

Memorial Box 1: Australia in the First World War

The Craig family



Leslie Craig, c. 1915

Twenty-two-year old Leslie Craig was working on his father's property in the south-west of Western Australia when he volunteered for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in October 1914. The youngest of Francis and Hannah Craig's four sons, Leslie was also the only one from the family to enlist. His three brothers were also farmers and they remained at home to tend to their livestock.

Before the First World War, Leslie had trained for two years with the militia. As an experienced soldier and horseman, Leslie was selected as an officer for the 10th Light Horse Regiment and in early 1915, he set sail for Gallipoli.

By the time Leslie arrived on the peninsula in May, the combined Australian and New Zealand force had withdrawn to a precarious position that was surrounded by Turkish strongpoints on all sides. But the Turkish army wasn't the only threat the Anzac troops encountered on the steep and rugged slopes.

In the summer months, swarms of flies began to gather near refuse, latrines, and rotting corpses, carrying infection to food eaten in unwashed dixie tins. Bully beef and hard tack biscuits were the staple of most meals, and fresh water was in short supply. By June hospitals were treating far more troops for disease than for wounds received in action.

In August the allies sought to break the stalemate by capturing the high ground along the Sari Bair range. As dawn broke on 7 August, they launched an attack on



Frances Boyd, c. 1913

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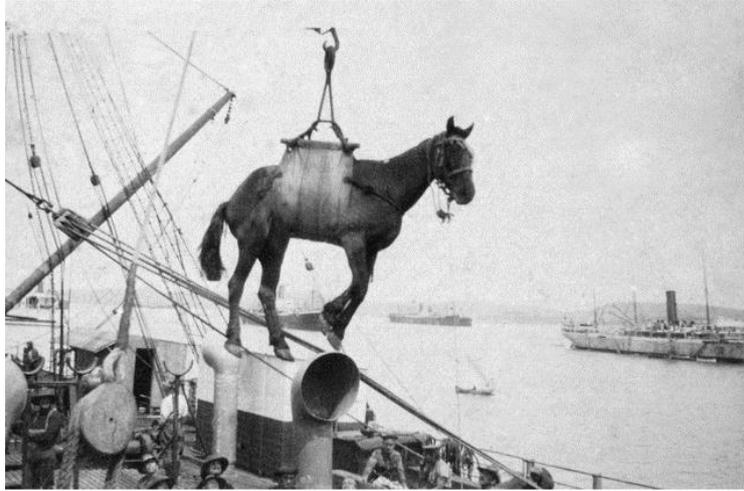
The Nek in an effort to divert attention away from the main offensive. Four successive waves of light horsemen rushed from the trenches hoping to capture this narrow strip of land but each line found themselves under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire.

Leslie was in the third wave of this attack. By this stage, success appeared unlikely, but the commanding officer in charge of the attack refused to accept defeat. When the whistle blew, Leslie leapt from the trench. As he scrambled past the dead and wounded from the first two waves, he was shot.

With both his legs and his right arm badly damaged, Leslie was immediately transferred to a hospital in Egypt but the wound on his left leg became infected and the leg had to be amputated. After further treatment, he was admitted to a hospital in England to recover. It was while learning to use his new prosthetic leg that Leslie fell in love with Frances Boyd, a young Irish woman who was working as a nursing orderly in the same hospital.

Leslie married 21-year-old Frances in her hometown in Donegal a year later. In October 1917 he brought his new wife home to Western Australia, where he was discharged from the AIF. Leslie initially worked at an accountancy firm, but farming remained his passion. He acquired a property near Dardanup and settled there with his wife and four children.

Activities for research and classroom discussion



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P00211.004

A horse in a sling is unloaded from a troop transport, c. 1915

1. Men from the Light Horse were unable to use their horses on Gallipoli. Why do you think this wasn't possible?



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART07965

George Lambert, "The charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7 August 1915", c. 1924, oil on canvas, 179 x 333.5 x 9.5 cm

2. How has this painting depicted the charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek? What techniques has the artist used to achieve this?
3. George Lambert finished this painting nine years after the actual battle. Do you think this artwork is a reliable source of information?

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AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P08414.007

Lieutenant Leslie Craig after surgery and recuperation in England, c. 1916

4. 40 per cent of all Australians who enlisted were wounded during their service. What might life have been like for these soldiers and their families when they returned home?



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P08414.005

Leslie and Frances in Ireland, c. 1917

5. Thousands of women fell in love with Australian soldiers during the First World War. Many, like Frances, eventually married their sweethearts and moved to Australia to begin a new life. Imagine you were one of these women. Write a postcard home to your family. How do you think you would be feeling? How would you describe your new home?

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