alone the catalyst for the birth of a nation. Before 1914 there had been a basic social unity. However, the war created a rift between those who had fought and those who had not. The political ramifications were considerable:

By the 1916 referendum on conscription the confidence and cohesion which had given impetus to their pre-war social welfare ideals were gone, and they [the radical nationalists] found themselves caught between the increasingly discordant

⁴⁵ *Advertiser*, 8 June 1915, p. 9.

⁴⁶ CEW Bean (1961) *Anzac to Amiens* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial), p. 539.

⁴⁷ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ A Caesar (1998) ‘National Myths’, p. 156.

claims of the nation as they conceived it, and the Empire ... In short, the general majority which in 1914 had sought to create a social paradise in Australia was both split and made leaderless by the war, and by 1918 no longer existed, while the conservatives had joined with those who had fought in the war to take firm possession of the spirit of Anzac.⁴⁹

This disunity would have been inconceivable when the main part of the BEF engaged the Germans at Mons on the morning of 23 August 1914. In the first British battle in Western Europe since Waterloo, the British army fought well and though forced to retreat, inflicted disproportionate casualties on the numerically superior German force. The two week, two hundred mile fighting retreat took them to the outskirts of Paris. The Battle eventually achieved an almost mythic status, complete with divine intervention. The Angel of Mons was a popular legend with a number of variations with its origin in a short story by Arthur Machen published in the *Evening Post* on 29 September 1914. Phantom bowman from Agincourt, angels or St George himself or variations thereof, were reputed to have safeguarded the British retreat. Evidence ranged from witness statements to alleged sightings of dead German soldiers with arrow wounds. Making use of modern weaponry rather than longbows, the British Army and its French ally, both now in Gullett's view valuing country above all else, mounted a counter-attack at the Battle of the Marne (5-12 Oct. 1914) and eventually held the German advance.

Although Gullett wrote in an authoritative tone, like the other journalists he was hampered by a lack of verifiable facts or even personal experience on which to call. A number of his articles are little more than opinion pieces. These range from one entitled 'A Gossipy Letter' dealing with a conversation with 'an old Russian' who predicted that a million Cossacks would soon be ravaging eastern Germany to a broad exploration of 'Labour and the War'.⁵⁰ As if despairing of ever writing authoritatively about the British army, a discussion about the attrition rate for horses at the front was added to the list although this did suggest that he was offering a justification of official policy rather than seeking a harmless topic on which to write. In 1914 the British Army owned just 80 motor vehicles and as such relied very heavily on horse drawn transport. During the first year of the war the British countryside was virtually emptied of horses. Over the course of the conflict 800 000 horses of all types were

⁴⁹ B Gammage (1990) *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (New York: Penguin), p. 308.

⁵⁰ *Daily Mercury*, 3 Oct. 1914, p. 7; *Daily Herald*, 17 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

used by the British Army on the Western Front, ranging from donkeys to Clydesdales. Nearly half of them died from wounds or disease.

Gullett did make efforts to explore some of the deeper issues and in doing so was quite perceptive in his understanding of German actions in a manner far beyond some of the more unsophisticated jingoism that pervaded so much of his writing at this time:

The German people, in the depths of their hearts, believe that they are fighting this war for the right to live and grow ... However wonderful it may appear to us from our standpoint, the Germans are not conscious that they are fighting a wicked, brutal war which is destined to humiliate their pride and smash, perhaps forever, their colossal power. They believe that they have been sinned against. Their cause is to them as spotless as ours is to us and that being so they will fight as a solid and patriotic nation to the very end of their military resources.⁵¹

As perceptive and nuanced as this piece of writing was, Gullett did not make a link between the German people's belief in the rightness of their cause and the possible implications this might have for the Allied war aims, which might well be equally erroneous. Yet for any reader looking for a sustained analysis of the cause of the war, Gullett, like the press as a whole, generally provided little insight. To him, it was simple. 'Germany wanted war'.⁵² Gullett did not absolve the German people from blame. The German aristocrats had long enjoyed their full support and were united with them in their belief that they were 'individually and collectively superior to every other race'.⁵³ Gullett predicted a 'terrible revenge' when the Allies crossed the Rhine and the Russians marched from the East, one that would not be confined to the German Army and the German government.⁵⁴

Gullett was not without sympathy for those who viewed the war differently from the masses. In fact he was relatively generous given the popular mood, yet he again stopped short of a full interrogation. He saw these 'dissidents' as falling into two groups. The first was populated by men such as Lord Morley and John Burns who opposed the war unwaveringly and resigned from 'good and honourable posts rather than be parties to the conflict'. Yet once the war began, they kept their concerns private, believing instead that 'it is their country,

⁵¹ *Daily Herald*, 26 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

⁵² *Daily Herald*, 26 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

⁵³ *Daily Herald*, 26 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Daily Herald*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

right or wrong'. The second group, peopled by men such as Ramsay McDonald, continued their opposition. Even though he acknowledged the harm McDonald had caused England, Gullett recognised the 'depth and sincerity of his patriotism'. Though he also conceded that 'in a country of free speech and free institutions, there must always be these differences and, taken as a whole, they are of the greatest benefit to the nation', it was clear which approach he supported.⁵⁵ This tension between public duty and private conscience would be one that each of the correspondents, to a greater or lesser degree, would in time confront.

Whatever reservations he might or might not have had, Gullett showed himself well able to participate in the virulent anti-German rhetoric of the British press. He was eager to frame the conflict as a war between culture, decency and the rule of law on one side and militarism and nihilism on the other. This mirrored wider developments at home, for though initially there had been a tolerance extended to Germans in Australia, by September 1914 the plethora of anti-German propaganda provided by journalists such as Gullett had done its work. The absence of hard news was hardly a barrier to this process. Gullett played his part by offering his readers a description of what were then still hypothetical Zeppelin raids aimed at the 'historic London buildings which the Kaiser and his gentle captains dream of destroying'. The targets included Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Downing Street, Pall Mall and St Paul's; a history of Britain writ in stone. Describing area bombing a quarter of a century before it became reality, Gullett noted that Devonshire House, the home of the Red Cross and the leading hospitals would be 'particularly attractive' targets. The German pilots, 'flying away in the rosy dawn to the Fatherland' would be rewarded with an 'extra iron cross or two from William's inexhaustible supply'.⁵⁶ It was in fact the German navy that struck first when it shelled the British seaport towns of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby three weeks later on 16 December 1914 and killed between 100 and 200 people and damaged or destroyed 300 houses, seven churches and five hotels. The first Zeppelin raid on Britain did not in fact occur until 19 January 1915 but as Gullett would have been aware it was widely accepted before 1914 that attacks on cities from the air were possible, perhaps even probable. He was not alone in drifting into fiction, given that the *Daily Mail* was reduced to publishing a detailed account of an entirely fictitious naval battle.

⁵⁵ *Daily Herald*, 17 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Daily Herald*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 2. For an outline of pre-war perceptions, see B Holman (2014) *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate).

It was not just the German airmen who Gullett believed would step outside the norms of civilised behaviour. The German army that crashed through Belgium and northern France was comprised of ‘triumphant Tuetons’, who were nothing short of being ‘a turbulent foreign host swilling wine and insulting women’, all the while ‘exulting in the prospect of the days close ahead in Paris’. Clearly Gullett had been exposed to the stories of German atrocities in Belgium and so hinted at what would be in store for the women of Paris if the city fell. The destruction of parts of the Cathedral of Rheims by German shellfire on 20 September 1914 offered Gullett further proof that the Germans were the enemies of civilisation and culture. As the site where the Kings of France were once anointed and crowned, it was a particularly potent symbol. He saw in its destruction, which left it ‘almost as desolate as Pompeii’ an act ‘infinitely blacker’ than the destruction of Ypres. He conceded that military necessity might be pleaded for the ‘demolition’ of Ypres though it ‘would not be attempted by any nation but the Germans’. For the ‘outrage’ upon Rheims, there was ‘no shred of justification’.⁵⁷

There were other atrocities that were viewed in a kinder light because they were perpetrated against the Germans by non-European soldiers and therefore did not challenge Anglo-Saxon rectitude. In a separate article in the same issue of the *Daily Herald* in which he reported on Rheims, Gullett quoted an English officer observing that the Germans on the battlefield had thus far behaved with ‘conspicuous gallantry’. In contrast, the same officer had seen Turcos, the Algerians who made up some of the approximately 450 000 colonial troops mobilised by the French, many of whom served in Europe, parading around with German heads and necklaces of ears.⁵⁸ In its tone, Gullett’s description was consistent with early war French propaganda which described colonial infantry as ‘démons noirs’ (black demons) who would carry over the Rhine, with their bayonets, the revenge of civilisation against modern barbarism’.⁵⁹ Likewise, Gullett believed that the Gurkhas serving with the British Army did ‘not believe in being embarrassed with wounded, and perform[ed] various sacred rites on the

⁵⁷ *Mercury*, 29 March 1916, p. 5.

⁵⁸ It is probable that Gullett used the term Turco generically to refer to colonial infantry sourced from Senegal, French West Africa and throughout west, central and east Africa.

⁵⁹ *La Dépêche Coloniale*, 18 Aug. 1914. In C Koller (2014) *Colonial Military Participation in Europe* (Zurich Open Repository and Archive). doi: 10.15463/ie1418.10193. Ironically the French depiction of their own troops’ propensity for violence was remarkably similar in tone and content to that offered by the German propaganda machine. Indeed, the sub-heading to Gullett’s article is ‘Savages in Europe’. Beginning in 1915/16, officials ‘propagated a modified image of infantile and devoted savages. African soldiers were depicted as belonging to races jeunes [young races] and as absolutely obedient to the white masters because of the latter’s intellectual supremacy. Therefore, they were a danger neither to white supremacy in the colonial world, nor to the French metropolitan population’ (Koller, *Colonial Military*).

battlefield, which don't improve the health of those who fall into his hands'.⁶⁰ Though his tone bordered on the flippant, Gullett's treatment of these soldiers of Empire was unremarkable as racial stereotypes permeated representations of African and Indian soldiers even in British and French newspapers for whose armies they fought.

Gullett was well aware of the racial undertones of both his own writing and the Allied response to the behaviour of colonial troops. He conceded that these stories would have attracted little comment had they occurred outside of Europe. Yet these atrocities were not happening in the far reaches of Empire where they might be dismissed as the savagery of 'exotics' as Gullett characterised them. Though he had not witnessed them himself, he believed either that they were occurring or that the fabrication of them was justified in the context of a war. If he believed that they were indeed occurring and that they were being perpetrated by soldiers fighting with the Allied armies in common cause against an enemy vilified for the rape of Belgium, he did not consistently condemn them on moral or even practical grounds. Instead, German brutality is offered as proof of their innate barbarism. When they were the victims of atrocities rather than perpetrators, they were cowards who were so fearful of colonial troops that German newspapers were reticent to denounce them for fear of spreading panic.⁶¹ In reality, the German press characterised the Turcos as 'the incarnation of barbarity at war' and their use as undermining 'any claim the Allies made to the mantle of civilisation'.⁶² Gullett believed that the 'relish' with which 'peace loving Londoners' listened to these stories of Allied atrocities was 'one of the early effects of the war upon civilisation' yet he did not acknowledge his role in that process. His observation that these atrocities would continue unless the French exerted a strict discipline was the full extent of his criticism.⁶³

In contrast to his reticence to condemn Allied atrocities, Gullett was far more prepared to direct his fire against his professional counterparts. There could not 'be a sharper contrast in journalism than the angry outbursts of the German press and the quiet tone of the English'. He noted hysteria that suggested to him that all German journalists between the ages of 16 and 75 were now at the front 'and that the writing is done by immature boys and excitable old

⁶⁰ *Daily Herald*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

⁶¹ *Daily Herald*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

⁶² B Taihe (1999) *Defeated Flesh: Welfare, Warfare and the Making of Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 163; A Jarboe (2014) 'Indian and African Soldiers in British, French and German Propaganda during the First World War'. In T Paddock (ed) *World War One and Propaganda* (Boston: Leiden Brill), p. 191.

⁶³ *Daily Herald*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

men'. Though he could not have helped but be aware of his own participation in a propaganda war that involved the suppression and manipulation of information, Gullett dismissed the German press as the 'lie factory in Berlin'.⁶⁴

Where Gullett's 1914 writing rises above unsophisticated jingoism, however, is in his assessment of the prospects of an early peace reached via negotiation rather than a protracted affair decided on the battlefield. Some of his writing during this period, now long forgotten, is impressive in its perceptiveness and intelligence. He understood that the waging of total war, the hatred that was needed to sustain it, and the calls for the great issues to be decided on the battlefield, would be impediments to any type of negotiated peace. He knew that any Allied terms would undoubtedly require a dismantling of German power and a loss of territory. Even if the Germans sought an end to the fighting, he believed that they would be deterred by the nature and extent of these demands:

Possibly when the first general armistice is declared and negotiations for peace opened, Germany may be disposed to yield Alsace-Lorraine. They might also be ready to grant the billions of money France will demand as indemnity. But that will be only the beginning of the settlement they will be peremptorily asked to make ... Think for a moment of the only terms on which peace is possible, and the conclusion reached must be that Germany will fight as long as she has an army corps in the field ... This war will end only from one course - the utter destruction of German strength.⁶⁵

When Gullett visited the front again in 1915 he would do so as an official correspondent. As it became clearer that the war was to be a protracted affair, Gullett sought a greater level of participation. Like his friend and fellow correspondent Philip Gibbs, Gullett discovered that watching from the wings brought with it many personal and professional frustrations.

⁶⁴ *Daily Herald*, 30 Nov. 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁵ *Daily Herald*, 26 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

Chapter 5 - Official Correspondent and Lecturer

Despite the army's antipathy toward the press, a number of journalists were invited on tours of the front line in Belgium and northern France in March 1915. This concession was made reluctantly and far from indicating a softening of official opposition was actually an attempt to prevent press criticism by absorbing the correspondents into the system rather than allowing them to function as outsiders. The question of dominion representation was also addressed at the same time as the visit for British journalists was being arranged. The Secretary of State for the Colonies contacted George Pearce, the Australian Minister for Defence to indicate that Lord Kitchener had sanctioned tours of the battlefields for representative journalists of the Empire. Still deeply suspicious of the press, the army offered to provide facilities for the dispatch of the correspondents' letters to their newspapers as a means of controlling the news at the source. In any case, access was not to be unconditional, for the correspondents were only 'allowed to go as near the firing line as was considered advisable'.¹ What constituted an advisable distance had been well and truly established in September 1914 in a directive to the censors to suppress any report that dealt with events that were less than five days old and which had occurred within twenty miles of the front.

Pearce contacted Gullett's old employer, the High Commissioner Sir George Reid, who nominated him as the Australian representative on 12 March 1915. Gullett, a respected journalist with a firm commitment to Australia and the Empire, was from the outset a volunteer, not a conscript in the propaganda war that ensued. Within two days of receiving an invitation, Gullett was on his way to the front. His expenses were paid by the Australian government which would arrange for his reports to be distributed to the Australian press. Gullett's articles, which were filtered through the Censor and the War Office before being passed to the Australian High Commissioner in London, were then mailed to Australia or cabled if they were short enough. They were then censored again before being published with the advice that copyright was reserved by the Crown. These official tours shaped a number of precedents regarding war reporting that remain unchallenged to this day: the censorship of

¹ *Argus*, 11 March 1915, p. 8.

the press, military briefings, and accreditation (and, by extension, denial and removal of accreditation), the pooling, or sharing, of news copy, and embedding.²

The concession was made on the eve of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle (10-13 March, 1915), a choice of timing that was indicative of the army's desire to move beyond their instinctive opposition to the press and instead seek to control it. By the end of the war the relationship had evolved into a close collaboration. Although Philip Gibbs, one of the four British correspondents, wrote that during the visit 'few things have been hidden from us' not one of the correspondents were told anything about the first British offensive of the war happening just outside GHQ.³ Instead they wrote a series of irrelevant articles that showed just how effectively the Army could stifle dissent under the guise of collaboration. Nevertheless, the Australian newspapers of March 1915 trumpeted Gullett's proximity to the front in a variety of headlines – 'Australian Journalist to visit scene of Warfare', 'Describing the Battlefields', 'Tours of Battlefields' and 'Another Australian Writer at the Front'.⁴ Although the correspondents' standing as eye witnesses would be regularly reinforced over the course of the war, the fact that no French or British Empire correspondent was killed by direct enemy action suggests otherwise.

Gullett did not witness any fighting first hand during his three official visits and in fact visited the frontline on only one occasion. In contrast, when Charles Bean was appointed official correspondent with the AIF he wrote that he was free 'to go absolutely where I liked in the line, without resistance, so long as I was with our troops'.⁵ In reality, when the opportunity came he spent much of his time with officers rather than enlisted men. By contrast, Gullett and his colleagues on the Western Front in 1915 lived in the world of the General Staff. In his post-war memoirs, Charles Montague, a journalist turned censor, offered a fairly balanced though critical view of the dilemma that this proximity created:

[The correspondents lived in] the Staff world, its joys and sorrows, not in the combatant world. The Staff were both their friend and their censor. How could

² Anderson and Trembath, *Witness to War*, p. 46.

³ *Daily Chronicle*, 15 March 1915.

⁴ *Examiner*, 11 March 1915, p. 6; *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12 March 1915, p. 5; *Argus*, 11 March 1915, p. 8; *Barrier Miner*, 11 March 1915, p. 2. The reference to 'another Australian writer' is an interesting point. At this stage Bean was in Egypt, so unless that constituted a front in the opinion of this journalist, it may be a reference to Marie Louise Mack, Australia's first female war correspondent. She reported from Belgium for the *Evening News* and the *Daily Mail*.

⁵ Bean, *Diary*, 21 April 1915, cited in D Winter (1992) *Making the Legend: The War Writings of C.E.W. Bean* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. 7.

they show it up when it failed? ... When autumn twilight came down on the haggard trench world of which they had caught a quiet noon day glimpse, they would be speeding west in Vauxhall cars to lighted chateaux gleaming white among scatheless woods. Their staple emotions before a battle were of necessity akin to those of the Staff, the racehorse owner or trainer exalted with brilliant hopes thrilled by the glorious uncertainty of the game, the fascinating nicety of every preparation, and feeling the presence of horrible fatigues and the nearness of multitudinous death chiefly as a dim sombre background that added importance to the rousing scene, and not as things that need seriously cloud the spirit or qualify delight in a plan.⁶

With his background in using journalism as an advertising tool, Gullett was already well versed in what was required, as indeed were all the correspondents. This was hardly surprising given that the War Office had assured the government that only ‘good and reliable men’ would be accredited.⁷ As just such a man Gullett felt compelled to work within the parameters of the law and his own patriotism in a manner that did not require a conscious dishonesty. After much deliberation he decided to approach it from ‘a personal standpoint’. While this appeared an ‘intrusion of self’ Gullett believed that it was preferable to ‘assuming a knowledge which no outsider can possess in attempting to reach definite conclusions’. Instead, Gullett ‘kept closely, or as closely as the Censor would permit, to what I actually saw’.⁸

Gullett’s work as a war correspondent in Europe was not a subject that he regularly returned to in his post-war writing. In 1929 he did, however, inadvertently provide an important insight when he discussed how a journalist might influence the news without conscious falsehood. In an address to the New South Wales Institute of Journalists Gullett discussed the declining influence of the editorial and the commensurate rise in importance of the news column. He assured his listeners that though he would never ‘interfere with the facts’ he acknowledged that he would ‘put into the news a sort of sub-conscious bias’. In this way, journalism could then act as a ‘tremendous moral force’.⁹ Though it was a concession he never made publically, it is clear that Gullett saw his war reporting in much the same light. In

⁶ CE Montague (1922) *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto & Windus), pp. 96-7.

⁷ Anderson and Trembath, *Witnesses to War*, p. 44.

⁸ Letter HG – George Reid, 30 March 1915. European War - Mr H S Gullett, War Correspondent representing the Commonwealth of Australia – reports, AWM 252, A 259.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1929, p. 10.

fact, contrary to much of the criticism, the contribution of the press to the propaganda war was not solely a matter of who lied and who did not. In fact, it was just the type of bias that Gullett described and the strategic omission of important material that became the defining characteristic of the propaganda war as it pertained to the press. Indeed, in spite of the censorship, Gullett was still relatively free to write as he had always done. In encouraging migration, he admitted that the ‘bush is thickly sprinkled with pathetic failures’ but reminded his readers that ‘the country rewards generously those who have good qualities’.¹⁰ The optimism appears more legitimate because the negative observation creates a veneer of even handedness. In Paris in late 1915, Gullett observed that there though there was much grief, there were rewards on offer for a nation whose people proved worthy:

For tragic as the war has been for France, it has not been nearly so tragic as everyone feared at the beginning. France, having feared annihilation, finds herself, after 18 months of war, on the road to victory. The spirit of the people is eager, even elated. The worst is behind, and the bright goal which shines clear ahead is considered worth the price which is daily being paid for it.¹¹

In 1914 the price being paid daily by the French people was 2220 dead, though in 1915 it would ‘drop’ to 1180. By April 1916 when this article was published, the Battle of Verdun had been raging for six weeks. By the time it ended in December the French had suffered a further 377 000 casualties. Before the war Gullett warned potential immigrants that ‘success upon the soil in any country must be bought and paid for’.¹² In war, as in farming, there was a price to be paid.

As Gullett made his way to France just after the offensive at Neuve Chapelle, he might well have taken solace in the fact that though he was not reporting on Australian troops, his political understanding and his literary inclinations had prepared him for what lay ahead. As he had shown in his immigration work, he would not feel ethically compromised when called upon to blur the lines between journalism and advertising. The ends well and truly justified the means. To some extent, all of the Australian correspondents subscribed to that belief and instead of positioning themselves as disinterested observers of the conflict they acted as publicity agents for the AIF.¹³ This approach would set the tone for Australian war writing

¹⁰ Gullett, *Opportunity*, pp. 41-2.

¹¹ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 4 April 1916, p. 2.

¹² Gullett, *Opportunity*, p. 41.

¹³ Gerster, *Big-noting*, p. ix.

for a century. Yet Gullett's first report, published on 22 March 1915, made no mention of Australian troops who were then training in Egypt. It also did not mention the battle of Neuve Chapelle which had marked Britain's debut as a major land power and for the standards of the time was a remarkably sophisticated operation.¹⁴ This was the more egregious omission given that the evidence was right in front of him.

Like his British counterparts, Gullett focused on individual impressions rather than interrogation and analysis. In his first article he described his journey to France as though it was a peace time jaunt across the Channel. He painted a scene of order and purpose in which the liners move 'inward and outward, cleave the placid waters; a sailing ship beats bravely up; the might of the British navy is vividly realised in this swish across the waters to France'. The 'loudly advertised German blockade' was a month old but 'England's shipping is practically undisturbed' despite German submarines 'haunting the Channel'. The vessel he was on passed one of the fleet of hospital ships and Gullett felt that it was 'almost gay in her clean, white paint, with a wide green band, and symbolical of the cheerful spirit which everywhere marks the British conduct of the war'.¹⁵

During a visit to a clearing hospital on his first day in France he saw hundreds of wounded soldiers, some of whom 'lay very still, others tossed feverishly in their pain; all were unshaved and battle worn, none were composed'. By contrast, Gullett observed the Indian wounded on a hospital ship who 'lay and suffer with a sublime restraint, as become tribesmen whose forefathers had been fighting men since time immemorial'. The remainder of this first article was devoted to an actor focused narrative with the Indian troops' 'oriental magnificence' taking centre stage:

They are nearly all small landholders who adopt soldiering because the love of fighting is in their blood. On their appearance you could not vote them fierce warriors whose joy it is to fight till they kill or are killed because with all their soldierly bearing and deadly lances and hideous weapons peculiar to themselves, they are a grave host of dignified and gentle, rather than savage countenance.¹⁶

¹⁴ J Terraine (1997) *The Great War* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions); P Harris and S Marble (2008) 'The 'Step-by-Step' Approach: British Military Thought and Operational Method on the Western Front, 1915-1917', *War in History*, vol. 15, no.1.

¹⁵ *Advertiser*, 8 June 1915, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Great Southern Star*, 27 Aug. 1915, p. 4.

What Gullett did not report is the fact that the attack at Neuve Chapelle was an isolated attempt on a small front with inadequate resources, which even he later acknowledged doomed it to failure. In spite of some initial success, the advance quickly lost momentum and after three days was called off after only a very modest capture of ground. British forces suffered 12 811 casualties in four days of fighting, 4233 being sustained by the two Indian divisions. The Indians had already received a battering at the First Battle of Ypres (19 Oct. – 22 Nov. 1914) and would receive another at the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April – 25 May 1915). Instead Gullett described it as ‘a glorious day at close quarters with their foe’. The Indians had fought the Germans ‘hand to hand in his trenches’ and had ‘chased him and slashed him as he fled’.¹⁷

In both tone and content, Gullett’s report shows just how selective the Army briefing had been and how enthusiastically he disseminated its views. The emphasis he placed on the Indians being a warrior people reflected the racial theory which shaped the recruitment practices adopted by the British. Men from the northern part of the subcontinent, principally from the Punjab and Nepal, were characterised as belonging to the ‘Martial Races’. In spite of ‘plentiful and persuasive evidence to the contrary’ they were considered better soldiers than their counterparts from Bengal and the south of the subcontinent.¹⁸ The other issue that Gullett does not mention but which might have shaped his laudatory tone was a rash of self-inflicted wounds among Indian soldiers. The initial exposure to mass industrial warfare that they were neither prepared nor equipped to fight had led to an outbreak of self-wounding. It had been dealt with promptly by the high command and had ceased by mid-November 1914, four months before Neuve Chapelle. Such was the official concern about the Indian troops that despite their good performance in battle, a secret analysis of their battle wounds was conducted by Colonel Sir Bruce Seton, the commanding officer of the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton.¹⁹ He found that there was no evidence of self-infliction of wounds which could be supported by statistical analysis. Gullett’s article was therefore more about offering a reassuring message about one of Britain’s allies rather than one displaying even a modicum of objectivity.

¹⁷ *Great Southern Star*, 27 Aug. 1915, p. 4.

¹⁸ A Sharpe (2015) ‘The Battle of Neuve Chapelle & the Indian Corps’, *History Today*, vol. 65, no. 8, p. 48. <http://www.historytoday.com/andrew-sharpe/battle-neuve-chapelle-indian-corps>. Date retrieved 21 Jan. 2017.

¹⁹ B Seton (1915). An analysis of 1,000 wounds and injuries received in action, with special reference to the theory of the prevalence of self-infliction. British Library, IOR/L/MIL/17/5/2402. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/analysis-of-1000-wounds-injuries-received-in-action>. Date retrieved 7 Jan. 2017.

The degree to which Gullett was acting as the mouthpiece of the British Army is further evident in his claim that the relative success of the Indian part of the battle was partially the result of effective artillery. Though the initial bombardment was indeed relatively successful, once the troops moved beyond the scope of the elaborate system of communications and the ordinary chain of command, the system broke down.²⁰ In reality, the Indians had actually been compelled to attack without covering fire. Denied access to alternative sources of information, Gullett was left with little option other than to pass on the Army's preferred view of events, often in some depth. According to Gullett, the Allied generals had 'no doubt of the capacity of the Allies to break the Western line and force the enemy to fight at an early date upon his own soil'.²¹ Gullett contrasts the army, which 'fully appreciates the obstacles that must be surmounted' with the politicians who hoped in vain for the economic collapse of Germany. In Gullett's view, one almost certainly provided to him at GHQ, Germany needed to be 'smothered' with 'plain downright strength in men and artillery'. For only then could the Allies 'engage and menace the whole German line simultaneously'.²² Gullett's physical and ideological proximity to GHQ is palpable in this series of observations which provided a reader in Australia with an extended statement of the British Army's view of the conflict and its preferred preeminent place in the decision making process. It was a strange anomaly that a correspondent was able to criticise a democratically elected government but not the army it directed.

Even where Gullett acquired insights, it was difficult to place them in a meaningful context. He argued that attacks needed to be on a sufficiently wide front to gain a significant breakthrough, not that he made an explicit link between that view and the just completed battle. In fact, what the battle had shown was the value of not just the 'bite and hold' approach which was an advance in a series of short steps backed by massive fire power, which the British at that time did not possess, but a 'bite and bite' approach which involved:

a series of progressively deeper bites, ensuring that each bite was manageable for the teeth and jaws available, and that each mouthful was adequately chewed and swallowed before proceeding to the next. No single bite would prove fatal, but a

²⁰ 'Tactical Lessons of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and Their Bearing on the Strategic Problem That Confronts Us', Du Cane to Robertson, 15 March 1915, PRO, WO 158/17. In Harris and Marble, *The 'Step-by-Step' Approach*.

²¹ *Great Southern Star*, 2 July 1915, p. 3.

²² *Great Southern Star*, 2 July 1915, p. 3.

series could, if not kill the beast, at least force it to retreat a good distance to lick its wounds in relative peace.²³

That said, the lesson was also lost on General Sir Douglas Haig, whose 1st Army conducted the attack, so an Australian journalist with no military experience could hardly be held to account for such an oversight. Left to make what he could of the information available to him Gullett sought to humanise the battle by leading his readers through each of the steps of a hypothetical attack. The de-contextualised nature of this article was perhaps a means of escaping censorship, but it had a significant though unintended consequence. It was inaccurate, profoundly so, in that it gave order and purpose to a chaotic event. He created a narrative structure comprised of a series of logical planned steps, each progressing toward a clear and attainable objective. Beyond this shortcoming was the issue of language. ‘The crowded and glorious hour of the supreme test’ when ‘hell is loosed by the attacking force’ sees the troops ‘eager, dry lipped but rejoicing in their appointed task’ as ‘they clamber over the parapet and dash for the smoking mutilated ground which shelters the remains of the enemy’. The actors, playing the parts the scriptwriter conceived for them, ‘are not yet warm, and know no lust of battle; they are impelled by duty and calculating love of honour and country’.²⁴

There is no room in Gullett’s narrative for traumatised soldiers or futile attacks through mud, wire and machine gun fire. To even acknowledge their existence threatened the narrative. Self-control, stoic endurance and the forbearance of pain as Gullett portrayed them was not a quirk of style or the product of wartime censorship. They were central to a deeply engrained construct of Christian masculinity that offered the comfort of familiarity to a society coming to terms with a modern industrial conflict.²⁵ The traditional martial language that Gullett adopted also mirrored that of the other correspondents. This was a language in which ‘soldiers were not killed; they had fallen or had died gamely ... words such as honour, duty, sacrifice and manliness had clear meanings. Empire meant the British Empire ... The one word that was never tolerated was failure’.²⁶ This was consistent with war correspondence at the time, but it also reflected broader trends in the language choices of Australian journalists across both world wars. As they worked in a profession governed by masculine stereotypes,

²³ Harris and Marble, ‘The ‘Step-by-Step’ Approach’, p. 21.

²⁴ *Great Southern Star*, 2 July 1915, p. 3.

²⁵ F Anderson (2014) ‘Collective Silence: The Australian Press Reporting of Suffering during the World Wars’, *Journalism History*, vol. 40 no. 3, p. 150.

²⁶ Anderson and Trembath, *Witness to War*, p. 66.

they studiously ignored both their own trauma and that endured by the combatants. It was impossible for them to even recognise psychological distress let alone contextualise it.²⁷

Gullett's emotional restraint also extended to the civilian population. In June 1915 he offered his readers a remarkably depersonalised image of a seventy year old French woman hoeing in a field just beside a British battery surrounded by a house with every pane of glass blown out and a neighbouring church 'riddled with German fire'. Yet there is 'no cheap bravado about it' for her indifference is 'genuine'. Perhaps she 'had given her husband against the Germans in 1870' as Gullett's own mother had given her husband to the taming of the frontier.²⁸ In Gullett's hands she becomes an unflappable, almost fatalistic rural worker, an archetype with which Gullett's Australian readers were intimately familiar. The description of this woman would not have been out of her place or time had she been facing drought or deprivation in rural Victoria a half century before. With his own romantic attachment to rural life it was inevitable that Gullett found much in the French peasantry to admire. In particular, he lauded their refusal to join the mass exodus to Paris:

His little patch of land is his all; and so he, or his women and children, stayed and met the terrible invaders. Right up to within a couple of hundred yards of the trenches you find them still there engaged at their cultivation. The young and able are long since gone to grimmer business, but the old men and women and boys and girls of tender years wrestle bravely with ploughs and tools beyond their strength, every one of them fighting Germans as stoutly and surely as their menfolk in the trenches.

Reaching again into history and ignoring his earlier characterisation of war as an act of purification Gullett argued that 'none of the ancients had a finer disregard for death than these poor people of the twentieth century race, who have been glibly condemned as decadent'.²⁹

Increasing pressure from the newspapers, a growing clamour for news from the front, the effect of a series of articles critical of the government during the 'shell scandal', and the realisation that official pressmen could be more easily controlled than those acting outside the system, led to a change of policy. In June 1915 John Buchan, Philip Gibbs, Percival Phillips,

²⁷ Anderson, 'Collective Silence', p. 148.

²⁸ *The Advertiser*, 8 June 1915.

²⁹ *The Advertiser*, 8 June 1916, p. 9.

Herbert Russell and Valentine Williams were presented to the commander in chief, Sir John French, as officially accredited war correspondents. The war correspondents, then ‘attired in the King’s uniform, were, to all intents and purposes, Officers of the army, conscious of their debt to it and conscious too of their duty to keep up morale and to reinforce the continuing loyalty of the people at home’.³⁰ This absorption of the news gatherers was pursued at all levels, not just with the correspondents:

By absorbing whenever possible the power of the press into the service of government, by making some of its members an integral part of the defence of the realm, and by the provision of honours and appointments to certain leading editors, and proprietors thereby giving them a vested interest in the survival of the system, the British government was thus able to exploit the enormous potential of the press for the duration of the war. In short, the British press became the servant of official propaganda more out of willing acquiescence than as a result of Government coercion.³¹

Now back in London, Gullett was heartened by this development. He wrote to Bonar Law, the Secretary of State for the Colonies seeking to arrange a second visit. Gullett was courteous in his appeal but did note that ‘under the circumstances I venture to submit that those Dominions which have representatives specially appointed for the work might have an equal opportunity with the British newspapers’. Having played the justice angle, Gullett showed that he was equally adept at flattery. For although he conceded that the main Australian contribution was at that moment in another theatre, ‘the chief interest of the people of the Commonwealth is naturally with the decisive British Army in France and Flanders’.³² This reflected Gullett’s view that any threat to British sovereignty and power was a mortal threat to Australian security. He did not believe that a single Englishman seriously feared a cross-channel invasion. Instead the army fought for ‘honour and prestige, and for the future’ for though defeat in Europe would not herald the immediate invasion of Britain it might well mean the ‘ultimate loss of a great portion of the overseas Empire, and much else besides’. Happy enough to concede that Britain fought for abstract ideas, Gullett was convinced that Australia fought for its very survival, as did France who fought ‘from day to day for her very

³⁰ L Macdonald (1983) *Somme* (London: Michael Joseph), p. 80.

³¹ M Sanders and P Taylor (1982) *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan), p. 31.

³² HG – Bonar Law, 26 June 1915. Official History, 1914-1918 War: Records of Henry S Gullett. AWM 40/56.

life. Every square mile lost or won means the devastation or salvation of so much beloved territory and so many women and children and homes'.³³

Unlike the British correspondents who were able to spend extended periods in France, Gullett was only allowed to visit the front in September/October 1915 and then for a longer period from 10 December to 18 January 1916. There are only sparse details concerning his engagement with the other correspondents, although Cutlack was in no doubt that he had left a mark on them:

He bore a light heart through fair days and days not so fair, and in every company his sane and cheerful spirits were infectious. There was some natural quality about him that compelled notice, and a gathering of strangers into which he might suddenly be introduced would be apt to remember him for long afterwards. It took a great deal to make any but the most ephemeral impression upon the seasoned members of the British war correspondents' mess at G.H.Q. during the last war. The first night Harry Gullett dined there all newspaper despatches were late and short, and some of the correspondents seriously debated for days afterwards whether this Australian could be right and, as he prophesied at their dinner table, the British Government would after the war really have to repudiate the internal war debt.³⁴

Gullett was home in Australia well before the Battle of the Somme having spent a good portion of his time on the Western Front during quieter periods. Outside of the great battles, Gullett lamented the 'inconceivable' monotony of the constant stalemate. He denied that censorship imposed any meaningful restrictions on the work of the correspondents:

They live at Headquarters within easy distance of the lines; have a staff of press officers and a fleet of motor cars, and the privilege at a few hours' notice of going anywhere and seeing anything. And yet week after week the correspondents, who include a number of the ablest descriptive writers in the United Kingdom, are depressed with the knowledge that they send to their papers little or nothing which satisfies or excites the public. They traverse each month hundreds of miles

³³ *Advertiser*, 8 June 1915, p. 9.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Aug. 1940, p. 6.

of front line trenches, talk to thousands of men, hundreds of officers and scores of generals, and still they rarely have an important message for their readers.³⁵

Gullett was not averse to searching for a story rather than waiting passively for one to appear. When Bean made his own preliminary tour of the French battlefields in January 1916, the British correspondents relayed the news that Gullett had on one occasion spent a night in a crater in no man's land with a British sniper. Though it was hardly a deed that won an empire, it won the respect of the other correspondents, who 'greatly admired him'.³⁶

Like the troops themselves, the correspondents settled into a daily pattern. Initially they lived in a chateau in the village of Tatinghem near General Headquarters at St Omer. When they were covering a major battle they divided up the front line and then drew lots to see which portion they would cover. Often beginning before dawn, they made their way by car to a vantage point to witness the preliminary bombardment. In time they would then walk over the captured ground and interview the walking wounded and prisoners of war. They then moved to Divisional and then to Corps Headquarters, where they saw the reports come in by telephone, aircraft or pigeon. From Headquarters the correspondents, 'tired, hungry, nerve-racked, splashed to the eyes in mud, or covered in a mask of dust' returned to their quarters. Here they met as a group and shared their experiences, 'each reserving for himself his own adventures, impressions and emotions'.³⁷ The actual writing of an article during a major battle was always a pressured affair. With impatient dispatch riders and censors circling them the correspondents, battling fatigue and their own strained nerves for up to five months without a break during major offensives, wrote articles, saw them censored and then dispatched in quick succession.

In 1940 Gullett commented on this highly ritualised life in a generally empathetic, yet slightly dismissive tone:

[After the early months of movement] the correspondents on both sides had a remarkably pleasant existence. They established a central mess of their own in an agreeable French chalet, and under the direction and easy discipline of a British Officer ... they lived a life which, had it not been for the general shadow of the war, could have called for little protest. Under the guidance of a member of the

³⁵ *West Australian*, 4 March 1916, p. 8.

³⁶ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 204.

³⁷ Gibbs, *Realities*, p. 35.

military staff they visited almost any part of the line they wished to see. They had the run of the crowded back areas. If they wanted a spell, or to report to their newspapers, they could be in London in a few hours and for a military change they could from time to time make a tour of the French and Belgian parts of the long drawn battlefield.³⁸

This generally positive characterisation of press freedoms probably reflected the fact that by the time he delivered this assessment he was in charge of censorship in Australia. In reality, each correspondent had a censor attached to him, ‘a kind of jailer and spy, eating, sleeping, walking, and driving’.³⁹ Philip Gibbs was well aware of how tenuous their position was in these early months, for though they possessed ‘a doubtful respectability,’ they were like ‘a woman of easy virtue who has been made respectable by marriage, but is expected to break out into open sin at the slightest opportunity’.⁴⁰ Possessing a gentler disposition than Gullett, Gibbs felt that the censors, most of whom were ‘gentlemen and broadminded men of the world’ eventually became loyal friends and allies.⁴¹ One even confided to him and to Beach Thomas that the Chief of Intelligence had given them written instruction to waste the correspondents’ time. Lieutenant Colonel James Edmonds, who later wrote the British official history, was one of a number of staff officers at GHQ who amused themselves by intentionally passing false information to the correspondents as a test of their credulity.⁴²

For all Gullett’s public acceptance of the restrictions, the type of material removed from his articles shows the real aim of the censorship regime. In an article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* Gullett discussed the declining role of the cavalry:

If the cavalry did nothing more during the war it would have amply justified its champions in recent years. In the retreat from Mons the British Army was in a large measure saved from annihilation by the gallant rear-guard of men who day after day rode and fought as cavalry never fought before, until their horses often dropped from sheer exhaustion.⁴³

³⁸ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

³⁹ Gibbs, *Adventures*, p. 251.

⁴⁰ Gibbs, *Realities*, p. 37.

⁴¹ Gibbs, *Realities*, p. 26.

⁴² Letter from Edmonds to Charles Bean, cited in S Badsey (2005) ‘The Missing Western Front: British politics, strategy and propaganda in 1918’. In M Connelly and D Welch (eds) *War and the Media* (IB Tauris: London), p. 47.

⁴³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 Nov. 1915, p. 10.

Removed by the censor was a series of additional observations that were hardly likely to prove injurious to the war effort:

A very considerable force is still maintained within the battle area may be taken to indicate that the Allied generalship hopes for a return to open fighting. We know from the official despatches that cavalry was in readiness for action when the big attacks were made at Neuve Chapelle. But my knowledge of the wide trench area inclines one to the opinion that the war will end without further enhancing the fame of our dashing mounted soldiers.⁴⁴

The first sentence may be regarded as a legitimate removal of military information of potential benefit to the enemy. The second sentence referenced an official despatch while the third was the expression of an opinion based on facts as equally obvious to the Germans as they were to any of the hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers holding the almost 500 miles of trenches stretching from Switzerland to the North Sea. The additional removal of the observation that had the Uhlans ‘been loose among our infantry’ during the retreat from Mons the previous year, the army, ‘already pressed perilously close to breaking point, must either have become a mob rout ... or perished before its overwhelming foe’ suggested a very broad view of what information could be of benefit to the enemy. It also indicated a less than clear commitment to releasing information to the public in a timely manner because the article was passed by the censor on 14 September 1915 but did not appear in an Australian newspaper until 22 November 1915.

Gullett’s next article ‘Australians as fighters’ expressed a number of dangerous ideas that also attracted the blue pencil. In the article he characterised the attitude of the British Army to Australian troops as ‘kindly but distinctly superior’. As such, this following passage had to be cut:

Officers hinted that this was not another riding picnic like the South African campaigns but a sterner form of fighting which promised victory only to the soldier of long training and war discipline. The sentiment which prompted the Dominions to send troops was admired, but in the mind of the British Home Army our men were a lot of untrained Colonial fellows, full of courage,

⁴⁴ European War - Mr H S Gullett, War Correspondent representing the Commonwealth of Australia – reports, AWM 252, A 259.

doubtless, but very raw and not easy to handle, and in need of heaps of hard work before being put to serious European fighting. The same view was held about all the troops other than the regulars, and was exposed in the extreme care with which the Territorials and the Canadians were introduced to the trenches. Both soon demonstrated in a very gallant manner that they were to be trusted under the most trying conditions.⁴⁵

This article was not published until 25 November 1915, the type of delay that Gullett had sought to avoid in August when he sent censored articles to the High Commission via the Press Bureau so that they could be included in that week's mail to the Minister of External Affairs in Melbourne. He repeated the observation that he had first made at the end of March that they had already been approved by the Field Censor and that further time need not be lost censoring them in Melbourne. He added with a surprising level of delicacy that 'last time the Department seemed to hold them up for some weeks'.⁴⁶

There were things that Gullett witnessed that he did not even attempt to write about. The failure at Loos (25 Sept.-13 Oct. 1915) was particularly disturbing. Sixty thousand casualties, 8000 of them in the first four hours, cost Sir John French his job as commander in chief of the British Army. Gullett witnessed the debacle and with the other correspondents described to Bean the remnants of the New Army returning 'in pieces', a sight which they admitted was more depressing than anything they had witnessed during the war:

Column after column coming past dejected, hang dog, displaced – they knew it – almost ready to weep on the mention of the disaster – a beaten ashamed army.

And poor chaps, it wasn't their fault.⁴⁷

Gullett had already explored in his writing the contrast between the geographical proximity of the Western Front to England and the gulf in understanding that separated the two worlds. For the 'war is very close to England. You can breakfast in London and arrive at British headquarters in France in time for lunch'. Even the journey to France could be described in peace time language: 'The Channel steamers leave the English port just as in the days before

⁴⁵ European War - Mr H S Gullett, War Correspondent representing the Commonwealth of Australia – reports, AWM 252,A 259.

⁴⁶ European War - Mr H S Gullett, War Correspondent representing the Commonwealth of Australia – reports, AWM 252, A 259.

⁴⁷ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/37/1, Jan.-Feb. 1916, pp. 41-2.

the war, and with the exception of some significant exceptions [an attempt to hint at the presence of major warships] the shipping in sight appears to be much as it was a year ago'.⁴⁸ Beyond this world there existed one in which the trenches 'oozed and dripped from top to bottom month after month'. The soldiers existed there in a surreal subterranean world with 'water up to their ankles or knees or waist, and as the pumps triumphed the mud was scarcely easier to endure than the water'.⁴⁹ Even when Gullett visited the line, it is doubtful that he left with anything approaching an insight. Following a journey from Rheims along the line from Soissons, Gullett conceded that he had witnessed no fighting and heard only a few big guns at a distance and some sporadic rifle fire. He found it interesting but beyond that the only observation that he could offer was that even a vital section of the Western Front was not the scene of constant fighting. It is not surprising that a man of Gullett's temperament and outlook would later take steps to cross this divide and join his countrymen in battle rather than report on their achievements and their suffering.

Yet for the time being Gullett had to content himself with his uneasy existence trapped between the war's observers and its participants, not prepared to identify himself with the former and not yet entitled to identify with the latter. This tension is evident in his attempts to contrast life at the front with a civilian world which did not appear to be animated by the same purity of purpose. For despite the conditions and the ever present fear of death and destruction, Gullett believed that the morale in the Army was so high that the magnitude and horror of the war was actually more keenly felt in England than in France. This claim was part of a broader effort on the part of Gullett to advertise the Army as once he had advertised Australia. The government had been wise, in Gullett's view, to select the generals and then trust them to do their job without political interference for the Army was already 'the master of its job'. It possessed a 'perfect understanding' of the war and was in fact 'a delightful democracy'. The War Office, in Gullett's view, was also playing its part by remembering that it was 'at once the master and the servant of the leaders in France'. As if fearing that even this was too subtle, Gullett added that 'here at last is an army without a grievance' and one which 'smiles from end to end'. Even the class system, so rigid before the war, could not survive the sustained exposure to this 'great, happy brotherhood':

⁴⁸ *Advertiser*, 9 June 1915, p. 12.

⁴⁹ *Advertiser*, 9 June 1915, p. 12.

There is the closest sympathy between the officers and the men. The long strain of the winter, the constant proximity of the deadliest foe the world has known, the splendid triumph of the headquarters over every obstacle in the way of necessities and comforts for the troops and the sublime spirit of the rank and file in the unspeakable trenches have cleared the expeditionary force of its social barriers to an extent which, before the war, would have been deemed chimerical.⁵⁰

The classes fought, however, for different reasons. Officers and men of the regular army fought 'because it is their game, and because they are told to fight'. They do not concern themselves with politics but are very aware of the reputation of their regiment and their service. In contrast, the men of the new army 'fought more consciously for a great cause and for England's ideals of freedom'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, writing in October 1915, he argued that their 'avoidance of personal or patriotic sentiment is absolute. They seem to think rather of their own towns and villages than of Britain as a whole; their parochialism is intense, strange as that may seem in a race of unparalleled Empire builders'.⁵² Gullett's confidence in the physical and mental attributes of the New Army was in stark contrast to some of his earlier concerns about the debilitating effect of city life.

In September 1915 Gullett returned for a second official stint on the Western Front and found the army resigned to the war continuing well into the next year and beyond. Gullett did not believe, however, that there was reflected a general disenchantment because 'pessimism could not exist in the midst of this cheery army'.⁵³ For though there are 'shadows in the trenches' they are 'only passing. The insistent sunshine of those young spirits chases swiftly after them and vanquishes them'. Cheerfulness was not the only quality evident in Gullett's construct of these soldiers of Empire. Just as vital was their stoicism for 'the casual note about death is not affected. Those men, who every moment risk their lives, are not as shy of death as they were last year. They are on intimate terms with him. A friend goes; they might follow to-morrow'.⁵⁴

Though Gullett was free to observe that the two trench systems were now 'immeasurably stronger', this was far from indicative of a loosening of censorship or a desire to offer a more

⁵⁰ *Advertiser*, 8 June 1916, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Daily News*, 8 July 1915, p. 6.

⁵² *West Australian*, 2 Nov. 1915, p. 5.

⁵³ *Advertiser*, 28 Oct. 1915, p. 7.

⁵⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 Nov. 1915, p. 10.

honest appraisal of events. More likely, it was the use of honesty in moderation as a propaganda tool. Any hope for a quick end to the war through campaigns outside of France and Belgium threatened the British Army's pre-eminent place in the nation's war effort. Gullett actively sought to disabuse civilians of any notion that there existed a shortcut to victory and looked instead to prepare them psychologically for years of war:

One would gladly write otherwise, but it is well that we all should recognise what is ahead of us. We must not cherish the idea that the mere increase of munitions and the employment of the grand new Citizens' Army will suddenly make a marked change upon this western front.⁵⁵

Using the example of the French at Champagne in September 1915, Gullett noted that despite the firing of six million shells, the German line was 'dented, but it was as a wall of lead might be dented with a heavy steel hammer'. Both here and at Loos 'the gain was inappreciable'. He reminded his readers that the Allies had 'learned that no cause, however just, no fighting spirit, however noble its stimulus and heroic its application, can alone beat down the enemy machine'. Yet a negative observation could not be left unchallenged. In the same article Gullett reassured his readers that 'rightly or wrongly, and all evidence is that it is rightly, our soldiers believe that they have got the Bosche man for man and mile for mile badly beaten'.⁵⁶

If victory could not be measured in ground taken, there was other less comforting evidence. By the end of 1915 Gullett had adopted the language of attrition which had come into vogue around the time of the Battle of Loos. For a decent man such as Gullett, his mathematics of death was quite appalling:

But we know that as more and more of our shells and bombs explode amongst him, his strictly limited manpower is reduced, while ours, despite our casualties, is daily increasing. The enemy holds altogether some 1500 miles of front, and as our guns increase so do his casualties He suffers losses, counting killed and wounded, and prisoners and sick, of at least 10 men per mile per day, that is 15 000 casualties a day, or 105 000 a week. Give him all the best of the calculation, and say he loses a million in three months. Then as his aggressiveness diminishes, as it undoubtedly does on this Western Front, our own casualties fall far below

⁵⁵ *Advertiser*, 28 Oct. 1915, p. 7.

⁵⁶ *West Australian*, 2 March 1916, p. 5.

his, while we can bear losses better than he. The feeling here is not one of excitement but one of quiet confidence that in the fullness of time, next year or the year after, the Germans will, despite their doubtful recruits in the Balkans and elsewhere, become so thin on their line that we shall be able to break them. And once we burst through on a front of some fifteen to twenty miles, the decision will have been made and the war practically finished.⁵⁷

By the time the majority of Gullett's reports reached Australia, the landing and subsequent stalemate at Gallipoli was obviously of greater interest to his readers. No doubt determined to take advantage of the opportunity to report on his countrymen, Gullett offered a British perspective on this seminal event. As his first overt contribution to the Anzac myth it is worth quoting at length, particularly given that the core element of the myth is already in place – the birth of a national identity grounded in a military tradition:

When the Australians made good on the beaches at Gallipoli and the story reached London it was said that, whether or not the Turk and the German were defeated, the men of the Commonwealth could never be said to have fought and died in vain. Their sacrifice and achievement upon that April morning would be for ever the inspiration of the Australian people at home and their glory abroad. The British people were profoundly moved: they shared in our pride and our grief. Australia has within a few terrible but splendid hours gained a new place in the mind of England and the whole outside world. Our little force of native born, schooled only in peace and strangers to soldiering had joined the rare company of their race who' followed Drake and Wolfe and Nelson; old fighting England welcomed them as of Balaclava breed. After the landing at Gallipoli the Australian abroad was vividly conscious of a great citizenship.⁵⁸

To counter any perception that the fighting at Gallipoli was less intense than that experienced on the Western Front, Gullett quoted an unnamed corps commander who observed that 'for troops to get ashore at all was a great achievement, because the fighting since has shown that the Turk on the defensive is as good under German leadership as the Germans themselves'. However Gullett was more concerned with what the landing revealed about Australian character rather than the Turkish defenders. Life in Australia, particularly life on the frontier,

⁵⁷ *West Australian*, 2 March 1916, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 25 Nov. 1915, p. 2.

had in Gullett's view, created a type of man suited to war. Yet he was far too skilled a propagandist to make the point himself. Instead he left it to the same officer who described it as a 'triumph of sheer natural fighting qualities ... In a job like that every man must be more or less his own leader and that would suit the Colonial temperament'. This belief in a peculiarly Australian identity also found expression in Gullett's use of a sporting anecdote to highlight that Australians possessed characteristics honed in peacetime that were particularly suited to warfare:

An officer who is a famous big game hunter, and who a few years ago was one of the best bowlers in England and often played against our cricketers, said 'good sportsmen are nearly always hard fighters. At sport the Australians are the strongest fighters in the world. They are harder to beat than any others; one could never count on an Australian 'rot' till the last man was out. In a pinch the wicket-keeper was as likely to make a score as the crack batsman.'⁵⁹

Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's description of the landing at Gallipoli immediately captured the nation's imagination when it was published in Australia on 8 May 1915. Since that moment, approbation from outsiders such as Gullett's British source has remained a vital component of the Digger mythology. Gullett recognised this from the outset, and though he acknowledged that he had not been to Gallipoli, he knew 'what all Europe, and especially the French Generals think of the Australians. They believe them to be the most terrible infantry engaged in the whole war'.⁶⁰ Gullett later sought to make his own contribution to the literature of the campaign when he came to write the history of the Light Horse. The Australians on Gallipoli had by their 'dazzling valour won the admiration of the world'. They had displayed 'uplifted resolve', 'dazzling, self-sacrificing valour', and 'cheerful suffering'. They had done so in a time during which 'splendid young manhood never lavished itself with less reserve' as they drew on 'all the might and resource of their proud exuberant manhood'.⁶¹ Though the war had been over for almost five years by the time he wrote these words, Gullett displayed almost no reticence in explaining why such sacrifice proved insufficient to win victory:

⁵⁹ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 25 Nov. 1915, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 1 April 1916, p. 3.

⁶¹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 18.

Gallipoli was not a soldiers' failure. The fighting men had not blundered or faltered. They had strained human endeavour to the breaking point. The failure was higher up. The tragedy of Gallipoli lies to the discredit of Whitehall.⁶²

Gullett conceded that the campaign had been 'inspired by a flash of genius' but it had been 'accidental and fleeting'. From the outset it had been marred 'by impulsive politicians, vaingloriously trying their prentice hands in the art of war'. In contrast to the amateurism of the politicians, the common soldier was celebrated as a man 'deeply pledged and consecrated to his mission'. Beyond the 'strong sporting instinct of the young men of Australia and New Zealand', however, there was a 'deeper and nobler' motivation for their valour:

Anzac was the first great battleground of these sister Dominions. The men who fought had a profound, if unexpressed, sense of the significance of their enterprise. By their work at Anzac would the world know them, and not only them, but the two new nations which had sent them forth into ordeal of battle among the old warring Powers.⁶³

As if to emphasise the extent that the war had legitimised pre-existing views, Gullett made a clear ideological link to his pre-war view of migration and population growth:

By their work would the standard of valour be set for all time in lands destined someday to breed many-millioned nations. Conscious of the prestige they enjoyed as the descendants of a race whose victories were world-wide on a thousand fields, these children of spacious young countries were impelled by the vision of their assured and splendid future.⁶⁴

In 1915 however, Gullett was unable to offer anything approaching an eye witness account of Australian troops at war, so instead he turned his attentions to the French:

The French Army is as impressive to an Englishman as the British Navy is to a Frenchman. The French excel on the land as we do on the water. The accidental defeat of 1870, when there was temporary failure of French leadership, has been foolishly accepted as the failure of the French soldier, and as marking the deterioration of the whole people. Capably led, as he has been in this war, the

⁶² Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, pp. 18-19.

⁶³ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 18.

French soldier today has no superior in the world, and, measured in millions, no equal. The truth is, if we are in the least generous, that we must admit that France practically saved herself, and at the same time saved Europe.⁶⁵

Gullett also explored the concept of a national spirit, a useful literary tool employed regularly by his fellow correspondents. When writing about the French Army Gullett felt compelled to write about the French nation because the ‘spirit and strength of the great armies engaged in this war are the spirit and strength of the nations they represent’.⁶⁶ Believing that this was truer of the French than any of the other combatants, he would have been pleased by what he saw when he visited Paris in late 1915. Arriving in early evening he found the chief boulevards thronged with cheerful people. Nearly all the theatres were open, the music halls were packed and though forced to concede that it was not the equal of pre-war Paris, he saw little evidence of depression or strain.

As Christmas 1915 came and went, and with his time on the Western Front drawing to a close, Gullett lamented the lack of significant action on which to report:

Five hundred miles of trenches; millions of men on either side generally within speaking distance: hostility ever growing in intensity; a ceaseless seeking after enemy life with every conceivable weapon ancient and modern, from arrows and hand grenades to aeroplanes and heavy howitzers; men killed and mutilated on every mile every day, the greatest, the deadliest battle ground the world has ever known, and yet week after week and no news!⁶⁷

Gullett and a companion ventured out on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas Day in search of material. Christmas had raised the correspondents’ hopes that there might be found ‘amongst these millions of Christian citizens of many countries who are temporarily engaged in the profession of arms some picturesque stories of how Christmas was spent along the battle line’. They were thwarted, however, for ‘Christmas only served to emphasise the depressing stultifying monotony of trench fighting’. There was not even the prospect of a Christmas truce similar to the one the previous year for even if there had not been orders on

⁶⁵ *Mercury*, 3 April 1916, p. 5.

⁶⁶ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 4 April 1916, p. 1.

⁶⁷ *West Australian*, 4 March 1916, p. 8.

both sides forbidding it, 'so much more bitter [was] the feeling towards the unchivalrous Bosche ... that there was little likelihood of any actual suspension of hostilities'.⁶⁸

Gullett met with Bean, fresh from Egypt and Gallipoli, in London in early 1916 before he returned to Australia on a lecture tour and then to enlist. No doubt they had much to talk about. They had been friends in London before the war and meeting there again would have emphasised to them the extent that their world had changed in the interim. Gullett left Europe cheerful about the prospects for victory in 1916 or shortly after. The evidence he used to support this view was sometimes trite and unworthy of an official correspondent. The European countryside 'quickly recovers from the ravages and horrors of war. Over this rolling area today the peasants go stolidly on with their winter tasks; the cultivation is in its proper stage, and in the vineyards the stakes are neatly piled waiting the return of sunshine and growth'.⁶⁹ The use of winter as a metaphor for the grim business of wearing the German Army down was balanced by a promise that the days of sunshine and growth would return.

By the time the AIF arrived in France in the middle of March, Gullett was already back in Australia. The reason for his resignation is unclear, but 'rumours swirled' that it was caused by the government's reaction to his expense claims, the extent of which 'appalled them'.⁷⁰ The concern with Gullett's expenses suggests that the Australian government's treatment of correspondents was driven as much by indifference as it was by an outright opposition. His second visit to the front had cost £60, hardly surprising given that the War Office had, in Gullett's view, arbitrarily imposed the cost of motor transport on the correspondents. Perhaps sensing the government's parsimonious attitude would prevent a third visit, Gullett offered to pay for the transport out of his own pocket in the event that it went ahead. To give an indication of the costs relative to the war as a whole, the standard British machine gun mounted on a tripod cost £30 a minute to fire. Even though the Government accepted Gullett's offer, the expense claim for the third and final official visit totalled £105 pounds. The Australian government's view, which even from a century's distance appears unbelievably petty, was that 'if tours cannot be conducted [at a] more moderate expense [they] should be discontinued'. The Department of External Affairs was quite prepared to have Keith Murdoch replace Gullett provided that his expenses were more 'reasonable'.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *West Australian*, 4 March 1916, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Mercury*, 29 March 1916, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Anderson and Trembath, *Witnesses to War*, p. 61.

⁷¹ Cablegram referenced in Minute Paper to the High Commission for R. Muirhead Collins, 2/2/1916. Official History, 1914-1918 War: Records of Henry S Gullett. AWM 40/56.

The government's preparedness to have the Australian press absent from the main theatre of operations of the then largest war in history was clearly driven almost entirely by their reaction to a handful of trivial expense claims.

In November 1915, Murdoch wrote to Pearce, the Defence Minister asking that he be considered for Gullett's position. He made it embarrassingly clear that he was aware that a capacity for objective reporting was not essential:

Dear George ... let me have a nomination someday soon ... The Government here would have no objections. Indeed, many Ministers I have seen at their own request have told me the Ministry is under an obligation to me for what I was able to tell them about the Dardanelles ... I have been asked today to write the Anzac number of the *Times History of the War* and you can bet that I mean to do justice to my country, its leaders, and my countrymen.⁷²

Murdoch's assurance that his reports would be positive suggests that he did not feel at all constrained by any deep commitment to truthful reporting, or indeed, any sense that he should be. Men such as Philip Gibbs felt a degree of moral unease over their role in a propaganda war. Murdoch had no such qualms and worked enthusiastically in semi-official roles for the Australian government while serving as the London based manager of United Services Limited, the cable service owned jointly by Sydney's Sun Newspapers and Melbourne's *Herald* and *Weekly Times*. He worked for Prime Minister Hughes during the conscription campaigns and showed himself a rather skilful disseminator of German atrocity stories.

Aside from the Australian government's pettiness, there were other more personal reasons motivating a return to Australia. Gullett's temperament was not likely to be satisfied playing the role of the observer for an extended period. Hazlehurst credits Gullett with having by this stage seen 'war at close quarters' which is only true if his experience is contrasted with non-combatants in Britain and Australia.⁷³ He had moved among those enduring the risks and discomfort and caught glimpses of their world but he was not one of them. A period spent as an ambulance driver left him equally frustrated, perhaps less so than the wounded who endured his driving. For as his son observed, 'he drove as he rode a horse – with a firm hand.

⁷² P Putnis (2011) 'Keith Murdoch: wartime journalist, 1915-1918', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 33, no. 2, p. 64.

⁷³ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 240.

The brakes slightly on in case it should get any foolish ideas – yet he would keep it going with the spurs. He was a great burner out of clutches'.⁷⁴

The offer of a commission in the Grenadier Guards promised just the type of participation for which he yearned. Yet it did not, it would seem, satisfy the call of his homeland. Instead he returned to Australia with Penelope and Jo, arriving there on 3 March 1916 in order to enlist in the AIF. He did not do so immediately, for there were other tasks to complete. Eight days after his ship docked, he commenced a series of lectures, beginning in Sydney on 11 March and eventually taking in the Western Districts, Brisbane and the Darling Downs. Gullett's opening efforts in Sydney took the city 'by storm', a success which reflected the view that he told the 'truth of the war position today'.⁷⁵ A journalist for *The Brisbane Courier* was only slightly less effusive when he described the lectures as 'candid' and reflecting 'the spirit of the happy British Army and the deep religious purpose of the soldiers of France' who were then fighting at Verdun.⁷⁶ Gullett was not the bearer of good news. He warned his listeners against placing any faith in short cuts to victory through the economic collapse of Germany or internal revolution. Only wastage and exhaustion would win the war:

If we in Australia, or the people of the United Kingdom, were fighting against the world, and were offered the only terms of peace offered to Germany – that is, terms of unconditional surrender – we would eat the leaves off the trees, and fight to the last gasp before we gave up the struggle. Germany is as proud as we are, and more arrogant and ambitious, and she will die just as hard as we would.⁷⁷

On 20 March 1916, Gullett and Penelope entertained guests at Lennon's Hotel in Brisbane where he spoke briefly about the Western Front. *The Queenslander* gave greater prominence to Penelope's view of the British mobilisation of women. She noted that the munitions industry was 'absorbing' thousands of women who received good wages for engaging in work which was not 'excessively laborious'. Other work was now available in banks, offices, as lift attendants, porters, chauffeurs, post women and telegraph messengers. She made the rather quaint observation that those working at railway stations wore a 'neat, serviceable looking uniform' and were by the use of small portable stools, able to rest for brief intervals between trains. She assured her audience that the British people were delighted to have

⁷⁴ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 120.

⁷⁵ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 5 April 1916, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 23 March 1916, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Mercury*, 16 March 1916, p. 5.

Australian soldiers as guests but nevertheless noted that when she and her husband entertained the wounded at their country home the 'boys enjoyed being free and easy amongst some of their own people'.⁷⁸

Penelope's reference to having entertained Australian troops belies the extent of her family's efforts on behalf of their countrymen. Over the course of the war Barbara Baynton and Penelope invited 8000 Australian soldiers to their houses in London and Essex. While most of her circle invited officers, Baynton initially confined her hospitality to enlisted men and then limited it even further to Australian enlisted men. On their behalf she felt keenly their isolation and vulnerability:

The Australian soldiers generally speak no foreign tongue. One day he leaves the thunder of guns and shells and the deadly poison gas. When he leaves these and other atrocities created by the worse than cannibal Huns, and comes for a short respite, say to London, small wonder that the prowling harlot, even if she speaks but broken English and borders on the half century, finds these boys easy victims.⁷⁹

Though the image of Australian troops wandering around London being preyed on by prowling harlots is not one that springs readily to mind, there is truth in it. There are numerous reports of Australian soldiers being repeatedly propositioned in restaurants and bus queues by prostitutes well aware of their high rates of pay.⁸⁰ This was subsequently reflected in high rates of venereal disease. Thousands of Australian troops met Baynton and Penelope extending an entirely different type of hospitality. Baynton later recalled that her experience offering comfort to her countrymen had 'enriched me for as long as I live'.⁸¹

Unsurprisingly, Gullett's audience was curious as to the experience of their fellow Queenslanders. Gullett had spent some time with the Australian Motor Transport Supply Column which he believed had a large Queensland contingent. He found them a 'particularly keen and capable lot'. Equally predictably, Gullett's audience was interested in how they compared with British and Empire troops. There could only be one answer to that question.

⁷⁸ *Queenslander*, 25 March 1916, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Barbara Baynton, *The Australian Soldier*, p. 323.

⁸⁰ EM Andrews (1993) *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian relations during World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁸¹ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 122.

These men, a ‘fine advertisement in Europe for our grand young men’, are recognisable by their ‘outstanding physique and high, keen intelligence’. A ‘famous British War Correspondent,’ who he does not identify but was probably Philip Gibbs, had expressed surprise that they were not handpicked soldiers like the Guards but were instead ‘chauffeurs and wealthy motorists who had eagerly volunteered for service at the outbreak of the war’. Gullett, perhaps speaking for himself as well, believed that they ‘fretted at missing the tragedy at Gallipoli and were eager for the trenches’.⁸²

Three days later Gullett spoke with ‘captivating fluency’ at the Brisbane Exhibition Hall about conditions on the Western Front. Though he included ‘a little humour’ he told the ‘grim, terrible story of modern warfare in earnest and impressive terms’. The *Brisbane Courier* journalist who reported on his speech drew comfort from the fact that the ‘graphic recital’ was ‘brightened by the description of deeds such as those that won the Empire’. Gullett lauded the sacrifice of the British regular army as a ‘defence never before accomplished or equalled by any army in the world’. He admitted to speaking with ‘love, admiration and reverence for the old regular army’.⁸³ Given that the Gallipoli campaign had already become the yardstick by which his audience understood war, he observed that in contrast to the constant exposure to gunfire endured by those who fought on Gallipoli, the troops on the Western Front were in his view better fed and better able to be relieved.

Although not yet entirely free of censorship, Gullett was able to discuss issues that may have attracted the ire of the censor had he been writing for an English newspaper rather than addressing an audience in Australia. In both his words and an ‘admirable’ series of pictures he emphasised the ‘absolute helplessness of infantry in attack unless efficiently supported by artillery’. He was dismissive of poison gas as weapon capable of decisive results but ignored the terror that it invoked in frontline troops. Its initial success was against French Colonial troops from Martinique, which was in Gullett’s view hardly proof that it was an effective weapon. The fact that the seven kilometre gap in the line that it created was successfully filled by the 1st Canadian Division and some French troops would have appeared to bear out his assessment. Though he did not leave the impression that he was overly pessimistic, Gullett’s description of the Western Front as a ‘skeleton of a world bleached with the ruthless

⁸² *Queenslander*, 25 March 1916, p. 15.

⁸³ *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1916, p. 8.

blaze of artillery and broken with the hail of iron' served to illustrate his claim that further and greater sacrifice was required.⁸⁴

During a second lecture the following night Gullett again emphasised that the increasing strength and complexity of the trench system meant that the end of the war was far distant. Very slowly, in his view, it had been recognised that there was 'no short and lucky road to victory, and that the Germans can only be defeated by the sheer might of arms'. He dismissed any hope that there was an easier option to defeating the German Army on the Western Front as a 'false friend'.⁸⁵ This was a consistent theme in both his lectures and newspaper articles, for by now he was more convinced than ever that 'the road into Germany lies by No Man's Land [and that] the war must be won in a fierce hell of fire and death'.⁸⁶ A writer for *The Mercury* was less accepting of this assessment and dismissed Gullett's criticism of 'various imaginary and real people who believed in the existence of easier options' as nothing more than 'cheap sneers'.⁸⁷

Though it may not have proved much comfort for those who sensed shortcomings in the higher direction of the war, Gullett saw the stalemate as proof that it was a soldier's war, one which 'genius will not win'. Always ready to have a third party articulate his ideas for him, he quoted a French general who observed that, 'even single handed, Britain would, in the long run, wear down the world ... British troops may not always be brilliant but they simply won't take defeat'. So impressed was the general that he ranked the First Battle of Ypres as a finer effort than the French on the Marne. At the Marne, the French had 'out thought' the Germans, but at Ypres, the 'common British soldier outfought him'.⁸⁸ The extent to which Gullett now subscribed to the strategy of attrition was further evident in his confidence that this determination would keep the British fighting for half a century if need be. For there is 'still in the breast of every Anglo-Saxon in France and at home – and certainly in the breast of the Australian soldier as you see him in London – the old traditional idea that he is worth any two or three foreign soldiers, including even the pick of the Germans'.⁸⁹

Despite being recognised as an authority, like most of society, Gullett had been unprepared for the sheer magnitude of the events he had witnessed, events which might have been

⁸⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1916, p. 8.

⁸⁵ *Brisbane Courier*, 25 March 1916, p. 7.

⁸⁶ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 21 March 1916, p. 35.

⁸⁷ *Mercury*, 17 March 1916, p. 4.

⁸⁸ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 21 March 1916, p. 35.

⁸⁹ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 21 March 1916, p. 35.

beyond his skill as writer even if he had not been shackled by censorship. During a tour of the First Army, Brigadier-General John Charteris, who later as head of military intelligence became the correspondents' commanding officer, was surprised at how little they actually understood about modern warfare. Although he did not identify which correspondents he found lacking, his observations were to some extent probably true of them all:

The first batch of correspondents had to be treated gingerly. I doubt whether they will really be much wiser after their visit. They arrived, accompanied by three officers from the WO [War Office], who themselves were quite as ignorant of what was actually happening as the correspondents ... There were many well-known names among the correspondents. They were all most amazingly ignorant, but that was the real justification for their mission as opposed to the official 'Eyewitness.' It is impossible for us here to realise how ignorant the public must be, and in writing copy that the public requires, one must begin with the knowledge of how little they know.⁹⁰

While newspaper reports in 1915 and 1916 celebrated Gullett's proximity to the war, he made no such claim twenty five years later when he wrote a short article that was delivered either as a speech or a radio broadcast on 29 July 1940 entitled *Journalism and the War*. Although primarily concerned with the state of war journalism in 1940, Gullett also included a description of life as a war correspondent. It remains the only significant post-war statement that Gullett made about the process of war reporting on the Western Front. Though he displayed almost a bemused empathy for the limitations under which the correspondents operated, by writing in the third person Gullett showed no inclination to claim part of that experience as his own. The Middle East would remain his legacy:

At seasons of big fighting as on the Somme, at Messines or Passchendaele they would traverse as much of the front as they could before an engagement. During the actual initial attack and subsequent days, they would motor out early from their headquarters, drive as far as was permitted, and then, at a considerable distance from the actual fighting get some sort of impression from the terrific barrage of bursting shells and the cloud of smoke and dust which enshrouded all movement. After that they would only proceed to casualty clearing stations, and

⁹⁰ J Charteris (1931) *At GHQ* (London: Cassell), p. 79.

take such opportunity, as our wounded and German prisoners offered, to glean news of the battle. Army headquarters would give them, late in the day, a few more or less unilluminating facts as to what had actually taken place. The correspondents with this unsatisfactory, piece work information, would proceed to write a column or two at speed, submit it for censorship and have it telephoned to London.⁹¹

Although he conceded that there was no ‘opportunity of observing fighting at close quarters’ Gullett noted that despite the restrictions there was ‘a field for highly trained news gathering, for getting the utmost into a story without incurring pitiless work by the censors, and for brilliant literary treatment’. Gullett was well aware that men such as Philip Gibbs had become household names across the Empire and the United States. In fact it was Gibbs’ reports that Australian newspapers turned to when Bean’s dispatches were found wanting. Yet Gullett was quick to add that as a ‘matter of justice’ the exception to his description of the gulf between the correspondents and the real war was Bean, who ‘never for a moment forgot that he was to be the Official Historian’.⁹²

Possessing literary pretensions or not, the correspondents used a set of language conventions that proved woefully inadequate to communicate the reality of warfare on the Western Front. Though it was almost inevitable that the journalists gave the war meaning, dignity, order, and greatness, the truth of the matter is that all too often it was futile, undignified, disordered and petty. Nevertheless, from 1916 onwards European writers, though not the correspondents, developed an alternate rhetoric which was stripped of ‘abstract values’ and instead was ‘plain, descriptive [and] emptied of value statements’.⁹³ In contrast, the Australian literary response to the war celebrated the Anzacs as representatives of a new and vigorous race strengthened by frontier life. Poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg and novelists such as Henri Barbusse and Erich Maria Remarque, portrayed the front line soldier as a passive rather than an active hero. What he does is never as important as what is done to him.⁹⁴ By contrast, the carefully constructed ‘imagining’ of the Australian soldier stressed that he possessed all of the qualities encouraged by a settler society, foremost among them courage, initiative and an egalitarian view of social interaction. He might be a

⁹¹ ‘Journalism and the War’, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

⁹² Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

⁹³ Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 112.

⁹⁴ See Gerster, *Big-noting*.

victim of bigger events, but he was never passive. In his determination to enlist, Gullett showed that rejected the role of passive witness to the war and desired instead to be a participant.

Chapter 6 – Soldier, Official Historian and War Correspondent

Gullett showed his preparedness to be part of the heavier sacrifice he predicted would be required to achieve victory on the Western Front by enlisting in the AIF in July 1916. In an article written before embarkation he made it clear that patriotism was only one of his motivations. In describing his first evening on leave after being issued with his uniform he made an explicit link between war service and his own conception of Australian manhood:

We go out of the big gates into Moore Park and go on into the City with a conscience easy for the first time since the war began, and a sense of satisfaction with our manhood never before attainable. And we no longer fear as we did until yesterday, when the challenging scornful eyes of the wives and mothers of the men who have been fighting these two years; and when we take a brazen peep into the mirrors outside the hotel bars and the tobacconists we are intensely pleased at what we see there smiling self-consciously and happily in the khaki. The supreme step is taken and after two years of doubt and hesitation and musing we have cut ourselves off from that dishonourable company we have kept too long.¹

Not just the nature of the men was exposed by army life, but also a national character shaped by this ‘pre-eminently happy land ... which knows no lower classes’. For ‘dungarees are pitiless levellers’ and the Australian ‘who owns a station and counts his stock in the tens of thousands or is a shining light in one of the professions is peculiarly like the boundary rider or the tram conductor’. Having thus covered the country/city divide and the class system whose existence he himself doubted, Gullett observed that when these men peel potatoes or clean out stables ‘you get real democracy in an army which has hard fighting close ahead of it’.² Though their responsibilities had prevented many of them answering the call earlier with the original Anzacs who were now in France or still in the Middle East fighting the Turks, they were nevertheless rightful peers of those who had shown such a ‘spirit of adventure’ and

¹ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/2/47.

² Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/2/47.

‘exultant patriotism’ for they enlisted with a ‘full knowledge of the grim nature of the fighting ahead’.³

Before embarking for overseas service Gullett contributed to the ‘Yes’ campaign in the referendum of October 1916. His views were best articulated in an article written after the campaign had failed. In it he lauded the Labor party’s introduction of compulsory military service in 1911. Although his tone is congratulatory, he is in fact damning them with false praise for in reality it was an unsubtle attempt to highlight perceived inconsistencies in the Labor Party’s approach to the issue of compulsory military service:

It was the Australian Labour party, of which Mr Fisher has just resigned the leadership that gave to the Empire its first forced soldiery. Socialists elsewhere scoff at Labour leaders who would impose compulsory training upon a young free Commonwealth. At scores of emigration meetings in this country I have heard British trade unionists hoot at the statement that every young Australian was proud to learn how to bear arms for the defence, of his country and the Empire. But Labour leaders like Mr Fisher were careless of the views of dreaming, idealistic, international Socialists. Enough for them that Australia was a rich continent, very lightly peopled, that these are land hungry days, and that a weak Australia meant a weak spot in the great Empire.⁴

Gullett congratulated Fisher for recognising that ideals sometimes must be sacrificed in the face of harsh realities. This is the key to understanding the inconsistencies that became apparent during Gullett’s political career. In this instance he believed that it was preferable for the Australian workers to ‘sacrifice a shade of principle than run the risk of losing the generous land in which they lived so happily’.⁵ It was a sacrifice that he would show himself increasingly prepared to make in pursuit of Australian interests.

Two months before the article was published, Hughes, facing a no confidence vote and a hostile caucus led 26 parliamentarians both out of the room and the Labor Party with the rallying cry ‘Let those who think with me follow me’. He formed the National Labor Party and governed with Liberal support until February 1917 when it merged with the Liberal Party

³ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/2/39.

⁴ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 13 Jan. 1917, p. 6.

⁵ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 13 Jan. 1917, p. 6.

to form the National Party. In spite of the defeat of the conscription referendum Hughes was returned to power in the election of May 1917 with a significant majority in both houses. To say that the Labor Party was bitter at what they saw as a betrayal is an understatement. His expulsion from the Party he had helped found was characterised by Hughes in typical fashion – ‘I did not leave the Labor Party. The Labor Party left me’.⁶ Later Gullett would experience first-hand what it was like for those who left Hughes.

As a member of the 13th reinforcements, 2nd Australian Division Artillery Column, Gullett embarked for overseas service on 10 February 1917 on the troopship *Osterley*. In a rather odd twist, he was accompanied by his family, a situation which reflected the fact that he had been engaged to write fortnightly articles on the life of the Australian soldier. In this twin role Gullett was able to provide an account of the journey to England and life as an artilleryman waiting for orders for the front. Gullett’s description of the rituals of shipboard life are dominated by discussions of the food, training, concerts, and the ‘royal days in many strange ports, and a thousand races in rickshaws and motor cars’:

Everywhere we had hospitality from the citizens whose shores we visited, even to an unlimited free use of the trams, and the best of refreshment as a gift or at nominal prices. Australian mothers would be gratified to have seen how their kinswomen overseas paid homage and did sympathetic and practical kindness to the boys.⁷

His arrival in England on 11 April 1917 prompted an even more lyrical rhetoric from ‘Gunner Gullett’ who observed that ‘blue seas and bluer skies fade into green and grey’ when ‘England is near at hand’:

We see more steamers, great and small, each going her chosen way as though the seas had been suddenly cleared of their peril; and, grandest sight of all for the eyes of those who love ships, many stately sailing vessels go by, the submarine zone safely behind them, the most wonderful evidence surely of all the evidences of British sea power. Unattended, save by the matchless unseen organization of

⁶ LF Fitzhardinge (2016) ‘Hughes, William Morris (Billy) (1862–1952)’. *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hughes-william-morris-billy-6761/text11689>. Date retrieved 30 December 2016.

⁷ *West Australian*, 21 July 1917, p. 8.

the Navy, they went their way, the winds of God their one arm against the highest scientific achievements and destructive weapons of the enemy.⁸

After disembarking, Gullett found that the troop train was ‘warm and not crowded’ as it ‘glides through the hill and dale of the West Country with its thousand rushing streams and its sheltered low lying villages’. Only the absence of young men ‘because of a great combing of the countryside for fighting men’ intruded on this rural idyll. For the ‘old line in France has been broken and the price has been paid’. The march from the station to their huts on Salisbury Plain was ‘a gay walk, not without its touch of mystery, almost magic! The still country side echoed with our songs and whistlings; greetings were exchanged with women and girls whose faces peered out from the dimly lighted windows of little cottages’.⁹ As the winter gave way to warmer weather, Gullett found ample opportunity to call on rural imagery to emphasise that Australia now had a military tradition on which to base a national identity:

Grass lands are ablaze with the gold of buttercup and dandelion; the sky larks sing and sing; an orchard in the little valley shimmers pink and white in the morning sun, and we ponder a moment on those beautiful immortal things, undisturbed by the war, and we know that, devastating as it is the conflict is but passing, and that even in all its magnitude, it will in an incredibly short space of time lie safely behind us, and but a wonderful page in our national story.¹⁰

Always eager to emphasise the links between Australia and Britain, Gullett observed that though many of the soldiers were underwhelmed by Stonehenge, others could be found ‘walking with unwonted reverence about the old village churches while the writing on the damp and grey tombstones will entertain them for hours; and a wonderful picture it is to see these young Australian soldiers treading softly on the graves of their ancestors’.¹¹ Though they may have been returning to an ancestral home, Gullett still saw them as men shaped and improved in a new land. Even before seeing the Australian soldier in battle, Gullett was singularly adept at making his own contribution to the Anzac mythology. Compared to their European counterparts, Gullett believed that the Australian soldier was ‘supreme in his physique, his intelligence, and his shrewd sense of humour’. It was an army well aware of the

⁸ *Canowindra Star and Eugowra News*, 3 Aug. 1917, p. 1.

⁹ *Canowindra Star and Eugowra News*, 3 Aug. 1917, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Border Watch*, 29 Aug. 1917, p. 3.

¹¹ *West Australian*, 21 July 1917, p. 8.

‘justice of its cause’ and the ‘greatness of its fighting qualities’. To be part of such a group was a ‘ceaseless joy’.¹²

In the name of journalistic objectivity, Gullett was prepared to admit that the Australian soldier possessed some flaws but it was a false humility. Compared with other armies the Australian is a ‘hopeless soldier on humdrum routine’ but if he is interested ‘he is perfection – keen, intelligent, and singularly deft’. If the work he is called upon to do appears to have no value he is a ‘slacker and malingerer without equal’. The humour of such a claim was probably lost on Gullett, who was no doubt sincere in his claim that the Australian soldier was better than everyone else even at being slack. In reality, it was a warning to the army leadership that they ‘cannot have the alert aggressive mind of the Australian, which insists upon thinking for itself, and an extraordinary capacity for swift conclusive execution, and at the same time have that docile, dog-like submission to every petty routine order’. If the leader is the ‘right kind his men are a joy to him’.¹³ Like Bean and Monash, Gullett needed to answer the question of whether the members of an army so ostensibly democratic would possess the discipline necessary to make war. As Gullett does in this article, they would also extend their celebration of the national virtues embodied in the common soldier to include the officer able to lead him.

While Gullett completed his training, Penelope and Jo stayed with her mother in London which was then enduring air raids. Regardless of the war’s intrusion, Gullett still saw it as the ‘world’s wonder city’ which ‘drew Australian soldiers irresistibly’. He was pleased that his comrades did ‘the sights’ and returned to ‘camp and talk for days of the revelations of the Tower and of the monuments in the Abbey, and the glory of St. Paul’s, and a thousand other things which go to make every man of English blood strangely at his ease and at home in London’.¹⁴ Gullett was clearly not in London long enough to get a sense of the disillusionment felt by many Australian soldiers, both with Britain and the British. A general weariness, the sense that the war was being mismanaged and a by now thoroughly idealised vision of life at home left many Australian soldiers far less enamoured than Gullett and his comrades. Gullett did see some of the 50 000 visitors to Britain who had even less reason to celebrate a trip to Blighty. He found the German prisoners of war ‘well fed, comfortably housed, and gently exercised’ and apparently as ‘docile and contented as a herd of milking

¹² *West Australian*, 21 July 1917, p. 8.

¹³ *West Australian*, 21 July 1917, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 29 Aug. 1917, p. 8.

cows on a rich pasturage ... They are burly, slow-witted fellows of the peasant type'.¹⁵ He saw a marked contrast between the Australian and British attitude to the 'Hun':

The Australians have never had towards them the almost incredible neutrality of feeling which distinguishes the attitude of the British and the hideous story of the German treatment of Australian prisoners in France did not make it easier to witness the handsome, even indulgent manner in which the Hun is handled here, but underneath we are apparently truly British in the matter, for I doubt if one of these captives, who are to be seen all over the Plain, has ever received even a direct personal taunt from an Australian soldier.¹⁶

The 'hideous stories' was a reference to the mistreatment of Australian prisoners after 1st Bullecourt (11 April 1917). Though certainly nowhere near the brutality meted out to Australian prisoners of the Japanese during the Second World War, the failure to adequately feed or house Australian POWs and the physical mistreatment of the French civilians who attempted to offer aid was well known to Bean and therefore, one would assume, to Gullett as well. The escape of two Western Australians and Bean's later dispatch in the Commonwealth Gazette on 29 October 1917 ensured the story had a wide currency. It was hardly surprising that the relatively soft treatment of German prisoners was the cause of some disquiet for an audience familiar to depictions of German brutality.

While Gullett continued his training in Britain, Bean was in France acting as official correspondent and organising the Australian War Records Section as a preliminary step to the establishment of what would become the Australian War Memorial. Bean was convinced of the need to establish a national museum and had begun to agitate for the systematic collection of relics:

In France Bean learnt the horror of war and the strength of those who could endure and, while he was a realist who knew that no man wanted to go to the front and that many men would not fight, he began to appreciate what achievement the AIF represented. He understood that to honour these men would

¹⁵ *Border Watch*, 29 Aug. 1917, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Border Watch*, 29 Aug. 1917, p. 3.

demand something magnificent, beyond war museums as the world had known them.¹⁷

A stone in the courtyard of the Australian War Memorial acknowledges the commencement of work by the Australian War Records Section under the direction of John Treloar on 16 May 1917 as the moment of ‘inception’ although Bean had been pursuing the idea since the previous year.¹⁸ The first task of the new section was the improvement of the unit war diaries, which to this day are of inestimable value to historians. Responding to pressure from a variety of sources, in late August 1917 the Australian government began to regulate the creation of all Australian war records. Bean’s vision, however, went far beyond developments in Melbourne, and by September 1917 the War Records Section was also collecting relics. Gullett’s cousin Sidney was a prominent figure in Bean’s quest for a national museum. As the field officer in France from early 1918, he made collecting material something of an art form. The success of this initiative, which in Treloar’s exaggerated view culminated in every man going into action with a pocketful of museum labels, saw the collection grow from less than 1500 pieces in April 1918 to 25000 in February 1919. The motives, though, went far beyond the joy and excitement of collecting, for each of them was sustained by the belief that they were engaged in work of national importance.¹⁹

The sense of higher purpose was such that Bean and his team felt considerable disquiet at finding Frank Hurley, one of the war artists, treating an exhibition at the Grafton galleries in London as he would a peace time exhibition. In Bean’s view, it was the subject, not the artist, who should be centre stage. Gullett also had concerns about the war artists. In a letter to Treloar written from Cairo the following year, his claim that his criticisms were not personal ring hollow:

Personally I think the treatment of the artists foolishly generous ... Artists should serve like the rest or stay out. It is absurd to pay them fancy prices for their big pictures ... an artist should throw in his work for his military pay like everybody

¹⁷ M McKernan (1991) *Here Is Their Spirit* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. 43.

¹⁸ Widely considered to be Australia’s first great museum professional, as director of the Australian War Memorial Treloar did as much as anyone to ensure the institution’s survival. His efforts almost certainly shortened his life.

¹⁹ McKernan, *Here is their Spirit*, p. 48.

else ... I have of course got on famously with both of them. There is nothing personal in the point raised; it is merely a matter of what will give best results.²⁰

Five days later Gullett observed that 'for a selfish, greedy, petty pack command me to the ... Australian War Artists. Bill Dyson is about the only one of decent spirits I have known'.²¹ He later regretted these words when Lambert offered to visit Penelope in person in England. Gullett was ashamed by what he had written and assured Penelope that she would find him 'extraordinarily diverting' and a 'greatly gifted Australian painter with the uncommon ability to make the best of his gifts'.²² He was no great fan of Hurley, 'the South Pole chap', noting to Bean in early January 1918 that 'Hurley is here and is travelling at his customary pace. His pictures are not as good as one could wish'.²³

In England, however, Gullett's past caught up with him. Though undoubtedly courageous, he was afflicted with pleurisy and was clearly unsuited to the physical demands of frontline service. In any case, he would not be called upon to serve his country in the manner he expected when he enlisted. Instead, Bean arranged for him to join him in the task of collecting war records and laying the groundwork for the creation of a war museum. The choice of Gullett was hardly surprising given Bean's very high opinion of a friend he described as a 'brilliant, transparently clean Australian, with a wholesomeness that wins your admiration and respect when you consider the advanced crowd he has mixed with'.²⁴ As early as 1916 he entertained hopes that he would one day be prime minister but believed that he was 'too independent – too damned rebellious – to submit to the dictates of any party organisation'. In a rather prescient observation, Bean added that Gullett would 'feel it necessary to be free to obey his conscience and be independent'.²⁵

On 15 August 1917, the newly commissioned Lieutenant Gullett proceeded to France to 1st ANZAC Headquarters to take up his new post in the Audit Section. Although Gullett's greatest contribution was to be in the Middle East, he did not officially accept the role of

²⁰ HG – Treloar (JT), 19 May 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38 3DRL 6673

²¹ HG – Penelope Gullett (PG), 24 May 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/152.

²² HG – PG, 24 Aug. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/255.

²³ HG – PG, 26 Dec., 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/492; HG – Charles Bean (CB), 4 Jan.1918, AWM 38.

²⁴ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/87/1, Aug. 1917, pp. 53-4. The 'advanced crowd' is probably a reference to Gullett's work with the Australian High Commissioner and his political reporting in Australia before 1908.

²⁵ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/37/1, Jan.-Feb. 1917, p. 34.

correspondent with the Australian forces there until the middle of 1918. Nevertheless, a newspaper article in July 1917 which reported his change of duties also noted that this would be his destination after three months in France.²⁶ On his first full day on the Western Front Bean travelled with Gullett and Will Dyson to Kemmel to see the opening of the Battle of Langemarck, the second Allied attack of the Third Battle of Ypres. They then proceeded to Cassel to meet with the British war correspondents in their mess. Gullett renewed acquaintances with old friends such as Philip Gibbs, for whom he had a ‘tremendous admiration and friendship’, and who was now a household name throughout the Empire and the United States.²⁷ As a group Gullett found the correspondents ‘a wonderful kind lot; always make a fuss and produce the best in the cellar’. He was amused to have one of the correspondents tell him that ‘the best that Cutlack could say about you Gullett was that it was unfortunate you had not your wife’s brains’.²⁸

The group then moved onto Zillebeke where Gullett visited his old comrades in the artillery but arrived to find that a friend had been killed the previous day. In fact, Bean records in his diary that 15 men had been killed when a German shell hit one of their trenches. Perhaps self-conscious that his posting offered him the comparative safety of a non-combatant role and that his commission was not a recognition of soldierly qualities, Gullett admitted to being pleased to hear the roar of the guns and to find that his friends ‘were quite sincerely delighted at my promotion’.²⁹ He assured Penelope that she should have no concerns for his safety by offering the rather questionable comfort that it was easy to time the shelling and to seek shelter.

Gullett also had some frank discussions with Bean about the danger of trying to balance the role of war correspondent with that of the official historian. On the return journey from inspecting some Australian officers serving with Royal Flying Corps squadrons on 24 August 1917, he was particularly pointed in his observations. Gullett urged Bean to leave a gap of three or four months between the end of the war and the writing of an official history in order ‘to get a bit of distance from it so that it doesn’t seem too commonplace to you’. This would allow him to see the ‘real truths’. Bean characterised Gullett’s concern as a fear that he was ‘writing too much for the military critic – the men of the AIF, and men such as White,³⁰ and

²⁶ *Ballarat Courier*, 18 July 1917, p. 3.

²⁷ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 DRL606/87/1, Aug. 1917, p. 53.

²⁸ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/414.

²⁹ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/326.

³⁰ Sir Cyril Brudenell White (1876–1940).

not enough for the people. One always writes up to some critic, he says'.³¹ In contrast, Gullett claimed to write with his sister Isobel in mind, who was then writing for the Sydney *Sunday Times*. Gullett would later follow his own advice when writing the history of the Light Horse, offering a tone and style he believed would be accessible to the Australian people as a whole. He raised the issue with Bean again in the first week of September, making the rather curt observation that he was not indispensable as the official war correspondent, but he was as the war's historian. The observation hit its mark. By now exhausted and aware that the war might go on for years, Bean organised for many of his responsibilities to be passed to Cutlack in order to distance himself from the subject as Gullett had suggested.

In the middle of September Bean and Gullett visited the battlefields from the previous year on the Somme and found the ground at Pozieres 'a wild waste of weeds and flowers dotted over with our crosses'.³² Bean believed that the bombardment endured by the Australian infantry at Pozieres was beyond anything else they would experience in the course of the war, a view that he would have shared with Gullett.³³ Twenty three thousand casualties in less than seven weeks lend weight to Bean's oft quoted observation that the Windmill site (just north of the village) 'marks a ridge more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth'.³⁴ Less well known are his diary entries which include a description of the battle on 4 August 1916 as 'an insatiable factory of ghastly wounds', and an admission on 22 August 1916 that he was surprised that he had survived.³⁵ Gullett clearly absorbed something of Bean's experiences for he argued that the ground at Pozieres should be purchased by the Australian government for 'it is holy ground for us, and ever will be'.³⁶ Yet at the time Bean showed that he was just as able to ignore unpalatable facts as the most avowed propagandist. In *Letters from France*, a collection of some of his dispatches published in 1917, he adopted a markedly different tone when he asked 'What is a barrage against such troops! They went through it as you would go through a summer shower'.³⁷

Gullett witnessed the start of the Battle of the Menin Road which was the opening round of the Australian participation in Third Battle of Ypres on 20 September 1917. He positioned himself with the heavy batteries in order to witness the opening of the attack at 5.40a.m. He

³¹ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/87/1, Aug. 1917, p. 53.

³² *Sunday Times*, 30 Dec. 1917, p. 2.

³³ Winter, *Making the Legend*, p. 100.

³⁴ Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p. 264.

³⁵ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/54/1, July-Aug. 1916, p. 90.

³⁶ *Sunday Times*, 30 Dec. 1917, p. 2.

³⁷ C Bean (1917) *Letters from France* (London: Cassell and Company), p. 109.

was still there at 9.00a.m to see the first prisoners and the wounded pass through his position. In a letter to Penelope on the day of the attack Gullett noted that ‘the great show came this morning and went exceedingly well ... the men were above themselves’. The anecdotal nature of some of his comments indicate how much they substituted for informed assessments. In the same letter he drew conclusions based on the fact that the attacking force was clean shaven and that he had never seen wounded in such good spirits.³⁸

Both Bean and Gullett recorded the elation of the Australian troops, both at the initial success and the fact that for the first time two Australian divisions were fighting side by side. Not yet acting as a correspondent, Gullett’s report was published in the Australian press as extracts from a letter to an unnamed friend. Gullett struggled to contain his excitement which was heightened by his own proximity to battle:

Yesterday we had the big fight in Flanders in which the Australians were engaged. I saw a lot of it. A wonderful day, and in many ways the least distressing and most successful of all our attacks. The arrangements were at last close to perfect, and the men suffered a minimum and reached their full objective ... Our fellows were in such heart it was a joy to be with them.³⁹

The success achieved on the opening day was in Bean’s view a favourable trial of the step by step approach, an assessment supported by Gullett, who reminded his readers that ‘these gains seem small, but they are big results and after this show seen at close quarters I am more hopeful than ever before. The cost will be heavy, but we shall win’.⁴⁰ Despite Gullett’s high hopes for the attack, in reality the step by step approach, which Martin Farrar characterises as a series of ‘long, slow crawls ... which ended in men drowning and guns and machinery disappearing in the sea of mud’ had already suffered setbacks in the weeks leading up to the Australian participation.⁴¹ The battle eventually petered out into a series of limited and costly offensives that resulted in 38 000 casualties among the Australian divisions and more than 310 000 for the Empire. The position for the Allies at the end of Third Ypres was if anything worse than it had been at the start of 1917. It is entirely possible that Haig did more damage to his own army at Ypres than he managed to inflict on the Germans. Certainly for the AIF

³⁸ HG – PG, 20 Sept. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/20.

³⁹ *Sunday Times*, 30 Dec. 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, p. 367; *Sunday Times*, 30 Dec. 1917, p. 2.

⁴¹ Farrar, *News from the Front*, p. 169.

and the nation the results were devastating, with two thirds of all Australian battle deaths occurring in this single year.

Though Leon Wolff criticises the British correspondents for their failure to communicate to their readers that ‘the affairs were disgraceful and impossible’, their tone was profoundly different from what it had been during the carnage on the Somme the previous year.⁴² Thirty years later Philip Gibbs was still astonished that the censors passed them. Even a strident critic such as Farrar found the truthfulness of the dispatches ‘shocking’ in their descriptions of the helplessness and futility of pursuing the offensive.⁴³ This new freedom was reflected in the constant references to the worsening weather and the almost impossible terrain. Though Gullett wrote only one article covering the battle, he too drew his readers’ attention to the landscape:

For many miles in Flanders – hundreds of square miles in fact you could not find amid the shell holes a space on which to pitch a tent so complete and terrible has been the shelling. It is impossible of description. Not a tree is alive, not even a blade of grass, and over that the men advance under the barrage from the guns.⁴⁴

All was not as well as this new openness appeared to suggest. On 11 October 1917 Bean, the Canadian correspondent Ross and the British correspondents met with Haig to deal with a ‘pretty acute crisis in censorship’.⁴⁵ In response to some of the more absurd limitations, such as those preventing the mentioning of units by name, the correspondents had gone on strike. Brigadier-General John Charteris who oversaw the censorship regime was, in Bean’s opinion, suspicious of anyone not in the old army and like all regular officers was unfit to play a role in anything that required a breadth of vision. Haig opened the meeting by thanking the correspondents for the manner in which they had helped the national cause, an interesting assessment of the accepted understanding of the role of the press. In response to a series of questions concerning the appropriateness of describing the terrain and the weather, Haig encouraged the correspondents to mention the Flanders mud which had, he reminded them, defeated other armies in the past. In this case, it would appear that censorship was relaxed not so much in the national cause but as an explanatory factor in the failure of Haig’s offensive.

⁴² L Wolff (1979) *In Flanders Field* (London: Penguin), p. 267.

⁴³ Farrar, *News from the Front*, p. 168.

⁴⁴ *Sunday Times*, 30 Dec. 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Bean, *Diary*, AWM 38 3DRL 606/89/1, Sept.-Oct 1917

The shift in focus to the physical elements suited Gullett's style and temperament for it allowed him to provide his readers with the comfort of historical continuity. As other Australian writers would do, he characterised the physical environment of the Western Front as a hostile foe in a manner reminiscent of the struggles of frontier life. Australia's first immigrant martyrs, the explorers of the Outback had lived and died in a 'primordial world of confusion, heat, thirst and dust'.⁴⁶ Their descendants now did the same in the mud of France and Flanders. At Broodseinde on 4 October 1917, Gullett, Bean and Keith Murdoch found themselves witness to just such a martyrdom of thousands of their countrymen in a landscape that may even have left the most resilient explorer downcast. While positioned in one of the innumerable shell holes that pock marked the battlefield they discussed again how best to commemorate the men of the AIF. A discussion of a potential Australian war memorial, however, was not in itself a unique event. Around this time Gullett, Bean, Murdoch and the artist Will Dyson comprised a group characterised as the AIF's unofficial brains trust. After many months of reflection and conversation, in which Gullett and Dyson were particularly active, Bean's vision for the commemoration of the AIF had been refined and extended. In time, the Memorial would become one of the central pillars of the Anzac mythology, exerting perhaps an even more pervasive influence than the official history.

Before leaving for the Middle East Gullett accompanied Bean on a final visit to the front. In a letter to Penelope he shared with her an almost reluctant hope that the end of the war beckoned. Three years of conflict had left him a wiser, perhaps more pessimistic witness:

We had a very exciting and wonderful time: went up to the outposts in what is practically open country where we could see Germans and they could see us at a couple of hundred yards distance. But beyond the normal shelling which is now always close and exciting nothing happened. His shooting is curiously inaccurate and he snipes not at all. He gives the impression – indeed it is certain – that he is very badly organised. This does not mean the end is near but certainly he is not the enemy of old. We saw many of our own dead but many more of the enemy's.

While certainly not a callous man by nature, Gullett was nevertheless hardened to the realities of war and its impact on human behaviour. In the same letter to Penelope he did not balk at describing to her his reaction to finding a dead German tied to a tree stump like a 'horrible

⁴⁶ Hoffenburg, 'Landscape, Memory and the Australian War Experience', pp. 118-9.

scarecrow'. He credited the act to 'some line humourist – only a Scot or an Australian could do it'.⁴⁷

After spending seven weeks in France and Belgium, Gullett returned to London to the AIF War Records Section, then under the command of the newly promoted Major John Treloar. He had been appointed in May 1917 and by the time Gullett departed for Egypt in November of that year to establish a War Records sub-section and to commence the ground work for a history of the campaign, he had a staff of 15 occupying two or three rooms. By the end of the war the staff had grown to almost 650. No mention was made in Gullett's orders that even hinted at the possibility that he might eventually work as an official correspondent. However, Gullett did not arrive in Egypt unheralded. Bean had introduced him to Chauvel⁴⁸ in a letter in October 1917 and described him as 'the most brilliant Australian writer that we know of'.⁴⁹ Brilliant or not, the posting was still less than explicit in terms of the role Gullett would fill. This lack of detail mirrored Gullett's own doubts concerning the wisdom of the posting. In a letter to Penelope he advised her that 'the chapter in Bean's work I proposed is going through and as I could not escape Egypt and stay myself I suggested that I should [indecipherable] and that too is highly likely ... the Head is very keen I should go and take up the History of the Light Horse'. It appears that once it was clear that he would be posted to Egypt Gullett volunteered to write the history, aware as he was that it would be a work that 'would stand for all time'.⁵⁰ He sought to convince himself that it was the correct decision despite feeling 'sore to be going so far':

Frankly I am not sorry to escape the winter. Always I am sore in the ribs: the right side this time: nothing at all but I should not care for seven months of cold. Also no one who loves these boys as we do could wish to stay and see the inevitable suffering between now and next spring.⁵¹

Surprisingly Bean had not arranged for an appointment before 1917. The failure of White, Prime Minister Hughes, George Pearce, the Minister of Defence and the rest of the cabinet to

⁴⁷ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/37.

⁴⁸ Sir Henry George Chauvel, GCMG, KCB (1865 –1945) fought at Gallipoli and during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign. He was the first Australian to attain the rank of lieutenant general and later general, and the first to lead a corps.

⁴⁹ CB – Harry Chauvel (HC), 18 Oct. 1917. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38.

⁵⁰ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/412.

⁵¹ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/414.

arrange for a representative of the press or even an official visit was endemic of a wider lack of interest in the exploits of the 17 000 Australian soldiers serving under Allenby's command. This anomaly has not been challenged even by the interest generated by the centenary commemorations. Other than Gallipoli, the war against the Ottoman Empire has yet to attract research commensurate with its standing as being the only one fought which involved all six combatant empires simultaneously. Even a discussion of the appointment of an Australian correspondent was an unnecessarily convoluted process. Bean suggested to White that Gullett would be an appropriate choice as Australian correspondent in the Middle East. White declined to put the idea to Birdwood, insisting that any recommendation must come from the Australian government via the High Commission in London. It was left to Gullett, who was disinclined to surrender his commission, to make the decision once he gauged the feelings of the AIF in Palestine. If and when he acquiesced to the appointment Bean would then arrange it through the High Commission who would ask the Australian government who in turn would seek the approval of the War Office. The contrast between the disinclination to push Australian interests during this period with Hughes' later determination to do so at Versailles could not have been more marked.

The AIF in Palestine, who had long felt that they were forgotten, or worse, seen as 'loafers, enjoying themselves in the Holy Land, or in the unholy land of Egypt, while the infantry divisions slogged it out in Europe' viewed Gullett as a godsend and pressured him to assume the role of official correspondent.⁵² Understandably they were very sensitive to any suggestion that they were facing an inferior enemy. Gullett quickly learned that in conversation he needed 'to walk warily' although he assured Penelope that 'I don't compromise much':

Last night a major asked me straight out if I considered the Turk in the first class as a fighter. I said no and he became very excited. But most of them know and recognise that they are lucky to have missed France and the Germans. The Turk fights well on the defensive but by the Western Standard he has no weapons and he never pushes an attack as they do on both sides in the West.⁵³

⁵² AJ Hill (2016) 'Gullett, Sir Henry Somer (Harry) (1878–1940)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gullett-sir-henry-somer-harry-448/text11157>. Date retrieved 12 June 2014.

⁵³ HG – PG, 26 Dec. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/488.

Given the number of casualties being suffered on both sides on the Western Front, it was actually the comparatively lighter casualties suffered in the Middle East that mitigated against any effort to convince outsiders that the Light Horse were involved in a real war. Gullett argued that this was, at least in part, because of the intelligence of the soldiers themselves:

The Force so impresses one by its amazing cleverness ... The Turk has been outwitted by them from the jump. We have won everywhere with such light casualties. It is no foolhardy death or glory Force. Every leader has a holy regard for the lives of his men and brains are exercised as backup (as) in no other force in the war.⁵⁴

Gullett lamented the failure of the army in Europe to adopt a similar attention to detail and a real concern for the lives of the soldiers. Too many British officers in Gullett's view were incapable of either the mental effort or the temperament that such a sympathy required. This echoed the divisions that he had witnessed between the classes in pre-war England. Yet the crossing of this divide was not always to Gullett's tastes either, for he found much to fault in the attitude of the middle class when war time exigencies 'vest many fools in authority'. Though the occasional Australian officer was a 'bounder', that was rare compared to the 'cheap jack upstarts who hold commissions in the British new armies'. So great was his distaste that Gullett found it in himself to 'readily forgive the attitude of the old Regular officers towards them and it makes me sympathise with the system which makes the army so impossible to men from lower English classes in peace time'.⁵⁵

In contrast to the class divisions in the British army, Gullett saw the differences between Australians as a matter of geography. Before leaving for Egypt Gullett visited a Tasmanian battalion and found them 'quite alone in their way among the Australians'. They displayed a 'marked simplicity and innocence' for they did not possess the 'lawlessness and guile' of their New South Wales counterparts nor the 'irritating smartness and respectability' of the Victorians.⁵⁶ Interestingly, one of the shortcomings of the official history was Gullett's surprising failure to acknowledge the importance of regimental identity, perhaps instead seeing the family atmosphere of the Light Horse as being the result of their shared rural

⁵⁴ HG – PG, 10 Feb. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/467.

⁵⁵ HG – PG, undated and written in transit to Egypt, Nov. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/435.

⁵⁶ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/411.

background. It would be the land, not the artificial construction of a regiment that would bind these men together.

Gullett was pleased by the welcome extended to him by the ‘forgotten army’, but was nevertheless disappointed that he was not acting as an official correspondent. He was convinced that Chauvel, the commander of the Desert Mounted Corps, was keen on the idea but having been refused the previous year when he suggested Oliver Hogue, Gullett felt that he was unwilling to risk a repeat. It was a shame in Gullett’s view to leave them so neglected and to celebrate the achievements of British troops in preference to those of the Light Horse. This situation was hardly surprising given that before his arrival in Egypt Australian newspapers had relied almost exclusively on cable services, official communiques and articles written by WT Massey, the London *Daily Telegraph*’s correspondent in Palestine, and Fergus Ferguson who worked for Reuters. Massey would also be identified as the British war correspondent with the troops in Palestine and the Australian Press Association representative at British headquarters.⁵⁷ Gullett found him ‘a charming chap but he goes nowhere – except to Corps HdQrs. and sees nothing, and our people know him not’.⁵⁸ Neither correspondent appeared to Gullett to be in any position to capture the ‘life and colour’ of the campaign.⁵⁹ The only Australian correspondent was Major Oliver Hogue whose letters were published intermittently in the *Sydney Morning Herald* under the pseudonym ‘Trooper Bluegum’. He had tried unsuccessfully to become Australia’s official war correspondent when Bean was chosen in 1914. He then enlisted in the AIF and served with distinction on Gallipoli and later in the Middle East. Thematically his writing was consistent with Gullett’s work, though it exhibited less emotional restraint.

Gullett’s was not shy of discomfort or danger when pursuing the life and colour of the campaign, as is evident in an observation by Brigadier General Lachlan Chisholm Wilson in June of the following year that ‘when there has been anything doing, he goes out with the troops and gets first-hand information’.⁶⁰ Yet walking around Gaza which had been captured in early November 1917, Gullett found it ‘serene and wonderful after France’. He also noted that ‘all ranks were enthusiastic about the Staff work which is a gratifying novelty’. Gullett

⁵⁷ *Argus*, 17 Aug. 1918; *Argus*, 25 Sept. 1918.

⁵⁸ HG – CB, 20 May 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38.

⁵⁹ HG – CB, 2 Aug. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38/116.

⁶⁰ Wilson to L.E Groom, 1 June 1918. Australian War Memorial registry file, AWM 93/12/5/116.

was sufficiently concerned by what he saw to add that he ‘didn’t like the look of it’. It would be all right ‘if the old Hun keeps away but a hell of a spill there’s going to be if he has a few divisions and a hundred planes to spare’. He readily conceded however, that such a view was ‘only an ignorant impression on my part’.⁶¹ This view that an expanded German commitment would tip the balance in the Middle East reflected both Gullett’s awareness that the Allies were fighting against an empire that was economically underdeveloped and a reasonably widespread bias against the Ottoman leadership. The officer corps was by 1914 the beneficiary of considerable operational experience and several decades of German military education. Too often an operation that was skilfully conducted was assumed to have been planned and even conducted by the Germans. Though the methods may have been German, they were not necessarily German directed.⁶²

In late November 1917 Gullett spent an hour with Chauvel and found him ‘most cordial and frank’. Gullett described him as a man of ‘scarcely average height dried and wrinkled; a typical little horseman from Queensland, with a quiet and composed manner; speech slow and efficient and occasionally a flashing smile of extraordinary charm ... there is capacity all over him’.⁶³ Given Chauvel’s background it is not surprising that Gullett would find much in him to his liking. It is equally unsurprising that he felt an instant affinity with the men that Chauvel led for he believed that they were a ‘far more truly Colonial force even than the infantry: not nearly so formal; by no means so smart. But full of tried capacity’.⁶⁴ They were the products of the Australian bush, or at the very least her country towns, a world that Gullett both knew and loved. In a letter to Bean the following year, his affection for the men and the Australia they represented is palpable:

These chaps in their way are peerless. It took me some time to appreciate them. In their general slackness of carriage and almost utter neglect of ceremonial they contrasted very badly against the infantry in France. They present none of the snap and smartness of the Infantry. The Light Horseman is no longer a man of swank and polish. But he is a most wonderful fellow in a fight. His freshness and keenness when really on the move are phenomenal after four years campaigning. He is in a class of his own as a cunning fighter in the open. Every fight is

⁶¹ HG – PG, 23 Nov. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/15.

⁶² J Grey (2015) *The War With The Ottoman Empire* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press).

⁶³ HG – PG, 27 Nov. 27 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/34.

⁶⁴ HG – PG, 27 Nov. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/29.

distinguished by magnificent little sacrifices and absolute steadiness by isolated troops. And at the same time the occasional bayonet charges in strength are equal to the best of their kind anywhere.⁶⁵

This understanding of the nature of the light horsemen was consistent with Gullett's construct of Australian identity. More importantly, however, it was consistent with the way the light horsemen saw themselves. For though writing about Bean, Alistair Thomson might just as well be describing Gullett when he observed that he had constructed a version of the Anzac war experience that overlapped with the soldiers' own understanding and which filled a deep emotional need.⁶⁶ Though British soldiers were regularly dismissive of the exaggerated heroics and the outmoded rhetoric adopted by their correspondents, Gullett and Bean faced little censure from the AIF. For in Bean and Gullett's descriptions, both in their correspondence and later in the official history, the soldiers saw a version of themselves which pleased them. When in the post-war years they came to articulate and generalise their experience, many of them conformed to this ideological framework, one which has endured to this day. This wide use of this template has ensured that though at a superficial level Australian writing on the First World War appears extensive, in fact much of it replicates itself in either subject matter or approach, or indeed, both.⁶⁷ The emphasis on battle and the soldiers' experience that is characteristic of much of the material comes at the cost of a sustained treatment of the campaigns at an operational level.

In the first week of December 1917 Gullett wrote to Charles Bean from the headquarters of the Desert Mounted Corps where for two weeks he had been hampered by a lack of transport. He had also spent ten days with the 1st Brigade and then had been up to the line for a similar period with the 2nd Brigade. Gullett found it 'intensely interesting but after France, a pleasant gentle silent campaign (although it is not tactful to say so here)'.⁶⁸ He was less concerned about tact when he came to discuss the campaign in the official history. It was not just at Gallipoli that an opportunity had been squandered. He characterised all of Britain's campaigns against Turkey as 'all more or less accidental in their origin and half-hearted in their conduct ... sanctioned and undertaken without the enthusiasm, resolution, or military

⁶⁵ HG – CB, 3 Sept. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38/116.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 64.

⁶⁷ Grey, *The War With The Ottoman Empire*.

⁶⁸ HG – CB, 7 Dec. 1917. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38, 3DRL606/97/1.

strength necessary to ensure their vigorous prosecution'.⁶⁹ Though in 1915 he had considered the Western Front the decisive theatre of war, Gullett later found reason to amend that opinion. Free of censorship when addressing wider failings in the prosecution of the war as official historian, he made the most of the opportunity.

Despite the obvious paucity of news from the Middle East, the army moved at a glacial speed on the issue of a correspondent, leaving Gullett 'still waiting and preaching patience unto myself'.⁷⁰ It was good that he did so, because it would not be until 3 August 1918 that he would receive his official appointment. The uncertainty over his role may in other circumstances have proved an insurmountable barrier to making the connections that his work required, but Gullett mixed easily and readily with most people, possessing what Prime Minister Menzies later described as a 'great gift for friendship'.⁷¹ The political indifference to the campaigns outside of the Western Front was so pervasive that Gullett even offered it as mitigation for the shortcomings of the unfortunate British commanders and to the armies they led:

For years such men [Sir Ian Hamilton at Gallipoli, Sir Archibald Murray in Palestine, and various British leaders in Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and East Africa] were a mere afterthought of the Cabinet. They and their campaigns were subordinated in an extreme degree to the war in France and Flanders. When France was fully furnished, they received the overflow; when the Western Front called for any of their divisions, they were required immediately to release and embark them, regardless of the consequence to their own operations.⁷²

Gullett believed that this policy played into Germany's hands and achieved little other than to keep a million soldiers scattered around the world and unable to strike meaningfully at Britain's enemies. One senses not just his anger at the squandering of opportunities and the deaths of so many in subsidiary campaigns, but also the months of personal frustration sitting in the desert seemingly forgotten. Even Sir Archibald Murray, an officer who possessed 'some great qualities as a soldier and many charming qualities as a man' and who

⁶⁹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ HG – PG, 23 Nov. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/15.

⁷¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Aug. 1940, p. 6.

⁷² Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 24.

‘accomplished important and enduring work for the Empire’ did not escape Gullett’s critical eye:

He possessed weaknesses which marred his performance as a leader and were prejudicial to his own personal interest. His political sense was very shrewd. His strategic conceptions in Sinai and southern Palestine were bold and sound. So far as he failed, he failed mainly because he was a bad judge of capacity in others, and because of his personal generosity. He was too generous in his attitude to the Western Front, too generous in his obedience to the War Office, too generous in his confidence in his chief subordinates. His generosity, indeed, rather than his mistakes was his undoing in Egypt.⁷³

In Gullett’s view, only an independent, selfish, aggressive, and persuasive character had even a reasonable chance of success in any of these campaigns. General Edmund Allenby, who arrived in the Middle East a few months before Gullett in June 1917 to succeed the unfortunate Murray, appeared just such a man. He was also fortunate to have a government now offering an assurance that he would not be starved of men and material and now eager that Palestine should be conquered.

During this period while based in Cairo working on what would become the official history, Gullett kept up his regular correspondence with Penelope in London. The letters reveal his distress at their continued separation and his yearning for home life. Written in haste and often in less than ideal conditions, the letters are also full of praise for the Light Horse and the national character that they personified. Gullett also used this time to familiarise himself with the details of the two years of campaigning that he had missed. It also sought to provide an historical context, noting that the ‘blood of all the races since the Beginning has been shed on this rolling plain – all the Biblical peoples, the Greeks, the Romans, then the French under Napoleon’. But it was the medieval Crusaders who most attracted his attention, for they had fought Saladin and Gullett found himself drawn to the generosity he showed to those he conquered. The Jews were ‘late comers’ though Gullett understood why they might be tempted to belittle the New Testament. ‘The Old Book is substantial history’ Gullett conceded, ‘while the New [is the story] of a wonderful young life with a humble origin’.⁷⁴

⁷³ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, pp. 24-5

⁷⁴ HG – PG, 8 Dec. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/42.

The subject of the Jews is one that Gullett returned to on a number of occasions, as his son would do somewhat notoriously after the Second World War. He wrote to Penelope in December 1917 and predicted that the war would give Palestine to the Jews which he dismissed as merely a political move designed to ‘flatter the upstart Rothschilds into lending us more and still more millions at a ruinous rate of interest’. Gullett went far beyond what he saw as the cynicism of the Allied governments to find fault. There was clearly a personal element at play. He complained that the Jews in Palestine had told their ‘tale of honour stolen by the Turks – sold doubtless if the truth were known at a war value’. Gullett was outraged that the British lent the Jewish farmers donkeys, mules and ponies to ensure that the cultivation went ahead. When the army did business with ‘the servile wretches the price goes to the clouds and they cheated us’. In his estimation they were ‘a cringing odious’ people, ‘sickeningly effeminate’, ‘greedy and thieving’ and unlike the Arab who is an ‘honest, lousy fellow’ they are ‘piety and lousy’:

The Jews are as mobs of hungry wolves accustomed to prey upon one another ... and who have suddenly awakened to find a multitude of fat and foolish and defenceless sheep in their midst. The meaningful lesson [is] that all nations lose their virtues.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, Gullett would have been heartened by having arrived in the Middle East in time to observe the fall of Jerusalem on 9 December 1917. It was an event that Prime Minister Lloyd George saw in a mix of pragmatic and symbolic terms; on the one hand, it was an event likely to impress both the enemy and neutral states and on the other, a balm to the British Empire bleeding after the Third Battle of Ypres. In the context of a world war, the fall of the city was hardly a decisive event, but symbolically it was an important moment. After 674 years, Jerusalem was again in the hands of a Christian power, offering to the Allies their only victory in a year of almost ceaseless battle. Its symbolic importance was certainly not lost on Allenby who made a conscious effort to limit the destruction and to carefully stage manage his entry into the city. Aware of the effect of the Kaiser’s entry into Jerusalem in 1898 on horseback, Lloyd George wanted the city occupied ‘with reverent if impressive humility’. Allenby walked into Jerusalem and ‘surrendered to the invisible and enchanted

⁷⁵ HG – PG, 8 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/16.

spell which surrounds the Holy City'.⁷⁶ That spell was still in evidence when Gullett described the event in the official history:

In all that great army it is doubtful if a single man of European origin entered Jerusalem for the first time untouched by the influence of the Saviour. Christ met each man on the threshold of the city; each man, as he entered, was purified and exalted. The influence was, perhaps, not lasting. War is not a Christian mission. But for a brief spell at least the soldier's mind was purged of grossness, and he knew again the pure and trusting faith of his early childhood.⁷⁷

There was more, however, than just a religious aura enveloping the city. In a letter to Penelope, Gullett described the 'nauseating impression of indescribable filth'.⁷⁸ He was, if anything, more critical in the official history of a city so filthy that to a Christian nation the conquest of Palestine was justified 'if only on the ground that the cradle and inspiration of its faith should be cleansed and made physically wholesome and fragrant':

Excessively crowded and undrained, and with most of its main thoroughfares covered and therefore unpurified by the sun, the old city had been for centuries one of the most nauseating and verminous areas in the world; and even the open and pretentious new town beyond the walls was scarcely less revolting to the senses. To the habitual uncleanliness of a lazy, unproductive, parasitical people – most of them living by a traffic in manufactured holy relics and shoddy souvenirs, and by the general prostitution of religion to tourists of three faiths and many races – had for three years been added the primitive habits of the Turkish soldiery.⁷⁹

Gullett wasted no time in reporting the capture of the city, an approach that almost proved very costly. Hearing a mechanical clicking in what was thought to be an empty house, one Allied soldier stormed upstairs, gun at the ready. Instead of a Turkish sniper, he found Gullett sitting on an upturned box typing a dispatch.

⁷⁶ D Shermer (1973) *World War One* (London: Octopus Books), p. 223.

⁷⁷ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 519.

⁷⁸ HG – PG, 17 April 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/126.

⁷⁹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, pp. 523-4.

Perhaps inevitably, the start of another year generated some hope that the war would soon end. By February 1918 Gullett was weary, but he remained committed to supporting ‘a war to a finish so that our children may enjoy peace’.⁸⁰ Some of his old certitude was nevertheless conspicuously absent. However, it was not just Australia’s future that occupied his mind. As his uncle had done before him, Gullett had resolved by early 1918 to pursue a political career. Before 1916 he would not have even contemplated aligning himself with anyone other than the working class but war time divisions had left him conflicted:

The Labour Party will not prove impossible with conscription out of the way the field would be clear for a run. I have tried to contemplate the other side in the country districts. I should find very influential friends I have met in the war. But somehow I can’t digest the prospect. I would ... abandon the political idea altogether rather than actively oppose labour. My sympathy is a traditional instinctive one and with all the extremes the Labour fellows are best.⁸¹

In a letter written to his friend Jack Latham who was working with Naval Intelligence in Melbourne, Gullett showed that his attention was well and truly fixed on post-war opportunities. Indicative of his own frustration at being left in a comparative backwater, he dismissed his wartime work as ‘nothing to the employment that will lie before everybody at the conclusion of the War’. Perhaps conscious of his own participation in the propaganda war with the careful selection and presentation of material that it required, he felt that ‘so much splendid work in 1915 was interrupted by irresponsible criticism, which can only be described as crazy. I have never yet been able to understand why Australian people swallowed such stuff, however that cannot be helped’.⁸² He may well have been thinking of the failed conscription campaigns and the deep divisions in Australian society that they exposed. His frustration was particularly evident in January 1918 when he showed himself willing to see conscription forced on an unwilling public whatever the cost. He reserved his most hostile criticisms for ‘the brutes’ who in ‘their scores have voted silently out of sheer selfishness and cowardice and money making greed’:

The latest rumour has the government in Australia bringing in conscription as an executive. I pray it is true. The numbers should be forced – in the open – even if

⁸⁰ HG – PG, 8 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/16.

⁸¹ HG – PG, 3 Feb. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/68.

⁸² HG – John Latham (JL). 17 June 1918 MSS, NLA MS 1009/20/651A. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 244.

civil war [sic]. We should then see who they are. The secret ballot has played us very false on this thing ... Labour is unbearable on it. But at least they are honest. If the government is brave and resolute they can put conscription into effect even now. In a struggle like this ideals and principles have always won provided a leader could be found.⁸³

Gullett hoped that conscription would make the war a truly national enterprise, thereby preventing or at least ameliorating post-war divisions. This is further evidence of his preparedness to value ends over means. Gullett was a staunch believer in democratic government but he saw those who opposed conscription as endangering the survival of the British race and betraying Australia. In pursuit of what he perceived as the greater good, over the course of his life Gullett repeatedly showed himself prepared to compromise on ideals that in less traumatic times he may well have championed. It perhaps showed a capacity for brutal realism rather than hypocrisy, although that distinction was probably lost on his political opponents in the twenties and thirties.

In seeing conscription as a possible unifying force, Gullett showed that he had been absent from Australia for too long or did not fully understand or was dismissive of the extent to which the issue had ‘poisoned the wellsprings of national life’.⁸⁴ Recruiting, the war and the Empire, which might otherwise have been rallying points for White Australia, became symbols of broader internal divisions that were exacerbated by the authoritarian and vindictive manner in which Hughes conducted himself during the referendums.⁸⁵ Gullett did admit that he had given up even attempting to understand why the Australian people had rejected conscription. He preferred instead to contrast the ‘fresh wild echo of the original Anzacs’ with the ‘bitterness of treachery at home’.⁸⁶ In 1914 Gullett believed that British democracy was strengthened, not weakened by the existence of a loyal opposition. He made no similar concession on the issue of conscription. He was not alone. In Australia there was bitterness on both sides of the divide, for though there was never a real threat of revolution, there were increasing signs of political, industrial, communal and sectarian division. As Joan Beaumont observed, there was an embittering of public life, the effects of which were still

⁸³ HG – PG, 24 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/70.

⁸⁴ N Meaney (2009) *A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1901-23: Australia and World Crisis, 1914-1923* (Sydney: Sydney University Press).

⁸⁵ Meaney, *Australian Defence and Foreign Policy*.

⁸⁶ HG – PG, 11 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/9; HG – PG, 20 May 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/146.

being felt decades later. Though spared the turmoil of Europe in the post-war years, Australia was as she characterised it, a broken nation.⁸⁷

Gullett's own bitterness was not assuaged even by his confidence in 'how grand life will be when this war is behind us'. Yet he well understood the privileged position that he held, for though a soldier, in reality he straddled the boundary between the civilian and military worlds. His awkwardness is palpable when he admits to Penelope that though he would have been proud to lead Australian troops it would have been 'grossly unfair to you and to Mother when a far more useful job like this was offered'.⁸⁸ He had volunteered for active service but had been transferred out of an artillery unit just before its shift to the front. Although his new role was difficult and not without its dangers, it was not front line service as his comrades experienced it. It is interesting that in the post-war years when Gullett assumed the mantle of spokesman for returned soldiers or was prominent in discussions about defence preparations that there was no attempt to question his right to do so, however unjust such an attempt would have been. When courage and resilience were called for, Gullett was not found wanting. His was an honourable service but as would be shown with attacks on Robert Menzies, the sense that some had sacrificed more than others was a political tool wielded by many, Gullett included.

Unlike so many of the soldiers who faced the last year of the conflict, Gullett could at least reassure his family that he was eighty miles behind the front and unlikely to be in any danger for many months. The inactivity left him bored and depressed and sick of the endless routine of life in the camps. For some months in late 1917 and the first part of 1918 Gullett endured a nomadic existence as he moved between Desert Mounted Corps HQ followed by 10 days each with the 67th Squadron Australian Flying Corps, 3rd Light Horse Brigade and the 4th Light Horse Brigade. This period of wandering was followed by a month with the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade and two months at the 2nd Light Horse Brigade HQ before being appointed Officer in Command (OIC), sub section Australian War Records in May 1918. The movement could not conceal from Gullett that he was neither enduring the dangers of front line duties nor offering a service to his country that was anything other than incidental.

Gullett's sense of isolation and depression would not have been helped by the success of the German March Offensive on the Western Front. He felt a sense of doom when news reached

⁸⁷ J Beaumont (2013) *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin).

⁸⁸ HG – PG, 1 Feb. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/76.

him that the British had been swept away like ‘chaff’ by a German Army driving for the Channel. Saddened by the loss of places that were ‘as much ours as home itself’ he now resigned himself to the war continuing into 1919. After so many years of sacrifice, Gullett feared that the AIF would be ‘a shattered remnant when this year’s hard work is done’. He was also aware of the inevitable disconnect between those who had served in a war of such magnitude and those who had not. Officers returning from leave in Australia arrived ‘bitter and sore’ while Gullett had come to ‘loathe the casual indifferent attitude of ... men who have not known France ... Poor strutting fools’.⁸⁹

The long separation from his family also continued to prey on his mind. In May 1918 Gullett discussed at some length with Penelope their shared concern about having spoiled Jo. Showing a particular sensitivity to the public embarrassment that his misbehaviour might visit on them, he urged Penelope to be sterner in her discipline:

I beg you not to spare him. I don’t mean that you should take the hide off him (not that he runs much risk) but beat him plenty if he needs it + above all don’t let him be exhibited. That is the evil that I have always feared. I was just as foolish as you. More so. But he is older now.⁹⁰

He suggested that she treat Jo as a ‘commonplace bush boy’ and to remember the ‘hackneyed old rule to be seen and not heard’. In Gullett’s view Jo needed to be kept away from visitors and especially soldiers who ‘are so generous and appreciative’ that they ‘coax all the ... cheek’. Gullett did not wish to appear ‘in his dear mind as a terrible paternal schoolmaster’, but if he found him ‘bumptious’ he was prepared ‘to flog and chide it out of him’. Gullett saw part of the problem stemming from ‘the time in which we live’, but in ‘these days too we appreciate the qualities most to be desired in a boy are not mental, but simple qualities of plain, brave, unselfish manhood’. These are the qualities he would later immortalise in his vision of the Australian soldier at war. He held that same vision for his son. For if he was ‘a good natural unselfish boy I shall all my life rejoice and ask for no brilliance or conspicuous ability’.⁹¹ Late in life, Jo conceded that during the war his mother and grandmother had indeed spoiled him, but once they were settled in Australia, his father played a far more active role in his upbringing and insisted on elementary obedience and politeness.

⁸⁹ HG – PG, 13 April 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/122.

⁹⁰ HG – PG, 29 May 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/422.

⁹¹ HG – PG, 29 May 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/422.

By June 1918 Gullett had all but given up hope of leave for London given that he believed that it would be blocked by an un-named Colonel 'of the small breed' who was motivated by a desire 'to gratify his ungenerous spirit'. Yet this pettiness was not confined to just the matter of leave:

The war has gone too long. You miss today that ... spirit of service which was so prominent at the outset. But only among the non-combatants who are demoralised by soft jobs [and] the smallness of the work. [But for the combatants] the fighting war goes on. To him slackness means death, apart from that the service does seem to have given a touch of nobility to many.⁹²

His dissatisfaction was both personal and professional. In a letter to Treloar in June 1918 written from Cairo, he admitted that he now considered the chance of an appointment as correspondent as 'dead' as a result of what he saw as the sustained opposition of the newspaper proprietors and journalists.⁹³ Twelve days earlier Bean assured Gullett that he was doing all that he could to arrange the appointment. Given that he had indicated that a decision was imminent three months earlier, this may well not have offered any reassurance. Bean blamed the blurring of the lines of responsibility between the Colonial Office and the High Commission.⁹⁴ Clearly it had been consigned to a bureaucratic limbo which in Gullett's view could only be the result of 'culpable ignorance' of the importance of the Light Horse and its role in the war against Turkey:

It won Palestine and from now on Palestine depends upon it more each day. Our Force and the N.Z. Bge did practically all the work up to Gaza. From Gaza to Jaffa it was the spearhead all the way. Then the Infantry did fine work in the hills and now we have run two great but impossible shows across the Jordan. From now on our responsibility will greatly increase. For three years these men have lived like dogs. They have fought far more constantly and strenuously than any outsider knows. Their casualties are light compared to yours in France but they still have been substantial ... When first I came out I found them in rest after the

⁹² HG – PG, 14 June 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/351.

⁹³ HG – JT, 20 June 1918. Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013/63.

⁹⁴ CB – HG, 5 March 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38.

long drive – fresh from Menin Road as I was – I was biased against them. Since then I know their work better.⁹⁵

This sense of disconnect from Europe was matched by an exposure to the tyranny of distance first hand, one that compelled Gullett to request an increase in his allowances. As he informed Treloar, the line being held by the Australians was 20 to 25 miles from Corps HQ, 60 miles from GHQ and 360 miles from Cairo and brigades in rest were 30 to 60 miles from brigades in the line. The roads were hilly and rough and break downs were frequent. Gullett also included the none-too subtle observation that he was working side by side with a correspondent who was being paid £1000 a year plus expenses.⁹⁶ The continuing separation from Penelope and the sense that he was now a forgotten individual in a forgotten army encouraged a more proactive move on the part of the restless Gullett. In the third week of June he recommended that a start be made on the history immediately. Rather fortuitously he found a major stumbling block in his access to British records given that as each unit left the theatre they took their records with them. As the material ‘already grows old and cold and each day becomes harder to handle’ he suggested that he make an immediate and lengthy return to London.⁹⁷ The failure of this transparent effort to arrange a return to his family would not have improved his mood.

Despite his dissatisfaction and growing frustration, Gullett gave his country good service in the Middle East. He might easily have spent most of his time in Cairo but instead travelled widely and was not shy of either discomfort or danger. In his work for the Australian High Commission Gullett had written when directed. Now with his nation at war, he required no direction and in fact agitated for an opportunity to write about the contribution of the Light Horse to the war against Turkey. In doing so, Gullett would reassure them that their service and sacrifice was valued. At a personal level, Gullett would no doubt have wanted to write so that he could feel that he was making an immediate contribution to the war effort rather than working in the service of posterity, a desire that he made clear in a letter to Bean:

We are running short of reinforcements. I don't pretend to much pen power, but given the right to tell of this Force, and if I could not keep up the supply of L.H

⁹⁵ HG – CB, 20 May 1918. Papers of William Morris Hughes. NLA MS1538/23/76.

⁹⁶ HG – JT, 29 July 1918. Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013/36.

⁹⁷ HG – JT, 20 June 1918. Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013.

men I would be a duffer indeed. In choking publicity our Government is playing right into the hands of the Antis, whose policy is the suppression of all that is to the honour of the men who are away. I could paw the air at the sheer stupidity of it. I can get no support here. If Pearce will take no notice of it, as he won't, then I have only you and Murdoch to lean upon. Do try and stir Keith the Faithful. You will have Hughes among you. Try and interest him. We want

1. A correspondent (I don't care who it is)
2. A fair deal in official communiques
3. Fair representation on all staffs and in such services as Remounts, Ordnance, etc

In short, we want an independent man to come here and see the rottenness of things. One important point is that even if the big dailies did not publish stuff from here, the Country press would and that is where we get our men.⁹⁸

Although the Light Horse was understandably keen to have a correspondent attached to the Force, they were considerably less interested than their Western Front counterparts in collecting trophies for the planned War Memorial. Gullett found them 'philosophically indifferent to the outside world' and possessing 'little belief ... in any future existence in Australia or any other civilisation' and thus caring 'damn all about trophies or any other records'. Gullett believed that this stemmed from the widely held belief that they had been ignored by the Australian government and the AIF. This made the collection of photographs and trophies problematic as '99 percent of the Light Horse [regard it] as a vast joke and the man pushing the scheme is looked upon as a genial eccentric, with an incomprehensible appetite for the heat and dust of the Jordan'.⁹⁹ In addition, the unit diaries were 'slender' leading Gullett to observe ruefully that the light horseman 'is not a genius with a pen'.¹⁰⁰

Even if the Light Horse was indifferent to posterity, Gullett was not. In a letter to Bean he showed that he had not divested himself of an advertiser's sensibilities. He suggested that a dozen stories written for the Australian State School books would be welcomed by the respective Ministers for Education. Gullett feared that in Australia there was a significant

⁹⁸ HG – CB, 20 May 1918. Papers of William Morris Hughes. NLA MS1538, 23/76.

⁹⁹ HG – JT, 29 July 1918. Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013/36.

¹⁰⁰ HG-CB, 4 January 1918. Bean, Diary, AWM38 3DRL 606/97/1, Jan.-Feb.1918.

body of people who would seek to ‘suppress the war and deny recognition to the AIF. Their very attitude and conscience will insist upon such an attitude’. Looking already to the post-war world, he believed that we cannot ‘commence too soon to get to work upon the next generation’.¹⁰¹ Gullett sought a more immediate audience by producing a book which documented the campaign in a manner similar to Bean’s *The Anzac Book*. He subsequently acted as joint editor of *Australia in Palestine*, rightly lauded as an outstanding record of the campaign.¹⁰² He also broached the possibility of an exhibition of Australian pictures in Cairo with a ‘good selection’ that focused on the Light Horse. Gullett noted that the ‘picturesqueness of the Old Camel leads to the Imperial Camel Brigade (now extinct) getting an amount of publicity which is somewhat injurious to the vanity of the vastly more important Light Horse’.¹⁰³

Like Bean, Gullett found it difficult to do full justice to the variety of tasks that confronted him. He initially found Lieutenant Hector Dinning, the then commanding officer of the War Records section to be a very likable man.¹⁰⁴ He eventually came to believe, however, that he was ‘hopeless’ and the ‘man on trophies even worse’. Gullett believed that Dinning was the real culprit and found much to criticise in his decision to stay in Cairo when the final push was on.¹⁰⁵ Unlike many of his colleagues, Dinning had responded to his exotic surroundings with considerable enthusiasm. Even though he described the bazaars of Damascus as being covered in ‘offal, refuse and foul puddles’ and giving rise to a stench that ‘you will remember forever’, he still believed that there was ‘beauty in every foot of it’.¹⁰⁶ In *Nile to Aleppo: With the Light Horse in the Middle East*, Dinning describes the destruction of war with sympathy and understanding. Yet it is not a conventional war memoir as such, for it does not touch on his war work and in fact reads as a travelogue in which the war takes its place in the narrative next to interesting locals, hotels, travelling companions and sightseeing trips. Being in the company of so enthusiastic a tourist may well have grated on the impatient Gullett, who really just wanted to go home.

¹⁰¹ HG – CB, 2 Aug. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38/116.

¹⁰² Hill, ‘Gullett’.

¹⁰³ HG – CB, 2 Aug. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38/116.

¹⁰⁴ HG – PG, 16 April 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/444.

¹⁰⁵ HG – PG, 20 Oct. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/284.

¹⁰⁶ H Dinning (1920) *Nile to Aleppo: With the Light Horse in the Middle East* (East Sussex: The Naval and Military Press), p. 93.

Less than enthusiastic collectors or not, the Light Horse did add to the growing collection one of its great treasures, which in Gullett's opinion was 'worth a trip to the Pole'.¹⁰⁷ The Shellal mosaic, a Christian relic from the sixth century, was discovered partially exposed in a captured Turkish machine gun position overlooking the Beersheba road during the second battle of Gaza in April 1917. The British cast 'covetous eyes' over the prize, arguing that it could not be rightly considered a trophy of war.¹⁰⁸ Gullett pursued a line of thinking that might easily be described as 'finders keepers'. He fleshed it out sufficiently by adding that it had been captured in a Turkish trench by the Australian Light Horse, had the marks of Turkish entrenching tools on it, had been recovered after 'much labour' and was 'taken in the desert between Egypt and Palestine where it could never be seen except by a few scientific travellers'.¹⁰⁹ Bean and Treloar also applied pressure to ensure that Australia retained ownership of the mosaic. It was eventually allotted to Australia and remains part of the Australian War Memorial Collection.

Although Gullett was well aware that the Australians were at war with the Turks and their German allies, in the quest for trophies there was an enemy closer to home which he needed to confront. Although GHQ had given permission for Gullett to collect war trophies, it was under the direction of Major Beccles Wilson, a British officer. It was not, as Gullett opined, 'a desirable arrangement' but it was one that can 'be made to serve'. The way this would be best achieved, in Gullett's view, was with a mix of aggressive straight talking, subterfuge and a post-war appeal to the British to be reasonable:

He seemed quite hopeless but after a very plain talk on our side he has been more amenable. I don't fear him getting hold of anything we collect and shall in accordance with your policy try and see that he doesn't learn too much of any schemes which we hope to be exclusive ... Unfortunately B.W is in a position where he can easily beat us for the more important historical things relating to the Force as a whole. But after the war we can no doubt make a request for a reasonable share of such articles.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ HG – JT, 27 May 1918, Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013/36.

¹⁰⁸ McKernan, *Here is their Spirit*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ HG – Secretary, War Trophies Committee, 18 March 1918, Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013/42.

¹¹⁰ HG – JT, 20 June 1918. Written records, 1914-18 War: War Records Section, DO correspondence with Lieut H S Gullett, AWM 25/1013.

Bean was also very wary of dealing with the British over the question of war trophies, an attitude partially fuelled by his ambitions for the Australian War Museum which were almost without limit. He was determined that the Australian Museum would be the finest in the world, comparable even to the British Museum or the Louvre. To compete with the proposed British War Museum Bean believed it necessary to use all ‘the brains, imagination, and agility of intellect and energy which Australians have’. He placed considerable faith in Gullett’s ‘tact and diplomacy’ to prevent the British Army from claiming the best pieces and copying the Australian plans. Bean feared that the Australian Museum would then be little more than ‘an inferior duplicate of the big Museums in England’.¹¹¹

Although plans for the post-war years dominated some of Gullett and Bean’s thinking, there was still the small matter of the three Turkish armies blocking the Allied advance. To protect his inland flank and to divert attention away from the coastal plain where he was readying his army, Allenby decided it was vital that the Jordan Valley be occupied during the summer of 1918. One cavalry division and two infantry brigades would hold the valley and engage in various subterfuges such as dummy camps, horses, and ammunition dumps complete with narrow gauge rail lines leading to them. While the Turks watched developments in the Jordan, the other three cavalry divisions and five infantry divisions moved to positions behind the extreme left of the Allied line. Once the offensive resumed, Allenby’s plan was for the infantry to punch a hole through the Turkish forces on the coast. The cavalry would then ride hard for the Plain of Armageddon and isolate the Turkish Seventh and Eighth Armies. The troops left in the Jordan Valley to the west would then exploit any success.

Though the loss to disease while holding the bridgeheads across the Jordan would be less than those incurred in retaking them once the offensive resumed, this may not have proved much comfort to the Desert Mounted Corps who then spent a very long, hot, and disease plagued summer in the Jordan Valley. The extent of the suffering would have surprised few, given that the official military handbook for Palestine stated that ‘nothing is known of the climate of the Lower Jordan Valley in summer time since no civilised human being has yet been found to spend a summer there’.¹¹² By July 1918 daytime temperatures exceeded 54 ° C and by August 600 Australians were being evacuated from the line each month due to

¹¹¹ CB – Brigadier General Thomas Henry Dodds, quoted in a letter to HG, 21 March 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38.

¹¹² R Preston (1921) *The Desert Mounted Corps: an Account of the Cavalry Operations in Palestine and Syria, 1917-1918*, p. 177. <http://archive.org/details/desertmountedcor00pres>. Date retrieved 23 Nov. 2015.

sickness. In a letter to Penelope in May Gullett described the temperatures as ‘unspeakable’, so hot that ‘you can scarce breath in it’. From a man who had been present at the opening of the battle at Ypres in September 1917 and seen the carnage there, his observation that he had never felt more sorry for troops offers a poignant insight into the extent of their suffering.¹¹³

In contrast to the desperation evident in his correspondence in May and June, in early July Gullett wrote to Penelope and noted that although ‘the valley has outclassed itself today’ and that he had ‘eaten dust for hours’, he was ‘in good trim’ and felt capable of ‘walking to London’.¹¹⁴ Writing five days later from Jerusalem, however, he again despaired at the boredom and admitted to feeling ‘lonely to desperation’, unable to even find solace in his work ‘because it does not interest me when you are not there’.¹¹⁵ However, news from the Western Front had bolstered his spirits for he did not believe ‘for a minute the enemy will fight to a finish. A few knocks and the promise of more and you will see great advances for peace’.¹¹⁶ His brightened spirits were also evident in a letter written three days later:

Dear wife, I may be forty but I doubt it ... I am proof that romance and forty go gaily together. No love exalted youth ever looked more eagerly for his letter than I do for yours. My love grows strong through the years. Our separation only brings you nearer.¹¹⁷

Having endured months of frustration and seeing no break in the monotony, any plans that Gullett had for getting himself to London were dashed later in July. His long awaited appointment as the official correspondent made an absence from the Middle East impossible, a point he laboured to make in a letter to Penelope:

The position is this. The whole force has resented having no publicity and there has been the strongest [feeling] that I should do it. Now it is agreed so I feel it would be very questionable [to leave now]. I know how you will feel it. Just as I do. But there are some 15 000 to 20 000 men here and most of them have been

¹¹³ HG – PG, 19 May 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/140.

¹¹⁴ HG – PG, 7 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/172.

¹¹⁵ HG – PG, 12 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/176.

¹¹⁶ HG – PG, 18 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/183.

¹¹⁷ HG – PG, 21 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/183.

away for years. They and their people at home will be pleased to see the Light Horse written about.¹¹⁸

Gullett also acknowledged that the frustration and the separation had taken a toll. He had a ‘bad bout [of depression] a while back but happily I am at present more cheerful and I trust you will not fret about it’.¹¹⁹ To show how quickly the end came once Allenby’s offensive breached the Turkish lines, Gullett promised that if the line was not in turmoil, he would make it to London before the end of the year. He also broached the possibility with Penelope that she might make the journey from London to the Middle East. Gullett was aware, however, that she would have to be engaged in war work of some kind which would necessitate leaving Jo in London. The submarine threat also made it a potentially dangerous decision. Though his letters displayed regular attempts to be optimistic, the observation that in America the cost of insuring against submarine attack had halved looked ‘promising for future travel’ may not have provided much comfort.¹²⁰

Such was his listlessness, Gullett even entertained taking a journey up the Nile to Khartoum if the war continued into 1919 to investigate a post-war scheme to take advantage of this ‘amazingly fertile’ land. To show the extent of his frustration, in the same letter Gullett also observed that he was ‘writing very well these days’ and believed that he ‘could take a run at something ambitious’ for he had ‘never felt mentally so fit and calm’.¹²¹ The four year anniversary of the outbreak of war did nothing to improve his state of mind and in a letter to Penelope he came perilously close to questioning the reason for Britain’s involvement:

Four years today. You know all my thoughts about it. We dared them to take it as a thing of intent. We are wiser now. I strive to be philosophical and to recall worse that has befallen others but the result is not peace of mind. I know how unsettled and unhappy you are.¹²²

It was also a time spent ruminating on the nature of the Australian male as laid bare by the demands of four years of war. For he believed that the ‘world can never know another AIF. They could be the children only of a great free new country’. The death of a friend also

¹¹⁸ HG – PG, 26 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/205.

¹¹⁹ HG – PG, 26 July 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/205.

¹²⁰ HG – PG, 24 Aug. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/255.

¹²¹ HG – PG, 24 Aug. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/255.

¹²² HG – PG, 4 Aug. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/234.

emphasised to Gullett that the sacrifice was not spread evenly. For though he had ‘no regrets about my humble service and our sacrifices’ he took comfort in the fact that ‘of all my friends of my age – few of who came up – that old extra special Robbie saw it as I did and did what he could’.¹²³ He would have been heartened by being made a Companion of the Order of the Bath, ‘not the decorations and mentions of his cousin Sid, nor the distinction in battle of Sid’s younger brother who was killed in action; but it was welcome recognition of the earnest and sometimes dangerous duties to which he had been summoned’.¹²⁴

Gullett’s appointment as the ‘Official Reporter of the Australian troops in Egypt and Palestine’ came just in time to cover the final offensives which ended in the rout of the Turkish forces in the region. The treatment he subsequently endured showed that even four years of loyal service from her correspondents and the dissatisfaction felt at the lack of interest shown in the Light Horse’s achievements in the Middle East had not entirely removed the army’s enduring suspicion of the press:

The censorship is extraordinary even with my knowledge of what is common in France. The usual procedure is for the article to be read by everybody remotely associated with the subject treated. First, they are read by the Press Officer who makes suggestions but not alterations. Second, by the Chief Censor who makes both alterations and suggestions. Third, by the Operations Branch, and fourth, by the C in C. By this time the unhappy correspondent, or rather his article as it finally emerges, is highly suggestive of the first literary effort of a fellaheen writing on the war from Upper Egypt.¹²⁵

Gullett was not of a temperament to suffer in silence and ‘made what disturbance I could, practically refusing to continue unless a little more generosity was shown’. The result was ‘immediate and substantial’ in that he was permitted to mention ‘for Australian consumption alone the names of officers who were doing well’. That concession was rescinded almost immediately when he attempted to name Australian aircrew. Gullett assured Bean that he was ‘going forth to do battle on the subject this morning’. Tongue in cheek, Gullett added that ‘on the whole the outlook as far as the Censor is concerned is now quite good although the practice of submitting articles to the majority of officers and other ranks means that the

¹²³ HG – PG, 2 Aug. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/228.

¹²⁴ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 244.

¹²⁵ HG – CB, 3 Sept. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38/116.

Censor is a proud man if he posts them within a week of getting them'.¹²⁶ Even if the Army had cooperated with Gullett the drip feed of news from the Middle East would have continued given the once monthly mail service to Australia. It was, as Gullett observed, hopeless in a journalistic sense even though the Light Horse appreciated a mention of any description.

Like the other correspondents Gullett accepted that censorship in some form was an unavoidable limitation in wartime. He assumed, too hastily as later events would show that as an official historian he would be free to write what he wished once the war finished. If he found any post-war obstacle 'to plain speaking' he made it clear even at this early stage that he would withdraw from the project. He acknowledged that though his writing would be 'harsh upon various people – and Australians among them ... honest it will be'.¹²⁷ It was not just censorship that occupied his mind. Gullett believed that it was just a symptom of a wider mindset. Following an argument with an 'Imperial Colonel' who was 'far from being a combatant' Gullett criticised the lack of faith in one's own people that underpinned some of the more petty restrictions. In this officer Gullett saw the personification of the 'superior professional soldiers who believe the public to be fools and currs (sic); who has absurd tales of the panic in London during each air raid and believes the war should be run by GHQ alone and that the public should be told nothing'. Gullett did not compromise, though he was satisfied that he had 'maintained the high ground'. The war 'gets enough', Gullett reasoned, 'without stultifying one's honest views'. This narrow-mindedness and lack of sympathy 'betrays the greatness of us all'.¹²⁸

One of Gullett's first articles was indicative of the general ignorance of the Light Horse's contribution to the war against Turkey. Far from being a coverage of recent events, it was a general survey of what the Light Horse had achieved in the years after the evacuation from Gallipoli. No regular newspaper reader in Australia would have required a similar background to the fighting on the Western Front that included the Somme or Ypres. Nevertheless, it was a different war situation than Gullett had confronted while in Europe. Although the Allies had struggled through the summer of 1918 their opponents were in even worse shape. Having found themselves outnumbered and at the mercy of a failing supply

¹²⁶ HG – CB, 3 Sept. 1918. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38/116.

¹²⁷ HG – PG, 1 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/54.

¹²⁸ HG – PG, 8 Jan. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/16.

system, the three much depleted armies of Army Group F were in no state to continue prosecuting the war. Gullett noted, however, that the Turks ‘have been always aggressive, and fights have been frequent and sharp. Our line has been resolutely maintained, with heavy Turkish and German losses’.¹²⁹ By September 1918 Gullett was buoyed by a hope that the war might be approaching its end, although he was resigned to it continuing into 1919:

The position here is very obscure. We are very strong ... I should not be surprised if one day I’ve awakened to find the Turks flying the white flag. How good if we could [defeat] one of the enemy powers and the news from France grows better and still better. If we can knock him about like this today we shall next year smash him altogether.¹³⁰

This flash of hope faded, for three days later he again complained of being ‘bored to death’ and lamenting that ‘no one is in the faintest bit interested in the small talk we can write’. Instead the public only wanted news of ‘victories and Western victories at that’.¹³¹ Yet events were moving far more quickly than Gullett might have imagined. The day after he wrote these words a bombardment that was not unusual for the Western Front but was ferocious in its intensity by the standards of the war in the Middle East opened a campaign that would destroy three Turkish armies in little more than a month. Once the infantry breached the Turkish Line, the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions followed by the Desert Mounted Corps galloped through and struck deep into the Turkish rear. The Anzac Mounted Division, which had remained in the Jordan Valley as part of Chaytor’s Force, then engaged the Turkish Fourth Army in mountainous terrain. Within a week the Turkish Seventh and Eighth Armies were destroyed and the Fourth was in retreat. Moving north into Syria, Allenby captured Damascus on 1 October, Homs on October 17 and Aleppo on October 26. Four days later Turkey signed an armistice. The battle, ‘one of history’s masterpieces’ is given an added claim to the immortality ascribed to it by Liddell Hart by its link to the Biblical Armageddon.¹³² According to the Book of Revelation 16:16 it would be on this ground that five armies would meet in an apocalyptic confrontation that would culminate in the end of the world. Though not quite the end of the world, the scope of Allenby’s plan was indeed

¹²⁹ *Mercury*, 31 Aug. 1918 p. 7.

¹³⁰ HG – PG, 9 Sept. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/266.

¹³¹ HG – PG, 12 Sept. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/9/269.

¹³² B Liddell Hart (1992) *History of the First World War* (London: Papermac), p. 432. It would have also appealed to Liddell Hart on the grounds that it appeared to support his view that the war might have been won by sea power and success in peripheral campaigns. Modern scholarship has cast serious doubt on that assertion.

brehtaking. Seeking some historical context, Liddell Hart was compelled to make comparisons with Caesar, Scipio, Cromwell, Moltke and finally even Napoleon. Even Allenby was moved enough to write home that he was ‘absolutely aghast at the [excellence] of the victory’ which was in reality an excellent example of a well conducted all arms offensive.¹³³

With the months of inactivity now forgotten, Gullett’s reporting during this triumph was vivid and skilful, with his approach and language well suited to communicating the rapidity with which the Turkish defences crumbled.¹³⁴ He described the opening attack as so ‘swift and absolute’ that it left the Turks ‘completely surprised’ and with little option other than to surrender or to retreat with ‘galloping cavalry with sword and lance ... thundering at their heels’. The Turks’ only concern was to ‘make their surrender clear before they were run through by the exultant Indians and Yeomanry’. Finally Gullett wrote the phrase that every correspondent had yearned to write during the Battle of the Somme two years before: ‘the road was open for the British Army’.¹³⁵ It was, without doubt, stirring stuff. In 42 days fighting from 19 September to 31 October 1918, Chauvel’s Desert Mounted Corps covered 800 kilometres and captured 80 000 prisoners.

In the midst of the celebrations, Gullett took stock of the routed enemy. His generally sympathetic portrayal of the Turks was ideologically consistent with the pattern established by Bean in his reports from Gallipoli in which he characterised them as ‘worthy adversaries’.¹³⁶ It was, however, a different army they faced in the final months of the war. Having ‘lost any semblance of morale’, the Turks were ‘crazy for mercy’ and ‘waving white flags of all sizes’. They were ‘seized with panic’ and as their discipline collapsed ‘they become a fugitive rabble’ which ‘invariably surrendered on the galloping approach of steel’.¹³⁷ Gullett later offered a more nuanced appreciation of the Turkish armies. He was certain that the British triumph was not lessened by the acknowledgement that the Turks were no longer the force they had been at Gallipoli or Romani. Gallipoli had ‘stirred’ the Turkish soldiers to a ‘passionate temper, fierce energy and unselfish sacrifice’ that proved to his enemies that he was a ‘strong patriot and a religious fanatic’. At Romani he was excited with

¹³³ J Bou (2010) *Light Horse: A History of Australia’s Mounted Arm* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), pp. 194-5.

¹³⁴ Anderson and Trembath, *Witnesses to War*, p. 83.

¹³⁵ *Register*, 21 Sept. 1918, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Anderson and Trembath, *Witnesses to War*, p. 60.

¹³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Sept. p. 11; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Sept. 1918, p. 13.

the rich promise of Egypt. Nevertheless he remained ‘a foe to be respected, a resolute defensive fighter and one of the surest riflemen of the war’. Yet if his line was broken and his flanks threatened, Gullett believed that as events showed, he would ‘crumble to pieces’.¹³⁸

Worthy adversaries or not, Gullett’s description of the Turks, both in his correspondence and later in the official history, were pervaded by pronounced racial, nationalist and Social Darwinist features.¹³⁹ Chris Lee identifies a contrast in Gullett’s representation of the Light Horse as ‘spiritually ennobled Christian warriors’ and the ‘people of the East [who] are motivated by a mixture of fanaticism and illicit desire that is incompatible with the rational and ethical virtues that distinguish a Christian civilisation’.¹⁴⁰ Gullett conceded in 1923 that the Australians and the British generally found him ‘a clean and even a chivalrous fighter, and a docile, tractable, unresentful prisoner’. Yet he also identified ‘another and a sinister side to his character’, one that showed itself when ‘turned loose with licence to do their worst upon the unhappy Armenians’. Here they engaged in ‘every conceivable act of unchivalry, cowardice, and indescribable violence’. The Turks’ ‘latent passion for lust and plunder’ saw them revel ‘in the horrible work because they enjoyed it, because it sated their desires and gave to them and to their race the wealth of the fairest and richest provinces of the Empire’. Simply put, if one appealed to his baser side, as the Turkish leadership did, ‘he will burn, ravish, and mutilate’.¹⁴¹ Gullett was more circumspect in a letter to Penelope when he described the surrender of 100 Turks in late November 1917:

A fine body of young men, not dissimilar to our own in physique – spare and very supple. They looked a decent lot and so far as fighting goes they are. There is an entire absence of feeling between our men and them. No killing of prisoners here. Altogether pleasant war of the old sort.¹⁴²

Among these vacillations, Gullett acknowledged that the Turks possessed capacities as soldiers that the Light Horsemen respected. But they were not considered equals:

They [the Light Horseman] knew also his lack of personal initiative and his feebleness as an individual fighter in the open. Every Australian and New

¹³⁸ *Morning Bulletin*, 19 Dec. 1918, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Anderson and Trembath, *Witnesses to War*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁰ Lee, ‘War’, p. 92.

¹⁴¹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 6.

¹⁴² HG – PG, 30 Nov. 1917. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/35.

Zealander respected the Turk as a soldier; but every trooper felt his man-to-man superiority over the enemy; and that consciousness, natural to men of a superior race, endured throughout the campaign. 'The light horseman,' said an experienced Australian officer during the campaign, looks upon the Turk as a superior nigger'.¹⁴³

It was not an Australian and Turkish war alone, and Gullett was consistent in his praise of all elements of the force, though the level of his sincerity did vary. The censor in the Middle East, at least in Gullett's view, was disinclined to see the Australians receive due credit for their achievements. The Australian correspondents, notably Bean at Pozières and later in the final battles in 1918, attracted the ire of the field censors when their reports became too obviously a vehicle for the expression of Australian nationalism. Gullett's nationalism was just as overt, perhaps even more so, though he was prepared to speak highly of Allies who displayed 'Australian' qualities. The New Zealanders were also 'pioneers, or the children of pioneers, born to and practised in country life, natural horsemen and expert riflemen', so they were especially worthy of acclaim. If not quite the Australian's equal they were nevertheless almost indistinguishable in battle:

Closer in physical type than the Australians to the big men of England's northern counties and to the Lowland Scotch, they perhaps lacked something of the almost aggressive independence of thought and individuality of action which marked the Australians. They represented in fact a younger dominion than the Australians; they were more closely, although not more purely, bred to the parent British stock, more 'colonial' and less 'national' in their outlook than their Australian comrades in the division.¹⁴⁴

Gullett did try to spread the credit among the Allied force - the British, Indian, and French infantry 'fought grandly', the Arabs under Lawrence made 'fine efforts' with their 'escapades of blowing up railways and raiding Turkish posts' while the 'airmen, including the Australian Flying Corps, continue ceaselessly to harass the beaten enemy with bombs and machine-guns'.¹⁴⁵ The leadership of the offensive was not forgotten either, for the 'bold staff

¹⁴³ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁴ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Sept. 1918, p. 11; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Sept. 1918, p. 13; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Sept. 1918, p. 13.

conception was brilliantly executed by all services'.¹⁴⁶ It was a 'fine strategy' that had 'achieved so great a success at a cost so trifling'.¹⁴⁷

Gullett's proximity to the action lent a vitality to his reporting that was often missing in his reports from the Western Front. At one point he joined an expedition of armoured cars in an advance on Haifa that 'was marked by splendid dash and daring'. Gullett described speeding over the hills of Lower Galilee, crossing 'the Plain of Esdraelon under the shadow of Mount Carmel and sweeping aside an enemy strong point. On reaching the outskirts of the town, the force was met with heavy fire but with 'their mission fully accomplished, the cars pulled out slowly, marching the prisoners before them, all the while fighting a vigorous rear guard action'.¹⁴⁸ This proximity, bordering on outright participation, was in marked contrast to the orchestrated tours of the Western Front three years before. Philip Gibbs believed that as a journalist and writer he was an 'onlooker of life,' standing in the 'wings of life's drama' but never walking on the stage as one of the actors.¹⁴⁹ Beach Thomas felt that it was natural that 'men of words should wish to be men of deeds'.¹⁵⁰ Though Gullett was more given to action than either Gibbs or Beach Thomas, it would have pleased him to be so close to the fighting after having experienced the frustration of trying to report from the Western Front in 1914 and 1915. He did, however, refer to the force as 'they', perhaps indicating that he kept some distance between himself and the subject. Yet he was anything but a disinterested observer.

Gullett found the region's Biblical connections compelling, never more so than when he saw light horsemen bathing in the Sea of Galilee. If this was not enough to recall the New Testament, it was followed by 'two tumultuous little storms which disturbed the waters' and which were immediately followed by calm.¹⁵¹ There was local colour as well that hinted at an exotic land. Gullett had earlier been much attracted by the beauty of the Jewish settlement in Likera which was surrounded by Australian eucalyptus and flourishing orchards but it was the impact of the destruction of the Turkish forces on the local populace which particularly attracted his attention.¹⁵² The proportion of Christians visible in the streets had increased and Gullett was appreciative of the sincerity of their welcome. Yet the Moslems appeared

¹⁴⁶ *West Australian*, 24 Sept. 1918, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Register*, 25 Sept. 1918, p. 7; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Sept. 1918, p. 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Register*, 26 Sept. 1918, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ P Gibbs (1957) *Life's Adventure* (London: Angus & Robertson), p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ W Beach Thomas (1925) *A Traveller in News* (London: Chapman and Hall), p. 131.

¹⁵¹ *Register*, 30 Sept. 1918, p. 5.

¹⁵² *Register*, 21 Sept. 1918, p. 7.

indifferent to the arrival of the British army and went about their usual work without even glancing at the light horsemen who now thronged the bazaar of this old stone town.

One of Gullett's most memorable reports from the Middle East was his description of the fall of Damascus on 1 October 1918. It had the added poignancy of involving the 10th Light Horse regiment (although Gullett mistakenly identified them as the 4th Light Horse Regiment) which had been slaughtered at the Nek in 1915. Four hundred Western Australians entered a city in turmoil and captured 12 000 Turks in a bloodless occupation. It was, as Gullett observed, 'a fitting termination to the wonderful and practically bloodless British ride'.¹⁵³ Gullett portrayed the taking of Damascus as a liberation despite the light horsemen finding the city 'suffocating and squalid, with a stench that they had breathed in elsewhere in cities such as Jerusalem'.¹⁵⁴ He characterised the meeting with their Arab allies as a 'join[ing] of hands' between allied forces who had 'started hundreds of miles apart with two mountain systems intervening' and who are now 'mingling in the midst of the swirling madly excited populace'.¹⁵⁵ Gullett was well aware that to the Arabs, Damascus was 'the dazzling prize', 'the promised reward', 'the oldest city in the world' and a 'city distinguished by the richness and strange character and beauty of its surroundings'. The Arabs had ridden 'in from his tent on the desert, or his little mud village' and was now 'fired with pride [riding] the streets on his sprightly desert horse, his long robes touched with brilliant patches of silks and richly woven Persian saddlebags. His gold and silver scabbards flashed in the sunlight, and he fired his rifle freely at the skies'. Prince Feisal was given an 'almost fanatical greeting' as his supporters 'pelted him with flowers and rare rugs, and showered him with all the scents of the East'.¹⁵⁶

This generosity to the Arabs was not as magnanimous an act on the part of Gullett as it would have appeared to his readers. The British War Office was waging war not only against the Turks and their German allies, but also for post-war influence in the region. It suited them to emphasise to the French the Arab role in the fall of Damascus, a point made with startling clarity when the time came to arrange an armistice. Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his cabinet authorised Admiral Arthur Calthorpe, Britain's naval commander in the Aegean Sea, to negotiate with the Turks without consulting France. Needless to say, this enraged

¹⁵³ *Register*, 20 Dec. 1918, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ R Perry (2010) *The Australian light horse* (Sydney: NSW Hachette), p. 467.

¹⁵⁵ *Register*, 20 Dec. 1918, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Register*, 20 Dec. 1918, p. 8.

Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister. Gullett described his own flirtation with realpolitik in a letter to Chauvel:

On the question of the Arabs v Australians and the entry to Damascus, we are, I fear, butting against policy laid down from London. Apparently the Arabs were to have entered first but did not fancy the job until the Light Horse made the way safe for them. Like the other correspondents I was advised of the policy and asked by GHQ to say anything I could in favour of the Arabs. I disregarded the request and made repeated efforts to disclose that the Australians were first into the town. But the Censor each time took steps to prevent it.

The same policy was adopted in regard to British and Indian troops at Deraa. The Arab was glorified all the way by GHQ. A passing reference I made to the fine work done by the little band of British officers, who directed the Arab operations, was cut out.

I enclose an article I wrote ... giving in some detail the story of the 3rd Brigade's entry. I headed it "First into Damascus". The Censor altered this to "Entry into Damascus". And in the text where I wrote "the first troops into the city were the Light Horsemen from Western Australia" – the Censor altered the sentence to read "first British troops".¹⁵⁷

Though Gullett conceded that the large Hedjaz force had made a sizeable contribution to the war against Turkey, he was nevertheless careful to make an explicit distinction between these forces and the Bedouin. Gullett was well aware that the torture and murder of British prisoners by the Bedouin in April 1916 had set a pattern of interaction that ensured that Australian soldiers would never trust them again, regardless of official directives:

These Arabs are not the semi-civilised Bedouins with whom we are familiar along the Mediterranean. They are Arabs at their best, proud, roaming fighting men from desert places. They are equipped as completely as any British force, and their admirable organisation and the effective campaign they have waged do them great credit.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ HG – HC 1 Jan. 1936, Chauvel Papers, pp. 7-8. In Perry *The Australian light horse*, pp. 478-79.

¹⁵⁸ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 7 Oct. 1918, p. 5.

Once free of censorship, Gullett was far less reticent in voicing his criticisms of the Arabs in the official history. He made use of a string of pejorative descriptions that characterised them as ‘burning to ... plunder ... pillage and murder’ all the while ‘insensible to chivalry and instinctively cruel’.¹⁵⁹ In Gullett’s view, they were always ready to let others do the fighting while they concentrated on the looting. Gullett contrasted the Arabs’ lack of chivalry with what he characterised as the hardest and most distressing task of the campaign. The hospitals in Damascus were crowded with sick and dying Turkish soldiers in conditions that would not have been out of place during the Crimean War. A death rate of seventy a day was quickly reduced to fifteen with many no doubt benefitting from being in the care of Australians rather than the Arabs as Lawrence had demanded.

The military parade that celebrated the fall of the city was a colourful celebration, both of a stunning offensive and the diversity of the Empire that achieved it. It was also a pragmatic statement of where the real power in Damascus resided, for the long columns of artillery, armoured vehicles and mounted troops made it clear that modern war required more than mere bluster. Lawrence, ever the schemer, had won permission from Chauvel for a small detachment of the Sharif’s gendarmerie to clear the way. It was a transparent effort to create the illusion that the Arabs were in fact in charge of Damascus. It fell rather flat, for the sight of Arab horseman, with every second man it seemed to Chauvel, waving a huge Hedjaz flag, only served to emphasise the stark realities of a military occupation. Gullett’s skilful description of the parade did justice to the victory and the men who accomplished it:

This afternoon our general rode through Damascus at the head of a great force of his victorious cavalry. The worn and dusty horsemen included squadrons representative of the whole cosmopolitan host which makes up the largest and most successful mounted body engaged in any theatre of war. Approaching the road from Mecca, the column, extending over many miles, entered the city by the Gates of God, and rode along the narrow winding streets, between dense masses of citizens of many races and religions, in their distinctive gala dress. Behind the throng the horsemen had peeps of colour from the bazaars, glowing with examples of the matchless handicraft of the East, and occasional glimpses of

¹⁵⁹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, pp. 724-27.

slender minarets, rising above the dingy houses, and beautiful gardens of the widespread town. The column made a rare appeal to the imagination.

Past applauding multitudes, all deeply moved if not all enthusiastic, rode the dashing Australian Light Horsemen in the lead, followed by the brilliant cavalry from the Indian Highlands, and then the Yeomanry from the English shires, dark skinned French colonials from Northern Africa, on their Arab stallions, sturdy New Zealand machine gunners, and batteries from England and Scotland. This grand march of fighting men, riding as they ride in battle, with the least ceremonial, was a magnificent demonstration of the might of the British and allied forces.¹⁶⁰

Despite the entire forward area ‘reeling with evil sickness’ Gullett observed the ‘great relief everywhere and joy at the approach of peace’ but it was tinged with sadness.¹⁶¹ The loss of two friends to sickness at this late stage was particularly hard to take:

Many deaths. I am depressed at the loss of two good friends. Lieuts Massy¹⁶² (sic) and Glanfield¹⁶³ both from illness at Damascus. Glanfield from cholera and Massy was one of my favourites here; a dear strong man ... One of those brave fresh smiling personalities. I cannot think him dead: a simple man but a fine cynical twist in his manner; a country man who could walk the world’s finest places as a Gentleman. No country breeds them quite so natural and strong and truer I think as ours. I’m very bitter at this stage. One feels the war is not worth anyone’s life now.¹⁶⁴

On 30 October 1918, aboard the British battleship HMS *Agamemnon*, then at anchor in the port of Mudros on the Aegean island of Lemnos, representatives of Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire signed an armistice that brought the war in the Middle East to a close. Free now to look to the future, Gullett decided that it was neither journalism nor London which were calling as they once did in 1908:

¹⁶⁰ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 7 Oct. 1918, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ HG – PG, 20 Oct. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/284.

¹⁶² Lieutenant Frank Raymond Massie. Died of illness 15 October 1918 and buried in the Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery.

¹⁶³ Lieutenant William D Glanfield. Died of illness 15 October 1918 and buried in the Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery.

¹⁶⁴ HG – PG, 20 Oct. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/284.

I have no ambition in journalism in Australia. It is politics or nothing for me and also I think for you. London would be a surrender – pleasant – but a surrender. Our lives would go gaily enough and we should live in a house beautiful and rejoice in Jo. But feeling as I do today more composed and full of fight than I have ever been, London is not satisfying.¹⁶⁵

It was a decision reached after considerable thought. Determined to be involved in constructive work of some kind, Gullett accepted that he would have to compromise because ‘the Labour people at home will be hard to swallow. And they must be swallowed whole’.¹⁶⁶ His evident disgust at working with the Labour movement showed the extent to which the conservatives had already taken possession of the spirit of Anzac and aligned themselves with those who had fought. Like many others who supported social reform in the pre-war years, after 1918 Gullett found himself increasingly drawn to the conservative side of politics. He nevertheless resolved to curb his ‘restlessness and temper and go in for better or worse’.¹⁶⁷

The closing months of the war was a period of transition for the country just as it was for Gullett. Manning Clark later observed that the emergence of Anzac Day as ‘Australia’s day of glory’ has made the country a ‘prisoner of her past’ with an emotional attachment to the heroism of the Anzacs so pervasive that the founding ideals of Australia, ones which Gullett subscribed to, were ‘cast to the winds’.¹⁶⁸ Yet the war had appeared to legitimise the views of many Australians, Gullett included, regarding nationhood, defence and immigration. A critic might suggest that he had fewer ideals to cast to the winds than others, but what is certain is that unlike the more sensitive and introspective Philip Gibbs, Gullett looked forever outward and forward. He could consign the war to its place in his life narrative rather than have it become the yardstick by which to measure all other experience. This capacity is evident in his letters to Penelope in which he explored his political options, which he characterised as a choice between Labor and the Conservatives:

I have flirted with the idea of the other side but it is no use. I can’t see myself as a champion of fat¹⁶⁹. Having myself attained no fatness it might have been

¹⁶⁵ HG – PG, 3 Nov. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/301.

¹⁶⁶ HG – PG, 3 Nov. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/301.

¹⁶⁷ HG – PG, 3 Nov. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/302.

¹⁶⁸ A Burke (2008) *Fear of Security: Australia’s Invasion Anxiety* (Sydney: Cambridge University Press), p. 49.

¹⁶⁹ Fat, a nineteenth century Australian invention, was cartoonist Will Dyson’s favourite symbol. He represented Capital, Finance and Power; ‘a gross figure of large paunch, top hat, spats and a cigar, the image of greed in a

different. But that I should spend the rest of my life writing to make fat still fatter is unthinkable. Even with riches I think [I would have] been publically for Labour. Without riches the decision is easier. It will be hard to take sides of class [as I have] many good friends in the AIF who are uncompromising. But all in all we have few we care about as far as that. We are so independent and complete in our happiness.¹⁷⁰

Gullett's plan was to write to the new Labor newspaper *The World* without committing himself with the intention of using the press as a political apprenticeship, perhaps in the same way his uncle had done. Though he believed that it would take three years to be elected to parliament, he was confident that advancement would be all but assured.

On 26 November 1918 Bean invited Gullett to join him on a visit to Gallipoli as a member of the Australian Historical Mission. Based on his correspondence with Penelope it appears that the army refused him permission. 'So I determined - as usual - to fight it' and he went so far as to inquire about the availability of a berth on a ship, cabling Bean to make it clear that he was ready to leave and return to Gallipoli via London.¹⁷¹ He told Penelope of his deep disappointment and though there are no record of the details, he did not accompany Bean. To add to his dissatisfaction at how his war was winding up, he viewed with horror the demobilisation plans for the AIF. The decision to break the units up and repatriate the men on the basis of length of service was, in his view, a 'cold blooded scheme'.¹⁷² The shortcomings in the decisions made immediately after the cessation of hostilities would soon be dwarfed by what Gullett would witness at Versailles just over two months later.

world of ignoble advantages. Hackneyed now, the symbol was a notable creation in its day' (V Lindesay (2016) 'Dyson, William Henry (Will) (1880–1938)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dyson-william-henry-will-6074/text10399>. Date retrieved 30 March 2016.

¹⁷⁰ HG – PG, 3 Nov. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/301.

¹⁷¹ HG – PG, 28 Nov. 1918. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/307.

¹⁷² HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/330.

Chapter 7 - Confidant of a Prime Minister

Early in January 1919 Gullett was at Charing Cross Station in central London preparing for yet another lengthy separation from Penelope. He had been home for only a little over a month but was now preparing to journey to the Continent just as he had done in the opening weeks of the war almost five years before. Though he would not officially relinquish his commission until late September 1919, he had been engaged as the Press Liaison Officer for the Australian delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference. Gullett's granddaughter claimed that his appointment was the result of Hughes' mistaken belief that he could speak French. Penelope could but Gullett was 'antipodean, if not antediluvian in his approach to foreign languages'.¹ Regardless of whether that was true or part of family folklore, the error would certainly not have been as instrumental as Gullett's previous work promoting conscription and his mother-in-law's friendship with the Australian prime minister.

In keeping with the uncertainty of the positions he had filled during his earlier journeys from his home in England, which ranged from freelance journalist to official correspondent, lecturer, soldier and historian, his contribution to the Australian effort at Versailles is also difficult to evaluate. Any assessment of the nature or the extent of the personal contributions made by Gullett and the various members of the Australian delegation is inevitably hindered by the considerable shadow cast by the Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes. Chris Lee believes that Gullett was 'highly influential' but despite forging a strong bond with Hughes, there is no evidence that he had any influence on the wider deliberations.² Yet in coming to the attention of the most powerful politician in Australia, Gullett's decision to leave journalism and pursue a political career was seemingly vindicated within months of him broaching it with Penelope. This would have pleased his ambitious mother-in-law for she was if anything more driven than Gullett himself. At times he had to fight to maintain a sense of balance in the face of her now thoroughly revised estimation of his prospects.³

Forever the pragmatist, Gullett was already looking to cement his new found standing in an immediate and practical manner. Hughes' wife was at the station to farewell him, and Gullett,

¹ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 134.

² Lee, 'War', p. 87.

³ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 128.

noting that their daughter was about Jo's age, sensed an opportunity. He wasted no time in suggesting to Penelope, who would also remain in England, that she invite them to tea. At a professional level Gullett was already thinking of transforming his presence at the conference into some kind of written record and asked Penelope to keep his letters so that they might serve as notes. His mother-in-law was busy on that front as well. She was friends with Hughes and had made significant efforts to ensure that his wife felt welcome in London. She well understood the benefits of a well-placed social connection and would almost certainly have sought to use them to further Gullett's career.

On the journey from Charing Cross to Folkestone, Gullett had time to take stock of his companions, particularly Australia's sixth and seventh prime ministers. Sir Joseph Cook was 'a nice old chap – very simple and domestic'.⁴ Gullett was touched when he asked after Penelope and her mother and indicated an interest in meeting the latter. He suspected that Cook had endured a somewhat dull and lonely time in England. Hughes believed Cook to be an unimaginative plodder, though he had been a loyal deputy and an able politician despite his deep mistrust of his prime minister. He probably deserved better from Hughes, but his plight garnered him no sympathy from fellow delegation members Jack Latham⁵ and Frederick Eggleston⁶ who were very critical of his indolence and lack of spirit. Within a few days Gullett was already aware how superfluous he would become when he Cook as 'an amiable passenger but a dear old fellow'.⁷ By contrast, on the journey from London Gullett found Hughes in good form as he entertained his companions with long and amusing descriptions of his droving days and a puppy he had once carried for a thousand miles in a leather bag.

At Folkestone the group dined in company with some of the other Empire delegates, including British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, South African Prime Minister Louis Botha, Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and South African statesman and soldier Jan Smuts. A meal in the company of the most powerful men in the Empire would have emphasised to Gullett the extent of the opportunities that were hourly unfolding in front of him. Lloyd George came in late and 'looked remarkably well and a mass of eager life'. Botha possessed 'one of those old time Dutch dark brown faces with a fine light in it. Large

⁴ HG – PG, 12 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/507.

⁵ Lieutenant Commander John Greig Latham.

⁶ Lieutenant Frederick William Eggleston (assistant to Sir Robert Garran).

⁷ HG – PG, 12 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/511.

luminous dark eyes. I have seldom seen a face I like so well'. Smuts, the only man who would sign the peace treaties ending the First and Second World Wars, was 'plain and lean'. Both South Africans had 'close clipped pointed heads like the Elizabethans'. Borden was described with less panache, with Gullett merely observing that he looked 'respectable'. Of Hughes, it was sufficient to note that 'Billy is himself'.⁸

The delegation stayed in Paris at the Hotel Majestic off the Champs Elysees. The allure of the French capital even left its mark on Hughes who described it as an 'ancient and most wonderful city'. His belief that the delegates were 'gathered together for the amiable purpose of settling the peace of the world' showed him to be a man not easily overawed by an occasion.⁹ Shortly after arriving, Gullett and Keith Murdoch visited the Bois de Boulogne and had coffee in one of the restaurants. Gullett was delighted to find the park little changed from 1914 when he and Penelope had visited. Yet the differences were there if one chose to look. In 1916 Gullett described the 'spirit of the people [as] eager, even elated. The worst is behind, and the bright goal which shines clear ahead is considered worth the price which is daily being paid for it'.¹⁰ Now he found the park 'not so crowded and gay but a cheerful atmosphere and although many black dresses being smart and Parisian withal'.¹¹

The peacemakers at Versailles would fail to do justice to the 'bright goal' that Gullett had seen so clearly three years before. The war had ended so abruptly that the victorious powers found themselves with little idea of how to translate their military success into a sustainable peace. Two months had already passed since the Armistice and it was this lack of purpose and the conflicting desires of the peacemakers that ensured that it was not until 1925 that there was a general détente and a relaxation of tension. At almost a century's distance even as the world still finds itself confronting the ramifications of decisions made at Versailles, it is not difficult to sympathise with the plight of the peacemakers. They existed in an artificial world of Parisian hotels and social functions, all the while conscious of their monumental responsibilities and the complex, often intractable challenges they faced. As the months passed and the pressure and confusion mounted, the atmosphere grew increasingly hysterical.¹² This was hardly surprising, even at the time, for the peacemakers grappled with

⁸ HG – PG, 12 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/507.

⁹ Letter, Prime Minister WM Hughes to the Governor General RM Ferguson, 17 Jan. 1919, Novar papers, NLA. Quoted in 'Australia's Centenary of Federation'. <http://archive.li/DDfc>. Date retrieved 25 June 2017.

¹⁰ *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 4 April 1916, p. 2.

¹¹ HG – PG, 12 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/507.

¹² LF Fitzhardinge (1979) *The Little Digger 1914 – 1952: William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography Vol. II* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson).

two mutually incompatible systems of thought regarding the post-war world. The first was concerned with meting out retribution to the ex-Central Powers and ensuring that they could never again wage war. The second was a commitment to an international organisation which would facilitate a peaceful resolution of international issues underwritten by collective security. As Paul Twomey observes, both were ideals that were pursued but never fully attained. The system adopted was therefore inherently unstable.¹³

Gullett saw some benefit in the dithering for he believed that it allowed time for the negotiators to establish some degree of personal rapport and to explore opportunities for compromise. However he chose to excuse it, Gullett nevertheless recognised that eventually the great issues had to be 'seized and settled'.¹⁴ One of the issues that occupied his mind and that of his prime minister was the need to thwart the Americans. Gullett's fear that Hughes was destined 'to be in a rather long furrow' in dealing with them was in the light of subsequent events quite prescient. For all that he later came to distance himself from Hughes' approach, Gullett was also less than enamoured with the Americans. He saw them using their wealth to intimidate and characterised their 'new found morality' as a toy to be 'flaunted and rattled in the eyes of the world'.¹⁵ Keith Murdoch summed up the prevailing view of the Australian delegation by commenting to Gullett that the 'American attitude is scarcely tolerable'.¹⁶

Woodrow Wilson's arrogance in responding to German overtures for an Armistice in October 1918 with his 14 points and Lloyd George's exclusion of Hughes from the secret deliberations on the Armistice terms, made it clear to Gullett that Australian interests needed to be defended, and defended aggressively when the occasion demanded it. Even a man less defined by his character flaws than Hughes, and Gullett was by now well aware that he was by nature suspicious and inclined to think the world against him, would have found much in these developments to generate concerns about the Americans specifically and the peace conference generally.¹⁷ In his early dealings with Gullett, Hughes showed that he was in fact

¹³ P Twomey (2000) Versailles and the 1920s [online]. In: C Bridge B Attard, *Between Empire and Nation: Australia's External Relations from Federation to the Second World War* (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing), <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=772509448331352;res=IELHSS> Date retrieved 30 May 2017.

¹⁴ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/538.

¹⁵ HG – PG, 15 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

¹⁶ HG – PG, 15 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

¹⁷ HG – PG, 15 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

a keen student of human nature. Cook, Garran¹⁸ and Gullett shared tea with the prime minister on 12 January 1919 after which he called Gullett to a private meeting. The intimacy of that meeting and Hughes' exaggerated desire for privacy would have sent a clear message to Gullett. The exclusion of Garran and Cook would have sent a different, though equally clear message to them:

Then Hughes took me off to his room for a general education. He is an amusing little beggar. He walked in, closed various doors. Even drew the blinds ... beckoned me over opposite a very long table, carefully laid out his listening apparatus, placed his chin in his hands and his elbows on the table and expectantly looked at me and I likewise listening expectantly looked back and then we both burst into laughter.

Hughes then briefed Gullett about his view of the impending conference. He was concerned that America was going to cause the Allies considerable embarrassment. Though the French were solidly with Britain on the bigger issues, Hughes conceded that there was little or no unity among the Dominions which he found both 'strange and tragic after all our common sacrifice'. Sensing perhaps how prepared Hughes was to take on any and all comers at the Conference, Gullett thought it a pity that Hughes did not join the British cabinet as Lloyd George had suggested in 1916. He would be 'lost as an Australian but we are him alone in the conference but he would have been a great national fighter with Britain behind him'. Though Gullett's admission that Hughes alone spoke for Australia was intended as a compliment, it suggests that at some level he was aware that the prime minister's style was, as Donald Horne colourfully described it, auto-erotic in that in order to 'excite himself to the point of performing some action, he usually had to do it all himself'.¹⁹ In that sense, Hughes' approach to Versailles was not an anomaly.

The next evening Gullett was again favoured by Hughes with another confidential briefing which left him convinced that the conference 'promises to be a fascinating enterprise'. Though he told Penelope that he could not share details, 'things are coming the way of the dominions in a highly gratifying manner and it has been a fine initial score'. What would have been even more gratifying was the continued sense that he had been marked for special

¹⁸ Sir Robert Randolph Garran (Solicitor General Australia)

¹⁹ D Horne (1983) *Billy Hughes: Prime Minister of Australia 1915-1923* (Melbourne: Black Ink).

favours from a powerful man who he found ‘most clever and daring’.²⁰ The other delegates at the conference would also discover just how clever the diminutive Hughes could be. While stubborn aggression might have initially appeared one of his defining characteristics, he was as politically astute as any of them, and in the case of Wilson, more so. Yet whatever the judgement of history concerning his means and ends, Hughes was undoubtedly correct in his assessment that Australia’s one time allies were not to be trusted to protect Australian interests.

These briefings and the intimacy they suggested was more than Hughes manipulating a potential acolyte, for though Gullett was no doubt flattered by the experience, he could be a harsh judge of his fellow man. It would take more than tea and talk to turn his head, yet it is true that Gullett found himself drawn to the prime minister in spite of his awareness that he had ‘his vanities in a biblical way’. This was balanced by ‘a delightful zest for life’ and a ‘naturalness’, a reference perhaps to Hughes’ humble origins and his aggressive Australian nationalism.²¹ The intensity of this collaboration, short lived though it was, suggests that two self-made men had looked at each other as though staring into a mirror. They valued what they saw because what they saw was themselves. What it also shows is Hughes’ awareness of the power of the press. He was skilful and experienced in using it as a means of influencing public opinion and bringing pressure to bear on his opponents. Hughes was to make very good use of Gullett and Murdoch’s press contacts during the conference, particularly in his battles with Wilson. Their efforts on his behalf helped bequeath to succeeding generations the image of a man who single-mindedly fought for Australian interests and in doing so took on the world’s politicians and won. It is an exaggerated view, certainly, but there is just enough truth to it to make it a compelling story, both then and now.

A pattern in Gullett’s correspondence emerges over these initial days and weeks as he celebrated each interaction with Hughes that confirmed his status as a Court favourite. At the end of the first week in Paris, Gullett found ‘Hughes beaming with good will’ and was no doubt delighted when Percy Deane,²² Hughes’ private secretary, informed him that he had never heard the prime minister ‘so keen about anyone working with him. His one wish was

²⁰ HG – PG, 14 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/513.

²¹ HG – PG, 12 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/511.

²² Percival Edgar (Percy) Deane (1890-1946). Although Hughes was at first irritated by Deane, he soon ‘found irresistible his audacious humour, immense capacity for long hours and skilful organizing, and ability to project and develop Hughes’s own ideas’ (S Murray-Smith (2016) Deane, Percival Edgar (Percy) (1890–1946), *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/deane-percival-edgar-percy-5933/text10113>. Date retrieved 27 June 2016.

that he could not have had me long ago'.²³ Equally pleasing would have been Deane's observation that though 'it is very un-English to say so, but your wife is a wonderful woman'. More importantly, 'WM talks so much of her'.²⁴ Gullett was also very pleased with the contacts he was able to make outside of the Australian delegation which included a range of political figures such as British Foreign Secretary and former prime minister, the 81 year old Arthur Balfour, who he found extraordinary for his age. Sadly, Gullett believed that the 'foreigner looks only to the little Welshman', a reference to Lloyd George.²⁵ Another was the Frenchman Pierre Comert,²⁶ who shared with Gullett the 'usual round of lunches, teas and dinners'.²⁷ Gullett was also the guest at some other gatherings, even fielding an invitation from the South African delegation who wanted his insight into the war in the Middle East. Such was Gullett's success at what would now be described as networking, he reported to Penelope that the other members of the Australian delegation 'congratulated me on very greatly interesting visitors – 'How did I get them' and 'how can I keep them up'.²⁸ He was still as a rule aggressively impatient when confronted with actions he considered stupid, as the detectives guarding his hotel discovered:

A tilt yesterday with the detectives who guard the door for offensiveness to some of my guests. They are a stupid ... lot who treat all callers as crooks. Not a gleam of penetrating intelligence; just a brute force barrier. I said a few plain words and greatly discomfited them with the truth that they miss about one caller in five ... The discerning detective exists only in fiction ... They were almost aggressively polite to a couple of my visitors afterwards.²⁹

It is easy to dismiss this altercation as a man wielding his new found power but in Gullett's defence his commitment to democracy extended to a preparedness to assert himself regardless of class considerations as delegates to the inter-war trade talks he attended could attest.

²³ HG – PG, 18 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/8/523.

²⁴ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/549.

²⁵ HG – PG, 14 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/515.

²⁶ Pierre Comert (1880-1964) was a French journalist who had worked in the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before becoming a press officer for the French embassy in London in February 1916. After the war he became Director of Information for the League of Nations.

²⁷ HG – PG, 17 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

²⁸ HG – PG, 18 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/8/52.

²⁹ HG – PG, 17 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/521.

When the Conference opened on 18 January 1919, Australia attended with a dual status as both a small power and by arrangement, the British Empire representative. That Australia attended in its own right was due to Hughes' growing concern by late 1918 that Australian interests would not be best served by the Lloyd George model of rotating membership of a British Empire delegation. He petitioned Lloyd George who then won over Wilson. Like Hughes, Gullett believed that the direct representation of the Dominions was in effect a recognition of nationhood earned by sacrifice on the battlefield.³⁰ Hughes sought to make full use of the prerogatives that it permitted. For while Gullett lingered on the periphery of power politics, Hughes was busy making an indelible impression on the other leaders. He opposed American efforts to replace the safety of Empire with a liberal internationalism founded on free trade, self-determination and the League of Nations. He opposed the addition of a declaration of racial equality to the Covenant of the League of Nations and offended the Japanese to the point that it probably did Australia lasting harm. He fought the British over Australian representation, their seeming indifference to Australian national interests and on the issue of mandated territories. It is not surprising that the Australian mythology about Versailles continues to emphasise Hughes' preparedness to take on all comers. It is a natural bookend to the national celebration of self that began on Gallipoli.

Hughes' behaviour at the conference showed that for all his belief in the importance of Australia's status at Versailles, he was not a convert to internationalism. For though he was the leader of the most democratic nation in the New World, Hughes showed himself a more fervent devotee of the realpolitik of the Old World than even the French.³¹ In his view politics was simply 'the attainment of limited, concrete objectives with whatever weapons were at hand. Grand designs were to him utopian and illusory'.³² Gullett was not a new convert to this viewpoint, for in 1915 when confronted by the destruction of Ypres he wrote that he prayed that the city would be rebuilt 'to the last brick with German gold when the war is over, and that the supreme sacrifice of the Belgians has not been all in vain'.³³ These were not sentiments that appeared likely to be satisfied by an American led peace centred on the creation of a league of nations. At a speech in London in mid-1919 Hughes asked the question that was really at the core of the Australian concerns - would it be the British Empire or the League that Australia would call on if threatened? To further emphasise his

³⁰ P Spartalis (1983) *Diplomatic Battles of Billy Hughes* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger), p. 120.

³¹ Meaney, *Australian Defence and Foreign Policy*.

³² WJ Hudson (1980) *Australia and the League of Nations* (Sydney: Sydney University Press), p. 43.

³³ *Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga age*, 5 July 1915, p. 4.

point, which was valid enough, what will Australia's position be if the British navy is part of a 'polyglot, heterogeneous force attached to the League, which will probably include our deadly enemy'?³⁴ It went without saying that the deadly enemy was a reference to Japan.

The clash between Hughes and Wilson was at least partially the result of the gulf separating a realist who embraced the amorality of international life, and an idealist who tried to cajole the world into accepting his vision for the post-war world yet in the final analysis could not even win over his own people. Added to the mix was a personal dislike that added a real venom to their interactions. Hughes both loathed and distrusted Wilson. Hughes was, as William Hudson observed, 'extremely sensitive to sham [and] loath to recognise altruism in other political operators'.³⁵ He was dismissive of men who 'talk loudly about justice' yet who were in his estimation committed to nothing more than an 'advancement of their own interests'.³⁶ Wilson was just such a man and for the rest of his life, long after other grudges had faded away, Hughes retained an intense dislike of the American president. Wilson was no great fan of Hughes either, likening him to a 'pestiferous varmint'.³⁷ Gullett shared some of Hughes' views and admitted that 'I can't get up any enthusiasm for Wilson. His self-satisfied smirk is too offensive for any single member of the fighting allies'. Gullett derided his faith in the League of Nations as 'pathetic' and saw no logic in the 'sudden determination everlastingly to love one another after our centuries of war and this last and greatest orgy of all'.³⁸

The Australian delegation did have allies, however. Gullett noted that the French were 'very partial to the Australians ... They know what our fellows stand for'. He was particularly amused when Hughes informed the French that 'in the middle ages with half a million of our chaps you could have conquered the whole world'.³⁹ At one of the seemingly endless round of social gatherings, he found himself in the company of a number of French generals whose 'praise of the Australians was boundless'.⁴⁰ Gullett saw this as further proof that Australia had earned its standing as one of the victorious allies, a prize which he was not prepared to see shared with other less worthy recipients. For though he acknowledged that 'the big

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 1919, p. 7.

³⁵ WJ Hudson (1978) *Billy Hughes in Paris: The Birth of Australian Diplomacy* (Melbourne: Nelson), p. 18.

³⁶ WM Hughes (1929) *The Splendid Adventure* (London: Ernest Benn Limited), pp. 103-4.

³⁷ S Moloney (2007) 'Billy Hughes and Woodrow Wilson', *The Monthly*.

<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2007/october/1290559133/shane-maloney/billy-hughes-woodrow-wilson>.
Date retrieved 26 Sept. 2016.

³⁸ HG – PG, 15 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

³⁹ HG – PG, 13 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/514.

⁴⁰ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/552.

Powers are very properly not giving much say to the little fellows' it was appropriate that they give 'respect and consideration to Belgium and those who have fought and suffered'. 'For the crowd who rushed in at the finish', Gullett was confident that 'there will be justice without too much opportunity for them to talk'.⁴¹

There were enemies other than the Germans and Wilson that Hughes targeted while at Versailles. The demand from the Japanese for a statement of racial equality was also anathema to his vision of the post-war world. This was driven by the threat it posed to Australian immigration laws and the basic tenets of White Australia. Hughes was deeply suspicious of the Japanese, and though his antagonism may have gone beyond what some may have found acceptable, he was supported in his stand by the Australian press and parliament. Following a Cabinet meeting in early April, the Deputy Prime Minister William Watt sent a telegram to Hughes in which he reaffirmed that 'neither people nor Parliament of Australia could agree to principles of racial equality'. In a letter to his wife Latham showed he too understood how vital the issue of race was in Australian domestic politics because 'no government could live for a day if it tampered with a White Australia'.⁴² As Gullett was intensely interested in immigration matters, it was not surprising that he shared Hughes and Latham's concerns:

For the moment Japan has retreated in the face of WH uncompromising hostility but only temporarily. The little man refused to discuss in any way the question of racial quality. The Japs have been living on our doorstep for a fortnight. They made good with NZ, Canada and South Africa apparently and finally appeared before the Dominion delegates as a whole. But Hughes as I say declining courteously but firmly even to discuss it. For the moment he is alone (LG and W will accept anything) but I believe we shall win in a walk. If we yield or falter our White Australia is gone.⁴³

As a man firmly committed to the Imperial connection, Gullett was appalled by what he saw as Britain's ignorance of Australian concerns. He believed that the war had been fought to maintain the Empire on which Australian security depended. For Britain to concede in peace what had been won in war at so exorbitant a cost appeared incomprehensible. In the end,

⁴¹ HG – PG, 23 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/530.

⁴² M Lake, H Reynolds (2008) *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press), p. 294.

⁴³ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/534.

Hughes stood alone in publically refusing to make any concession to the Japanese and he prevailed, in part because he comprehensively out manoeuvred Wilson. Though fearful of the Japanese and angered by Britain's seeming failure to protect Australian interests, like Rupert Brooke Gullett still conceived of a world under an English Heaven. In a letter to Penelope he thanked it for providing Australia with 'a strong uncompromising man'. Without extrapolating, but probably referring to a use of their press contacts, Gullett added that 'I have not been idle in it: nor has Keith [Murdoch]'.⁴⁴

For all of Gullett and Murdoch's efforts, from first to last it was Hughes who led the Australian participation at Versailles.⁴⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that on any important issue Hughes was influenced by his advisers. They were without exception astute and intelligent men who in spite of their personal misgivings and their treatment at Versailles were loyal to both their country and their prime minister. Even the status of having been an Australian prime minister did not save Cook from being little more than a passenger. Hughes ignored him in a series of humiliating slights, although he found a somewhat dubious place in the history of the conference by virtue of his contribution to drawing up the borders of Czechoslovakia. Gullett found him to be 'a pleasant good old man' and so 'simple and gentle in his outlook that one is much attracted to him'.⁴⁶ He found it painful to see 'poor old Joe' venture 'one of his feeble jests at [the absent Hughes'] expense' and to note that everyone talked to Hughes but for Cook they display a 'polite but fleeting interest'. Cook was well aware that he had been marginalised and one morning complained openly to Gullett that Hughes and Deane 'did not play the game'.⁴⁷

Inside the delegation, there was also some friction between Hughes' advisors and his Hughes' intimate circle. Lieutenant Frederic Eggleston (assistant to Sir Robert Garran) noted in his diary that Hughes ignored Garran and Latham and instead listened only to Gullett, Murdoch and Deane. Though Eggleston and Gullett would become political friends in the twenties he was particularly scathing of him:

⁴⁴ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/534.

⁴⁵ Taking his lead from his mentor Lord Northcliffe, Murdoch parted ways with Hughes ending five years of close collaboration. Like Gullett, Murdoch offered easy access to the world's press which Hughes made good use of as a political weapon, most notably in a *Daily Mail* article that was very critical of President Wilson and which appears to have originated with the Australian prime minister.

⁴⁶ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/538; HG – PG, 14 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/513.

⁴⁷ HG – PG, 17 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/520.

A mere *claqueur*, another journalist who can apparently write well ... but he can neither think nor talk coherently. He came over to boost Hughes. He knows a lot of journalists & he gets them all to come along & see Hughes & makes Hughes popular with the press. He is a regular worm about Hughes & would let Hughes spit in his face with pleasure.

Such was his disdain for these ‘contemptible satellites’, Eggleston saw them as worms ‘simply crawling around’ Hughes, who was, in contrast, ‘at least honest and sincere’.⁴⁸ Not for the last time Gullett apparently showed himself prepared to engage in conspiracies against colleagues. In his dealings with Allenby and later with George Robertson, Hughes, Earle Page and Joe Lyons, Gullett showed that he was unafraid to take a stand for what he perceived as the greater good. Sometimes, however, he did so in a manner that could appear cynical, perhaps even unprincipled. This may well have been the case at Versailles, for Latham and Eggleston came to suspect that they were being asked questions by this group as a means of ascertaining their loyalty. Latham believed that they falsely represented his views to Hughes while Garran was repelled by their crude cynicism.⁴⁹

Although conscious of the history that was being made around him, Gullett was less enamoured of the prospect of being separated from Penelope so soon after returning from the Middle East. He encouraged her to contact Hughes’ wife in the hope that when she visited Paris she might travel with her. He was well aware that officers on leave in Paris were allowed to arrange for their wives to join them ‘and that’s in reality our position. I have been out of my home now these three years and with Egypt looming up again [it] is but fair that we should be together for a while’.⁵⁰ When Hughes’ wife did not journey to Paris, and conscious of the cost of living in the French capital, Gullett attempted to arrange an offer of accommodation from friends. Nothing came of these efforts either, so Gullett then explored the possibility of returning to England for a short visit but that plan found little support from Hughes. There is a suggestion in one of his letters that Jo was ill, which would have done little for his temper:

I can’t tell you how I am to think it should fall on you and all because of WM’s rank selfishness. I am doing absolutely nothing except my own work ... I’ll get

⁴⁸ Paris Diary of FW Eggleston. Quoted in W Osmond (1985) *Frederic Eggleston: an intellectual in Australian politics* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin), p. 92.

⁴⁹ Meaney, *Australia and World Crisis*, p. 344.

⁵⁰ HG – PG, 22 Jan. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/524.

away within a month; things will be so strained otherwise that I'll be let go quite cheerfully. Even now we don't seem as cordial as we were. I'm no good hand at concealing protest as you know.⁵¹

Gullett was eventually able to get leave to England in April, returning for seven days from 10 April and three days from 24 April 1919 but Australia beckoned. During what was an increasingly frustrating time in Paris, Gullett wrote a monograph titled *Unguarded Australia*. In it he showed that he had certainly not embraced internationalism as a result of his time at the Conference and instead saw the central lesson for the citizens of a sparsely populated country the necessity of obtaining a population adequate for defence:

Lust of territory, and the increase of power which conquered territory promised, brought this war upon us, and lust of territory has been the sinister and dominant note of the proceedings in Paris. Almost without exception the Powers, great and small, have come forward in their turn and sought to extend their boundaries at the expense of someone else. All wanted more land.⁵²

This was not a wartime aberration. It was as it had always been and for 'as long as the world endures, it will be the same: nations which are rich and strong and congested will prey upon those which are weak in men and rich in territory'.⁵³ The war had not left him embittered or stripped of his ideals. There was no epiphany. The war had not challenged let alone destroyed his world view. What Gullett saw in the destruction of war and the machinations of the peace makers was vindication, pure and simple. Immigration, White Australia, the Imperial connection, and the power of the Australian bush to create a type of man untouched by the degenerative influence of city living were all ideological convictions strengthened not conceived in war. Yet the defence of Australia rested in the hands of a 'mere handful of people in possession of a whole continent' backed by the 'manufacturing genius, the vast industrial power and the boundless wealth of Britain'. In order to be safe from invasion, Australia must be prepared to fight alone but to do so she needed the 'manufacturing machinery capable of supplying our armies during a prolonged war with all the arms and munitions used in modern fighting'.⁵⁴

⁵¹ HG – PG, undated. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/532.

⁵² Gullett, *Unguarded Australia*, p. 4.

⁵³ Gullett, *Unguarded Australia*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Gullett, *Unguarded Australia*, p. 5.

As Gullett had warned Penelope, after the conference he would have to return to Egypt. He arrived in Cairo at the start of June but it was a short stay as he was back in Australia by the start of August. While in Cairo Gullett found himself a central player in a series of events that in a modern context would be considered a war crime. Three brigades of the Anzac Mounted Division – the New Zealand Rifles Brigade and the Australian 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades – were camped near the village of Surafend, now a suburb of Tel Aviv. A New Zealand trooper was murdered by an Arab intruder he disturbed in the act of stealing a bag that he was using as a pillow. The tragedy of so meaningless a death when home beckoned was exacerbated by the simmering discontent at official inaction over similar incidents. In the official history, Gullett did not baulk at expressing a view that though appalling to a modern reader, was then reflective of contemporary attitudes:

All the Arabs of western Palestine were thieves by instinct, and those who dwelt close to the Jewish settlements were especially practised and daring. Throughout the campaign the British policy, as already noticed, was to treat these debased people west of the Jordan as devout Moslems, kin not only to the Arabs of the Hejaz but to the Mohammedans of India. And the Arabs, a crafty race, quick to discern British unwillingness to punish their misdeeds, exploited their licence to extreme limits.

Gullett conceded that ‘all troops may have suffered equally; but, while the British endured the outrages without active resentment, the Australians and New Zealanders burned with indignation, and again and again asked for retaliation, but without obtaining redress’. The resentment became ‘dangerously bitter’.⁵⁵

The murderer was tracked to a point near the village and though the village leaders denied any knowledge of the crime or the perpetrator, it was the failure of the authorities to take meaningful action that sealed their fate. The village was subsequently surrounded by 200 men, most of them from the New Zealand Mounted Rifles who expelled the women and children and then set upon the remaining males, both in the village and in a nearby Bedouin camp. It appears likely that between 15 and 40 villagers were murdered and many more assaulted, although some unsubstantiated reports put the death toll closer to 100. To make matters worse, the flames from the village and the shouts and cries of the attackers and the

⁵⁵ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 788.

attacked were within the sight and hearing of Allenby and his staff. The piper would have to be paid.

Gullett criticised the massacre in the official history, but his attempts to contextualise it show that his heart was not in it:

That which followed [the murder] cannot be justified; but in fairness to the New Zealanders, who were the chief actors, and to the Australians who gave them hearty support, the spirit of the men at that time must be considered. They were the pioneers and the leaders in a long campaign. Theirs had been the heaviest sacrifice. The three brigades of Anzac Mounted Division had been for almost three years comrades in arms, and rarely had a body of men been bound together by such ties of common heroic endeavour and affection. From the Canal onward men had again and again proudly thrown away their lives to save their wounded from the enemy. Not once in the long advance had a hard-pressed isolated body ever signalled in vain for support. The war task was now completed and they, a band of sworn brothers tested in a hundred fights, were going home. To them the loss of a veteran comrade by foul murder, at the hands of a race they despised, was a crime which called for instant justice.⁵⁶

The Anzacs were no more inclined to hand over their own to face the consequences of their actions than the village leaders who had so incensed them. As no penalty was possible on an individual basis, the punishment would fall on innocent and guilty without fear or favour:

Allenby wasted no time in expressing his mind to the division. The brigades were assembled on foot in hollow square, and the Commander-in-Chief addressed them in strong, and even, one might say, ill-considered language. He used terms which became his high position as little as the business at Surafend had been worthy of the great soldiers before him. The division fully expected strong disciplinary action for Surafend, and would have accepted it without resentment. But the independent manhood of the Anzacs could not accept personal abuse from the Commander-in-Chief. Allenby's outburst left the division sore but unpunished. The affair had unfortunate consequences.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, pp. 788-799.

⁵⁷ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 790.

In addition to the public humiliation, all members of the Division on leave were recalled and all further leave cancelled. The names of officers and men of the Division were then removed from the list of those recommended for honours and decorations. This strained situation continued until June 1919 when after the suppression of the revolt in Egypt, the Australians of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and New Zealanders readied for their departure without having heard from Allenby since Surafend. Having returned to Egypt after attending the Peace Conference, Gullett sought an interview with Allenby at his headquarters in Cairo to urge a reconciliation.⁵⁸ The meeting did not begin well. Once Allenby became aware of the reason for Gullett's appearance he ordered him to leave. As the official historian, Gullett was rather fortuitously present as a representative of the Australian government rather than as a soldier. Had he been of a different temperament or had he still been in uniform and answerable to the Commander in Chief, the meeting may well have ended there. Instead Gullett stood his ground and urged Allenby to consider the damage to Imperial relations. The reference to the broader picture may have given Allenby reason to pause for he was at this point surprisingly unaware of the extent of the Light Horse's resentment.

Gullett must have hit the right note because Allenby eventually calmed down to the point that he even sought Gullett's view on how best to resolve the issue. Gullett suggested an 'Order of the Day' in which Allenby thanked the troops for their services to both the Empire and to him and wished them well as they departed for home. Although attributed to Allenby, Gullett actually wrote the Order and recommended that sufficient be printed to ensure that each soldier received his own copy. Anyone familiar with Gullett's style, however, would have seen his hand in it. In particular, the last paragraph was particularly reminiscent of Gullett's earlier depictions of Australian identity as it has been revealed by war:

The Australian Light Horseman combines with a splendid physique a restless activity of mind. This mental quality of mind renders him somewhat impatient of rigid and formal discipline, but it confers on him the gift of adaptability and this is the secret of much of his success, mounted or on foot. In this dual role, on every variety of ground; mountain, plain, desert, swamp, or jungle, the Australian

⁵⁸ Gullett recounted the detail of the meeting later that night while dining with Brigadier George Langley, the commanding officer of the 14th Light Horse. This has proved valuable for historians given that in the official history Gullett did not identify himself as the catalyst for a way out of the impasse (Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*).

Light Horseman has proved himself equal to the best. He has earned the gratitude of the Empire and the admiration of the world.⁵⁹

In the official history, Gullett described it as ‘the painful Surafend affair’ but he was referring to the friction between Allenby and the Australians and New Zealanders rather than the massacre itself. Gullett later forgave Allenby and made his criticisms general rather than specific:

It was characteristic of the strong temper and of the frailties of both [Allenby and the Anzacs]. Both had erred in anger. The sincerity of Allenby's final words to them was never doubted by the troops. Surafend, however, should not be forgotten. Without making excuses for the Anzacs, it may be said that the affair arose out of the simple fact that British regular officers entrusted with Australian commands in Egypt and Palestine, with a few notable exceptions, too often failed to grasp the vital fact that the narrow traditional methods of handling the soldiers of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales are not by any absolute law also the way to handle young men of the dominions. There is in the young British peoples overseas a genius, strong and distinctive, which must be considered in war as in peace.⁶⁰

Before departing for home, Gullett admitted to Penelope that he would ‘give a fortune to be out on the Labour ticket next elections in Australia. With a good propagandist on their side they will sweep H & Co into the sea. The present administration is a hopeless thing & is not improving’.⁶¹ In any case, when the elections were held in December 1919 the Nationalist Party avoided the calamity that Gullett had predicted, though there was a nine percent swing against them. Gullett was well aware that an open break with Hughes was inadvisable. Penelope was pregnant with their second child and needing an income he did not dare risk alienating Hughes, either in pursuit of political office or in the press. Having seen Hughes close up, Gullett knew that one was either with him or against him.

Rather than risk missing a berth by attempting to return to Australia together, Penelope and Jo sailed from Britain and Gullett left from Egypt. He arrived in Melbourne before her, having decided against staying in Perth to await her arrival because of the expense. He wrote

⁵⁹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 791.

⁶⁰ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 791.

⁶¹ HG – PG, Gullett family MSS quoted in Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 248.

to her the day before his ship arrived in Fremantle on 4 August 1919 and explained that he would instead take 'what consolation I can in the thought that our long period of wretchedness is so nearly finished'.⁶² Most references to Gullett in Australian newspapers of the period concentrated on his work as a correspondent in Palestine or discussions of immigration rather than the Peace Conference. The Perth *Daily News* did try to report on his experience at Versailles. Gullett, however, could only discuss the peace conference through the prism of his own political pre-occupations. He preferred to expound on the role that immigration would play in ensuring Australian security in the face of the 'mad lust for other people's territory shown by all, or nearly all the Allies' and Japan's insistent support for the principle of racial equality. He acknowledged that there had been 'a semblance of respect for moral claims to territory, but only a semblance'. In reality Gullett argued that 'the general practice was to snap at every acre about the ownership of which there could be the slightest doubt'.⁶³

Like Hughes, Gullett was unwilling to place any faith in internationalism because he believed 'an adequate supply of men and guns and shells will, for the next century at least, be the only guarantee of national safety'. Gullett's lack of confidence in international guarantees was matched only by his dread of self-determination, a view that went far beyond the threat of an expansionist Japan:

The coloured peril bogey of our youth has become the reality of to-day. From Egypt to Japan there is religious, political, and industrial unrest. National aspirations are everywhere soaring, and everywhere the coloured subject peoples are so deeply moved that they are ready to fight and die for the achievement of their independence. England is faced with very critical years in the control of her dark skinned dominions.⁶⁴

Perhaps arriving home nine months after the Armistice denied Gullett the chance to celebrate and to take stock of his wartime experience. Having seen the failings at Versailles he now could not even acknowledge that the war had ended in victory. It was instead a 'grim warning' that immigration needed to be added to the great national preoccupations that had underpinned the move toward Federation – Defence, Protection, and a White Australia.

⁶² HG – PG, 3 Aug. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/5/556.

⁶³ *Daily News*, 6 Aug. 1919, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Daily News*, 6 Aug. 1919, p. 4.

Pursued in a 'bold and unselfish' manner it would 'complete and arm our national garrison'.⁶⁵ Gullett was hardly swimming against the tide, for in spite of the natural relief that accompanied the end of the war, the 'world sank, if anything, deeper even than before 1914 into the fever of romantic and bellicose patriotism'. Though Australia would avoid the extremes, the 'worried, intolerant, and nationalistic forces that brought fascism to Europe were often in muted evidence'.⁶⁶ Gullett was, without doubt, worried, intolerant and nationalistic. To that brew was added an impatient ambition that months sitting in the desert and then cooling his heels in Versailles had sharpened.

Gullett was well aware that the work of the correspondents and the official historians would be central to the survival of the Anzac story in the post-war years. At a dinner attended by Charles Bean a week after his arrival in Melbourne organised by the Australian Journalists' Association, he specifically addressed the issue of the accuracy of war reporting. In doing so, he reaffirmed his commitment to the Anzac legend which the official history would soon help cement in the national psyche:

Some people imagined that correspondents had said remarkable things about the Australians to flatter the men or their relatives. There was no expression that in any sense could exaggerate the superiority of the Australians in the war, and it had been a ceaseless delight to be associated with the force in Palestine. He could testify that the 12 divisions sent by the outer Dominions, the men from the young countries had been supreme, and he was content to say that the Australians were the equals of the Canadians and the New Zealanders. The Australian Light Horse, with Australian horses, were a distinctive Australian production, and what had always impressed him, was that in spite of all the soldiering they had had to learn they had always retained their character as Australian citizens. They never became soldiery in the conventional sense.⁶⁷

On 16 September 1919 Gullett attended a gathering organised by the Institute of Journalists in honour of the prime minister, newly returned from his 16 months abroad. In a speech at the function Gullett, always the advertiser though in this case not quite the true believer, described Hughes as 'one of the first five or six great personages in that great conference'. In

⁶⁵ *Daily News*, 6 Aug. 1919, p. 4.

⁶⁶ R Murray (1989) *The Confident Years: Australia in the twenties* (London: Allen Lane), p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Argus*, 18 Aug. 1919, p. 4.

return, the prime minister was just as flattering, although his failure to mention Sir Joseph Cook, who was in the audience, was a final unnecessary slight. In a time ‘when every man's hand was turned against him’ Hughes believed that but for the assistance of Gullett and Deane ‘it would have been impossible for him to have borne up under the difficulties with which he was confronted’.⁶⁸

Bean encouraged Gullett to dictate a confidential note on his experiences at the Peace Conference. He recommended doing so on the same basis that he had promised his notes to the War Museum – 60 years or the lifetime of every person mentioned, whichever was the longest. Gullett was amenable to the idea but believed that without Hughes’ notes it would be impossible to write an accurate account. Though he was confident that Hughes would make them available, he was equally certain that he would then want to see what he intended to write. Such an intrusion was out of the question, even more so given what he now characterised as his profound disagreement with Hughes over his attitude to Britain, America and Japan. As a matter of ‘personal loyalty’ he felt unable to write honestly of his experiences at Versailles.⁶⁹ As he would show later in his dealings with Joe Lyons, Gullett did not always feel so constrained so his reticence may well have been an awareness that a public break with Hughes would be unwise given his ambition for a political career.

⁶⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Sept. 1919, p. 11.

⁶⁹ HG – CB, 10 Sept. 1920. Official History, 1914-1918 War: Records of Henry S Gullett, AWM 40.

Chapter 8 – Defender of Anzac

On his return to Australia, Gullett rather reluctantly replaced Bean as Director of the Australian War Museum, a job he would hold concurrently while working on the official history. Although the two decades of frustration that awaited supporters of a national museum fall outside the parameters of this biography, suffice to say, in the face of war weariness, regionalism, and economic, philosophical, and logistical concerns, they struggled to fully garner the support of successive Australian governments and sections of the public whose interests they represented. Bean's vision of a museum that would rank with the famous galleries of Rome, Florence, Dresden, Paris and London far outstripped that of his government, which was unconvinced of the value of the collection or the urgency of the work.

In spite of his very public criticism of the League of Nations, in November 1919 Gullett received an invitation from Pierre Comert, the director of its Information Section, to join his staff. For a time, he seriously considered the offer. Far from suggesting a seismic shift in his attitude to the League, this dalliance was probably indicative of a determination to pursue career opportunities separate from his war experience. It also shows that he was, as ever, prepared to write when directed. Though he had been director of the Australian War Museum for only three months, he assured Comert that he was available for any work which would help strengthen the League. Apart from the official history, he characterised his current work as temporary and merely the winding up of his military service. Though he reserved the right to make a decision once he was fully informed of the nature of the role, he observed that 'it is only necessary for me to add that whatever the work is I should undertake it with much zest [and] serve the Section with any ability I possess'.¹

In order to survive it was clear that the League needed to mobilise considerable public support across national boundaries and in doing so it revolutionised the relationship between diplomatic activity and the public.² Central to this task was the Information Section under Comert, which pursued this policy with such vigour that it provided all official documents to the press even before they had been publically discussed in the Assembly or Council.

¹ HG – Pierre Comert, 10 Nov. 1919. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/2/124.

² AHM Van Ginneken (2006) *Historical Dictionary of the League of Nations* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press).

Gullett's eventual decision to decline the position was met with a comment that was terse even in the days of telegrams – 'Your decision very disappointing await your letter'.³ Gullett had assumed, incorrectly, that he could operate on the League's behalf while residing in Australia. He could not countenance another overseas sojourn so soon after his return.

Though Gullett would eventually tire of his work on the official history and as Director of the Museum, they were creative tasks that were 'enlivened by good company'.⁴ This was an important consideration for a man of so social a temperament. Jo Gullett recalled the pattern that developed, one which saw an overlap between the professional and personal:

My father used to rise very early and work a couple of hours on his history. Then he set off to the Exhibition Building on the old cable tram. On Sunday mornings artists and soldiers would come to our house with notes, sketches, maps and battle pictures. General Chauvel and General White rode up on horses, while Generals Gellibrand and Glasgow came by taxi, because there were no trams on Sunday morning. Albert Jacka, the most famous of all Australian fighting soldiers with his VC, MC and Bar, rode a bicycle. Bill Dyson and George Lambert walked the mile or so from the railway station. Only our cousin Sid Gullett drove his own car.⁵

For four years the family lived in rented properties in Toorak or South Yarra before buying an acre of land near Kooyong railway station which they christened 'Orchard Cottage'. When Penelope's mother arrived from England, it was enlarged to include an acre and a half of garden and a tennis court. The family retained the services of a cook, a housemaid, a parlour maid, a gardener, part time laundress and a chauffeur. It was some way from Toolamba, in both a literal and figurative sense.

Gullett grew increasingly frustrated by the Museum's lack of progress and though he had only assumed the role of Director on 18 August 1919, he resigned in May 1920. He was forced to concede to Senator Alexander Poynton that 'the work is not so far advanced as we might have hoped'.⁶ Later he admitted to Bean that he had only accepted the one year appointment as he was 'still on service, and had done so little with the AIF it seemed up to

³ Telegram, Comert – HG, 6 ?, 1920. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/2/125.

⁴ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 248.

⁵ Gullett, *Good Company*, pp. 2-3.

⁶ HG – Poynton, 4 May 1920. Australian War Memorial registry files - First series, AWM 93, 20/1914.

me to do what I was asked'.⁷ In spite of his resignation, in May, July and October 1920 Gullett took part in a series of sold out lecture programs in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide respectively, organised under the auspices of the Australian War Museum Committee. Dealing with the wartime experiences of the AIF, the proceeds were rather disingenuously earmarked for 'war memorials'. This led to the not unreasonable belief on the part of those raising funds for regional memorials that they would share in any windfall. In this, they were to be disappointed. The series opened on Saturday evening 1 May 1920 with a lecture about the Western Front by Sir John Monash. On Monday evening the focus shifted to Palestine with lectures by Gullett and Harry Chauvel. A touch of modernity was provided by a flight of aircraft dropping advertising leaflets over Melbourne. Gullett might well have attracted an audience himself given that he was lauded as a man 'possessing gifts as a raconteur' who was well able to 'unfold a story that was brimful of life and incident'.⁸

The language used to advertise the lectures was actually more interesting than the showmanship of the aerial advertising. References to 'every action portrayed uncensored', 'official uncensored still and moving pictures that have hitherto been withheld from the public', 'Front Line Pictures Uncensored', 'Uncensored Official War Film' and 'an authentic account' as a means of further enticing audience members hinted at how widely wartime censorship was acknowledged and accepted.⁹ Even the film and still photographs that accompanied the lectures were reputedly 'exposed by intrepid cameramen right at the points of impact of the diggers and their foes'.¹⁰ Clearly, wartime censorship had not created a breach between the press and the Australian people, who remained unaware of the physical distance that often separated the correspondents and photographers from the actual fighting.

Far from detracting from the presentation, official sanction was considered vital to any representation of the 'truth'. A journalist for *The Argus* observed that 'so much unofficial and obviously stage managed screen material is been offered to moving picture lovers as representing what happens on war's wrinkled front that the opportunity to see the actual conditions under which the Hun was harried from France and Belgium and the Turk driven out of Palestine, will be all the more acceptable'.¹¹ The lectures were not met with universal

⁷ HG – CB, 29 March 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian, AWM 38 3DRL 7953/8.

⁸ *Advertiser*, 29 Sept. 1920, p.7.

⁹ *Argus*, 27 April 1920, p. 12; *Argus*, 29 April 1920, p. 8; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1920, p. 2; *Register*, 20 Sept. 1920, p. 2; *Advertiser*, 29 Sept. 1920, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Argus*, 29 April 1920, p. 8.

¹¹ *Argus*, 29 April 1920, p. 8.

approval. A correspondent from the *Bulletin* described them as ‘the most depressing exhibition on earth’. It was not the content that attracted his ire, but the fact that the lecturers were guilty of an ‘unduly punctilious observance of the very English rule that gentlemen never talk about themselves’. In contrast, the writer congratulated a veteran who told his part of the story of Mouquet Farm in a manner so engaging that he ‘lifted his big audience to its feet in tears and cheers’.¹²

There was competition in the field beyond that posed by veterans with a clearer grasp of the art of public speaking. Lowell Thomas, an American backed by a lavish advertising campaign brought his film *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* to Sydney in August 1920. His film, which would eventually be viewed by a worldwide audience of four million, firmly established the legend of Lawrence of Arabia. Its enormously successful six month season in England was replete with incense braziers, dancing women in exotic costumes and the band of the Welsh Guards. His Australian tour was a confrontation between function and form. Treloar, for one, was concerned that form might win out. The Australian press did not share Treloar’s misgivings. They certainly did not prove parsimonious with the superlatives either, describing Thomas as a ‘famous war lecturer’ who both ‘presents a remarkable entertainment’ and possesses a ‘great personality as a lecturer’.¹³ This was tame compared to the advertising campaign which lauded him as ‘a friend of Princely Emirs’, a ‘Cosmopolitan known to Princes and Beggars of Jerusalem and of Mecca and of London and Rome’ and one who ‘brings the truth of a great drama from the land of the Queen of Sheba and Mohammed’. If that was insufficient to attract an audience, it was also observed that ‘nothing more romantic and picturesque has come out of Arabia since the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights’.¹⁴

While Gullett, Bean and Treloar might well have been able to smile at the absurdity of this hyperbole, there was also a pointed challenge to the organisers of the War Museum lectures. In the short term, the organisers argued that the ‘narrative properly belongs to the journalist’ rather than the historian. What the people wanted was ‘the truth’.¹⁵ Worse than this oblique criticism from someone who was in effect a business competitor was the claim that ‘during the recent war no person did more to throw light on the campaign in Palestine than did Mr

¹² *Bulletin*, 2 March 1922.

¹³ *Daily News* 2 June 1920, p. 3; *Argus*, 26 June 1920, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Aug. 1920, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Aug. 1920, p. 2.

Lowell Thomas'.¹⁶ Adding salt to the wound would have been the American's observation that he considered it a 'duty to let the people of Australia know the details of a campaign which they were more than interested in'.¹⁷ For the men who had done so much to ensure that the AIF would have its Iliad, and who had very clear ideas about how it should be represented, this must have been a bitter pill. Gullett advertised Australia and the men of the AIF with considerable determination and at times it must be admitted, a lack of nuance. In contrast, Thomas appeared to be advertising himself as much as his message. Forty years later he boasted that no one had even heard of Lawrence or Allenby before he arrived in the Middle East.

Treloar convinced an initially reluctant Gullett to attend the first lecture which was delivered to a full house at the Sydney Town Hall. The size of the audience did not impress Gullett, for he believed that half the audience had availed themselves of complimentary tickets and that far from posing a threat to the museum lectures, the season was a 'sharp financial failure'. Though Gullett acknowledged that Thomas was more skilful in his use of pictures and film, as a lecturer he 'rambled widely and unconvincingly over a very wide area ... he spoke entirely without conviction and repeatedly made slips'. Using one of the criticisms regularly made of the British correspondents, Gullett noted that Thomas had seen little or nothing of the fighting. His performance was 'a travesty', one which showed he knew little and 'cared less about the facts of the campaign'. As though searching for further invective, Gullett opined that his work was 'the sort of thing that a picturesque Penny-a-line might produce from second hand information for publication in a cheap magazine'.¹⁸

A more egregious fault even than the gaps in Thomas' knowledge was his complete disregard for veracity, a shortcoming that would have been anathema to Gullett, Treloar and Bean in equal measure. He used pictures and film from varying sources and combined them in a single narrative, at one point even suggesting that he had been a passenger in one of the aircraft. That said, in a profile written in 1958, Albert Hirshberg credited him with being the first American and 'one of the first mortals' to fly over the Sinai Desert.¹⁹ If that hyperbole is even partly accurate, perhaps the constraints that dogged Gullett's own war correspondence

¹⁶ *West Australian*, 9 Aug. 1920, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Argus*, 7 Aug. 1920, p. 20.

¹⁸ Gullett, 'Report on a lecture by Mr Lowell Thomas on 28 Aug. 1920'. Australian War Memorial registry files - First series, AWM 93, 3/1/49.

¹⁹ A Hirshberg (1967) 'Fifty Years of Adventure'. In: NR Bowen, *Lowell Thomas: The Stranger Everyone Knows* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

left him doubtful that a journalist would be afforded that opportunity. The fact that Thomas' photograph appeared between 20 and 30 times in the course of the lecture also did not escape Gullett's notice. The effect of this showmanship on men devoted to commemorating the achievements of the AIF and who had each worn their country's uniform can only be imagined. Most damningly perhaps, Thomas failed to show the 'spirit of the Light Horse'.²⁰

The criticism of Thomas's approach to history generally and his treatment of the AIF specifically offers a valuable insight into Bean and Gullett's vision for the official history. It was clear in this instance that they saw themselves as the guardians of the AIF's spirit. It was not a view motivated by a sense of their own proprietary interest, nor was it vain or selfish. Rather it was born from their identification with the ordinary troops whose story they told, their intense nationalism and their sense of civic duty. Bean was later described by a friend as a man possessing 'no hidden vanities lurking behind the modest exterior'.²¹ Though Gullett was confident and ambitious, he was certainly not vain. Having lauded the egalitarian nature of the AIF, it was inevitable that their shared approach to the Australian history was pervaded by a democratic tone. The British history was written for the generals or so it seemed to Bean and Gullett. Their own approach was one that left no room for vanity or self-aggrandisement such as the type they saw in Thomas' efforts. Instead, they sought to write for the diggers so that they could see their story and know that it would not be forgotten and that their families might understand and remember. That said, the British official history remains a towering historical and literary achievement, greater perhaps even than Bean's.²²

Yet for all these high ideals and Gullett's own preparedness to include some of the less savoury parts of the narrative such as the Surafend massacre, he felt that the truth needed to be supplied in moderation. Though he was as seemingly intractable as Bean in his opposition to any censorship of the official history, he was on at least one occasion ready to pass a censorious eye over the work of others. George Berrie sent Gullett the manuscript of his history of the 6th Australian Light Horse Regiment in October 1919. Gullett expressed concerns that mirrored some of the very constraints that wartime censorship had imposed. One involved the withholding of information he believed was 'too realistic for broadcast

²⁰ Gullett, 'Report on a lecture by Mr Lowell Thomas on 28 Aug. 1920'. Australian War Memorial registry files - First series, AWM 93, 3/1/49.

²¹ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 489.

²² For the background to the writing of the British official history see: A Green (2003) *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories 1915-1948* (London: Frank Cass).

consumption' and the second was the desire to avoid a criticism of the commanding officer of the 7th Light Horse Regiment who was 'no doubt carrying out Brigade orders and the Brigade were simply passing on orders from Division'. Gullett urged Berrie to be mindful of the fact that his book would be read not only by ex-light horsemen but by members of the general public including women and children whose loved ones had been killed on active service. It would be 'unnecessarily painful' to read about 'the awful stench arising from no man's land and from the rear of our lines where many who fell in the landing lay still unburied'. Gullett conceded that it was true, but felt it was unnecessary to 'remind our women that their dead were allowed to rot unburied on the battleground'.²³

The non-military reader in Australia apparently did not need to read about the bodies of their loved ones rotting in no-man's land any more than Gullett was inclined to describe it to them. Although Berrie took Gullett's advice and removed the overt references to the bodies of Australian soldiers left unburied, a reader did not have to be very knowledgeable to glean that information from the material he retained. In this instance Gullett encouraged the removal of material he knew to be true. When dealing with some of the mythological conventions he had helped established, he was equally prepared to allow inaccuracies to go unchallenged. In the official history he emphasised the bond between rider and horse:

They began their campaigning strong in the first essential quality of mounted soldiery; they instinctively understood and loved their horses. The light horseman's horse was something more than the animated machine which served and carried him. It was his respected friend and ally. Very early in the mounted war in Sinai the troopers learned that the asset above price was the good horse, and that the horse evacuated because of debility, or sore back, or any other cause, was never recovered by its former rider. This knowledge, added to the strong affection of the men for their animals, led, as the campaign developed, to a very high standard in horsemastership.²⁴

The absence of the oft repeated story of light horsemen shooting their horses at the end of the war rather than hand them over to be sold to the locals is a significant gap in the record. The story is as enduring as it is inaccurate. Gullett's decision to include Oliver Hogue's poem 'The Horses Stay' in *The Australians in Palestine* in 1919 ensured that the story was widely circulated. Hogue's narrator shoots his horse rather than imagine him 'crawling round old

²³ HG – G.L Berrie, 23 Oct. 1919. Australian War Memorial registry files - First series, AWM 93, 19/53.

²⁴ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 32.

Cairo with a ‘Gyppo’ on his back’. The illustrations that accompanied the poem were unashamedly sentimental. But it was in fact the previous year in *Kia Ora Coo-ee*, the Light Horse and Mounted Rifles magazine that Gullett first spread the rumour that the horses would be left behind and sold to the locals.²⁵ When he came to write the official history, by which time he could not have helped but have been aware of the story’s inaccuracy, rather than correct the record, he chose to simply ignore it. When viewed in light of his advice to Berrie, Gullett showed himself prepared to censor the truth if it ran counter to the mythology of the AIF and to ignore inaccuracies on the condition that they reflected its ‘spirit’. In this case a literal truth was deemed less important than a figurative one.

Yet Gullett’s flirtation with censorship was piecemeal. Bean recognised this as a shortcoming and advised him to reconsider his treatment of the British war leaders in the official history. He asked Gullett whether he too had felt like a boy able to hurl rocks at people in other yards with impunity but unable to do so in his own yard for fear of the consequences. He counselled his friend to be strong but if he was to ‘hit the distant man straight from the shoulder’ he would need to treat targets closer to home in the same manner.²⁶ Hanging over Bean’s head at the time was the question of access to British documents such as the GHQ diaries, the use of which was contingent upon him offering an assurance that no comment or criticism could be made of them. Bean informed Gullett that he would offer only the assurance that he would make no comment based solely on the diaries which could not have been made on the strength of the information at his disposal. Rather hopefully, Bean believed that ‘they can only ask us to be fair’.²⁷ Gullett did not share the same faith in the British preparedness to accept fair criticism, noting only that he had given no such assurance but his use of the British documents made available to him probably conformed to Bean’s compromise anyway.

The concern about criticisms being made in an official history was by no means a one way street. In a draft version of the volumes of the British official history dealing with the Gallipoli campaign, Brigadier-General Cecil Faber Aspinall-Oglander criticised the performance of Australian soldiers on the day of the landing. Though the criticisms were

²⁵ In reality, most of the fit horses were transferred to the British and Indian Armies. Horses that were deemed too old or unfit were destroyed in a strictly controlled and humane manner. See G Wilson (2012) *Bully Beef & Balderdash: Some Myths of the AIF Examined and Debunked* (Newport. NSW: Big Sky Publishing).

²⁶ CB – HG, 21 Aug. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

²⁷ CB – HG, 21 Aug. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

supported by Bean and to a lesser extent Monash, the Australian High Commission made a formal objection. As a result, the chapter was redrafted and the offending material was expunged, even when it was supported by evidence. Bean saw nothing in the British account that challenged the accepted narrative, but was himself later subject to some mild criticism from Geoffrey Serle that he had been too reserved in dealing with contentious or discreditable aspects of AIF behaviour' in Volume VI.²⁸ Bean's analysis was inevitably weakened by his tendency to always soften his judgement of Australians. Eric Andrews put it best by observing that by painting all his pictures in bright colours, Bean was unable to distinguish between light and shade.²⁹

Though Gullett was prepared to give due consideration to criticisms from his close friend, he was not prepared to extend the same courtesy to Chauvel who was making a 'hideous lot of trouble' about the manuscript. Gullett believed that Chauvel wanted any criticism of the British removed in order to satisfy his own vanity and a desire for self-advertisement.³⁰ In reality, Chauvel's detailed responses to Gullett's chapters, which proved of great value, were proof of both his kindness and his loyalty to the commanders under whom he served.³¹ Gullett was not an unkind man nor was he disloyal for reasons of self-advancement. Yet as he showed throughout his political career, his loyalty was never unconditional. He was quite prepared to withdraw it if he believed a greater issue was at stake. His mischaracterisation of Chauvel's motivation stemmed not from distrust but rather a failure to understand a profoundly different conception of loyalty.

In a letter to Chauvel in January 1920, Gullett made it clear that he did not find the role of critic to be 'a pleasant one'. Honesty demanded, however, that he approach it 'in the same spirit as good men took active service. It is simply a matter of duty. I know no friends or enemies in the matter'.³² Chauvel's reply was equally measured. He observed that for criticism 'to bear fruit [it] must not run the risk of charges of exaggeration or bitterness of

²⁸ G Serle (1983) Introduction. *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 - Volume VI– The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918.*

https://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/volVI_introduction/ Date retrieved 23 Feb. 2016.

²⁹ Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion*, p.145.

³⁰ HG – PG, 22 Aug. 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

³¹ AJ Hill (1983) 'Introduction'. In HS Gullett *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 - Volume VII – The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine, 1914–1918*

https://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/volVII_introduction/ Date retrieved 15 May 2017.

³² HG – HC, 30 Dec. 1920. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

feeling and the critic should deal with both sides of the question'. Chauvel defended his feedback as nothing more than an attempt to acquaint Gullett with the 'other side'.³³ In particular, Chauvel was outraged by the inclusion of the Surafend massacre. Gullett believed, not unreasonably, that a failure to deal with the incident would leave him complicit in a cover up. He was not prepared to 'deal with it in a small way', believing instead that 'it should either be complete or it should be dropped'. If he was compelled to remove it, Gullett threatened to publish it separately and advertise the fact that it had been omitted from the history 'under protest'.³⁴

In the dispute over Surafend, Bean was unequivocally on the side of Gullett because he recognised that it had to be included because once the story appeared in future histories it would appear that it had been 'hushed up'.³⁵ White supported its inclusion, but thought that the very detailed appendix was neither 'necessary nor in the same good taste as the remainder of his criticisms' and communicated that view to the Australian government.³⁶ Its eventual inclusion reflects well on Gullett, but there were shortcomings in the manuscript that Bean recognised and commented on. Though acknowledging that as it stood it was 'extraordinarily good' Bean saw in Gullett's description of the relations between the British Yeomanry and the Australians a smallness that had no place in a 'big history'. Though Bean was prepared to concede that it might well be 'interesting contemporary journalism', 'it is too self-conscious: it is too small for you, for our light horse, and for our country'. Bean went so far as to describe Gullett's preparedness to assess the relative merits of the fighting men of each of the combatants as a 'defect'. In his estimation, it was as though the war was 'a contest between rival armies and parts of armies with the object of obtaining a judgement as to who were the best fighters on each side, and ticking them off in their order – 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on'.³⁷ Bean was, however, equally as guilty of this as Gullett, though he engaged in it with greater sophistication and subtlety. For years both men had been immersed in a world which celebrated the martial virtues of the AIF at the expense of the British, who in contrast appeared to be bungling the war and squandering the human and material wealth of the Empire. Both remained supporters of the Imperial connection but their vision of Australia's

³³ HC – HG, 4 Jan. 1920. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

³⁴ HG – CB, 22 Aug. 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

³⁵ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 424.

³⁶ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 424.

³⁷ CB – HG, 21 Aug. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

place in the Empire would evolve. Bean, though, was always readier to criticise the system rather than individuals. Gullett was prepared to do both.

That Bean was able to share these concerns with Gullett, who was sensitive about his writing, says much for their mutual regard. In his response, Gullett described it as a ‘wise and generous letter’ and acknowledged that his bias had seen him stray from ‘true history’ to ‘contemporary journalism’.³⁸ Nevertheless, Gullett’s exploration of the character of the light horseman, which was at times quite beautifully executed, was marred by an idealisation that was at times unworthy of an official history. Echoing Baynton’s justification of the Australian soldiers’ capacity for ribaldry, Gullett trivialised their misbehaviour as ‘harmless celebration’, ‘occasional sprees’ and ‘joyous demonstration’.³⁹ This was indicative of Gullett’s often indiscriminating admiration of the Australian soldier and a contempt for the peoples of the Middle East, attitudes which pervade the official history.

Bean made it explicitly clear that what he was suggesting was not tantamount to censorship. He urged Gullett to ‘tell the facts that must be told quite frankly and adequately’ but to leave some of the interpretation to the reader.⁴⁰ This reflected the style Bean himself consciously adopted in the six volumes of the official history that he wrote – ‘factual, restrained and sparing in its use of adjectives, the overall impression is severe’. It was not to everyone’s tastes, indeed, even a friendly critic such as John Gellibrand believed that Bean’s ‘pen was cold’.⁴¹ Perhaps this was the inevitable result of Bean’s split vision, for he sought favourable reviews from military critics for a work that he wanted to be accessible to a general reader. Bean once confided to Gavin Long, who he recommended for the post of general editor of the official history of Australia in the Second World War, that he had never met an academic historian who had read even one of his volumes. It is unlikely that Gullett’s volume has fared any better in academic circles. Yet for all this lack of interest, Bean’s approach challenged the traditions of military history and set the parameters for those Australians who followed in his footsteps. In this way the official history has exerted, and continues to exert, a pervasive cultural influence.⁴²

³⁸ HG – CB, 24 Aug. 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

³⁹ Gullett, *The Australian Imperial Force*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ CB – HG, 21 Aug. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁴¹ Winter, *Making the Legend*, p. 15.

⁴² Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 488.

Gullett also wrote for the non-military reader, though he eschewed Bean's impersonal style and instead valued above all else a capacity to communicate 'spirit'. It was an approach that he adopted long before the end of the war. In September 1917 he circulated a letter to the Australian Divisions on behalf of the War Records Section outlining the importance of Unit Records. He encouraged each unit to become its own historian or else risk being denied their proper place in the historical record. Though they would by necessity record the 'personality and doings of conspicuous Officers and men', he took pains to emphasise that a 'War Diary is at best a bare military memorandum. A history is necessary in order that the life, spirit and personal side of each unit should be fully recorded'.⁴³ This was not entirely consistent with Bean's ambitions for the official history, one of which was an exploration of how 'the Australian people – and the Australian character, if there is one – had come through the universally recognised test of this, their first great war'?⁴⁴ Bean encouraged his friend to see the war through this broader lens, an effort that highlighted differences between the Oxford educated Bean and the bush reared Gullett who in this instance, however, stood firm:

I did not accept, owing to sheer incapacity, your suggestion to stamp the early chapters with some high moral purpose and peculiar Australian psychology. I failed to discern such things in the Light Horsemen. As I saw it their campaign was to a remarkable extent one with a casual sporting purpose to which they bent all their high intelligence and endeavour.⁴⁵

There were other, more practical concerns as well. In March 1921, Gullett wrote to Bean regarding remuneration and his desire to spread his history across two volumes. Both had been settled in London, presumably at the end of the war, but Gullett sought now to alter the agreement given the greater demands on his time and the length of the history as it now stood. In April 1920 Bean arranged for an increase in Gullett's contract from £500 to £750 and in November to £1000, but the issue of the Light Horse story being told across two volumes was not as easily addressed. Gullett was, as always, direct in articulating his discontent:

⁴³ Letter from HG, Sept. 1917. Written records, 1914-18 War: Copy of letter received from Lieutenant H S Gullett, War Records Section for the information and guidance of all units of the Division, September 1917, AWM 25 1013/20.

⁴⁴ CEW Bean (1938) 'The Writing of the Australian Official History of the Great War – Sources, Methods and Some Conclusions' *Royal Australian Historical Society, Journal and Proceedings XXIV, pt. 2*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ HG – CB, 29 March 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

It always seemed an outrage to me that the work of the Light Horse should rank in the History with the Rabaul ‘campaign’ in which one man was killed, and a few others who were unlucky enough to get malaria; Heney’s discursive masterpiece; the story of four flying squadrons, three of which were formed late in 1917; and with the somewhat hackneyed story of the Sydney-Emden fight to say nothing of the book of pretty pictures.⁴⁶

Bean was open to the question of remuneration; he was far less accommodating when it came to the question of his commitment to the legacy of the AIF. Replying to an earlier telegram which covered the same ground, Bean admitted to feeling ‘just a little hurt at the implication that I have been unjust to the Light Horse, or would be so’. Gullett had adjusted his assessment of the length of the volume on at least five occasions. Bean was at pains to point out that ‘it was your advice, from first to last, that led me to fix the length of the Light Horse volume; and the difficulties are not due to my being unjust to the Light Horse but to the estimates having been so very greatly increased in the last stages’.⁴⁷

There were bigger problems for Bean than this dispute with his friend Gullett. The publisher George Robertson found much in Bean’s writing style that he found unsatisfactory. After reading the first draft of chapter 1 of Volume I in April 1920 he conceded to Arthur Jose that the only thing preventing him from turning to drink was the late hour. Perhaps fearing that even that criticism did not fully articulate his concerns, he added that ‘Bean is what our dear friend Henry Lawson calls a Wanterwriteandcan’t’.⁴⁸ To Robertson’s credit, he repeated these criticisms in a letter to Bean two months later. Yet his dismissal of Bean’s language as ‘slipshod journalistic talk, misconceived and misbegotten’ showed that whatever qualities of character to which he might have laid claim, tact was not among them. If Bean was in any doubt about Robertson’s view after reading that assessment, he would have well and truly got the point when he read further:

Your first chapter would lead the discerning public to think that you do not know what to say, and that, if you did, you could not say it ... The chapter would suggest that you have no conception of, and no power to discharge the historian’s

⁴⁶ HG – CB, 29 March 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁴⁷ CB – HG, 24 March 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁴⁸ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 414.

duty in the slightest. Of orderly disposition of matter, resulting from previous digestion and re-conception of raw material; of dignified arrangement of language ... there is no sign.⁴⁹

Showing either a capacity to work with even so brusque a character as Robertson or a developing gift for sarcasm, Bean replied that after reading the letter he counted himself 'fortunate to have had a publisher so conscientious and a friend so courageous as to write it'.⁵⁰ Though he showed the self-effacement necessary to agree to rewrite the chapter, in characterising the criticisms as 'suggestions' Bean showed that he would not be subject to censorship regardless from where it emanated. Yet for all Robertson's colourful dismissal of Bean's writing ability, it was not the core issue any more than it was about official censorship. As Peter Stanley observed, the dispute was actually over the very nature of the history that Bean was aspiring to write.⁵¹ Robertson wanted great literature. Like Gullett, Bean wanted a work that would be accessible to the masses, or as it once indelicately described it, to a housemaid of ordinary intelligence.

Bean's compromises all came to nought, for in March 1921 even the reworked sections attracted Robertson's ire. In a letter to George Swinburne, the chairman of the Defence Department's business administration board, Robertson left little to the imagination. He considered it a shocking piece of work and one that would expose the Commonwealth to derision. At his suggestion Swinburne approached George Pearce the Defence Minister who raised the matter in parliament. Bean was summoned to meet Prime Minister Hughes who sided with Robertson and urged Bean to work with Professor Thomas George Tucker of the University of Sydney. When Tucker saw the manuscript, he acknowledged that though it was a very readable story, it was marred by, among other things 'faults of taste or tact'.⁵² In the toing and froing that followed, both Bean and Robertson threatened to resign if their conflicting visions were thwarted. Given that it took over six months to get agreement for Gullett to assume the role of correspondent in the Middle East in 1918, in this instance at least the Australian government showed a remarkable capacity for swift action in a matter intimately concerned with the shaping of the national narrative. To Bean's credit, he stood firm when it mattered and gave ground when he could. The collaboration with Tucker was a

⁴⁹ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 415.

⁵⁰ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 415.

⁵¹ P Stanley (2005) *Quinn's Post, Anzac, Gallipoli* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin).

⁵² Stanley, *Quinn's Post*, p. 190.

fruitful one, a reality that Bean acknowledged in the preface of the first edition and in private correspondence. Given the manner in which Robertson articulated his criticisms, Bean was wise to act as an intermediary in Gullett's own clash with the publisher. It is also to Bean's credit that he placed the survival of the official history as he conceived it before his own ego as a writer and the most prominent witness of the deeds of the AIF.

Tucker was also the first choice to work with Gullett, although that collaboration ended quickly. Tucker was an English born, Cambridge educated classical scholar whose literary advice was much valued by Robertson. Kenneth McKay acknowledges that authors often resented the 'tuckering' they received, yet Bean for one would come to value his 'conscientiousness and sense of style'.⁵³ However, there was little in Tucker's background to appeal to Gullett on any level. Though he claimed to have 'a good appreciation of Tucker's literary qualities', Gullett nevertheless dismissed his style as 'cold and pedantic'. As if intent on showing the gulf that separated their literary styles, Gullett added that he was as 'warm as frozen fish'.⁵⁴ Much of the debate that ensued between Robertson, Gullett, Bean, Tucker and later with his replacement Arthur Jose stemmed from different views about history and the divide between professional historians and journalists. It was a divide that at times threatened to derail Bean's plan for the official history.

Gullett spoke directly to Robertson 'with a complete absence of fireworks' and received an assurance that Tucker would not edit his book.⁵⁵ Robertson warned Gullett that he would probably find his preferred candidate, Arthur Jose, an even harsher critic; a warning that in retrospect should have been heeded. As he would do on a number of occasions, Gullett reassured Bean that he would consider any and all alterations but he would retain the right to insist on his original language being followed.⁵⁶ Bean later concluded that Robertson was in fact preparing to use Gullett's manuscript as the basis for a complete rewrite despite having been quite explicit in his assurance that Gullett was in fact free to reject editorial amendments as he saw fit. Yet it was more than Gullett's disdain for a different literary style and the critique of his own that underpinned his opposition. For though he claimed to have no vanity

⁵³ KJ McKay (2016) 'Tucker, Thomas George (1859–1946)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/tucker-thomas-george-8869/text15573.2014> Date retrieved 29 March 2016.

⁵⁴ HG – CB, 1 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁵⁵ HG – CB, 21 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁵⁶ HG – CB, 21 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

about his writing, it is clear that he was self-conscious about his lack of academic qualifications. This left him content to have factual errors corrected, as is evident in his willingness to submit the manuscript to Chauvel despite concerns over his motives in seeking a 'go lightly' approach to criticisms of the British. Gullett nevertheless remained steadfast in his view that a purely literary revision was 'ridiculous'. He paid lip service to the possibility it might merely be 'foolish pride' on his part, but he clearly resented being subject to a literary revision conducted by a university professor.⁵⁷ Gullett grappled with his own motives in opposing anything other than what a modern audience would describe as proof reading. He recognised that 'perhaps this is in some measure due to the fact that I am not a University man, and that any education I have has been gained as a side line in my own time'.⁵⁸

For all the self-awareness that some of Gullett's observations imply, he believed that while 'form counts for much', it must remain entirely secondary to 'spirit and strength'. Language use need only be 'tolerable'. For it was 'extremely distasteful, even impossible' for Gullett to accept alterations from a man like Tucker, who he dismissed as 'knowing nothing of either the Light Horse or Palestine, or the spirit which animated our men abroad'.⁵⁹ Gullett made it clear to Bean that if Tucker insisted on a literary revision of the manuscript he would resign. It was a demand he would be reminded of by Robertson when he complained about Jose and repeated the threat to down tools. Despite sharing some of Gullett's political views and writing Volume IX, *The Royal Australian Navy* and contributing to Volume X, *The Australians at Rabaul*, Jose would fare no better than Tucker. There is an air of inevitability about Gullett's rejection of Jose and a repetition of his threat to self-publish rather than submit his work to literary interference. No doubt emboldened by seeing off Tucker and aware that his first government appointment as head of immigration in 1920 offered access to a world of influence and power that the official history could not, Gullett was eager to finish. Temperamentally unsuited to the self-effacement necessary to accept literary criticism and professionally unable to devote the time that this collaboration demanded even if he was so inclined, Gullett opposed Jose from the first.

⁵⁷ HG – CB, 1 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁵⁸ HG – CB, 1 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁵⁹ HG – CB, 1 June 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

Now nearly a century on, it is easy to sympathise with Jose's plight; overworked, struggling with health issues, beset by financial problems, and enduring an interference in his volume that dwarfed Gullett's relatively trifling concern with two editors and a publisher with whom he had no literary sympathy.⁶⁰ For in the Australian Navy, Jose found an organisation which used the full weight of its influence and power to retain the right to censor all material with the intent of expunging all opinion or criticism. Along with this demand, which was not made of the other authors, Jose was then faced with Gullett's hostility when confronted over basic issues concerning style. Bean showed considerable skill in avoiding the twin calamities of Jose's resignation from the authorship of his volume or the submission to such strict censorship. These were skills he would also need when guiding the hot tempered Gullett to a resolution that would see Volume VII published to some critical and popular acclaim.

At first, the collaboration between Jose and Gullett began well enough. In response to a direct approach from Bean, Jose indicated that it was his understanding that the appointment of Tucker 'was the result of some trouble with Robertson' and that he did not wish to 'butt in'. That said, he was nevertheless 'willing – indeed glad – to do the revision of Gullett's work' for he 'liked his style immensely'.⁶¹ Bean did hint at the cause of the break with Tucker when he asked Jose to 'preserve, as far as is compatible with the dignity of the history, the racy style of the author'.⁶² In August he informed Bean that he was about to send Gullett the first of his revisions, noting that he had interfered as little as possible. Unknown to Jose, a month before he had even indicated that he was prepared to work on the Light Horse manuscript, he had been judged and found wanting by the outspoken Gullett – 'I can't write much, but if I am not more effective in appeal to the public than either Tucker, Jose or Geo. Robertson, I will take to wharf jumping'. Gullett then hinted at a preference for form over function, for though he conceded that both Jose and Tucker were 'men of high literary attainment, Jose's matter is hard and unsympathetic, while Tucker is invariably cold'.⁶³

⁶⁰ In a letter to Bean Jose listed his other responsibilities which included the Naval History, editor-in-chief of *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, a life of Father Therry and a 'beastly book on pig rearing' (HG – CB, 15 August 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶¹ Arthur Jose (AJ) to CB, 25 July 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶² CB – AJ, 23 July 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶³ HG – CB, 21 June, 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

In early September 1921 Gullett visited Robertson and Jose in Sydney. He still held out hope that they both might be brought to an understanding of the type of assistance he was prepared to accept. Perhaps softened by the positive tone that Robertson adopted, Gullett acknowledged that some of Jose's touches had helped substantially. He did, however, make it clear that much of his editorial work was 'sheer quibbling'. Corrections should, in Gullett's view, be confined 'absolutely to those which make an incontrovertible improvement'.⁶⁴ Despite assuring Bean that he would subsequently write to Robertson without hostility, a week later Gullett sent him a telegram that was decidedly belligerent:

Three chapters received some suggested amendments excellent and much appreciated. But many are unnecessary provocative and unacceptable Some are positively alien to my form of expression Others entirely alter meaning ... This is sent in friendliest spirit but wish you know that if amendment continues I must withdraw forthwith from contract.⁶⁵

Robertson played Pontius Pilate and wiped his hands of the problem by informing Gullett that though Jose was engaged in other projects for Angus and Robertson, the company was in no way responsible for his suggestions or amendments. He also reminded Gullett, and may well have taken some delight in doing so, that Jose was in fact a problem of his own making. Robertson had urged the appointment of Tucker, but had given way in the face of Gullett's threat to withdraw the manuscript rather than have his input. Jose was selected not by Robertson, but by Bean and by inference, Gullett.

Responding in late September 1921 to what he saw as Gullett's 'harrying' of George Robertson, particularly in regard to the telegram that was 'ill-tempered and ill-judged', Jose sought a compromise of sorts with Bean who was editor in chief of the series. Jose suggested that Gullett should make his representations directly to Bean and then he and Jose could 'fight out whatever fighting is needed'.⁶⁶ It all came to nought, as two days before Jose's letter Gullett wrote to Thomas Trumble, the Secretary of Defence and advised that 'if the present literary revision is insisted upon, I shall consider my contract at an end ... I shall then

⁶⁴ HG – CB, 7 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶⁵ Telegram HG – Robertson, 14 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶⁶ AJ – CB, 30 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

proceed immediately to publish the work independently of Government co-operation'.⁶⁷ He made it clear to Bean that he would burn the manuscript rather than 'put up with Jose's school mistress tirades'.⁶⁸ Whether Bean believed that Gullett would make good on the more extreme of his threats is unlikely, but he assured Trumble that Gullett was quite prepared to withdraw the manuscript.

Gullett's intransigence was exacerbated by his impatience to move beyond his wartime work. He admitted to Robertson that his health was suspect and in a reference to his work on immigration with the Australian government, there were more important things than a history of the Light Horse.⁶⁹ Fearful that his opposition to editorial interference would be characterised as 'trivial', 'petty', 'unnecessary', 'stultifying' and 'pedantic', Gullett assured Robertson that he had 'no exaggerated sense of the quality of my book, but it is written, I think, in clear simple English, and it is not without spirit'.⁷⁰ In the margin of a letter sent to Bean on the same day, Gullett added a handwritten note that 'a few more brackets and some dashes and throw in some dots, the story would be almost complete in Morse without my stuff at all. Blast them!'⁷¹ Gullett does not mention that one of the complaints to Robertson was that Bean had altered some of his sentences in his role as editor in chief before passing the manuscript to Jose. On reading Bean's alterations, Jose in turn altered them again and in doing so had unwittingly returned them to the original.

In his own letter to Trumble seeking a way out of the impasse, Bean described Gullett's book as excellent and a worthy addition to the series. He acknowledged that though phrases describing 'paradise dawning over the sorrowful surface of Turkey' might attract the ire of a critic in the London Athenaeum 'the book would pass anywhere – not perhaps as a monument of flawless writing but as a splendid adequate account of the campaign'.⁷² Despite the possibility that Bean wrote 'adequate' and then attempted to replace it with 'splendid' without remembering to remove the lesser adjective, it is clear that he was playing the peace

⁶⁷ HG – Thomas Trumble, 30 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶⁸ HG – CB, 28 September 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁶⁹ HG – Robertson, 28 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁷⁰ HG – Robertson, 28 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁷¹ HG – CB, 28 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁷² CB – Trumble, 30 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

maker. On the one side he had his friend Gullett, who he recognised had a very big following in the Light Horse. He warned Trumble that if the dispute became public, the whole history would suffer. On the other side, he had George Robertson, 'equally hot headed', aware that Gullett was bound by a legal agreement to submit 'to revision by any editor appointed by the Government', and in Bean's view ready to 'get Gullett's ms [manuscript] and maps from him, and then to revise them as much as he desires, and let Gullett do his worst'.⁷³

Bean's solution drew heavily on his standing with the warring parties and was in effect a casting of himself in the role of a go between. He recommended that Gullett work on the revisions that he had already suggested while Jose worked through his own copy but confine himself to 'essentials'. Bean would then go through the two copies and incorporate Jose's revision 'only where it clearly removes an ambiguity or improves the grammar'. The manuscript would then be sent to Robertson who then might indicate his views, again 'not on fine points but big ones'. Bean was confident in his ability to subsequently 'thrash these out' with Gullett.⁷⁴ The pressure on Bean to find a solution was exacerbated by his other responsibilities, not the least being his concern that an open fight with Gullett would precipitate hostilities with Heney and possibly Cutlack, with whom he had worked well despite the need for heavy editing of their work.

In mid-December 1921, Jose acknowledged to Bean that Gullett's hostility had made it impossible for him to 'put his heart into this job'. Jose wished to create 'great literature', but to do so he believed that the manuscript would not only need to be 'rewritten but reconstructed'. Though prepared to acknowledge that Gullett was a 'vigorous writer', his writing was 'verbose', 'pretentious' and 'damnably lacking in style and hopelessly journalistic in the worst sense'.⁷⁵ Jose's final criticism may well have found targets other than Gullett, for Bean was a journalist, as were the authors of three of the other volumes. In his two volume history of Australian literature, Henry Green observed that Volume VII was the one most readily identified as having been written by a journalist. For he found no vigour in the language, and instead saw in Gullett 'a journalist of all-round experience and ability' but one whose capacities 'did not transcend that required in careful and capable journalism'.

⁷³ CB – Trumble, 30 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁷⁴ CB – Trumble, 30 Sept. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁷⁵ AJ – CB, 19 Dec. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

Green also critiqued Gullett as a storyteller. For though he conceded that his approach was more conventional than Bean's, there were no vicarious thrills for the reader. Even an event of intrinsic interest such as the almost folkloric episode of a Light Horse detachment helping a body of surrendered Turks hold off ten thousand Arabs, was retold by Gullett in a manner Green dismissed as 'dull and flat'.⁷⁶ However, there were some virtue among the vices, but it was at best conditional. Though Gullett had been prepared to add colour to the narrative, too often it was 'cheap and faded: when he lets himself go he runs too often into the banalities and barren clichés in which the outworn romanticism of the Period ran to seed'.⁷⁷

Green also saw the pretentiousness that Jose observed with such despair, citing Gullett's description of Australia's racial patriotism which 'bursts into flame when the honour of the old land of his father is touched and when that land buckles on the armour of battle'.⁷⁸ As Alec Hill observes, however, it was a pioneer work 'told in spirited fashion' with a coverage of air power, logistics, terrain, transport, morale and disease skilful enough to ensure that it has 'real military value'.⁷⁹ Jose found no such mitigation and made an unintentional criticism of his countrymen when he observed that 'although Australia may not see how bad he is, in England his book will reflect discredit on Australian letters'. Having been worn down by the conflict with Gullett and his own difficult circumstances, Jose was resigned to the fact that 'we shall be saddled with a third rate and sometimes offensive piece of work'.⁸⁰ Jose was also prepared to broach some of these criticisms in his correspondence with Gullett although he did so in a more muted fashion. He denied Gullett's accusation that he was altering the 'matter' of the book and took issue with Gullett's claim that he did not have the time to go through corrections line by line given his government work:

These histories aren't just ephemeral journalism. They are the Australian statement to the world. They will be taken by the readers – official and other – of other nations as the best we can do for our fighters. And it seems to me that no

⁷⁶ HM Green (1984) *A History of Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson Publishers), p. 819.

⁷⁷ Green, *Australian Literature*, p. 819.

⁷⁸ An interesting link with *The Iliad* suggests itself here. In book 16 Patroclus asks Achilles to return to the fight, or if not, to give him his armor so that he might convince the Trojans that the great warrior was in fact there and thereby lower their morale:

"Let the whole Myrmidon army follow my command-
I might bring some light of victory to our Argives!
And give me your own fine armor to buckle on my back,
So the Trojans might take me for you, Achilles..."

⁷⁹ Hill, 'Introduction'.

⁸⁰ AJ – CB, 19 Dec. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

trouble should be spared to make them as clear, as concise, as correct in every way and as little like flawed literature, as circumstances allow.⁸¹

Central to the Anzac mythology was its acceptance by outsiders, and this was just as true for the literary record of their achievements. Volume I, written by Bean, had received a positive review in *The Times*. Bean pointed out to Gullett that reviews such as this one would ‘go a long way in establishing the attitude of the Staff College and of literary circles towards these volumes’.⁸² Having laid the groundwork, Bean acknowledged that he was aware that Gullett had been approached regarding Tucker, who had once seemed such an objectionable choice, reading through Volume VII as he was doing for the second edition of Volume I. Gullett’s resignation from Immigration in February 1922 (covered in Chapter 11) had necessitated a return to journalism with the Melbourne *Herald* and perhaps with fewer responsibilities, he proved more amenable to some type of literary revision. Nevertheless, Bean knew that he needed to tread carefully given the angst of the previous year. He made it clear that Gullett would have the final say on all editorial matters but added the not insignificant observation that anything that might further ensure the quality of the history ‘is worth doing and I believe that each further revision is valuable and, in our experience, does not detract from the spirit or style of the story’.⁸³

Probably to Bean’s great relief Gullett replied four days later and though couched in a face saving compromise, he indicated a conditional acceptance of the new arrangement as long as it did not cause a delay. Gullett assured Bean that he would be ‘pleased to receive all the assistance I can get’.⁸⁴ Three months later Gullett wrote to Bean and acknowledged that he was battling with eye trouble and headaches which made night work impossible. But the end was in sight. By September 1922, the battles had been fought and the enemies were routed so all that was left was the minutia. The question of spelling camels with a capital ‘C’ when referring to the troops of the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade took the place of the threats and counter threats that had dominated the discussions of the previous year. In retrospect, the clash between Robertson and Gullett was almost inevitable. Robertson regarded bookshops

⁸¹ AJ – HG, 6 Oct. 1921. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁸² CB – HG, 13 May 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁸³ CB – HG, 13 May 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁸⁴ HG – CB, 17 May 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

‘as cultural centres’ but was nevertheless ‘controlling and stubborn’, possessed a ‘short fuse’, and revelled in ‘battling the egos of his writers’.⁸⁵ On the other hand Gullett was overworked, self-conscious about his lack of literary attainments, suffering from ill health and was not in the habit of suffering in silence.

Bean wrote to Gullett in September 1922 and told him that he and Balfour had gone through the first half of the manuscript and could only find two small points to be settled. Bean reassured Gullett that in these cases he was free to disagree with the amendments and retain the original or seek a compromise. As for any potential problem with Chauvel, it would, in Bean’s view, take the form of an objection by the Minister. The procedure would then be for Gullett to meet with him and ‘talk over the difficulty ... but of course, both you and I would meet his views as far as it would be possible to do so without sacrificing what we believe to be our duties as historians’.⁸⁶ Looking to deal with Gullett’s concerns before he even raised them, Bean added what was a mission statement for the series. Conscious that his contract protected him from the vagaries of government censorship, Bean was adamant that safeguarding a reputation was not grounds for alteration:

[If] by complying or compromising you would be concealing from Australians a truth which they should expect to find in their history, then stand pat upon what you have written and I will back you up whatever the result. My contract with the Government is that a volume which I have to edit should not be censored.⁸⁷

Though Gullett was eager to put the entire experience behind him, he would no doubt have been heartened by the generally favourable reviews that the history of the Light Horse received, particularly from British reviewers. The two leading service journals, *The Army Quarterly* and the *Journal of the Royal United Services* both cast appreciative eyes over Gullett’s work. The former praised his ‘engaging enthusiasm’ and even characterised his criticisms of British policy, conduct of operations and commanders as ‘remarkably bold but, on the whole, well informed’. The latter described it as ‘a very valuable professional study’, quite an achievement given that Gullett had consciously targeted a non-military audience. Perhaps of even greater importance was that the history garnered a favourable review in *The*

⁸⁵ Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 412.

⁸⁶ CB – HG, 15 Sept. 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

⁸⁷ CB – HG, 15 Sept. 1922. Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Charles E W Bean, Official Historian AWM 38, 3DRL 7953/8.

Times, which acknowledged that it would ‘bring a glow to the hearts of the relatives and descendants of the men who fought and made Australia not only a nation but one of the foremost nations of the world’.⁸⁸ Interestingly given that it was an official history, the reviewer lauded it for being ‘full of intimate detail and dramatic colour that a historian writing from mere record could not hope to emulate’.⁸⁹ This dramatic colour was still being appreciated sixty years later when it was reissued, with one reviewer noting that Gullett had ‘obviously become imbued with the same cavalier attitude as the troopers of whom he wrote’. Yet it came at a cost, for he was unable to ‘maintain that detachment which adds greatness to the volumes on Gallipoli and France’.⁹⁰

Not all the reviews, however, were unconditional in their praise. Though *The Cavalry Journal* acknowledged that it was a brilliant piece of descriptive writing, the reviewer, like Jose before him, believed that it was hopelessly journalistic. In a departure from the view of *The Army Quarterly*, the reviewer was critical of the lack of reasoned criticism. The *New Statesman* condemned the Australian nationalism that pervaded the work, most notably in the form of patronising references to some British troops and the ‘flow of praise’ of the Light Horse which was ‘continuous and indiscriminating’.⁹¹ Gullett must have noticed that even the most laudatory reviews often contradicted each other. Perhaps he understood that this hinted at more than the shortcomings of literary reviews. The malleability of the developing Anzac legend allowed each reviewer to draw from it what he wanted.

Gullett was far too human not to have taken some delight in the fact that many of the reviews, both in Britain and Australia, lauded the very qualities that Robertson, Jose and Tucker had found so objectionable. Australian reviewers variously described it as ‘ably and enthusiastically written’, ‘a great war story told greatly’, and a ‘worthy successor’ to Bean’s coverage of Anzac’.⁹² The *Daily Telegraph* characterised it as a ‘real digger record, told in simple, convincing language’, a view supported by the *Weekly Times* which noted that ‘unlike many military books, which are too technical to be mastered by the ordinary reader, this volume will be read with equal enjoyment by professional soldiers and civilians’. The *Forum* went beyond the mechanics to crown it the ‘most national book ever written in

⁸⁸ *The Times* quoted in the *Daily Advertiser*, 9 July 1923, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *The Times* quoted in the *Daily Advertiser*, 9 July 1923, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *The Canberra Times*, 9 Feb. 1985, p. 16.

⁹¹ Hill, ‘Introduction’.

⁹² *Advocate*, 19 May 1923, p. 14; *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 4 May 1923, p. 2; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1923, p. 8.

Australia'. By contrast, the *Examiner* congratulated Gullett for dealing 'as accurately and dispassionately with the operations of the Imperial troops as he does with their comrades in arms, the Australians'. The *Herald* had one last dig at censorship, observing dryly that 'much that the censor smudged and high commands carefully veiled from public view is set forth in Mr Gullett's admirable volume'.⁹³

Gullett's place in the Australian war literature of the First World War is difficult to quantify. In Hazlehurst's view, his 'chronicles of battle' place him second only to Charles Bean as a historian of the war'.⁹⁴ The official history they worked on is considered by some to be the 'chief literary embodiment of a legend', but the question remains as to how many people have actually read even the one volume *Anzac to Amiens*.⁹⁵ It is in fact quite possible that *The Anzac Book* which Bean edited played a more decisive role in establishing the image of the Anzac in the popular imagination.⁹⁶ Beyond that, the Australian War Memorial has perhaps exerted an even more enduring influence. In 2016 alone, 1.14 million people visited an institution that the director, Dr Brendan Nelson, observed, 'left them with a deeper understanding of Australia as a nation'.⁹⁷ Perhaps Bean's reputation has proved too pervasive but the reality is that Gullett is now rarely mentioned in discussions of the Australian literary response to the war. In that sense, he is not alone. In his excellent assessment of this response, John Laird characterises the years between 1921 and 1928 as a period so barren that not a single work of genuine war literature emerged from the pen of an Australian writer. Indeed, in his view most of the prose works before 1928 are 'ephemeral' with only three, one of which was Bean's first two volumes of the official history, having 'any claim to consideration as works of literature'.⁹⁸

⁹³ Official Order Form, circa 1923.

⁹⁴ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 239.

⁹⁵ S Brugger (1980) *Australians and Egypt 1914 – 1919* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press), p. 73.

⁹⁶ *The Anzac Book* was a collection of stories, poems, cartoons and illustrations written and drawn by Australian soldiers on Gallipoli. By September 1916 over one hundred thousand had already been sold. Bean was a 'very selective editor who rejected anything which might have modified his vision or tarnished the name of Anzac' (D Kent (1985) *The Anzac book and the Anzac legend: C.E.W. Bean as editor and image-maker. Historical Studies*, 21(84), p. 376). Given the number that were purchased both then and subsequently (and assuming that more people actually read it than the official history), Kent's assertion is not without merit.

⁹⁷ K Burgess (2016) 'Australian War Memorial named Australia's number one landmark in TripAdvisor awards' *The Canberra Times*, 18 May 2016. <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/australian-war-memorial-named-australias-number-one-landmark-20160517-goxiz1.html>. Date retrieved 20 Dec. 2016.

⁹⁸ JT Laird (1971) 'Australian Prose Literature of the First World War: A Survey', *Australian Literary Studies*, 5(2). The other two are Harley Matthews' *Saints and Soldiers* (1918) and William Baylebridge's *An Anzac Muster* (1921).

Beyond the question of style, some of the assumptions that underpin Gullett's work, particularly those dealing with race, have also fallen victim to changing views. The same cannot be said of the essentials. Though the early commemorations of Anzac Day could hardly ignore that the nation had fought in support of King and Empire, over time it has evolved into a celebration of Australian manliness now widely regarded as the 'linchpin of Australian national identity'.⁹⁹ The core values are little altered from those explored by Gullett in his 800 page, 300 000 word panegyric to the Australian soldier. Yet in a modern academic sense, Jeffrey Grey's view that Gullett's history has a very dated feel is well justified.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ William Deane quoted in G Fischer (2012) 'The governor-general's apology reflections on ANZAC day' *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 222.

¹⁰⁰ Grey, *The War With The Ottoman Empire*, p. 191.

Chapter 9 - Politician

For all that Gullett saw value in his work with the Australian War Museum and the official history, they were activities tied to his past rather than his immediate future. He had not abandoned his plans for a political career or his obsession with migration. Neither were likely to be satisfied by a narrow focus on commemorating the war, either in word or in stone. His frustrations did not exist in a vacuum for they mirrored the broader national story. The period after 1918 marked the beginning of a shift in the political emphasis. Before 1914 Australia was a progressive social democracy pursuing social values that enjoyed almost universal support from a population with one of the highest average living standards in the world. After 1918, the initial burst of optimism after the war quickly dissipated in the face of a recession in trade. She was now a society sharply divided along class and sectarian lines and burdened with a massive war debt and facing an uncertain future. The defensiveness that was such a feature of pre-war attitudes was pursued with even greater zeal. Gullett was every bit the political zealot. He was not prepared to watch this drama unfold from the wings. An onstage role beckoned.

In spite of his concerns over his workload when juggling his commitments with the museum and the official history, in 1920 Gullett accepted an invitation from Hughes to become the Director of the Australian Immigration Bureau in Melbourne in a role that may have arranged himself.¹ What he would not have arranged was a job description quite breathtaking in its cynicism. 'Give me public opinion favourable to immigration' the prime minister promised, 'and I will give you a policy'.² Hill characterises this as replacing an albatross with a millstone and there is nothing in subsequent events to suggest that this is not an accurate assessment.³ Initially though, the role would have appeared to offer just the type of participation Gullett desired. He quickly became frustrated, however, by what he perceived to be Hughes' policy of 'talking big about immigration, yet doing little ... In his office,

¹ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 248.

² *Argus*, 25 Feb. 1922, p. 21.

³ Hill, 'Gullett'.

memoranda went unread, letters unsigned for weeks; he had no interest in boosting migrant numbers independent of the development schemes'.⁴

Gullett would have been further frustrated by what he saw as the British government's readiness to contribute even as his own government vacillated. *The Empire Settlement Act* passed by the British government in 1922 provided financial support to migrants approved by Australian authorities. In addition, there was provision for the subsidy of developmental programs conducive to resettlement. It was a move which ensured that Australia could be 'cajoled or bribed into greater receptivity'.⁵ In contrast, in Australia Gullett saw inactivity and empty rhetoric. In his view the main culprit was Hughes, his onetime friend and ally. In fairness though, the issue was bigger than just a lack of vision or understanding on the part of Hughes. Australian migration policy between the First and Second World Wars, at least as it involved Britain, is the story of two governments pursuing their own agendas while displaying scant regard for each other let alone the interests of the migrants themselves. The British government's support of a high level of emigration reflected the belief that unemployment was a threat to domestic stability. In return, the Australian policy was infused with a degree of scepticism only partially offset by a general readiness to subsidise migration if it supplied Australia's needs at modest cost and minimal trouble.

In addition to the Imperial complexities, the usual suspicion between the state and federal governments served to poison any effort at a united approach to post-war migration. The former feared that the Commonwealth's interest in migration was really driven by a desire for a further centralisation of power, while the latter feared that any financial aid to the States to settle migrants might be used for development projects without a migration focus. In fact, Gullett warned Hughes about this eventuality and urged that the Commonwealth assume complete control of immigration. Even Hughes demurred at that. This reluctance was partially motivated at an economic level by his fear that migration would cut wages. At a personal level, Hughes' eugenic leanings left him esteeming quality over quantity. This was not a helpful belief for a prime minister overseeing a process in which success or failure could be so easily reduced to a matter of numbers.

⁴ M Roe (1995) *Australia, Britain, and Migration, 1915-1940: A Study of Desperate Hopes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 39.

⁵ Roe, *Australia*, p. 39.

Such was his disenchantment, Gullett resigned in February 1922 after a ‘wretched quarrel’ with Hughes. He did so ‘with very deep regret, not impulsively but only after long consideration & when I was convinced that things must get worse before they could improve’.⁶ It was a courageous decision, particularly given that his annual wage of £1500 a year exceeded that of many state premiers while a senior journalist in Sydney or Melbourne earned between £10 and £15 per week which was sufficient for a nice home, a car and private school fees. Unfortunately the falling out between Gullett and Hughes was played out in an undignified fashion in the nation’s newspapers as each accused and counter accused the other of acting in bad faith. In both content and language Gullett’s criticisms of government inertia were little different from those he made of the pre-war immigration policies:

The intelligence of Australia was easily roused ... and today I think public opinion will accept immigration on a bold scale, provided that a clear intelligible policy is propounded. But unfortunately we have no policy. We are muddling along in a hole and corner, secretive fashion, which can only excite the suspicions of workers and land seekers in Australia and the derision of the people as a whole.⁷

Hughes responded two days later in ‘bravura style’ and refuted all of Gullett’s assertions, tabling correspondence between the pair as proof of his support for immigration and his dissatisfaction with Gullett’s performance.⁸ Hughes was no more inclined to pull his punches than his one-time protégé:

If all is as bad as Mr. Gullett says, he has fallen down on his job. A candid admission and a graceful retirement would have been commendable, but Mr Gullett has chosen to retire in a manner which, although he poses as the only true friend of immigration, can only harm the movement.⁹

The final claim was accurate enough, for their clash further crippled an immigration bureaucracy that had never been strong. In his final barb, Hughes observed that ‘Mr Gullett is temperamentally unfitted to do any constructive work’.¹⁰ Gullett’s friend George Langley

⁶ HG –Latham, 5 March 1922. Latham MSS, NLA MS 1009/1/995. Cited in Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 248.

⁷ *Argus*, 25 Feb. 1922, p. 21.

⁸ Roe, *Australia*, p. 39.

⁹ *Register*, 27 Feb. 1922, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Daily Standard*, 28 Feb. 1922, p. 8.

was with him the day after he resigned, having previously displayed a capacity to be in the right place at the right time by dining with Gullett the night of his confrontation with Allenby over Surafend. He recalled that Gullett received a cablegram from Northcliffe offering him a ‘most congenial and well paid post on *The Times*’. Gullett declined the offer because he ‘thought that it would look like funking it if he left Australia’ and he wanted Joe ‘to grow up an Australian’.¹¹

One of the causes of friction with Hughes was his failure to support the Queensland government’s scheme to populate the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley. Though Hughes initially offered a loan of £2 million to fund the project, he later reneged on that promise. In Gullett’s view, Hughes did not consider the proposal on its merits and instead declined it because it came from Ted Theodore, the brilliant and ruthlessly ambitious Labor Premier of Queensland. He had been a vigorous opponent of conscription, which was not an addition to a resume likely to endear him to a man such as Hughes who could have a long memory for those who crossed him. One journalist at the *Truth* commented that Gullett spoke on this issue as an ‘unimpeachable authority’ and in doing so implied none too subtly that no such claim could be made on behalf of Hughes.¹²

Perhaps inspired by the belief that an enemy of an enemy was a friend, Theodore offered Gullett the role of organiser of agricultural industry in Queensland in order to ‘place it on a proper footing and to investigate land settlement matters’.¹³ Gullett perhaps saw in Theodore echoes of his own political shift from the Left. In 1924 Gullett observed that Theodore had ‘been rapidly shedding his vivid Socialist colours and cooling in his early unconventional ardours’. He was clearly a man after Gullett’s own heart, for he was ‘logical’, ‘practical’ and ‘absolutely sound on big national things like defence’.¹⁴ He was just as accurately described by another writer as ‘brutally realistic’.¹⁵ In any case, Gullett declined the opportunity, for he had his sights set firmly on the political career that he had first broached with Penelope in 1918.

As the official history neared completion and having now well and truly broken with Hughes, Gullett contested the seat of Henty in the federal election held in December 1922 as an

¹¹ *Reveille*, Dec. 1940, p. 8.

¹² *Truth*, 11 Feb. 1923, p. 1. Although the *Truth* had initially styled itself as an organ of radical democracy and Australian National Independence it was mainly a scandal sheet.

¹³ *Horsham Times*, 10 March 1922, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 10 Aug. 1924, p. 1.

¹⁵ Welsh, *Great Southern Land*, p. 389.

Independent Nationalist. Gullett used his wartime record and his authorship of the official history to position himself as a spokesman for returned soldiers. In particular, he was a strident critic of their treatment by a government that had failed this 'sacred mission' in the 'most painful and disgraceful manner'. The mistakes had not been of the 'ordinary inevitable kind: they had been due to the most shocking series of blunders and acts of gross incompetence that Australia has ever known'.¹⁶ Gullett acknowledged that during the war Hughes had served his country well, but in peace his administration had 'signally failed. It had squandered millions of pounds. It had degraded public life and had shamelessly used office for personal and party ends'.¹⁷ As the leader of an administration that was 'doomed', the wise course of action, in Gullett's view, would be for Hughes to retire 'before he was swept away in ignominious defeat'.¹⁸ One journalist described Gullett at this time as 'a man of standing and sense' who 'could not be suspected of malicious hostility'.¹⁹ Alec Hill, speaking of his ministerial career, would later observe that Gullett was a man who bore no grudges. If both descriptions are accurate, his election campaign was the exception that proved the rule.

Before the election Gullett made it clear that loyalty to one's political party, let alone personal ambition, should never override the greater call of patriotism. Increasing Australia's population was 'a matter that transcended all others in importance ... Australians should get away from party political strife and get down to the big job of national development'. He predicted that 'someday there will arise a man big enough to realise that the best way to win an election [is] to forget it'. He rather ruined the impact of that observation by adding that 'if Australia ever did get such a man she would follow him blindly'.²⁰ He expanded on these views in his correspondence with Latham. When his friend later voted independently in the House, Gullett commended that approach while noting that 'the rigid party line is an accursed thing'.²¹ In later involving himself in disagreements with colleagues and conspiracies against his leaders, most notably Earle Page and Joe Lyons, Gullett showed that he was more than prepared to dispense with Party and personal loyalties when he believed the occasion demanded. He either could not understand or was dismissive of men who felt the pull of party loyalty in the midst of greater issues. In June 1933 when Lyons had been forced to rely

¹⁶ *Age*, 14 Nov. 1922, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Albany Advertiser*, Nov. 1 1922, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Albany Advertiser*, 1 Nov. 1922, p. 3; *Age*, 1 Aug. 1922, p. 10).

¹⁹ *Daily News*, 26 Oct. 1922.

²⁰ *Age*, 15 Dec. 1922, p. 12.

²¹ HG – Latham, 16 Aug. 1923. Latham MSS, NLA MS 1009/1/112. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 251.

on Labor support in the Senate, Gullett called for a coalition of the conservative parties as though the tumult of the Depression rendered lesser concerns irrelevant. He may have been justified in that view, but it did not necessarily show a nuanced understanding of human nature or the political system he wished to join.

Though Gullett polled well in his first election, he finished second to the Nationalist candidate Frederick Francis. Hughes fared little better, with the Nationalists losing their majority and being forced to seek a coalition with the Country Party. The price of their cooperation was Hughes' resignation. Stanley Bruce became the country's eighth prime minister with the Country Party's Earle Page his deputy and treasurer. Gullett's old friend Keith Murdoch, who managed and edited the Melbourne *Herald*, came to his aid and gave him a job. His friend John Latham who had also been part of the Australian delegation to Versailles won the seat of Kooyong in eastern Melbourne as a Liberal candidate. Proof that being in Versailles had also left its mark on him, Latham's campaign slogan was 'Get rid of Hughes'.

Forced to watch from the wings, Gullett conceded that he found it 'extremely difficult to abstain from rebellion against the prolonged idleness of the men of big personality and ability'. In an echo of his 1918 criticisms of those he believed had betrayed the nation's greatness, he added that he could 'not escape the conviction that the Country Party fellows are playing a very selfish game'.²² 'The game of politics', as he had observed earlier that same year, 'is seldom cleanly played'.²³ Working again as a journalist, Gullett continued to comment on Australian politics and the need for a national immigration policy. He also made time to comment on foreign affairs. The Greco-Turkish War (1919-22) elicited from him the observation that 'the Turk, with all his faults, remains in our minds as the gentleman of the Near East. We know his sinister side, but still think of him with respect, and even affection'.²⁴ In this instance Gullett showed that he was both propagandist and true believer, for the idealised and highly sentimental construct of the light horseman that he had helped create had in turn fuelled a view of the war as somehow cleaner in comparison to the Western Front. The Greek Consul was not subject to the same delusion and instead replied that he was in agreement with Gullett only if by gentleman he meant 'a blood thirsty murderer and ravisher'.²⁵

²² HG – Latham, 11 Aug. 1924, Latham MSS, NLA MS 1009/1/1270. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 251.

²³ *Sunday Times*, 23 March 1924, p. 7.

²⁴ *West Argus*, 3 Oct. 1922, p. 2.

²⁵ *Australian*, 6 Oct. 1922, p. 7.

In late 1923 Gullett made a 'special tour of the Far East' for the *Herald*, although in reality it was Japan that was the focus of his reports. He observed that a visitor to Japan was 'overwhelmed with assurances of the nation's desire to live peacefully'. For his part, Gullett found it 'difficult to doubt the sincerity of [these] protestations against aggressive design', a Eurocentric view on the part of Gullett as Japan was already an imperial power given her rule over Korea. While in Japan, Gullett interviewed Baron Ijuin Hikokichi, the Foreign Minister and previously a leading member of his nation's delegation at Versailles. Hikokichi offered just the type of assurance that Gullett sought by suggesting that he 'tell Australia that we have no ambitions in her direction and that we never had'. Showing either an awareness of Australian sensitivities regarding the racial makeup of the new nation or a preparedness to move beyond Hughes' opposition to the Racial Equality Clause at Versailles, Hikokichi saw fit to add that his people 'entertain no sort of resentment in regard to her exclusion policy'.²⁶ In retrospect, some of Hikokichi's additional observations, which Gullett reported, appear tragically ironic:

Japan is not warlike. With whom should we go to war? Surely not with America. Only the very foolish could think that possible. Apart from the incredible madness of such a war, remember that neither side could win. The intervening ocean makes a conflict physically impossible.²⁷

Gullett cast a critical eye over the Japanese cavalry which he believed provided 'a stirring example of Japanese capacity to adopt Western practices'. He conceded that though they were probably the equal of the French and Italians, they were 'certainly not of the class of certain other mounted gentlemen of our acquaintance'. Gullett dismissed the 'thought of them ever overrunning the Australian countryside [as] not calculated to cause loss of sleep'.²⁸ Yet there were contradictions in his assessments. Though he argued that there was widespread feeling in Japan in favour of a democratic reform, there were other less salutary observations:

The clamour for territorial expansion has momentarily been stilled but probably this will prove to be a mere unstable policy of international expediency. Japan must overflow and when it does migration will be backed by the vast and

²⁶ *Weekly Times*, 3 Nov. 1923, p. 8.

²⁷ *Weekly Times*, 3 Nov. 1923, p. 8.

²⁸ *News*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 3.

superbly trained military power. Moreover, viewed here, the moral right to expansion is difficult to deny.²⁹

In April the following year Gullett witnessed the scuttling of HMAS *Australia* 24 miles off the coast from Sydney. The reduction in naval strengths agreed to in the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 demanded the sacrifice, although in reality the ship was already superfluous to Australian defence plans, such as they were. Gullett had seen *Australia* launched in the UK in 1911 and witnessing her sinking thirteen years and a World War later left him yearning for an idealised past. He did acknowledge that the ‘tragedy of it was not in the scuttling of a useless and ugly hulk’. It was that he saw in her demise the ‘collapse of a far sighted patriotic resolution’. For on that ‘misty October morning’ when he had ‘thrilled as her grey hull, then the last word in Scotland’s ship building genius, went crashing out of the forest of timbers’ he believed that *Australia* had ‘made good ... our British heritage’. For those were days marked by a ‘robust nationalism’, ones during which the decision to build a navy was taken in ‘no spirit of extravagance or militarism’ but ‘by a sane, wise people’. Her scuttling was a ‘dismal enterprise’ during which the *Australia*, once the ‘proudest and stoutest thing afloat’, was now ‘wretched and pathetically helpless and dependent’.³⁰

Gullett’s despondency at the sinking of the *Australia* clearly informed an article he wrote only days later in response to the *American Immigration Act* (1924), which sought to preserve American racial homogeneity by banning the immigration of Arabs, East Asians and Indians. Although there had been only minimal Japanese immigration to the United States since 1908, there was a considerable outcry in Japan at what they referred to as the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924. If the Act served to alter Japanese thinking about the United States, it also focused Gullett’s thinking about the Japanese. Gone was his acceptance of Japanese assurances, for he now believed that the ‘gauntlet is down’ and for ‘generations, if not for centuries, the Pacific will be a vast armed camp, with East and West in potential collision’:

For American action defines and crystallises as nothing before has done, the issue between East and West, and between white and brown and black and yellow. The barrier is now boldly declared against the Asiatic and declared on racial grounds.

²⁹ *Weekly Times*, 10 Nov. 1923, p. 8.

³⁰ *Weekly Times*, 19 April 1924, p. 6.

The Asiatic is specifically told that the new white lands of the Pacific will have none of them.³¹

America, in Gullett's view, was safe but 'perhaps if the supreme test ever comes, America will stand to us. Perhaps not'. If the American commitment to Australian sovereignty was in Gullett's estimation uncertain, the Japanese character was less so. He believed that the Japanese 'like fighting' and that the 'the fiery, emotional temperament of the nation would acclaim a war launched to assert racial equality'. Perhaps with a view to establishing a political platform on which to base his campaign in the 1925 election he observed that Japan now nursed a 'grievance deeper and stronger than usually suffices to begin a war'.³² Gullett's dissatisfaction at being an observer rather than a participant is palpable in his associated criticism of Labor's determination to abolish compulsory military training. What is also clear is how faithful he had remained to his pre-war preoccupations with defence, immigration and a white Australia:

It declares Labor's infinite faith in International brotherhood and decency. It counts the Pacific out of calculation as a possible battleground. It ignores America's recent affront to the Japanese and Japan's bitter and everlasting resentment. It shuts its eyes to the turbulent rise of race consciousness and personal and collective ambition in all Asiatic peoples. It assumes that a thousand million Japanese, Chinese and Indians will be for ever content to remain huddled and relatively starved ... merely because rich and practically empty lands only a week or two distant have hoisted the sign 'Asiatic trespassers will be prosecuted'.³³

Perhaps Gullett saw in Labor's lack of commitment to core national interests a stark contrast to what he had witnessed during his travels to Japan. The Japanese possessed 'outstanding national characteristics' that could not have failed to impress a man like Gullett. They were imbued with a 'splendid collective patriotism', a 'love of country, pride of race and an emotional, impulsive spirit of self-sacrifice'. In Gullett's estimation the Japanese faced a choice. They could overflow or starve. They were 'too vain, too ambitious and too powerful to tolerate starvation'. They would 'migrate, or perish as a Great Power in the attempt'. He

³¹ *Sunday Times*, 20 April 1924, p. 5.

³² *Sunday Times*, 20 April 1924, p. 5.

³³ *Sunday Times*, 20 July, 1924, p. 7.

assured his readers that this was ‘no bogey talk’.³⁴ For beyond Japan, there were other threats, just as real and just as pressing:

It is sheer folly to close our eyes to all the signs of awakening national consciousness and the sure educational influence of industrial enterprise, which are so plainly to be found today in both China and India. The challenge of the East will come, and what shape it will take, no one living can tell. But that it will come, and that it will be aimed in many-millioned force at Australia must be clear to every intelligent mind.³⁵

The capacity of Australia to resist this southward thrust would be contingent upon the preparedness of the nation’s political leaders to ‘appreciate and admit the danger’. Inevitably Gullett saw this in the context of the touchstones of Federation – white Australia and defence. For this acknowledgement would see government ‘arm our slender garrison [and] to multiply it by white immigration’.³⁶

In April 1925 Gullett announced that he would stand again in Henty. In 1922 he had used the treatment of ex-servicemen as his clarion call. This time his ultimately successful campaign was played out against the background of the British Seamen’s strike and was informed by a strident anti-communist rhetoric. Gullett characterised the strike, driven in his view by the communists, as ‘the meanest and most contemptible that had ever taken place. It was a dirty, discriminating blow against the British Empire’.³⁷ The mercantile marine was ‘the great artery of Empire’, one so vital that the strike was nothing short of the communists ‘making war on us – plain, straight-out, seditious war’.³⁸ In a tone reminiscent of his reporting on German atrocities in 1914, Gullett called on the government to treat the communists as enemies who had ‘declared war and war it must be and war it will be during the election. They have declared war, and must take the consequences’.³⁹ The election would, in Gullett’s view, resolve the question as to ‘whether constitutional government or Communism should rule in Australia’.⁴⁰ Gullett used all of his considerable rhetoric to characterise communism as ‘an evil minded menace that had forced itself into our midst’, one which had arrayed itself

³⁴ *Sunday Times*, 13 April 1924, p. 7.

³⁵ *Sunday Times*, 13 April 1924, p. 7.

³⁶ *Sunday Times*, 13 April 1924, p. 7.

³⁷ *Age*, 4 Nov. 1925, p. 12.

³⁸ *Age*, 8 Oct. 1925, p. 13.

³⁹ *Age*, 8 Oct. 1925, p. 13.

⁴⁰ *Age*, 16 Oct. 1925, p. 11.

against the unions, the workers, the British Empire, and Christianity. As was so often the case during this period, anything that threatened Australian interests was characterised as foreign and Gullett's choice of language reflected a keen understanding that this was a view that would resonate with the voting public.

Though there may have been an element of opportunism in Gullett's anti-Communist rhetoric, he was certainly not alone in seeing the strike as a conflict between democratic government and forces seeking its destruction. Prime Minister Stanley Bruce saw union militancy being driven by 'an alien ideology' that was 'fundamentally inimical' to Australian national interests, the British Empire, and the international order that best protected them.⁴¹ Bruce was prepared to fight the militant unions with every legal weapon at his disposal and by introducing the *Navigation Act* (1925) and the *Immigration Act* (1925) he showed that if the existing laws proved unsatisfactory, he was prepared to create new ones. Despite the hysteria, the communists did not pose a significant threat to Australian institutions, or at least not to the extent that Bruce, Gullett, and their supporters may have feared. The bulk of the trade unionists who controlled the disproportionately Catholic Labor were never going to be sympathetic to an atheistic materialist creed in the manner Gullett appeared to suggest. As was clear at the 1924 federal conference when a motion preventing any member of the Communist Party joining the Labor Party was passed with ease, the outcome of the fight against Communism was never in doubt. Communists could never have hoped to attract significant support in a society in which the working class was, by the standards of the day, well protected by child allowances, pensions and unions able to wield considerable influence. This view appeared to have been shared by the majority of voters who though they elected the Conservatives in November 1925 rejected a referendum proposal the following year that sought to protect the public from any actual or probable interruption of essential services.

Gullett received vigorous support for his stand against the strike from Lady Headley, better known as Barbara Baynton, his mother-in-law. She arrived in Melbourne in late October 1925 having taken 73 days to make the journey from London. She spent almost five weeks in Capetown, and endured the added disappointment of her ship twice commencing the leg to Australia but being compelled to return to port on account of the strike. She was leaving

⁴¹ D Lee (2010) *Stanley Melbourne Bruce: Australian Internationalist* (London: Continuum), p. 50.

London permanently, for she had now decided that Australia was the only proper place for a loyal Australian. However, there was a deeper dissatisfaction prompting her return:

London – England, in fact – has lost its old character of calm and ordered security. Everywhere is unrest and destitution, the result of the evil promptings of the Communists. Home life is decaying, and the will of the workers is being rapidly sapped by the pernicious influence of the dole. The prosperity which the war brought to many of the lower classes has been wastefully dissipated. Long lines of starving women and children wait at the relief depots for food, the real victims of the industrial war.⁴²

Baynton settled next door to the Gulletts in Melbourne in a house specially built for her. The strain of having so difficult woman living next door was mitigated by Gullett's approach of being 'cheerfully irreverent'.⁴³

It was not just Gullett's formidable mother-in-law providing support. Penelope canvassed 1500 shops in the Henty Division, but later conceded that though proud of her husband she had no interest in politics. In an interview in 1927 she identified her chief interests as her home in Toorak, which 'she has beautified with some priceless antiques in the way of Chippendale furniture, and her two children, Joe and Sue, [who] are a constant source of joy'. She was a woman of her time, as were the journalists asking the questions and the public who read the answers. For she was happy to share the insight that her mother 'disapproved of games for girls and could not understand why they wanted to rush about like wild things, so I have never taken up golf, tennis, or any other recreation'. As if further proof of the inane questions the wife of a politician fielded during the period was needed, she was also asked for her views regarding fashion. 'Fashions do not make a strong appeal to me unless they are becoming' she admitted. 'If what is in vogue suits me I wear it, but otherwise I would cheerfully don the mode of three years ago without a qualm'. Given the chance to comment on her husband's crusade, she observed that 'her one hope was that all migrants would be British-born'.⁴⁴ Her view was certainly not unique, for the war had redefined 'White Australia' in more narrow terms as British Australia.⁴⁵

⁴² *Weekly Times*, 31 Oct. 1925, p. 7.

⁴³ Hackforth-Jones, *Baynton*, p. 154.

⁴⁴ *News*, 8 Sept., 1927, p. 7.

⁴⁵ D Day, 'The White Australia Policy'.

Standing as a Nationalist, Gullett won Henty handsomely, gaining 51.5 percent of the vote and easily sweeping aside Edward Stewart, the Labor candidate and Donald Mackinnon, an Independent Nationalist who attracted 29.7 and 18.8 percent of the vote respectively. At the opening of Parliament in January 1926, the newly elected Gullett delivered an outstanding speech in which he tried to balance a guarded support for the initiatives of the Bruce government while also acknowledging that the current position was still far from satisfactory. Though he would later disown some of the government's immigration and development initiatives, here he characterised them as being part of 'an all Australian programme'.⁴⁶ Underpinning both his congratulations and his criticisms was the belief that immigration needed to be part of a broader national discussion. In adopting an approach that was 'independent, constructive and essentially national', his conduct throughout this period was rightly characterised as 'the most statesmanlike' of all the participants.⁴⁷ For though Gullett deserved his reputation for straight talking, he was firmly committed to seeking bi-partisan support for immigration. In a speech to Parliament, Gullett even admitted that he could 'understand and sympathise' with the concerns of the Labor Party:

As one deeply interested in this subject, I know that the previous method of dealing with immigration has deserved the antagonism of the workers in Australia, and I hope that as we proceed on this new course we shall convince honorable members opposite and those whom they represent that we are following right lines, and shall ultimately obtain their close and active co-operation ... I can see no future for immigration in this country if Labour is hostile to it.⁴⁸

For all of his vision, Gullett knew that immigration still needed to be 'sold' to the Australian people. The government's '£34 million agreement' which had been signed in April 1925 and which arranged for both the British and Commonwealth governments to contribute to approved development projects was a case in point. He had previously called on the government to establish a committee consisting of experts from rural and secondary industries and the Trades Hall to consider the problem. One journalist believed that his powerful speech 'exercised a potent influence upon the minds of the prime minister and the

⁴⁶ *Daily Standard*, 15 Jan. 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁷ G Greenwood (1955) *Development in the Twenties, 1919-1929*. In G Greenwood (ed) *Australia: A Social and Political History* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson), p. 316.

⁴⁸ CPD, 1 July 1926.

other members of the Cabinet'. As a 'tribute to his vision and common sense' the government acted on his recommendation to form the Development and Migration Commission.⁴⁹

Perhaps Gullett should have been more wary of getting what he asked for, because though the Commission had wide powers of investigation, the focus shifted from migration to development. In any case, by the time the agreement was suspended in late 1932 only £8.5 million had been spent or committed.

The subsequent passing of the *Development and Migration Bill* (1926) was part of a campaign that would bring almost 300 000 Britons to Australia, although the yearly intakes were still lower than the pre-war figures. Gullett initially celebrated it as the 'first effort to deal with the question on broad national lines' but he would quickly find reason to reconsider his support.⁵⁰ Gullett came to see in its broad powers a threat to the Tariff Board and a subversion of Protection. He went so far as to express horror that his own call for an independent migration body may have played a role in prompting the creation of what he derided as a 'money eating machine'.⁵¹ In any case, by the time the machinery was in place to co-ordinate the federal and state governments' efforts, the economic downturn in the late twenties had created an environment entirely unfavourable to further migration.

Gullett consistently looked beyond short term barriers and continued to see migration in broader strategic terms. He argued that he was not an 'alarmist', nor was he in the habit of 'raising bogies' but he was fearful for the future:

I shall not refer to countries by name, but while we live in the age of Locarno and Geneva, we have also had the tragic experience of belonging to a generation which has known the greatest war in history. I doubt whether the world was ever more selfish or unscrupulous than it is to-day, and we know that it was never so land hungry. It has become very small. We are not defenceless, for to-morrow, if necessary, we could put 600,000 men of first-class quality into the field; but men cannot fight with their hands, and in these days they cannot travel far on their feet ... At present we do not own this country; we have been given merely a brief option over it, and it is for us to make that option good.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Weekly Times*, 10 April 1926, p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Examiner*, 2 July 1926, p. 5.

⁵¹ Roe, *Australia*, p. 96.

⁵² CPD, 1 July 1926.

Having spent almost eight years gaining political office, Gullett may have expected too much. During this period he found common cause with a group of Nationalist backbenchers, he revelled, at least initially, in his status as an independent who offered his support on a case by case basis. From the very first, however, Gullett found much about politics that was 'disagreeable' and after just two years in office, he told his wife 'God knows I am no saint but I feel at least a little too decent to remain long in this dirty game'.⁵³ His impatience was not just a character quirk or merely a new Member of Parliament eager to make his mark. Gullett did indeed have a vision of the future, but it was not one driven by altruism and high minded idealism alone. He may have fallen out with Hughes but Gullett could be as brutally realistic as his one-time patron. For he believed that in the East there was a 'definite menace'.⁵⁴ Immigration meant people and industry. People and industry meant an army and munitions with which to fight. Relying on international goodwill was the short road to disaster. Safety belonged to those with the fortitude and courage to fight for it.

Gullett also found that his brand of straight talking was not conducive to career progression. In March 1927 he voted with the opposition against the ultimately successful attempt by the Government to abolish per capita payments by the Commonwealth to the states. His opposition was driven by a belief that the proposed Bill would take the Commonwealth out of the field of direct taxation:

In a financial sense, the war is still on, and, if there was need for direct taxation in 1915-16, there [is a] greater need now. The Bill violates the spirit of the Constitution. It was never intended that the Commonwealth Government should be given Power to destroy the main principles of the Constitution. If the present Government was out to embarrass and belittle the States it could not have contrived a more effective way of doing so.⁵⁵

In particular, he took aim at Earle Page, the head of the Country Party and Coalition Treasurer. He characterised him as a 'whole hogger unificationist who desired to destroy the sovereignty of the States'.⁵⁶ That, however, was only the beginning. In November 1927 Gullett criticised Page in the House for overseeing a 'carnival of borrowing and spending'.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 251.

⁵⁴ *Age*, 14 April 1926, p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Register*, 15 March 1927, p. 9.

⁵⁶ CPD, 14 March 1927.

⁵⁷ *Argus*, 23 Aug. 1928, p. 13; CPD, 14 March 1927.

His effort to bolster weak rural industries at the expense of those that were self-supporting, notably wool and meat, and to underwrite it with loans from London would, in Gullett's view, result in 'an era of human suffering that we have never known before'.⁵⁸ Though overwrought and couched in language that was not likely to win him support in the House, by the end of the decade Australia's external financial position was indeed structurally weak. Any goodwill in London had all but evaporated with much of the overseas borrowing being used to service existing debt. The situation appeared to justify the longstanding criticism of Australia's excessive borrowing by British financiers.⁵⁹ It was a concern borne out in the numbers. Between 1923 and 1929, Australia governments accounted for over a quarter of total overseas government issues in London and about a seventh of new overseas capital raisings. In peak years, the proportions rose as high as 63% and 31% respectively.⁶⁰

Gullett's vision of where this economic turmoil would lead was informed by his memories of the financial struggles of the 1890s when 'scores of thousands of men, down on the breadline and below it, were out of work'. The war added a sense of urgency:

Though a young people, innocent of war intent, and of the covetousness or selfishness that makes for war, we have yet found ourselves engaged in two wars within the space of one generation. The world is still very restless, and it is possible that while this load of debt is upon us we shall find ourselves engaged in another war. If such a tragedy as that were to descend upon us, the country would be ruined.⁶¹

Though he claimed it was a painful duty, Gullett declined to look seriously at institutional pressures and took the easier route of giving Page both barrels. In doing so he displayed 'all the relentless, and indeed artistic flair for torment which would have made him a high salaried official in the rack and burning oil department of some ancient Chinese Empire'.⁶² It was delivered with such gusto that it left one journalist from *The Age* almost bereft of

⁵⁸ CPD, 16 Nov. 1927.

⁵⁹ B Attard (1992) 'The Bank of England and the origins of the Niemeyer Mission, 1921-1930', *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 32, no. 1.

⁶⁰ B Attard (2000) 'Financial Diplomacy' [online]. In: C Bridge B Attard *Between Empire and Nation: Australia's External Relations from Federation to the Second World War*. (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing)

<http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=772565347245126;res=IELHSS> Date retrieved 20 December 2016.

⁶¹ CPD, 16 Nov. 1927.

⁶² *Morning Bulletin*, 6 Dec. 1927, p. 6.

language choices. Gullett launched a ‘fierce attack’ during which he managed to ‘impale and impeach the Treasurer, to criticise and then to flay him for his extravagance which ... has exceeded all reasonable limitations’. He ‘raised his voice, and turning on the Treasurer, assailed him with unusual ferocity for generally so mild an orator’. In the midst of the carnage, the journalist noted that the now deposed Hughes ‘looked on delighted’ for ‘here was a worthy pupil’.⁶³ The *Dalby Herald* mounted a half-hearted defence by noting that he had perhaps been goaded by interjections into saying more than he intended’.⁶⁴

One witness who was less than impressed was Jo Gullett. His mother had taken him to parliament to hear his father speak but he had quickly fallen asleep. Late in life he conceded that ‘it seemed I missed a pretty good speech’. He did add, however, that as a speaker his father possessed ‘considerable assets’:

His appearance was impressive yet pleasant, his voice was very good indeed, always clear; but harsh, commanding, or persuasive as he thought necessary. He had a sharp turn of phrase, and because he thought parliamentary government a most serious business, he did not fear to make enemies’.⁶⁵

Though Jo may have found the cut and thrust of parliament insufficiently interesting to ward off sleep, his memories of his father reveal a deep connection. Fifty years after his father’s death he wrote of a childhood dominated by memories of a man he admired ‘because he was good at the things I wanted to do myself’. Beyond Gullett’s skills in horse riding, shooting and fishing, he was as Jo recalled, a man of the people, one ‘at home in any company. Writers, stockmen, soldiers, painters, shearers, gentlemen and hobos – he was at ease with them all and they accepted him’.⁶⁶

Gullett’s attempt to offer loyalty to Bruce while simultaneously excoriating his treasurer cut no ice with the prime minister. He swatted aside Gullett’s claims of government extravagance by reminding him that as a journalist he had urged the government to ‘spend £50 000 000 bravely’. He then added, acidly in the view of one of Bruce’s biographers, that ‘I am not prepared to accept loyalty to me and not to the Treasurer ... I do not like suggestions that the

⁶³ *Age*, 17 Nov. 1927, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Dalby Herald*, 16 Dec. 1927, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Gullett, *Good Company*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Gullett, *Good Company*, p. 2.

Treasurer is laying down the government's policy'.⁶⁷ Gullett would not have been disturbed by the fact that he had so clearly attracted the ire of a prime minister, for he revelled in his reputation as a 'vigorous critic', one the government could never 'look on as a dependable supporter'.⁶⁸ In February 1928 Gullett complained that he had heard 'disquieting rumours' that owing to the economic situation the plans for the War Memorial would be abandoned. Having raised the issue, he then added that he was doubtful of their veracity for 'he could not believe that the present government or any other government would do such a mean and contemptible thing'.⁶⁹ Within two days Bruce 'repudiated without qualification' the rumour that Gullett had simultaneously spread and dismissed. Perhaps indicating his frustration at Gullett's constant attacks, the prime minister added that he found it strange that 'a foolish story should be got abroad'.⁷⁰

The observation late in 1927 by one journalist that Gullett was less vocal in his criticisms may have just been perception or it may have been the result of a growing awareness that the opportunity to exert any real influence was dissipating with each criticism of the government. At some point in 1928 he had a private conversation with Bruce. It was, as Cameron Hazlehurst observes, just the type of interaction 'that party leaders bestow on promising but recalcitrant backbenchers'.⁷¹ One wonders whether it had a similar impact as the very personal conversation that Gullett had shared with Hughes in Paris before the opening of the Versailles conference in 1919. In an undated letter to Penelope, he conveyed the good news:

He had me marked for early inclusion in Ministry. He dwelt on my many qualities; pressed the point that outside the Ministry I could do nothing along the lines I believed in, while inside I could use my influence. He was a reasonable man, always prepared to listen &c &c.

He said nothing as to future & I can only guess at what he was driving at ... I gave no assurances, but admitted frankly that our repeated disagreements were a keen disappointment to me & that I regarded the future without much personal satisfaction.⁷²

⁶⁷ C Edwards (1965) *Bruce of Melbourne* (London: Heinemann), p. 137.

⁶⁸ *Morning Bulletin*, 20 Nov. 1928, p 7.

⁶⁹ *Age*, 14 Feb. 1928, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Age*, 16 Feb. 1928, p. 10.

⁷¹ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 252.

⁷² HG – PG, undated 1928. Gullett MSS. NLA MS 3078/5/600. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 52.

It is well that Gullett proved so amenable to Bruce's offer for when dealing with wayward colleagues the prime minister pursued a policy of gradual escalation:

In the firm he expected loyalty, and the best work of which his servants were capable. In his Cabinet he expected the same qualities. If he did not get them, first of all help and guidance would be offered, then tactful but firm remonstrance.

After that, graciously but effectively and finally, came the 'sack'.⁷³

In any case, it was the harbinger of greater things. In November 1928 Gullett was appointed the Minister for Trade and Customs. A journalist for *The Register* complimented Bruce on a 'bold and pleasing stroke of leadership. He has at once silenced a dangerous critic, and recruited for his ministry, which stood in need of new blood, a man of independent character and acknowledged political capacity'.⁷⁴ By contrast, *The Daily Standard* saw it as little more than silencing a critic by finding him a lucrative job:

He formed one of the group of able and dangerous rebels against the Bruce-Page combination, and no doubt his selection will reduce the strength of that group by one, for no one expects Mr Gullett to carry his enmity towards Dr Page as treasurer into the Cabinet. Henceforth, therefore, we need not expect the candid critic to be either candid, or a critic.⁷⁵

The year after his inclusion in the Ministry Gullett moved his family from Melbourne to Canberra. The new Parliament House in Canberra had been opened in May 1927, though the capital was hardly one of the world's great cities. It was still very much a small town, consisting of rows of bungalows in scattered suburbs, three small shopping centres and five temporary hotels catering to a population which in June 1928 had just passed eight thousand. The family stayed at the Canberra Hotel for the first few months before buying Hill Station which was about ten kilometres south of the city. The 2500 acre property, including a homestead and horses, was just the type of property to appeal to Gullett. His son was if anything more pleased with the choice – 'all of a sudden I had everything I ever wished for'.⁷⁶

⁷³ Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce*, p. 68.

⁷⁴ *Register* 26 Nov. 1928, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *Daily Standard*, 26 Nov. 1928, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Gullett, *Good Company*, p. 29.

Both Gullett and Penelope made friends easily and quickly assumed a leading role in Canberra social life. They were welcome visitors at Yarralumla where the Governor General Lord Gowrie found discussions with Gullett on ‘various subjects, local, Imperial, worldwide ... most helpful and instructive’.⁷⁷ Guests at the Gullett home included Charles Hawker, Sir Donald Cameron, Richard Casey (later Baron Casey) and his wife, Robert Menzies, the Fairbairns, and Enid Lyons. Gullett was certainly not a man without charm. One of his first social engagements as a new member of Cabinet was a dinner for Sir Hugo Hirst, the chairman and managing director of the General Electric Company who was visiting Australia at the invitation of the prime minister. Hirst found him a ‘most cultured man’, evidence of which he found in the decorations adorning the Gullett house which recorded his travels in Asia, Canada and Europe.⁷⁸ Like most people, Hirst found Penelope Gullett charming. It could not last, for later as a backbencher without wider responsibilities the property quickly became a burden.

Gullett would not enjoy the fruits of his political advance for long as the Bruce-Page government lost the 1929 election to James Scullin and the Labor Party. Though this left Gullett feeling directionless, echoes perhaps of his time in the desert, he could draw some comfort from his new position as Deputy Leader of the Opposition. He also had the dubious satisfaction of knowing that it would be the Scullin government which would bear the political cost of confronting the worsening economic situation. Unemployment, which had stood at 13 percent at the end of 1929, was 23 percent only a year later and by the time the Scullin government lost power in late 1931 it was 28 percent. Even allowing for the bad timing that saw Labor win office in the very week that the New York Stock Exchange collapsed, the government was paralysed by irresolution, internal dissension and differences of opinion on the best way out of the economic calamity. These years in power confronting a challenge that was beyond him left Scullin ‘a tired, white haired old man leading the remnants of a shattered party through an economic wasteland’.⁷⁹ This did not garner much sympathy from Gullett. As Jack Lang remembered, Gullett assumed the role of the ‘Gladfly’ who set about harassing the Government ‘incessantly’.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Lord Gowrie to Lady Gullett, 16 Aug. 1940, copy, Gowrie MSS NLA MS 2852/5/12. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 260.

⁷⁸ Sir Hugo Hirst’s diary, 25 Nov. 1928, 6 Jan. 1929, MS Marconi 3174, Bodleian Library, Oxford. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 252.

⁷⁹ Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 140.

⁸⁰ JT Lang (1962) *The Great Bust: The Depression of the Thirties* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson), p. 311.

Truth be told, Gullett could have saved himself the effort, for it was Scullin's own colleagues who caused his administration the most problems. So open was the dissension that Scullin attempted to sound proof the party room by adding thick double doors but even they could not 'confine the uproar' when the various factions made war on each other.⁸¹ The doors failed to even keep the party faithful contained. Joe Lyons resigned from the Cabinet and then from the Labor Party in early 1931 and in company with five other Labor MPs he then sat on the opposition benches. Lyons' All for Australia League, the Nationalist Party and the Australia Party merged to form the United Australia Party (UAP). Gullett worked closely with Menzies and was part of the manoeuvrings with Lyons, Murdoch, and others that led to the birth of the new party. One of Gullett's contributions was his standing aside as Deputy Leader of the Opposition for his old friend John Latham. After the UAP's landslide victory in the election in December 1931, Gullett, now a key member in the Lyons Cabinet, was installed as Minister for Trade and Customs. The final ten years of Gullett's life was from this point marked by a succession of appointments, resignations and ill-health. It was a period not without success, but it was one which seemed to reflect the uncertainty in Australia's internal and external fortunes.

Gullett's greatest success during this period was at the Imperial Economic Conference held in Ottawa from July to August 1932. It was, however, to be a short lived one. Max Suich characterised the conference as an attempt to 'ring-fence the empire market'.⁸² Although polemic in tone, it is accurate enough in the essentials to describe this attempt to promote the prosperity of the British Empire through favourable trade agreements between its members. As Sir Keith Hancock observed, however, what might have been 'envisaged [as] a gathering of flourishing nations triumphantly intent upon a task of economic integration' was in reality 'a gathering of anxious and suffering nations, desperately intent upon a task of economic salvage'.⁸³ Such an environment called for 'hard bargainers'.⁸⁴ The decision to send the ex-prime minister Stanley Bruce, then occupying the junior post of Minister without Portfolio, and Gullett, backed by representatives of industry, commerce, banking and primary producers, showed that the Lyons' government was well aware of that reality. Bruce was aware of the lurking professional dangers, initially characterising it as a 'suicidal job' while

⁸¹ Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, p. 268.

⁸² M Suich (2012) *1930s couldn't happen again - could they?* <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/s-couldnt-happen-again-could-they/story-fn59niix-1226412555209> Date retrieved 7 Jan. 2017.

⁸³ WK Hancock (1942) *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, vol. 2, Problems of Economic Policy 1918-1939*, (London, Oxford University Press).

⁸⁴ Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 208.

Richard Casey was only slightly less critical in predicting, correctly as it would turn out in Gullett's case, that any participant was 'liable to lose his reputation in Australia'.⁸⁵

The Australian delegation benefitted from the fact that the British had to conclude seven separate trade agreements in a short period of time while internally divided over the broader question of free trade versus protection and the specific ones of how to offer preferences to the Dominions and what demands to make of them. This should not obscure the fact that the Australian delegation's performance was both focused and skilful. They were united in their pursuit of preferences from Britain on a limited range of Australian commodities but not on wool and wheat, which usually accounted for half of Australia's export income.

Woolgrowers and wheat farmers had little to gain from preferences, so instead they were sought mainly for dairy products, mutton and lamb, beef and some other primary products.

Although there remains a perception that inter-war Australian governments invariably deferred to their British counterparts, they could in fact be openly combative on matters perceived to be in the national interest. At one point, Bruce threatened an Australian walk out and almost at the final moment refused to sign the final agreement over what Edwards characterised as a bit of smart practice on the part of the British representatives.⁸⁶ Though Bruce was more sensitive to broader imperial interests than Gullett, he did make good use of his colleague's more direct methods. The former prime minister, who Scullin observed could be abusive in a calm tone and have it pass for moderation and gentlemanliness, watched at close quarters a colleague at work who possessed no such veneer. At one point, James Thomas, the Dominions Secretary, referred to the 'bloody dominions', and though Bruce was aware that it was his habit to use that particular epithet without malicious intent, he made the mistake of doing so within Gullett's earshot. Bruce recalled that Gullett, 'who was pretty quick on the trigger, went for him; there was a frightful row and poor Jimmy had to spend the rest of the evening going round apologising and saying he hadn't really meant it'.⁸⁷ There were, however, material benefits to Gullett's approach, as Bruce recalled:

Gullett's fiery temper was useful, though. I remember that when we had worked out most of the agreements, I said to him that they were all right, but that the UK

⁸⁵ Bruce to Latham 24 June 1932 and Casey to Sir Harry Batterbee 10 June 1932. In B Attard (1998) 'The Limits of Influence: The Political Economy of Australian Commercial Policy after the Ottawa Conference', *Australian Historical Studies* 29(111), p. 327.

⁸⁶ Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 80.

⁸⁷ Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 211.

might have been a bit more generous on things like apples and dried fruits. He asked me why I didn't say so. I said that would only lead to a cold, logical discussion; why didn't he tell them what he thought? Well, he did exactly what I thought he'd do: went off the handle completely, said they were ungenerous, that we'd given everything and they'd given nothing. The result was that we got all sorts of little concessions at the last moment.⁸⁸

Although Gullett may well have been sincere in his view that the British had been ungenerous, in reality Australia made use of her considerable bargaining power to benefit from the conference while being called on to concede very little themselves.⁸⁹ Gullett telegraphed Lyons and assured him that Australian benefits under the Ottawa agreement were the most substantial of all of the Dominions. Yet this note of triumph was indicative of a flawed belief not unique to Gullett that spectacular results could be achieved while conceding virtually nothing of substance. The large increases in Australian production that made their way to British markets after Ottawa and which made a substantial contribution to Australia's economic recovery showed that in the short term, as Ottawa proved, hard bargainers could have their victories. It was not, however, a sound foundation for a broader strategy. As Throughout the 1930s, there was considerable domestic pressure on the Australian government to accommodate urban and rural interests while maintaining a healthy balance of trade. This ensured that Australia's commercial negotiations were characterised by a structural inflexibility and a preparedness to adopt 'purely negative – sometimes extreme – postures'.⁹⁰ Such was the case with the trade diversion policies in 1936-37 which would culminate in Gullett's resignation.

Ten months after returning from Ottawa Gullett took four months leave due to ill-health, following which he resigned. He was knighted, though he described it self-deprecatingly as being consistent with all political ones in that it was an accident but nevertheless was a 'pleasant souvenir of the happy, if somewhat hazardous, Ottawa enterprise'.⁹¹ Kate White argues that ill-health was only a cover story masking the fact that Gullett had considerable difficulty explaining and justifying the decisions reached at the conference. So 'bewildered' was he by the criticisms directed at his efforts, he felt that he had no option other than to

⁸⁸ Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 211.

⁸⁹ See K Tsokhas (1989) 'Australia and the Ottawa Conference', *Working Papers in Economic History*, 122. (Canberra: The Australian National University).

⁹⁰ Attard, 'Limits of Influence', p. 343.

⁹¹ Gullett to Sir Hugo Hirst, 11 March 1933, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA MS 3078/3/468.

resign.⁹² Regardless of whether White's claim is correct or not, it is true that the limitations of the imperial preference system agreed to at Ottawa were already obvious. To be fair to Gullett, even if one concedes that Australia's gains were 'unspectacular', they exceeded those achieved by the United Kingdom, which amounted to little more than 'the weakest of guarantees, and most of them dependent on interpretation and goodwill for their implementation'.⁹³ Gullett's exile was to be short, for after the 1934 election he returned as Minister without Portfolio with responsibility for trade treaties. He was still visibly struggling. Five months after the election, Jim Fairbairn observed that he 'looked like death (or a candidate for the mad house)'.⁹⁴

Looking like death or not, Gullett and Penelope left for the UK on 19 February 1935 on the *Otranto* as part of a strong ministerial presence for King George V's Silver Jubilee celebrations and an Empire Parliamentary Association Conference. It was a large group, numbering 16 in all, a point not lost on one reporter who reported that they travelled with 131 trunks.⁹⁵ Other members of the party included Prime Minister Joe Lyons and his wife Enid, Robert Menzies, the Attorney General, and his wife Pat, Harold Thorby, who among other things was Assistant Minister for Commerce, and his wife, the chairman of the Tariff Board, a special officer of the Customs Department, a meat consultant, and Menzies' private secretary. During the sea voyage Penelope and Enid Lyons became good friends, the latter finding the separation from her children and the claustrophobic social atmosphere on board ship not to her liking.

Though such a trip might have appealed to someone less travelled than Gullett, he was certainly not focused on the pomp and ceremony. He was preparing to challenge restrictions on the importation of Australian chilled beef as part of a broader discussion of trade under the Ottawa agreement. There was a need for some urgency given the impending British/Argentinian trade talks, which perhaps gave rise to his reputation for speedy negotiation, an approach that earned him the sobriquet 'hustling Henry'. Nevertheless, Gullett was still in London in mid-July locked in negotiations with his British counterparts

⁹² K White (1987) *A Political Love Story: Joe and Enid Lyons* (New York: Penguin), pp. 157-58.

⁹³ T Rooth (2000) *Ottawa and After* [online]. In: Bridge, Carl; Attard, Bernard. *Between Empire and Nation: Australia's External Relations from Federation to the Second World War*. Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, pp.110-29.

<http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=772583980216385;res=IELHSS>. Date retrieved 30 November 2016.

⁹⁴ Fairbairn to Hawker, 28 Feb. 1935, Hawker MSS, NLA MS 4848/1/1. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 257.

⁹⁵ *Argus*, 20 Feb., 1935, p. 7.

amidst rumours of the imminent collapse of the talks.⁹⁶ In spite of those rumours, at the end of the month Gullett announced a successful conclusion to the talks. He then travelled to Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, Prague and Berne for trade talks, though he would be hampered by unequal trade balances that heavily favoured Australia. Ironically, it would be the success of his negotiations with the British that would later prove his undoing.

While in London Gullett attended an Anzac Ceremony at St Clement Danes Church in company with Robert Menzies, Stanley Bruce, by then the Australian High Commissioner, Sir James Parr the New Zealand High Commissioner, Sir William Birdwood and Sir Ian Hamilton. His association with the Middle East was still much in the public mind as evident in his laying of a wreath at the Camel Corps Memorial. It was not the only reminder of the war. Gullett recounted that while in Europe, one leading official told him that whenever he was tempted to implement a policy that might redress the increasingly unfavourable balance of trade with Australia he remembered the men of the AIF and ‘put the files away’.⁹⁷ Though Gullett may have hustled, it would still be a nine month visit, which must have taxed his increasingly suspect health. For a man who had once so single-mindedly sought political advancement to admit that he felt trapped by circumstance into continuing is an insight into his fragility. While in London in late 1935, he conceded to Penelope, who had left for home in October, that ‘there is nobody else for the job & it must be done’.⁹⁸ He did, however, find time with Penelope, Susan and Robert Menzies to visit Jo who was studying at Oxford.

When Gullett returned to Australia there were rumours of another retirement due to ill-health or a shift to New York as a special representative of the Commonwealth. His renewed ‘zest’ in negotiating trade treaties suggested to at least one journalist that all was now well.⁹⁹ He later acknowledged to Sir Harry Chauvel that he had had ‘rather an awful 2½ years because of the fact that after my illness I joined in a junior capacity, and yet was called upon to handle so much important work’.¹⁰⁰ Though he had negotiated treaties while in Europe that proved relatively uncontroversial, his dealings with the Japanese, the Americans, and finally the Canadians were an entirely different matter. In May 1936 he announced a new policy of trade diversion intended to increase exports, bolster secondary industry and increase employment. Preference would be given to goods from ‘countries which were already great customers of

⁹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1935, p. 9.

⁹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 Sept. 1935, p. 9.

⁹⁸ HG – PG, 17 October 1935, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA MS 3078/5/626.

⁹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Feb. 1936, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ HG – HC, 22 March 1937. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA MS 3078/3/40.

Australia and which were expected to become greater customers if Australia's purchases from them were increased'.¹⁰¹ Australia subsequently directed in excess of sixty percent of her exports to the British market and thereby maintained a favourable balance of trade. This had some of its roots in Versailles which had seen Hughes and many of his conservative colleagues, clearly Gullett among them, further embrace economic nationalism and a pro-imperial trade-bloc ideology.¹⁰²

Imperial preferences and trade diversion brought with them serious consequences. British textile manufacturers complained about Japanese sales in Australia. Gullett responded to their concerns with such vigour that it appeared as though his government was spoiling for a fight. British competitors, such as the United States and Japan, now found themselves penalised in the Australian market and retaliated by purchasing wool elsewhere. Though diverting trade from the United States reflected a 4-1 trade imbalance, there was a significant trade surplus with Japan. She took 26 percent of Australian wool exports and 14 percent of total exports in 1935-36. The tariffs imposed on Japanese cotton textiles were more than doubled and duties on rayon goods quadrupled in order to protect British imports. A brisk trade war with Japan was only settled after six months to 'nobody's satisfaction'.¹⁰³ It proved expensive for Australia on two fronts. Within two years Australian exports to Japan had dropped by two thirds, with the goodwill generated by a visit to Japan in 1934 by Latham, the External Affairs Minister, by then appeared a distant memory.

During the difficulties with the Japanese, Gullett found himself arrayed against the Labor Party, the pastoral industry led by the NSW graziers, and members of his own government. Gullett was not one to dodge a fight. He saw Japanese negotiations as an attempt to challenge Australia's right to alter its customs duties. Gullett argued that 'no self-respecting Government' could give into similar demands from 'an outside source'.¹⁰⁴ His characterisation of outside sources was broad, for he found some of the language used by the president of the New South Wales Graziers Association in his criticisms of government policy 'irresponsible', 'dangerous' and 'foolish'.¹⁰⁵ Fiery exchanges in parliament also made it clear that Gullett's view of the economic implications of the policy was driven by a strident Australian nationalism. When Frank Forde, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, accused

¹⁰¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May 1936, p. 14.

¹⁰² Twomey, 'Versailles'.

¹⁰³ Welsh, *Great Southern Land*, p. 412.

¹⁰⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1936, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ CPD, 19 March 1936.

Gullett of ‘bungling’ the trade dispute with Japan, there followed a series of accusations and counter accusations that each was acting for foreign interests. Forde led with the claim that ‘we all know that the Minister directing negotiations for trade treaties can deal most caustically with those who disagree with him, but he often speaks with his tongue in his cheek, and his words have a very hollow sound’. Gullett accused Forde of the ‘deepest betrayal of Australian interests, and especially the interests of the Australian worker, that has been witnessed in this Parliament’. It represented, in Gullett’s view, a support for ‘outside sweated labour’. Returning serve, Forde saw Gullett’s policies as being driven by the interests of British manufacturers and the subsequent negotiations with the Japanese as being conducted like a ‘pig in the parlour’. No government, Forde declared, had ever antagonised a foreign nation as much as the Commonwealth government had their Japanese counterparts.¹⁰⁶ Speaking for a growing number of detractors, Henry Gregory, a United Country Party politician from Western Australia observed in the House that Gullett was really the ‘Minister for Trade Wars’.¹⁰⁷

While Gullett was sincere though certainly overwrought in his characterisation of some of his opponents as pro-Japanese, he was in turn criticised for being unnecessarily provocative in his treatment of their government. In a very critical article in the *Truth*, a journalist derided Gullett’s ministerial position as sinecure and his attitude as ‘fanatically anti-Japanese’ and born of Imperial sentiment. As though fearing that he missed a potential target, the same journalist added that the External Affairs Department had likewise been ‘bitten by the Yellow Peril bug’.¹⁰⁸ For all the vitriol, it was an understandable view. Moving beyond Gullett specifically the same journalist saw this as a pattern whereby all political parties ‘fall in’ when ‘Whitehall or a British mission bangs the Empire drum and flag wags vigorously’. The ‘good old Union Jack once again is called on to cover a Federal Government inanity’.¹⁰⁹

Gullett, later derided as ‘the clumsy architect of the policy’, cabled Australia House in London and boasted that trade diversion had received probably the ‘greatest press we ever had’.¹¹⁰ For all the shallowness of that comment, trade diversion was not merely the product of an emotional attachment to Empire in the manner that this journalist suggests for it was motivated by a mix of pragmatic and strategic concerns. As Gullett admitted in a letter to

¹⁰⁶ CPD, 9 October 1936.

¹⁰⁷ CPD, 14 October 1936.

¹⁰⁸ *Truth*, 3 May 1936, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Truth*, 3 May 1936, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Suich, ‘1930s couldn't happen again’.

Charles Hawker, the Commerce Minister, 'could we logically go on pressing Britain for an expanding share of her market in meat, butter and so on by reducing her imports from Argentine and Denmark if we were not prepared even to maintain the pre-Ottawa position of her most important item?'¹¹¹ In addition, Gullett, like many Australians, was fearful of the Japanese specifically and Australia's place in Asia generally. He articulated these fears in private to the Governor-General when he argued that if Australia could not control the import of goods produced in Asia to manageable levels 'there is no safe future for British Australia'.¹¹² The British High Commissioner in Canberra reported that Gullett 'expounded at some length ... on the indefensibility of Australia against Japanese attack. A couple of destroyers outside Sydney might easily cause something like an evacuation of Sydney and no help could be expected from the rest of the empire'.¹¹³ When combined with the general ineptitude of Australian dealings with Japan in the inter-war period, the policies pursued by Gullett contributed to a general poisoning of relations between the two nations. Though he would not live to see it, later events would vindicate Gullett's concerns about Australia's vulnerability to Japanese expansion.

As he was the face of the government's trade policies, Gullett was targeted by 'unimpressed graziers' as 'the author of their prospective misfortunes'.¹¹⁴ He had been supported by Lyons and the Country Party leader Earle Page who had both stood firm against pressure from wool growers and brokers to accede to Japanese demands. Gullett would soon find that this support had definite limits when the Americans showed that they were no more inclined to avoid a trade war than the Japanese. In response to their refusal to adjust the large trade imbalance between the two countries, the Australian government introduced a licensing system and prohibitive duties. The Americans retaliated with restrictions of their own. This was followed five months later by an attempt to further limit Canadian imports and encourage trade with nations outside Europe. Though the war haunted many of its participants, it was not the vision of the shell torn landscapes of Europe or the Middle East that drove Gullett, or at least it was not them alone. While dealing with the Americans, Gullett explained to J.P. Moffat, the US Consul General, his understanding of Australia's position in the world. It stopped short of apocalyptic, but not by much:

¹¹¹ DCS Sissons (1976) 'Manchester v. Japan: The Imperial Background of the Australian Trade Diversion Dispute with Japan, 1936', *Australian Outlook*, vol. 30, no. 2, p. 484.

¹¹² Gullett to Lord Gowrie, 10 Jan., 1937, Gowrie MSS NLA MS 2852/5/9. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 257.

¹¹³ Suich, '1930s couldn't happen again'.

¹¹⁴ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 257.

We are not out of the woods; we are fighting for national solvency. We have had six good moist years in a row, thank God! But Australia is a country of ups and downs; you have never seen it withered and parched and thirty or forty million sheep dying in a year. But we have. And the vision haunts us. We cannot rest until we have reserves enough to ride us over such a period. That is our first consideration. If not, we might have to default, and non-payment might gradually weaken the bonds of Empire and then God help us. No, our financial solvency is not only a matter of honour but of self-preservation.¹¹⁵

Moffat, who dubbed Gullett the ‘arch-priest of bilateral balancing’, was particularly well informed as to what subsequently occurred during a meeting of the Cabinet:

The rest of the Cabinet apparently pointed out that his trade diversion policy was getting nowhere, that this would cut across inter-Empire trade etc. Finding himself virtually alone, with only the Prime Minister supporting him, and with his colleagues almost a unit in censuring him, he walked out of Cabinet meeting, resigned then and there and is leaving Canberra today.¹¹⁶

Although Gullett resigned for personal reasons, only Lyons made even the slightest effort to pretend that that was the case and publically thanked him for the unselfish manner in which he had served the Commonwealth. The *Sydney Morning Herald* had no such scruples, immediately characterising it as the ‘culmination of growing differences between himself and some of his colleagues on the overseas trade policy of the Commonwealth government’. Even Gullett did not attempt to hide behind his personal reasons and within a day he conceded that ‘there was more than Canada in it’, although he refused to be drawn further.¹¹⁷ At the time though, he was far clearer in articulating what had *not* prompted the decision. He made it clear to a journalist that his health was not a contributing cause, boasting instead that ‘I have not felt so fit for many years’.¹¹⁸ He refuted suggestions that he had been unable to compromise or that he had sought to divert trade from Canada to ‘foreigners’ and later

¹¹⁵ Moffat diary 10 March 1937. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 258.

¹¹⁶ Moffat diary, 14-31 March 1937. In C Bridge (2000) ‘Relations with the United States’ [online]. In: C Bridge B Attard *Between Empire and Nation: Australia's External Relations from Federation to the Second World War*. (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing).
<http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=772621246158901> Date retrieved 30 March 2017; Moffat diary, 10 March 1937. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 259.

¹¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1937, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 259.

claimed that he was ‘the pigeon of the piece, as trade diversion really had its origins in the Treasury’.¹¹⁹

Perhaps closer to the truth of what motivated his resignation was Gullett’s observation that until recently the ‘Cabinet gave me a measure of support, of which I shall always have grateful memories’. Once that support disappeared, events unfolded in a manner that his colleagues believed was ‘inevitable’.¹²⁰ In private, Gullett was more forthcoming. In a letter to John Latham he identified his old adversary Earle Page as a key mover in the machinations against him: ‘He and his tribe deliberately worked behind my back in direct consultation with the Canadians’.¹²¹ J.F Murphy, Secretary of the Department of Commerce, had shown himself to be one of this tribe when he informed Moffat that Gullett did not even have the support of his own department. For good measure, he added that had Menzies and Page not been overseas at a crucial time, the policy would not have given ‘such offence’.¹²² Although ministers expressed regret at Gullett’s resignation and appreciation of his work, the sense that it was inevitable naturally tempered their response. Menzies wrote a private note that was less restrained:

Although I was, unfortunately, not able to agree with you on the particular point we were discussing before your resignation, I feel I must write to tell you how distressed I feel about the whole matter. In a way, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, any Cabinet must be the poorer when it loses a man of patriotism, ability and courage. On the other hand I have felt for a long time that you were over-exhausting yourself, both nervously and physically, and that only your indomitable spirit kept you to a task which most men would have long since abandoned. On the whole, I suspect that you will be a happier man from now on, and I certainly know that there will be many occasions during the next twelve months when I will envy you mightily.¹²³

Menzies’ words of friendship were matched by the Consul General for Japan who expressed deep regret at the retirement of an ‘able man, who understood Japan’. Perhaps more

¹¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March 1937, p. 12; Gullett to Sir Donald Cameron, 11 May 1939, Gullett Family MSS. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 260.

¹²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March 1937, p. 12.

¹²¹ HG –Latham, 24 March 1937. Latham Collection, NLA 1009/1/5117.

¹²² Moffat diary, 26 Jan. 1937. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 259.

¹²³ Menzies to Gullett, 12 March 1937, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA MS 3078/3/37.

surprisingly, he also observed that Gullett had ‘rendered good service in the establishment of trade relations between my country and the Commonwealth’.¹²⁴

Gullett chose to stay in the House of Representatives as a private member, seeing in that role a ‘great field of usefulness’.¹²⁵ Just what that meant would become abundantly clear to the colleagues in Cabinet he had so recently left. After having experienced a period in which he felt unsupported by them and been the subject of what he saw as a conspiracy, Gullett returned the favour, particularly following the election in October 1937 when the government abandoned almost all of the trade diversion policies. Gullett could not let that slight pass and attacked the new trade agreement between Canada and Australia while acknowledging that it was indeed ‘on this matter that I resigned from the Cabinet’.¹²⁶ Gullett was also prepared to reassess the pre-war migration program. It was now a ‘great Australian success’ and had made ‘phenomenal progress’.¹²⁷ Just two months after the election, he also accused the government of failing to keep its promise to assist the local manufacture of car chassis.

In April 1938 Gullett attacked the government’s defence proposals which he believed went ‘neither far enough nor fast enough’.¹²⁸ He made an open call for the creation of an effective infantry force, a mobilisation plan and a national register of men from 18 to 50. Six days later he voted against the government’s Defence Loan Bill as part of this running commentary on defence issues and conscription. To show that the role of critic is often less complicated than that of decision maker, just four months later Gullett spoke at the annual meeting of the Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and expressed that hope that the increased taxation to fund the new defence measures would not be allowed to curtail their work. There were also echoes of his pre-war attitudes when he observed that the greatest cause of cruelty and neglect was the ‘degrading environment’ of the urban slums.¹²⁹

As usual, Gullett was still able to mix readily with his fellows. Percy Spender found him welcoming at a personal level when as a new member he occupied a place next to Gullett on the remote backbenches:

¹²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1937, p. 9.

¹²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1937, p. 9.

¹²⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1938, p. 12.

¹²⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Aug. 1938, p. 12.

¹²⁸ CPD, 29 April 1938.

¹²⁹ *Argus*, 23 Aug. 1938, p. 12. For many years Penelope had been a Vice-President of the Association before becoming President in 1948.

He had a very good mind, was expert in choice of phrase, acidulous in criticism, somewhat querulous in voice, but I never had the feeling that he made any great impact on the House. However he gave me one piece of good political advice – ‘Speak only on issues on which you are informed, and above all don’t speak too much’.¹³⁰

Perhaps following his own advice, Gullett continued to make his usual contribution to the national discussion of immigration, one that no doubt seemed all the more pressing given developments in Europe. Five months after the *Anschluss*, Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria, Gullett again called for a national approach to population growth:

Static population would mean more than the frustration of our national dreams. It would profoundly menace our safety, it would undermine even our moral claim to the possession of the whole of this continent ... Only selfishness in our people, and cowardice in our Federal and State Parliaments, can doom this rich land of ours to a standstill with a population of 8,000,000.¹³¹

Gullett was not forgetful of his enemies outside of his own party. Of the Labor Party, he was particularly disdainful. He found John Curtin’s actions during the debate on national insurance to be ‘mean’, ‘partisan’, and ‘destructive’. Gullett believed that this was symptomatic of the Labor Party as a whole:

With the exception of two years, a period of about 22 years has elapsed since the party opposite has been in office, and for 20 of those years it has not written one line upon the statute-book, nor contributed to the writing of one line in aid of the workers whom it is alleged to represent. The present attitude of the Opposition is that of the dog in the manger – it can do nothing for the working man whom it comes here to represent, and, if possible, it will prevent honorable members on this side from doing anything to help him.¹³²

But it was clear, as Enid Lyons believed, that Gullett’s resignation was followed by an open opposition to her husband’s leadership. He had become increasingly alienated from the Cabinet to which he had once belonged and to which he apparently felt little loyalty. He

¹³⁰ Spender, *Politics and a Man*, p. 12.

¹³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Aug. 1938, p. 14.

¹³² CPD, 31 May 1938.

pursued this course of action in a manner that bore more than a passing resemblance to a conspiracy. With Menzies and others, Gullett belonged to a group seeking to replace Lyons as prime minister. It had also not passed unnoticed that Gullett spent considerable time while in Melbourne in Keith Murdoch's office at the *Herald*, who was by now a 'very frustrated king-maker'.¹³³ In fact, he did more than just visit the offices, for as Enid Lyons discovered, Gullett was actually writing the paper's anti-Lyons articles.¹³⁴ In Gullett's defence, there is little evidence to suggest that his own advancement was a motivating factor, let alone the main one. When he believed in the ends, Gullett was not always particularly discriminating in his choice of means.

Gullett opposed Lyons in both public and private in spite of the loyalty that the prime minister had shown to him during the trade diversion controversies and having previously been close to him. His criticisms of the government were more than just symptomatic of a disenfranchised colleague. There was a vacuum in the national leadership that was widely known. It is easy now to sympathise with Lyons. A decent, ethical man, overworked, ill, struggling with the demands of government, a sick wife and a large family, left yearning for a retirement that he would never enjoy. Bruce acknowledged that Lyons was a great election winner but beyond that questioned his fitness for the role. Menzies considered Lyons an ineffectual leader and openly chafed at the barriers to his own advancement. Richard Casey, an Honorary Minister from 1933, probably described it best when he observed that the government 'amble[d] along as a collection of individuals doing the obvious things that come to our hand'.¹³⁵

Not everyone was prepared to amble. Gullett's resignation in 1937 was one in a series – Hughes in 1935, White in 1938 and then Menzies himself in 1939. This instability was given a more urgent edge by the growing awareness that Italian and German territorial ambitions could not be appeased forever, nor could there be a blanket assumption that Britain could underwrite Australia's sovereignty in the face of a potential Japanese move southward. There was quite a field of potential successors, one that jostled none too subtly for advancement as Lyons' leadership became more lacklustre and his health more problematic: before his death, Charles Hawker was considered a possible prime minister, the indefatigable Billy Hughes

¹³³ A Henderson (2011) *Joseph Lyons: The People's Prime Minister* (Sydney: New South), p. 412.

¹³⁴ A Henderson (2008) *Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press).

¹³⁵ Welsh, *Great Southern Land*, p. 417.

had his supporters, as did Richard Casey, the treasurer, and Thomas White. Outside of parliament there was also Bertram Stevens, the NSW premier, and Stanley Bruce.

In early November 1938, Gullett spoke at a party meeting and expressed his dissatisfaction with Lyons' leadership and suggested that it was time for him to make way for someone else. That someone else was clearly Menzies. Some believed that this was a pre-arranged strategy orchestrated by Menzies with the intention of engineering a leadership spill. In any event, it failed and Menzies refrained from an open challenge. Age and ill-health had clearly not deprived Gullett of his capacity to wield language like a club. The next day he dismissed the government's decision to adhere to a voluntary training system as leaving the citizen forces 'a mere suicide club'.¹³⁶ Later that month he described the government's inquiry into the Kyeema air disaster as 'a mockery' and a 'travesty of justice'.¹³⁷ The Kyeema was a DC2 that crashed into Mount Dandenong, killing 18 passengers, one of whom was Charles Hawker, war hero, grazier, member for Wakefield and potential prime minister. In March 1939, three weeks before Lyons' death, Gullett was even more direct in observing that the 'government supporters outside of the Cabinet could make up an incomparably stronger Ministry than the feeble show led by Mr Lyons'.¹³⁸

Lyons died on 7 April 1939 and after some attempts by Page and Casey to deny him, Menzies assumed the prime ministership just a few short weeks after he had resigned from the ministry over the National Insurance Scheme. Initially reluctant to return from his own resignation, two meetings with the new prime minister, the offer of External Affairs and the implication that it was a matter of duty was enough for Gullett, in retrospect, perhaps more than enough. His view of serving his fourth prime minister was, nevertheless, a fair way short of effusive: 'A fair team. All depends on Bob. He has it in him, if it can be extracted & applied'.¹³⁹ One of Gullett's tasks was to prepare the Australian people for war. This required him to educate a people that had too long relied on Britain to keep the peace and were now reticent to potentially cede the same level of control in war. In what the *Sydney Morning Herald* characterised as 'the frankest speech on foreign affairs made by an Australian Minister since the period of international tension began', Gullett made it clear that if Great

¹³⁶ *Argus*, 4 Nov. 1938, p. 2.

¹³⁷ CPD, 23 Nov. 1938.

¹³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 March 1939, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Gullett to Latham, 3 May 1939. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 262.

Britain 'was plunged into war in pursuance of her policy of defence against unprovoked aggression, the Commonwealth would make common cause with her'.¹⁴⁰

Given the paucity of debates on foreign affairs in the years before 1938, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* approbation was not quite the glowing endorsement it appears. As Hazlehurst observes, neither was it particularly frank as Gullett 'danced gingerly around the contentious question of the extent to which Australia was free to make its own decisions'.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, he did make some attempt to reassure the Australian people that it was not a *fait accompli* that 'that in any and every set of circumstances the foreign policy of a government of the United Kingdom, if it led to war, should or would automatically commit Australia to participation in that war'. Gullett conceded that, at least in the abstract, 'it is conceivable that upon either side a policy might be adopted which met with strong disapproval or condemnation by the other government'. In the concrete he was less concerned:

But in the circumstances in which the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Commonwealth find themselves to-day there is no sort of disagreement. On the contrary, there is the most complete unanimity between the two governments as to the policy which is being followed, and as to any action which may arise out of that policy. The Commonwealth Government is fully satisfied that recent actions and the prevailing dispositions and certain preliminary moves of the totalitarian nations of Europe constitute a near and grave menace not only to the United Kingdom, but also to Australia and to the democracies of the world as a whole and to all institutions and traditions that stand for freedom.¹⁴²

As German propaganda was already highlighting, there was in reality little unanimity within the Empire regarding the policy to be adopted regarding Eastern Europe. Even more damaging was the impetus it provided for Ribbentrop's campaign to convince Hitler that Britain would not actively oppose further German action in the East. In late April 1939 the Dominions Office approached the Dominion prime ministers seeking public expressions of

¹⁴⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1939, p. 15.

¹⁴¹ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 264.

¹⁴² CPD, 9 May 1939.

support for the United Kingdom's European policy.¹⁴³ Only Menzies was prepared to comply and both he and Gullett dutifully delivered their speeches, with Menzies going as far to check the main points with Whitehall.

Though Gullett was able to discuss world affairs in the House of Representatives and in the country's newspapers, in reality Menzies had control of foreign and defence policy. As if to emphasise how quickly things can change in politics, Gullett found himself reassuring the Japanese that 'there was not the least hostility in this country toward Japan, apart from some feeling over the Sino-Japanese war'.¹⁴⁴ In public he was even congratulated for the 'bold and generous sentiments' that he expressed regarding the Japanese.¹⁴⁵ Generous they may have been, but how sincere Gullett was is less certain:

Why, in the event of war, or even in these days in which we live under the shadow of war, should Japan prefer its new friends in the Anti-Comintern Pact, to its far older friends throughout the British Empire? ... I venture further to affirm that Japan has to-day a vivid consciousness that it was happier and more at rest, and indeed safer, with its old friend and ally than with its new ones.¹⁴⁶

It was not always protestations of friendship which dominated Gullett's strategy when dealing with the Japanese. In an attempt to establish Australian interests in Portuguese Timor and to counter Japanese activities that were part of push southward, Gullett negotiated oil concessions in Timor and sought to block Dutch efforts to secure the commercial air route from Dili to Darwin.¹⁴⁷

Though Gullett did not entirely reject the policy of appeasement, by July he recognised that war was, if not certain, becoming more likely. The Council of Defence met on 5 July 1939 to discuss the progress of Australia's defence preparations. Drawing heavily on Foreign Office sources, Gullett made it clear that the European crisis was reaching its climax. The next six weeks would in his view be extremely critical, adding the prediction that war was now more likely than peace. It was not a reassuring briefing, for 'wherever Australian officials looked

¹⁴³ For a full coverage of the Australian government's actions during this period see: C Waters (2012) *Australia and Appeasement: Imperial Foreign Policy and the Origins of World War II* (London: I.B Tauris).

¹⁴⁴ HG - R. G. Menzies, Prime Minister, Memorandum, 7 June 1939, Secret, NAA: A981, Japan 101, ii. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 264.

¹⁴⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1939, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ CPD, 9 May 1939.

¹⁴⁷ H.S. Gullett, 'Portuguese Timor-Oil Concessions and Air Service', Cabinet submission, 13 March 1940, NAA: A981, Timor (Portuguese) 22, v. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 264.

in the world – central Europe, the Mediterranean basin, or the Far East – they saw danger’.¹⁴⁸ By this stage Gullett was less than impressed with his fellow Council members. Though he spoke in public about the absence of disagreement across the Empire, in private he found much to criticise in the Council’s efforts. General Squires, the inspector general of the Australian Army and as of May 1939 the acting chief of the General Staff, was ‘unscrupulous & a bad swine’ while even men who he had once respected were judged and found wanting. Generals Chauvel and Brudenell White joined Defence Minister Geoff Street as ‘nincompoops & Squires’ Yes men’.¹⁴⁹

As Gullett had predicted, war did indeed come in September 1939, a mere twenty years after the war to end all wars. As Page was not prepared to serve in a coalition government under Menzies, the prime minister led a minority government just at a time when government stability was vital. The immediate impact on Gullett was the enlistment of Jo in the 2nd AIF, his own inclusion in Menzies’ all United Australia War Cabinet and his role as Minister of Information in a newly created department. The other members of the War Cabinet were Menzies (Prime Minister and Treasurer), R.G Casey (Minister for Supply), G.A Street (Minister for Defence), Senator G. McLeay (Minister for Commerce), W.M Hughes (Attorney General), Frederick Shedden (Secretary of the Department of Defence who became the Secretary of the War Cabinet), and the Chiefs of Staff committee, which consisted of the Chiefs of Staff of the three armed services who served in an advisory capacity. In November 1939 the War Cabinet was reconstituted when the Department of Defence was separated into Defence Coordination (Menzies), Army (G.A Street), Navy (F.H Stewart) and Air (J.V Fairbairn). Into this mix was added the Minister for the Interior (H.S Foll). It was intended that the War Cabinet would become the executive subcommittee of the full cabinet, but by November it was clear that Menzies would control the nation’s war effort through the War Cabinet.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ C Waters (2012) *Australia and Appeasement*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁹ Edith Gellibrand diary, 8 July 1939. In P Sadler (2000) *The paladin: a life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), p. 247. Gullett’s view of Squires was not necessarily a widely held one. His proposals for preparing the army for war were appropriate and many had been approved by Lyons only to be discarded by Menzies when he became prime minister. He nevertheless enjoyed the respect of both soldiers and civilians and was a decorated and respected soldier. The basis for Gullett’s disdain is uncertain although the fact that his report had been welcomed by the Lyons government in 1938 may have coloured his view. Being English and educated at Eton may not have been inclusions on his resume that Gullett found appealing.

¹⁵⁰ D Horner (1996) *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia’s War Effort 1939-45* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin).

Perhaps the Ministry of Information was a job that Gullett may have had better luck with had he been ten years younger or in better health. The truth, of course, was that he was neither. With the benefit of hindsight, the government might have looked elsewhere than its British equivalent given that even its Director General would eventually concede, in public, that it was the most unpopular department in the whole British Commonwealth of Nations.¹⁵¹ Had it not been for Australia's distance from the rest of the Commonwealth, the new department might well have competed for that title. Gullett also harboured some deep reservations about his role. He acknowledged the need for censorship but his health was not really up to the added burden. If his statement to Parliament on 21 November 1939 reflected his true feelings, he certainly did not welcome this additional role. It was not his creation, he asserted, and had in fact 'been passed over to me for administration'. It was, he added, 'a very heavy task'.¹⁵² In a letter to the Chinese Consul General he was even more forthright when he described it as a 'wretched job'.¹⁵³

When Menzies announced the creation of the new department, he called on his formidable rhetoric to describe its function:

It will be the duty of the new Ministry to assemble and distribute over the widest possible field, and by every available agency, the truth about the cause for which we are fighting in this war, and information bearing upon all phases of the struggle; also by its many agencies, to keep the minds of our people as enlightened as possible and their spirit firm. I emphasize that precious word "truth" now in some countries becoming obsolescent so far as international affairs are concerned, because I am convinced that the only propaganda which in the long run is profitable and useful is soundly based upon truth.¹⁵⁴

In practice, it was far less high-minded. The department would issue news about government wartime activities, supply information for publicity purposes, facilitate cinema and photographic work about the war effort and take over responsibility for the wartime censorship of publicity media from the Department of Defence. Gullett appointed his old friend and colleague John Treloar as the Director of the Department, and though he was

¹⁵¹ J Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p. 6.

¹⁵² Submissions, Cabinet decisions and minutes, 16 Oct. 1939, Jan-Feb. 1940, NAA: A A2676, 36. In Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 267.

¹⁵³ HG – Dr CJ Pao, 1 April 1940, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/60.

¹⁵⁴ CPD, 8 Sept. 1939.

familiar with public service procedures and well used to hard work it was too little avail. The administrative chaos was only exacerbated by Gullett's ill health. In 1923 he had been prepared to criticise official failings in his history of the Light Horse. Though it would occur posthumously and the criticism was shared with others, Paul Hasluck returned the favour by characterising the department as 'by far the untidiest and administratively the most incompetent ... in the Public Service'.¹⁵⁵

It was more than just ill health and wartime exigencies that contributed to the strain on a visibly ill Gullett. He was dealing with a cocktail of pressures ranging from the jealousies and resistance of established departments to maintaining relations with Defence and the Army, the fallout from errors in releasing information about the arrival of the 2nd AIF in Egypt, and a public backlash against his claim that the Australian people were apathetic about recruiting. In particular, the relationship between the military and the Department of Information proved problematic. The Services were at best lukewarm about providing the Department with current information, even if it offered a valuable propaganda opportunity. This reluctance, or obstruction depending on the point of view, saw the Department releases 'scooped' by the newspapers who could rely on their own cable services. Many of the first censors were former military personnel, well used to following Service orders and by temperament and training inclined to defer to the Services' view of censorship.¹⁵⁶

It is the supreme irony of Gullett's life that as a war correspondent, his government, the army, and the army censors often treated him as an untrustworthy employee, present only under sufferance. Now with the positions reversed and overseeing censorship on a national level he found the army less than dutiful subordinates, far more able to give orders than accept them. For whatever Gullett's institutional powers may have been, in practice the military powers assumed for themselves the right to issue and interpret censorship instructions and in doing so proved 'both capricious and inconsistent in their censorship advice'.¹⁵⁷ It took intervention by Menzies in the face of protests from both the public and parliament in late February 1940 to reassert control by publically confirming the primacy of the Minister for Information with the liaison officers from the Services firmly relegated to the role of advisers to the censors.

¹⁵⁵ P Hasluck (1970) *The Government and the People 1942-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial), p. 403.

¹⁵⁶ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, pp. 23-4.

In the lead-up to the 1925 election Gullett had made particularly effective use of a system of committees that were similar to the telephone chains used by social and sporting clubs and volunteer fire fighters. Had he lived he was going to use it again in the 1940 election. Given that he had seen first-hand how a small network could spread a message exponentially further than a single individual, Gullett's deep antipathy for communist agitation is given further context:

[I] made touch at the outset with only a handful of people and asked them for their support and some work during the election period and at the same time to let me have the names and addresses of at least six others who might be disposed to come in with me. To each of these six I wrote a similar letter and so snowballed up a really great potential force. These were all carefully scheduled into districts and subsequently formed the men's committees and joined in the fray.¹⁵⁸

In October 1939 he wrote to 500 organisations ranging from trade unions, sporting clubs, friendly societies, and local musical societies and invited them to send representatives to meetings to be held in the state capitals. The plan was that they would imitate the men's committees that had helped Gullett win election by forming State Information Consultative Councils. The Councils would draw from different religious, educational, social, industrial, and business groups. Their purpose was twofold. As the grass-roots public representatives they were a useful contact to which the Department could distribute information on the war effort. Secondly, and more importantly, they were able to provide feedback about the type of information required and the appropriateness of the material being distributed. In less than six months the organisation could boast of 93 Group Committees representing 852 organisations, with a further 30 groups and 300 organisations preparing to follow suit. Hasluck, no defender of the Department of Information, acknowledges that the system influenced thousands, but how much it contributed to its aim of sustaining and stimulating the war effort is difficult to quantify.

Just before the formation of a coalition government in March 1940 Gullett advised Menzies that his health made it impossible for him to continue in the War Cabinet and as Minister for

¹⁵⁸ HG – Albert Bishop, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/67.

both External Affairs and Information. As he had anticipated, when the coalition with the Country Party came, he was dropped from the War Cabinet and replaced at External Affairs by the Country Party's John McEwen. It was part of a double shift for Gullett, for Menzies, believing that the Information Department was poor, appointed himself Minister for Information and installed Sir Keith Murdoch as Director General of Information. In this new role, one which granted him unprecedented power, Murdoch reported directly to the prime minister. By July 1940 regulations imposed under the *National Security Act* (1939) placed virtually all of the nation's newspapers, radio stations and film industry under Murdoch's direct control. Unsurprisingly, it would not be long before Murdoch attracted sufficient criticism from both inside and outside the government that even the prime minister would quickly distance himself from his own creation. Although there was a potential for conflict given Gullett's demotion, 'Murdoch was an old friend and shooting companion, and Gullett was not minded to make difficulties'.¹⁵⁹ Responding to a letter from Bean in which he lamented that not enough recognition had been paid to the groundwork that his friend had prepared, Gullett was quite sanguine about the whole affair. He noted that while he agreed that he and his staff had 'laid a wide and sound foundation ... Keith is welcome to whatever he has found, and I sincerely wish him well'.¹⁶⁰

Yet for all his natural combativeness, Gullett was not well. In an excellent short biographical treatment of Gullett, Cameron Hazlehurst characterises him during this period as a weary propagandist and it is a fitting description. Recurring bouts of ill health exacerbated by decades of smoking left him 'dream[ing] of the day when I may be able to go for the rest of my days to 'Tawstock' – my farm'.¹⁶¹ His farm, its name 'an evocation of the Somerset of his grandfather's youth' was a block of grazing land about fifty miles north of Melbourne on which he had built a weekend cottage flanked by a stream and surrounded by ash, oak and other English trees he had planted himself.¹⁶² It was a retirement that would have seen him come full circle. But it was not to be.

¹⁵⁹ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 268.

¹⁶⁰ HG – CB, 19 June 1940, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/100.

¹⁶¹ Gullett to Latham, [?] March 1940 Latham MSS, NLA MS 1009/1. Cited in Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 268.

¹⁶² Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 269.

Gullett's focus was now on censorship, a responsibility which had already placed him in the interesting position of having to justify just the type of control that had so infuriated him twenty five years before. As was the case with men such as Philip Gibbs, his had not been an instinctive, philosophical opposition to censorship. For if you were not the 'right type', as the British War Office had so quaintly characterised their preferred correspondents in 1915, you found in Gullett a man quite prepared to show you the limits of press freedom. His defence of censorship was vigorous and unapologetic although he did offer the reassurance that 'contrary to the general impression and the impression of some newspapers, the Publicity Censorship Branch does not act exclusively along repressive lines ... They may be wrong sometimes, but they are never vindictive or unreasonable'.¹⁶³ In time, Gullett showed that what constituted a vindictive and unreasonable censorship regime was, as with many things, a matter of perspective.

Despite his ill health, Gullett was still able to stir himself when suitably roused. He was particularly aggressive in his targeting of the communist press, which he defined as 'all self-professed Communist newspapers, and newspapers with a predominately Marxist Interpretation of social history and events'. Though this was the formal definition, his own characterisation of them was far more colourful. They were 'traitorous publications', a 'foul enemy mouth that should be closed' and the 'voice of avowed enemies not only of the Australian and total Empire war effort, but of the present form of constitutional government in this country and of every home in it'.¹⁶⁴ This was tame by comparison with what he had said in 1925 while on the campaign trail when he vowed to 'make war upon this evil'. If he was a unionist, he admitted that he would hang them.¹⁶⁵

Though stopping well short of making good on his more extreme threats, Gullett did resolve to treat communist newspapers as enemy publications, though disingenuously adding that they would not be banned but would be forced out of publication by drastic censorship. They would be forbidden from writing at all on certain subjects, including the war, recruiting and training, Russia and its government, any strike within the Empire, or any Allied country and

¹⁶³ Department of Information, Summary of Activities for the period ended 31/3/1940, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/703.

¹⁶⁴ *Courier Mail*, 20 April, 1940, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Daily News*, 29 Sept. 1925, p. 8.

any industrial unrest, 'real or imaginary'. The intent was clear. Yet Gullett assured 'loyal and decent Australians' that 'freedom of speech and of the Press, however, is not, in any British community curtailed except in the case of clear and supreme national interest'. Except for this pursuit of the 'enemy in our midst openly working for the defeat of the Allied cause and the destruction of our Australian overseas troops' censorship would continue [in a] co-operative, friendly spirit with the newspapers'.¹⁶⁶ In any case it became a moot point, at least for the communists, for on 15 June 1940 the Menzies government suppressed 10 communist and fascist parties and organisations.

In spite of the censorship, Gullett believed that on the whole, Australian newspapers were getting 'a wonderfully good and intelligent deal' and were showing themselves worthy of that trust by 'responding in the same spirit'.¹⁶⁷ Though his concern about the threat of communism was not without foundation, he was equally prepared to defend censorship in all the detail. Facing criticism in the House of Representatives that the Henry Lawson poem 'Faces in The Street' had been censored out of a Melbourne publication, Gullett denied any knowledge of the specific circumstances, but was nevertheless prepared to give the censors the benefit of the doubt:

Extraordinary things happen in censorship which cannot always be avoided. Part of Kipling's 'Recessional,' 'the tumult and the shouting dies, the captains and the kings depart' was censored out of the London *Times* in the last war ... I don't want to keep on threatening but as long as I hold office I am determined to use the national security regulations to check subversive activities. Of 3500 publications in Australia only 13 are in trouble, and of the 13 many are of the type with which very few of us would like to be associated.¹⁶⁸

There was more than petty bureaucracy informing Gullett's view of this new and greater threat to Australia's existence:

There is not room in the world for the German people under the foul and destructive cult of Nazism and at the same time for French liberty and British freedom as it is upheld and practised here in Australia. Hitlerism must be

¹⁶⁶ *Courier Mail*, 20 April, 1940, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ *Cairns Post*, 20 May 1940, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ *Cairns Post*, 20 May 1940, p. 6.

smashed and eradicated, or we ourselves and all that we and our fathers have built up so patiently and cherished so dearly must be destroyed.¹⁶⁹

At a 'Win the War' rally at Oakleigh in June 1940, Gullett showed all the old publicist skills he had honed while working for the High Commission when he again characterised the conflict as a battle for national existence. Like the French and Britain and her Empire, Gullett argued that Australia was 'fighting for all we have and all we treasure'. He saw the French as 'fighting against fearful odds, against two great foes, for her very life as a nation. A thousand years of illustrious, unique civilisation is swaying in the balance of unequal battle. All that is embraced by her beautiful and distinctive culture is hour by hour at stake'.¹⁷⁰ France, however, fought for more than just her own survival:

She fights today just as surely for the United Kingdom and for Australia as she fights for herself. Every brave poilu who falls with the German hordes before him and the screaming Italian backstabbers behind him, falls for Australia and Britain, even as he falls for his beloved Republic.¹⁷¹

As always though, he was not averse to interspersing the rhetoric with reference to the harsh realities, as he had done so regularly when advertising Australia. He believed that 'we are, as an Empire and as the Australian Commonwealth, right up against it. Distance does not lend security, although it may postpone the fateful day'. The belief that if 'Britain failed America would look after Australia' was both 'stupid and uncertain'. Gullett's additional claim that Australia's safety was dependent 'upon ourselves and upon France' would not have been particularly reassuring given that an undefended Paris fell to the Germans two days later.¹⁷² In private he was even more forthcoming. He confided to Bean that the war situation was 'bad beyond our worst anticipations'.¹⁷³

Perhaps even more interesting than Gullett's seeming disinclination to be remembered for his reportage from the Western Front was his view that by July 1940 the 'old time war correspondent has vanished almost as completely as the old time cavalryman'. There was 'little or no opportunity now for the column or more article from a colourful or vivid writer'

¹⁶⁹ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/780.

¹⁷⁰ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729.

¹⁷¹ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729.

¹⁷² Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729.

¹⁷³ HG – CB, 19 June 1940. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/100

and instead ‘the clamorous insatiable demand today is for news, stark news, in the briefest form in which it can be expressed’. After almost a year of a second world war Gullett struggled to think of ‘a single outstanding name’ among the ‘hundreds of specially selected writers who have been endeavouring by every means in their power to place before the newspaper readers of the world, vivid and intelligible stories of happenings in Europe’. Gullett attributed this ‘lack of old time satisfying, and often thrilling, despatch’ to a variety of developments ranging from the speed and size of operations to a readership ‘too restless, too excited, at times, unhappily, too depressed, to read long stories from even the best contemporary journalists’.¹⁷⁴ He lamented the fact that in an age of vast news agencies and broadcasting individualism was notably absent from the work of the war correspondent. Gullett’s nostalgia betrayed a view that war correspondence had a literary value that transcended the mere communication of facts, and in the case of his friend Bean, even a claim to greatness.

Though he believed that war reporting had become a much more limited field, in the same month he delivered a speech at the University of Melbourne during which he made it clear that he conceived of the war in the broadest possible terms. It was nothing less than a ‘stupendous battle for civilisation’, one between totalitarianism and democracy. The profound differences between the totalitarian states of Italy and Germany and the democracies now waging war against them, were, in Gullett’s view, evident in their respective approaches to censorship. A totalitarian state ‘claims perfection, smothers truth, denies reverses, exaggerates victories and forbids criticism’ and in doing so risks having their morale shattered by a reverse that cannot be hidden. In contrast the democracies of the Empire ‘erred on the side of leniency and [have] exercised patience in endeavouring to achieve its object by advice and persuasion rather than the exercise of more summary powers’. Conscious that the first year of the war had brought with it precious little in the way of victories, Gullett noted that this approach ensured that a democracy scrutinised by an ‘almost completely free press’ has ‘the advantage of standing right with its people through the darkest days which the war may bring’.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ *Journalism and the War*. Speech or a radio broadcast on 29 July 1940. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

¹⁷⁵ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

For all his defence of democratic values and free speech, Gullett did acknowledge that there were boundaries to press freedoms. They were of a type that any ‘reputable newspaper’ would not seek to transgress.¹⁷⁶ The location and movement of troops, or ships, or air force units were naturally banned, as were the rather more nebulous reference to any ‘information which might be helpful to the enemy and prejudicial and destructive to our own prosecution of the war’. In addition, it included anything written or spoken that either ‘intentionally or accidentally is calculated to embarrass and frustrate the Empire war effort’. Though Gullett ‘would not like to think of a government based on a truly democratic system venturing into war with a totalitarian state without the daily appearance of a free press completely free to criticise’ he added a condition, one which indicated a preparedness to suspend some freedoms to protect others:

But those who control and write newspapers will be wise in the national interest, unless they deem it desirable to change leadership, or to destroy and remove a government, they are careful not to carry their daily criticism to a point that brings the government of the moment into disrepute with soldiers or citizens or both.¹⁷⁷

This type of censorship did not, in Gullett’s view, trespass ‘in the slightest degree against the proper freedom of the Australian press’.¹⁷⁸

With an election approaching, Gullett felt the call of party loyalty in spite of his physical decline. He had all but decided not to contest the election but had to reconsider because the position of Henty was ‘precarious’.¹⁷⁹ As a sitting member Gullett felt that he would have a better chance of holding it than a newcomer. His reticence was understandable. He had ‘seen so many men who have been able to fill and hold a House linger too long on the stage’. He knew ‘of no more painful spectacle’. Yet if the body was weak, the same was not entirely true of the spirit. Gullett still professed to have more ‘nervous energy today than at any time in my life’. He was nevertheless realistic about his health:

I am somewhat feeble on the physical side. My capacity for night engagements really is most limited. As a general rule I take to my bed immediately after dinner

¹⁷⁶ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA, 3078/3/729-743.

¹⁷⁷ Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/729-743.

¹⁷⁸ CPD, 24 May 1940.

¹⁷⁹ HG – Albert Bishop, 4 April 1940. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/66.

and there read papers. The social side of my life has been almost entirely abandoned which at my age is perhaps not unbecoming.¹⁸⁰

His colleagues were aware that this was not the Gullett of old. While at External Affairs Keith Waller found him to be a ‘dilettante, rather indolent, very agreeable, very civilised, good company – but the sort of man who never bestirred himself very much’.¹⁸¹ According to Alan Watt, he had a reputation for being ‘an able but somewhat vain and pernickety man’.¹⁸² Both Waller and Watt were university educated career public servants, indeed, Watt was a Rhodes Scholar. One perhaps senses the same divide that had made Gullett sensitive to any effort to edit the official history. On at least one occasion, a member of Gullett’s family showed that he was also sensitive to Gullett’s fading capacities. While waiting to join the AIF, Jo characterised it as ‘Menzies put [ting] a dam side [sic] too much work on him because the Cabinet is pretty full of dumbells [sic]. Dad is working up to a frightful row with Street who lacks drive but he holds back with impatience’.¹⁸³ Just over a year before his death, one journalist summed up Gullett’s approach to government. The journalist saw in the incongruity of Gullett’s appearance and his nature proof that ‘public men in the flesh seldom resemble the mental picture that their activities create’:

Sir Henry, studious ascetic-looking, bespectacled with a scholarly stoop is the typical conception of a quiet peaceful reactionary. Actually he is a fiery man of action, a rebel – an intellectual rebel – who wants to see things move and if possible move fast. Throughout his political career he has given the appearance and striven to speed up the political administrative machine. He does not mind throwing bricks and if their flight strikes a hornets nests then he is better pleased.¹⁸⁴

Destruction wrought by fire marked the beginning and end of Gullett’s life. He was a passenger on a Hudson aircraft that crashed near Canberra on 13 August 1940 killing all ten people on board, three of them government ministers: Gullett, Geoffrey Street, Minister for the Army and Repatriation, James Fairbairn, Minister for Air and Civil Aviation, General Sir Cyril Brudenell Bingham White, Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Francis

¹⁸⁰ HG – Albert Bishop, 4 April 1940. Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078/3/66.

¹⁸¹ Sir Keith Waller, interview 21 June 1977. Cited in Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 268.

¹⁸² A Watt (1972) *Australian diplomat: memoirs of Sir Alan Watt* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), p. 21.

¹⁸³ Jo Gullett to ‘Weed’, 25 Sept. 1939. Gullett Family MSS. Cited in Hazlehurst, *Ten Journeys*, p. 266.

¹⁸⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 May 1939, p. 10.

Thornthwaite, Staff Officer to General White, Richard Elford, Fairbairn's private secretary, Flight Lieutenant Robert Hitchcock, Pilot Officer Richard Wiesener, Corporal John Palmer and Aircraftsman Charles Crosdale. The cause of the crash has always been a contentious point as flying conditions were excellent, Hitchcock was an experienced though not skilful pilot and there was never a question of sabotage. There is an enduring suspicion for which there is no definitive evidence that Fairbairn was at the controls when the Hudson crashed.¹⁸⁵

It might have been worse given that the prime minister's assistant private secretary Peter Looker arranged seats for himself and Menzies on the same aircraft. Menzies declined, for though he was prepared to fly when necessary, he was not an enthusiast. Yet the cost to the nation, the government, and to Menzies both professionally and personally was significant. As Hasluck observed, 'the loss of any one of these men alone would have weakened the Ministry and Parliament. The loss of the three together tore a hole in the fabric of government'.¹⁸⁶ Menzies' grief was palpable in the tribute he paid to the victims in parliament:

Geoffrey Street, Henry Gullett and James Fairbairn had their greatest attributes in common: they were men of courage and untouched honour, fired by a burning loyalty, and enlightened by ability and experience. Each in his own way had a genius for friendship. They were rare men.¹⁸⁷

Later in his memoirs Menzies expanded on the personal impact of what he characterised as a 'dreadful calamity'. For his three colleagues were his 'close and loyal friends', each of whom occupied not only a place in his cabinet but in a noticeable turn of phrase, particularly for Menzies, also in his heart. Even a quarter of a century after the event he felt that he could 'never forget that terrible hour; I felt that for me the end of the world had come'.¹⁸⁸ His language at the time was if anything even more raw. Though he acknowledged that much of Gullett's recent political work was still controversial, Menzies balanced that by observing that he had 'grown grey in the service of Australia and the British race'. His life and career 'was an epic of honourable achievement' during which he had made 'hosts of friends in many parts of the world'. Though he possessed 'the disinterested zeal of a crusader' Menzies was

¹⁸⁵ For a full coverage of the crash and the aftermath see: Hazlehurst (2013). *Ten Journeys to Cameron's Farm*. Canberra: ANU Press.

¹⁸⁶ Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, p. 244.

¹⁸⁷ CPD, 14 August 1940.

¹⁸⁸ RG Menzies (1967) *Afternoon Light, Some Memories of Men and Events* (London: Cassell), p. 18.

as aware as anyone that Gullett could ‘give and take hard knocks in what seemed to him a good cause’. But when the fight was over, Menzies believed that ‘even his opponent saw only the grey-haired, studious-looking man with the quick smile, the tender human charm, the capacity for giving a friendship so understanding and so moving that I can hardly bear to speak of it’.¹⁸⁹

Even Gullett’s old nemesis Sir Earle Page was effusive in his summary of his character, which ‘was marked by his passionate love of Australia and the Empire’:

His patriotism burnt like a lambent flame because of the extraordinary intensity of his nature. He had a constructive mind, and brought indefatigable industry, inexhaustible energy, and a wide knowledge to his work of fostering the development of Australia, and of increasing Empire trade ... He continued his work without respite, despite the frailty of his body, and the fact that he suffered from an organic disease which would have driven many persons to seek rest and leisure.¹⁹⁰

Though Menzies retained the prime ministership following the election in September 1940, he returned from a four month stint in the UK to find the support from his own party crumbling. He resigned on 27 August 1941 and was replaced as leader of the UAP/Country Party Coalition by Arthur Fadden, who in turn was defeated in Parliament in October 1941 when two independent MPs crossed the floor, thereby allowing John Curtin to form a Labor minority government. One of the independents was Gullett’s successor in Henty, lending some credence to Menzies’ view that his ‘rejection and, as I felt it at the time, my humiliation, would [not] have happened if those three men had lived’.¹⁹¹ Other writers have concurred with this view, although most would stop short of Andrew Tink’s claim that the crash destroyed a government.¹⁹² Hazlehurst disputes that assessment and sees instead a broader series of failings on Menzies’ part rather than just the absence, no matter how tragic the circumstances, of his three ministers and friends.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ CPD, 14 August 1940.

¹⁹⁰ CPD, 14 August 1940.

¹⁹¹ Menzies, *Afternoon Light*, p. 18.

¹⁹² A Tink (2013) *Air Disaster Canberra: The plane crash that destroyed a government* (Sydney: New South Publishing).

¹⁹³ Hazlehurst, *Ten Journey’s*.

Conclusion

The world that Gullett knew in 1940 has undergone a profound transformation. A second world war has been fought and won, and Japan, once the bogeyman of Australian politicians, offers no threat to Australian security, either real or imagined. Communism has also been defeated, the increasingly bellicose actions of North Korea and the sabre rattling of a Russian state driven by a nostalgia for past glories notwithstanding. The Empire has been dismantled. Both Britain and America appear to be flirting with a watered down isolationism grounded in the murky world of identity politics, one that Gullett would have understood and may well have supported. New threats to Australia now emanate from the Middle East in the form of Muslim extremism. Cities like Damascus and Aleppo, which Gullett knew well, are again wracked by war. As Gullett predicted, China is now one of Australia's chief strategic concerns, though as he acknowledged, the potential for trade is enormous.

What Gullett would have made of multi-cultural Australia, let alone the other evolutions in Australian society, can only be guessed at. What is almost certain, however, is that his response to each issue or challenge would have, in the final analysis, been shaped by what he believed were Australian interests. If he were to operate in a modern context he would appear to some, perhaps many, to be cynical and pragmatic. His strident nationalism would leave him open to criticisms of xenophobia and racism. His preparedness to vote in parliament according to his conscience rather than along party lines would infuriate many. In an age of social media and a 24 hour news cycle he would be sought out by journalists eager for a quote. Perhaps as a man of the people, he might go far as a popular candidate but whether he would be able to attract broad support or master the backroom political deals required to do so is questionable.

But what is left of his world? In 2016 Toolamba had a population of 769, down from 873 in 2006. The average age has risen from 34 to 40 over the same period. Almost ninety percent of the current population are Australian born. The most common ancestry after Australian is English, Irish and Scottish. The fact that eight residents were born in Italy and China would not suggest to a visitor that the racial makeup of the Australian people had changed significantly, or at all, since 1878. Yet it is not just in Toolamba that there are echoes of a past that is proving resistant to the march of time. Almost 530 kilometres northeast of Toolamba along the M31 is the national capital of Canberra. It was here that Gullett was

killed in 1940 and where in 2015, a century after Gullett first travelled to the Western Front in an official capacity, Malcolm Turnbull, the Australian prime minister, opened a memorial to Australian war correspondents in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial. Constructed out of black granite in the shape of an oculus, representing the lens of a camera or the eye of a journalist (although one reporter rather hopefully described it as ‘an all seeing eye’) the ceremony passed without controversy.¹ There was some rather emotive criticisms from a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist who ruined the impact of his opening statement that journalists should be servants of the truth, rather than myth making, by engaging in some superficial assessments of the Gallipoli campaign and linking it rather tenuously to the modern Australian military commitment in the Middle East.² Beyond that it barely caused a ripple. In his address, Turnbull felt no need to interrogate their role or the complexity of their experiences across a range of conflicts. Instead he characterised their work as ‘hold[ing] up the truth to power’, something that he believed was fundamental to democracy.³ One newspaper reporter even made the additional observation that the Australian war correspondents in World War One had ‘shared trenches with the diggers and sent their copy out by pigeon or steamer’. This was tame in comparison to the claim by the director of the War Memorial, Dr Brendan Nelson, that the correspondents wrote the first draft of history, which in the case of Bean and Gullett was a literal truth.⁴

War Correspondent Michael Ware, who covered the war in Iraq, acknowledged at the opening that there has always been a ‘feisty’ relationship between the military and the media but added an observation that virtually mirrored the one that Gullett made in 1915: ‘One of the greatest stories that we can tell as journalists is the story of our troops’.⁵ Since Bean’s very first dispatch, that has been the aim of Australian war reporters and it inevitably has carried them across dangerous mythological ground in which reverence and hero worship are not always compatible with the truth. In contrast, it is almost impossible to believe that a similar memorial could be unveiled in the United Kingdom without considerable uproar

¹ S Heanue, Tribute to war correspondents unveiled at Australian War Memorial in Canberra by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, 23 Sept. 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-23/war-correspondents-memorial-unveiled-in-canberra/6798062>

² N Stuart, War correspondents' memorial: A memorial to truth, not war. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Sept. 2015. <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/war-correspondents-memorial-a-memorial-to-truth-not-war-20150925-gjuohp.html>

³ M Turnbull, 25 Sept. 2015, quoted in <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-23/war-correspondents-memorial-unveiled-in-canberra/6798062>

⁴ War correspondents' memorial in a perfect place, *Canberra Times*, 23 Sept. 2015.

⁵ M Ware, 25 September 2015, quoted in <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-23/war-correspondents-memorial-unveiled-in-canberra/6798062>

given history's treatment of her World War One correspondents. Yet so essential was the contribution of Australian correspondents to the national sense of self that their new memorial sits comfortably alongside the memorials to the other nation builders commemorated in the Australian capital. One journalist summed up the prevailing mood by writing under the headline 'War correspondents' memorial in perfect place'.

But if the profession has emerged unscathed, what of Gullett the man? He served his country with distinction in war and peace. He was personally courageous, driven and outspoken but could be harsh in his judgements of those who were not similarly blessed. He was ambitious but he put the cause before himself. If he was at times too ready to dispense with personal loyalties or to use his pen to persuade rather than inform, he did so because he believed that one could not be half hearted in a world where might had so often proved to be right. George Carlin once observed that inside every cynical person, there is a disappointed idealist. Gullett was not a disappointed idealist but it was without doubt a frustrated one. He believed in the limitless possibilities of the Australian land and her people but was confronted at every turn by those he believed lacked the vision, drive or courage to grasp the opportunities as they presented themselves.

In 1916 Charles Bean had described Gullett as 'a man of whom one is always expecting big things'.⁶ In a letter to his wife in late 1917 Gullett made it clear that he had equally high expectations of his countrymen. He believed that Australians 'are an extraordinary people'.⁷ A few weeks after Gullett's death, his friend and colleague, Charles Bean, looked to articulate what posthumous contribution Gullett might make to a people he found so extraordinary. As Director of Immigration, Gullett had, in Bean's estimation, devoted himself to 'yoking the two great policies of development and immigration' which driven as a pair 'were the only team that would bring Australia to safety and prosperity'.⁸ The rural metaphor suited the man in death as much as it would have in life. Just as typical was the importance that Bean attached to posterity:

There is somewhere a young Australian that will catch again the vision, that seemed so clear to those kind, twinkling eyes, and will someday take the reins where he laid them down and drive our country into the future that he saw for it.⁹

⁶ Bean, Diary, AWM 38 3DRL606/37/1, Jan. 1916, p. 33

⁷ HG – PG, 27 November 1917, Papers of Sir Henry and Penelope Gullett, NLA 3078 3078/5/34.

⁸ CEW Bean (1940), *Reville*, p. 8.

⁹ Bean, *Reville*, p. 8.

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