

Leonard Worle in uniform during WW1

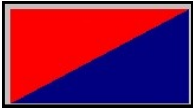
Abstract

This paper describes the military service of Leonard Victor Worle. Leonard served as an artilleryman with the 1st AIF during WW1 and reenlisted with the Volunteer Defence Corps during WW2. The milestones in his official Service Record are developed by including information from Unit Records and other sources about the military actions in which his unit was directly involved.

Leonard Worle saw action as an artilleryman in several of the bloodiest campaigns in which the Australian Army engaged during World War 1. These included Gallipoli, the Somme in Northern France where he took part in the dreadful fighting at Pozieres and the defence of Hazebrouck in the Ypres sector in Belgian Flanders. A senior non-commissioned officer with the rank of Sergeant, Leonard was wounded twice requiring hospitalisation both times. He displayed great bravery by returning to the fray after recuperating. The unit in which Leonard predominantly served, the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade, incurred the heaviest artillery casualties of all the Australian artillery units in France, suffering a total of 231 deaths and 1,036 casualties (Horner, 1995, p188).

The significance of the contribution of Leonard and his gunner mates to the war effort can be gauged from following appreciation in Horner (1995): "Essentially the war on the Western Front was won by the power of the British artillery and the Australian artillery was a major part of it. The Australian Corps had been one of the spearheads of the British advance, and in this its artillery had matched the aggressiveness, dash and discipline of its infantry counterparts".

Information collated in 2016 by Victor Stewart, grandson of Leonard Victor Worle



Enlistment

15 September 1914 - Leonard enlisted as a Gunner/Bombardier with the 5th Battery of the Australian Field Artillery. At the time, the pay rate for a private serving overseas was six shillings per day.

At the time of enlisting, Leonard was twenty-five years old and married to Henrietta with a baby daughter, Irene. He was a skilled Wood Carver who was born in Collingwood on 26 May 1889 and educated at the Melbourne Working Man's College (now RMIT) and the National Art Gallery. Leonard was also an elite Australian Rules footballer playing three games for Essendon in 1912.

Leonard had prior service from 1909 to 1912 with the 6th Battery of the Australian Field Artillery, at a time when the Australian Army was a militia force. During this time Leonard undertook specialised course in gunnery and signalling. It is noteworthy that during those pre-WW1 years, the militia was the vehicle through which the later Field Marshall John Monash developed and exercised new strategies that significantly improved the effectiveness of artillery operations and the integration of artillery and infantry operations.

Leonard's elder brother, Thomas (Tommy) Henry Worle, was also married and also served in the militia (for eight years from 1905 to 1913) as well as playing three games of Australian Rules Football for Collingwood in 1907. Tommy was 31 when he enlisted on 5 January 1916 and was posted to the Western Front. Here he was tragically killed in action in the field in Belgium near Armentieres on 2 August 1917. At the time Tommy was serving with the 31st Battery of the 9th Australian Field Artillery Brigade with the rank of Sergeant. Leonard's youngest brother, Harry (1894-1968), also became a Gunner with the 4th Australian Field Artillery Brigade, suffering wounds in France on 30 September 1917.

Initial AIF Posting

The unit in which Len initially served was the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade of the AIF. The Brigade was raised in Victoria and was commanded by LT COL George Johnston, aged 44. LT COL Johnston was a Melbourne business man and militia officer who had commanded the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade of the Militia from 1910 to early 1914.

The 2nd Field Artillery Brigade was one of the three artillery brigades attached to the 1st Division of the AIF. The Commander of Artillery (CRA) for the Division was Colonel J.J. Talbot Hobbs who later advanced to the rank of Lieutenant General and, at the end of the war, succeeded Monash as GOC of the Australian Corps

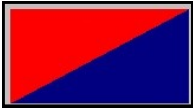
Each Field Artillery Brigade consisted of three field batteries, each equipped with four Quick Firing (QF) 18-pounder field guns, and a brigade ammunition column. The Australian field artillery was equipped like its British counterpart with the latest 18-pounder QF guns.

The three batteries comprising the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade were the following:

- the 4th Battery commanded by Major O. F. Phillips;
- the 5th Battery commanded by Major H. O. Caddy;
- the 6th Battery commanded by Major J.B Mills.

Major Phillips was a permanent officer while the other two were militiamen. (Horner, 1995, p80)

The Quick Firing (QF) 18 pounder was the standard field gun of the Australian Army throughout WW1 and was known as the "infantry killer". Its ammunition had the shell combined with the cartridge thus giving it the description of 'quick firing'. The gun was designed for an army that could move very quickly around the battlefield. The weapon was light, mobile and rapid-firing with a flat trajectory and a range of 6,500 yards (5,940 metres). The 18 Pounder would be brought into action to support the infantry firing at targets that were beyond the range of infantry weapons.



The gun and its ammunition limber were towed by a team of six light draught horses. A driver was allocated to each two horse team and rode the left horse of each pair. The two wheeled ammunition limber was hooked up to the horses and the trail of the gun was hooked to the limber. Further to this, each gun had two additional ammunition limbers towed by their own team.

The gun detachments, led by the detachment sergeant on his own horse, rode into action either on the horses or on the limber. During the early stages of the war, an ammunition limber was positioned on the left of the gun, but as the war progressed and larger quantities of ammunition were being used, stockpiles of ammunition were dumped in pits next to the guns.



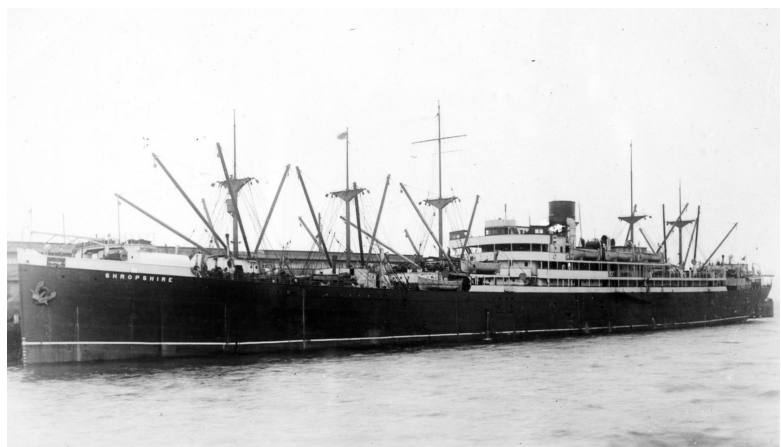
18 Pounder gun in horse-drawn configuration

Source: AWM P02508.002

Embarkation for Overseas Service

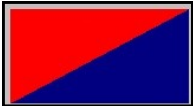
20 October 1914 - Towards the end of October, the various artillery batteries boarded ships in their respective cities, and assembled in a convoy in King George's Sound, off Albany, Western Australia. The WW1 Embarkation Roll shows Leonard's date of embarkation from Melbourne was 20 October 1914 and that the ship on which he embarked was HMAT Shropshire (Ship No A9).

The Shropshire and the other ships joined a massive convoy being formed in King George's Sound, off Albany, Western Australia.



HMAT Shropshire (A9)

Courtesy: West Australian Museum MHK D13 473



1 November 1914 - The convoy containing the whole of the 1st Division of the AIF set sail for the Middle East after it was joined by ships from New Zealand. The strength of the 1st Division Artillery at the time of departure was 101 officers, 2,682 men and 2,818 horses. (Horner, 1995, p81)

En route, there was a famous sea battle with one of the convoy's escorts, the cruiser HMAS Sydney, destroying the German cruiser, Emden.

18 November 1914 - The convoy arrived in Colombo and took on coal.

25 November 1914 - The convoy sailed from Colombo.

26 November 1914 - The convoy arrived in Aden and travelled from there to Alexandria in Egypt via the Suez Canal.

Arrival and Training in Egypt

4 December 1914 - The first ships carrying the 1st Division Artillery arrived at Alexandria in Egypt and by 9 December 1914, the units comprising the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade were in camp at Mena, eight kilometres from the Pyramids. Training began the following day. (Horner, 1995, p85)



The Australian artillery in training in Egypt in early 1915. Gunners are manning the drag ropes as the 18-pounder descends a hill. (Collection of Mr P. Heywood)

Source: Horner, 1995, p86

10 April 1915 - Ships carrying the 1st Division artillery sailed from Alexandria in readiness for the start of the Dardenelles campaign.

In mid April 1915, a week was spent on the Greek island of Lemnos with the gunners and drivers practicing unloading guns and wagons onto pontoons and slinging fully harnessed horses (Horner, 1995, p88)

The artillery was a component of the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, under the control of General Sir Ian Hamilton. Overall, the force was light on artillery by the norms of the day. According to *British War Establishments, 1914*, the four "British" divisions should have come with 304 guns; but they had only 118.

The force was also short of shells for the 18 pounder guns and there was no high-explosive ammunition just shrapnel rounds (Carlyon, 2008, p27).



Service in the Gallipoli Campaign

25 April to 1 May 1915 - One 18 PDR from the 4th Battery of the 2nd AFA Brigade was put ashore on the 25 April 1915 and commenced firing at 1800 hours. The battery in which Leonard served was amongst the first artillery units to go ashore at Anzac. Roberts (2015) states that two field guns of the 5th Battery were put ashore between 0500 and 0600 on 26 April 1915. Elsewhere, Bean indicates that the Australian troops landed at ANZAC Gallipoli over the period 25 April to 1 May included the 2nd Artillery Brigade HQ and the 5th Battery. At the time the 5th Battery comprised 3 officers and 57 other ranks. For ease of command, the batteries were described according to their commander, becoming known as Caddy's, Phillips's, Browne's and Hughes'. Len's 5th Battery commander was MAJ H.O.Caddy. The available records indicate that the field artillery played a major role in repulsing a major Turkish attack on 18 and 19 May 1915.



Australian gunners dragging guns into position after the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. By 6 p.m. one gun had been placed on the neck above the southern end of Ari Burnu beach, and on the next day more guns were dragged over this neck into the positions to the right. (AWM G918)

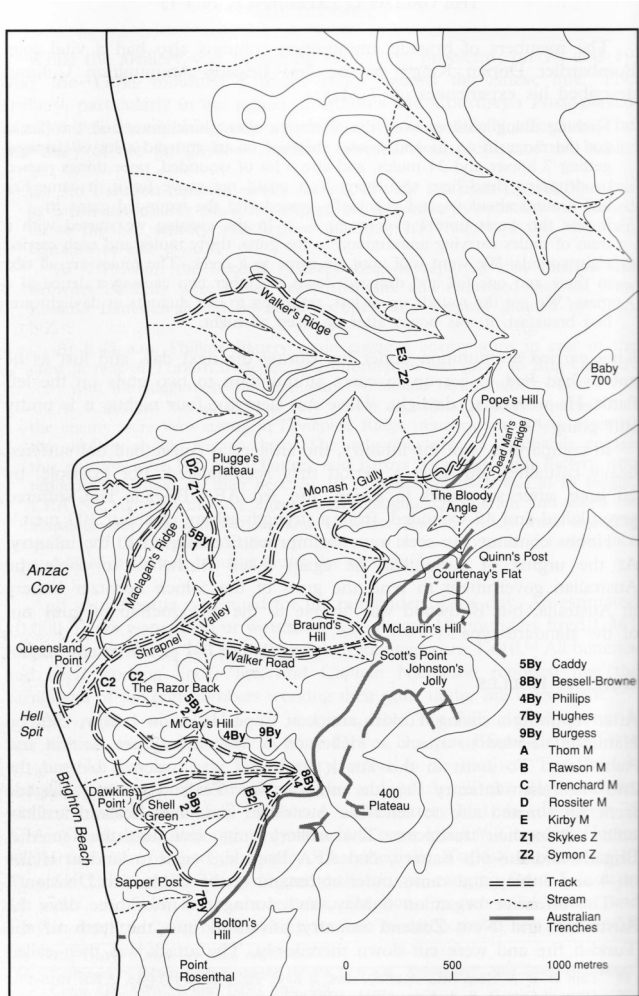


An Australian 18-pounder in action in late April 1915. One member of the detachment is observing fire through binoculars while another is looking through a periscope. (AWM A5764)



The Gallipoli campaign was one where the full burden of providing artillery support fell on the gunners of the 1st Division. Doing their job placed the gunners in great danger and required Leonard and his gunner mates to display courage in performing their duties on a day-to-day basis. The danger was exacerbated by the area of operations at Anzac Cove being tiny (the beachhead was only about 400 acres in size). The troops at Anzac were subject to a constant rain of small arms and shrapnel fire from the Turkish forces positioned on the higher ground above and looking down on the beachhead. (Carlyon, 2008). Even moving to and from the frontline via the exposed main thoroughfare that was Shrapnel Valley was risky as evidenced by the troops suffering 150 casualties each day in doing this.

The difficulties in finding sites for the artillery and bringing the field guns into forward positions during the early (May 1915) phase of the Gallipoli campaign are detailed in a Chapter in Bean's History "The Story of Anzac". Specific mention is made of the 5th Battery. Inter alia, Bean describes the saga on 8 May 1915 of 160 personnel dragging a gun of the 5th Battery into the firing line, into a position that proved hopelessly exposed.



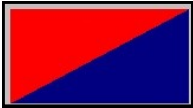
Map 9 Positions of the Anzac artillery at the end of May 1915. This map has been redrawn from one in the War Diary of Headquarters Royal Artillery, 1st Australian Division, but retains the original legend and place names.



Australian gunners in action on M'Kay's Hill, Gallipoli, 19 May 1915 (Source: Australian War Memorial Catalogue # A00879)

Source: Horner (1995)

Guns from the 5th Battery were positioned on M'Kay's Hill, Gallipoli during May 1915 as indicated on the map above. Alongside is a picture of Australian gunners in action at that very location



A separate attempt the following day to place a field gun into the frontline trench the following day is also described. Around the same time, there was a reorganisation of artillery within the beachhead that saw Caddy's 5th Battery being moved into better positions overlooking Shrapnel Gully. From here the Battery was responsible for protecting the two central sections of the Anzac line and firing against Turkish positions at the head of Monash Valley within an area where some of the heaviest fighting of the campaign took place.



The view up Monash Valley looking towards the lines at the head of the valley in 1915

Source: Pugsley, Christopher: Gallipoli, The New Zealand Story, Auckland 1998)



The view up Monash Valley today

Source: www.tripadvisor.com.au)

Vicious artillery duels continued through the months of June and July 1915 during which the gunners were progressively weakened by poor food, disease and constant bombardment (Horner, 1995). The flies were dastardly and 80% of the Anzacs were suffering from Dysentery in July 1915 according to Carlyon (2008).

15 July 1915 - Leonard sustained shell wounds (leg & buttock) while in action at Anzac in the Dardanelles. The time of 13 to 15 July 1915 coincided with a period of heavy bombardment around Steele's post, an area where the 5th battery provided artillery support.

After being wounded, Leonard was transferred to Malta on the **Hospital Ship Sicilia**. Carlyon observes that being evacuated from Gallipoli was an ordeal with the sea journey to Malta around this time typically taking three to four days.

On the hospital ships off Gallipoli, Australian nurses came face to face for the first time with the reality of the wounded. It made some of them confront the limitations of their nursing skills and the notion of the glory of war. Working on the **Hospital Ship Sicilia**, Sister Lydia King confided to her diary: "I shall never forget the awful feeling of hopelessness on night duty. It was dreadful. I had two wards downstairs, each over 100 patients and then I had small wards upstairs — altogether about 250 patients to look after, and one orderly and one Indian sweeper. Shall not describe their wounds, they were too awful. One loses sight of all the honour and the glory in the work we are doing."

23 August 1915 - The wounded Leonard was embarked on the **THS Andania** in Malta for transfer to England.

30 August 1915 - Leonard was admitted to the 5th London General Hospital, St Thomas, London, following arrival in England,.



Return to Duty & Deployment to the Western Front.

2 Feb 1916 – Leonard returned to duty in Egypt and joined the troops of the Australian Divisions in training.

9 Mar 1916 – Leonard was taken on the strength of the 23rd Battery. This formed part of the 21st Field Artillery Brigade, one of the four artillery brigades equipped with 18-pounder QF guns attached to the **1st Division**.

22 Mar 1916 – Leonard embarked at Alexandria in the early part of the March to June 1916 movement of the Australian Divisions from Egypt to France to join British Expeditionary Force.

28 Mar 1916 – Leonard disembarked at Marseilles in France. Late March represented the period when men of the 1st and 2nd Divisions began arriving in Marseilles (Carlyon, 2008).

15 May 1916 - Transferred to the 21st Battery. This formed part of the 22nd Field Artillery Brigade, one of the four brigades attached to the **2nd Division**. The battery was equipped with 18-pounder QF guns.

9 Jun 1916 - Taken on strength of 21st Battery in France

10 Jun 1916 - Promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

The Australian 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Divisions were initially positioned near Armentieres but left the area in early July 1916 for the Somme and the sorrows of Pozieres.

Service on the Somme and Pozieres

The Somme campaign in Northern France in 1916 saw exceptionally heavy fighting in which the 2nd Division and its artillery component in which Leonard served were directly engaged and experienced multiple tours of duty.

24 June 1916 – saw the commencement of the counter-battery fire which continued intensively thereafter preparatory to the launching of the major British infantry attack on 1 July 1916.

16 July 1916 – saw the beginning of the movement of units of the artillery towards the Somme preparatory to the 1st Division's attack on the heavily fortified village of **Pozieres** on 23 July 1916.

Pozières, a small village in the Somme valley in France, subsequently became the scene of bitter and costly fighting for the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions.

The village of Pozieres was captured initially by the 1st Division on 23 July 1916. The division clung to its gains despite almost continuous artillery fire and repeated German counter-attacks but suffered heavily. By the time it was relieved on 27 July 1916, the 1st Division had suffered 5,285 casualties.



The reality: wounded being taken off Anzac Cove in early May. The wounded from Anzac and Helles went through ordeals as bad as anything in the Crimean War 60 years earlier. After the landings, one hospital ship ended up carrying 850 wounded – and two doctors to look after them. [Australian War Memorial C02679]



27 July 1916 - The 2nd Division took over from the 1st and mounted two further attacks in the Pozieres sector - the first, on 29 July, was a costly failure; the second, on 2 August, resulted in the seizure of further German positions beyond the village. Again, the Australians suffered heavily from retaliatory bombardments. The 2nd Division was relieved on 6 August by the 4th Division, having suffered 6,848 casualties.



Courtesy: Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office

The 2nd Division artillery supported the Australian 4th Division as it entered the slaughterhouse and advanced towards Mouquet Farm.

The eight Australian artillery brigades were rotated to support the 1st Anzac Corps, with each brigade remaining two weeks in the line before being withdrawn for one week's rest.

The 2nd Division returned to the line in August 1916 for a second tour of duty before the Corps was withdrawn from the battle on 5 September 1916.

Overall, the ferocious infantry battle extended for six weeks and was characterised by unrelentingly heavy artillery bombardment with both sides deploying many hundreds of guns including some of up to 15 inches in calibre. Fitzsimmons (2015) provides a vivid description of the hellish conditions under which the infantry fought and fell.

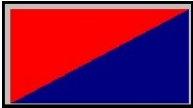
The outcome was a triumph for the Australians with the capture of the Pozieres Ridge and the strategically important highest point in the Somme Valley.

During the battle, the Australian 18 pounder field guns were positioned at the head of Sausage Valley, Pozieres. The valley was the location for the other Australian artillery and served as the conduit for men and materials to and from the front. Sausage Valley is depicted in the famous painting by Frank Crozier that hangs in the Australian War Memorial (AWM ID No: ART00239). The painting provides a view of the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions and shows their soldiers, horses, medical supplies and artillery, while explosions can be seen on the horizon.

Documentary footage exists of Australian 18 pounder Field Guns shelling Pozieres Ridge in 1916 and is available from Australia Screen via the following link:

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/australia-in-france-part-one/clip3/>

In September, the 1st Anzac Corps enjoyed the relative quiet of Flanders but then on 9 October 1916 was ordered back to the Somme where battles dragged on in deteriorating weather conditions and appalling conditions of rain and mud.



Battle of Flers

The Somme campaign, which had provided the Australian gunners with a demanding introduction to modern warfare, ended with the Battle of Flers in early November 1916. (Horner, 1995, p136)

It was in the field during the battle of Flers that Leonard was severely wounded. The high intensity of the artillery action around that time is reflected in the deadly counter-battery shoots that preceded the 2nd Division attack. This action saw about 12 enemy guns from the 4th Prussian Guards being put out of action daily over the period from 6 -14 November 1916

14 November 1916 – This the day of his being wounded coincided with the day on which the 2nd Division launched a major attack on the trenches around the **Maze**, a German salient near Flers. The purpose of the attack was to advance the sector. The day saw intense fighting in the sector with a strong German counterattack being made during the night.



A general view of the Maze showing the old German trenches and no man's land.

Source: Australian War Memorial Catalogue # E00220

Three Australian battalions went over at 6.45 am. The battalion on the right broke into the German lines but was thrown out. It was ordered to attack again. Most of the centre battalion also failed. It too was ordered back. The battalion on the left took the German line but eventually had to fall back as a result of the German counterattack. The cost of the unsuccessful attack was the loss of 901 men from the 2nd Division.

The War Diary for the 2nd Artillery Brigade indicates that on 14 November 1916 enemy shelling was above normal and that 8" and 5.9" shells fell in the vicinity of its batteries and that there was also a high level of enemy aerial activity (balloons and aeroplanes).

It is likely that the severely wounded Leonard was evacuated from the Flers front via the nearby rail-head at Longeval.

Hospitalisation and Recuperation in England

14 December 1916 - Leonard was admitted for treatment to 1st Southern General Hospital in Birmingham in England.

The hospital was located in the Great Hall of the University of Birmingham (see picture) and was initially equipped as a 520 bed hospital. The facility was used to treat Australian and New Zealand soldiers from 1914 onwards and was eventually expanded through the use of Annexes and Converted Schools to take 130 officers and 2357 other ranks.



Birmingham University Hospital

23 March 1917 – Leonard was discharged from Hospital and commenced close to a year of recuperation in England recovering from his wounds.

For the last half of 1917, Leonard was assigned to No 1 Command Depot. This AIF camp was a half-way house for training and convalescing located at **Sutton Veny** on the Salisbury Plain. The only event recorded on his service record was his committal of an offence on 25 July 1917 (not obeying orders) and suffering a reprimand.

Service on Western Front during the 1918 Campaign

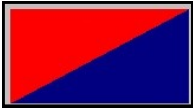
22 February 1918 - Leonard returned to France on 22 February 1918 marching in at Roulles and was again taken on the strength of 2nd Field Artillery Brigade of the 1st Division of the AIF on 8 March 1918. Deployment of the 1st Division provides insight into where Leonard saw action in 1918.

5 April 1918 - The 1st Division departed Flanders for the Somme as part of the British response to the German counteroffensive (Operation Michael) that began on 21 March 1918, being the last Australian formation to do so. (Carlyon, 2008)

The launching on 9 April 1918 of a separate German offensive (Operation Georgette) that broke through the Allied lines, caused return of the Division to Flanders. The key objectives of the German attack were the key town of Hazebrouck on the Belgian border and the Channel Ports. Hazebrouck was a critical rail centre through which half the food and ammunition for the Ypres front passed and was a gateway to the Channel Ports.

The 1st Division joined the battle to the east of **Hazebrouck** and was ultimately instrumental in holding the British line during heavy fighting that extended over the period 12 to 15 April 1918. The Division remained at Hazebrouck “nibbling” away at the enemy until August 1918, when the Division was transferred to the Somme battleground in reserve for the game-changing battle of Amiens that opened on 8 August 1918.

4 August 1918 - Leonard was by then out of the line as a consequence of being posted to England and taking an appointment on 4 August 1918 as an Artillery Instructor with the RBAA (Reserve Brigade Australian Artillery), located in Heytesbury.



Return to Australia

13 December 1918 - After four years away from Australia, Leonard returned to Australia on HT Port Hacking (D34) with the 1914 list.



HT Port Hacking (D34)

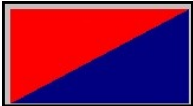
Source: Moore Collection, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Photo Gallery 14: New Zealand at War

While on board the troopship, Leonard was Sub-Editor and a major contributor to the compilation of **The Port Hacking Cough**, a newspaper for the troops that was displayed in poster form on the deck of the troopship each day. The Port Hacking Cough was subsequently printed after the ships arrival in Melbourne as a book (Sheringham, 1919) for the 1914-1919 men returning home on D24 to keep as a record. The book has subsequently received recognition as an excellent expose of trench humour.

The original manuscript was held for many years by Leonard's daughter, Irene, before being donated to the State Library of Victoria where it is now held and can be accessed (Manuscript No: 11595). It is worthy of noting the positive mindset of the returning soldiers in that Leonard's personal contributions were focussed on post-war reconstruction in Australia.



Cover of The Port Hacking Cough



World War 2 Service

15 March 1942 - Leonard reenlists in the Citizen Military Forces component of the Australian Military Forces offering experience as an artillery instructor. His service number is V372607.

16 June 1942 – Leonard is posted to the 2nd Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corps, in which he served until demobilised in late 1945.

The **Volunteer Defence Corps** (VDC) was an Australian part-time volunteer military force modelled on the British Home Guard. The VDC was established on 15 July 1940 by the Returned Sailors', Soldiers', and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA now the RSL) and was initially composed of ex-servicemen who had served in World War I. The VDC became part of the army in May 1941 and a Corps of the Citizen Military Forces a year later.

The organisation was given the role of training for guerrilla warfare, collecting local intelligence and providing static defence of each unit's home area. The army defined the objective of the Volunteer Defence Corps as to augment the local defences of the State by providing static defence of localities and the protection of vulnerable points and by giving timely information regarding enemy movements to superior military organizations More succinctly, its purpose was to **'Deny, Delay, and Protect'**.

Some of the particular missions for which the Volunteer Defence Corps prepared included the construction of road blocks, demolition of bridges and piers, protection of airbases, industrial sites, and vulnerable points, coast-watching, and village and guerrilla warfare. When workers joined the organisation, they often provided for the defence of their plants.

Twenty-four battalions were raised in Victoria alone. General Harry Chauvel, of Light Horse fame, who had retired in 1930, was recalled to duty in 1940 and appointed Inspector-General of the VDC holding this position until his death in March 1945.

1 October 1942 - Leonard is promoted to the rank of Acting Corporal.

25 January 1943 - Leonard is promoted to the rank of Acting Sergeant

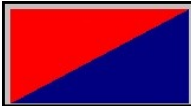
24 May 1945 – Leonard's rank of Sergeant is confirmed.

9 October 1945 – Leonard is discharged.

10 October 1948 – Leonard died in North Fitzroy, Victoria.



Leonard (left) at Volunteer Defence Corps demonstration during WW2



Awards/Medals



**Leonard 's medals:
Left to Right: 1914/1918 Star; Victory Medal; British War Medal**

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