

ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW ON CURIOUS CAMPBELLTOWN WITH LAUREN HOKIN ON 14 OCTOBER 2022

AA Hello everyone and welcome to Campbelltown City Library's podcast Curious Campbelltown. I am Andrew Allen and I work at Campbelltown Library. Today I would like to introduce author Lauren Hokin. Lauren wrote the comprehensive and amazingly researched ANZACs of Macarthur book that I absolutely love and use all the time. Lauren welcome to our podcast.

LH Thanks Andrew for having me.

AA So what's it like being a published author?

LH It doesn't feel any different really. It's not like I set out to be a novelist or write a book it's just a matter of circumstance to be honest. So my father is a Vietnam veteran and he was volunteering down at Dredge's Cottage with the Veteran's Recreation Centre. When Julia Gillard was Prime Minister they came up with ideas to help commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli landing through a bunch of projects that committees could undertake and they were approached to do something and they had no idea, being Vietnam guys.

I studied this at Uni and did my thesis on the First World War so my dad came around and was like we're looking for ideas. I was like you can do this, this and this. You can do a comprehensive collection of stories about soldiers, and like yeah that sounds good. I didn't think anything of it and he obviously went off to a meeting with the RSL heads and Russell Matheson our Federal Member at the time and a couple of days later he came back and said oh they want you to write it. I'm like oh, ok, and it just went from there.

AA Did you find that daunting?

LH Absolutely daunting and the problem was it just grew and grew and grew. It was just going to be the Campbelltown guys at first and then oh we'll just include Ingleburn and we'll include Minto and then well it's a Federal thing so we'll have to include all of our electorate so we'll do Camden as well. You know what Wollondilly feels left out so let's include Picton as well so it just grew from a couple of hundred soldiers to over a thousand within a couple of months.

AA That's massive.

LH Massive, yeah.

AA How long did it take for you to write it.

LH It took me about two and a half years to research and write and then about six months to edit and kind of put it together with the company that put it in like a

book format. It had to be kind of finished by 2015, the centenary. I finished it but it wasn't ready to be printed out in a book format until the following year.

AA Ok so a deadline can be a good thing and a bad thing can't it!

LH Absolutely, it kept me going but to be honest I didn't do everything the way I would have wanted it to be done. I just simply did not have the time to look at individuals in the depth that I would have been able to.

AA Wow, at times did you think that you weren't going to finish?

LH Weren't going to finish? Absolutely and then I saw other things that I could have looked into to get more information but I couldn't have the time. For instance there's these unit diaries. I don't know if you have ever watched MASH and you watch Radar writing in what happened each day, basically they had the same thing in the First World War. So every single unit would have like a clerk soldier or someone in the admin area working under the Colonel that would write about what happened that day especially if there was a battle, medal recommendations, deaths and things like that. They were all recorded so for every single day for every single unit there is a little entry and they are all on the War Memorial website but there is just thousands, thousands and thousands of entries and I just didn't have the time to go through them. They are very difficult to read because they are just scanned hand written accounts in most instances of hundred year old pencil writing. They are very, very difficult to read.

AA Yeah, I can just see how much research has gone into that. Did you have an ancestor who was in the First World War?

LH Yeah I had quite a number actually. On my mother's side I had two brothers who served, the **Jahns** boys, so they were German and one signed up was actually killed at Gallipoli and then a couple of months later his younger brother joined up and served on the Western Front and unfortunately he was killed as well just before the Battle of Messines in Belgium. And then there were a few other **Simms boys**, so one was wounded in the Battle of Ypres in Belgium as well he lost his arm unfortunately and he later died of his injuries. Out of the four only one came home.

AA It's pretty tragic, I had one ancestor who was killed at Ypres, he was on the Menin Gate. I would love to go over there one day.

LH It's a brilliant memorial if you ever have the chance you should go.

AA So what kind of writing experience did you have before?

5 mins

LH Not too much just mainly academic kind of experience. My Uni degree obviously, I stayed on and did my Honours Degree so I wrote a thesis and that is where I got a lot of my – this is how you write properly for academia kind of level of writing, and then I did a Masters of Teaching Degree as well so pretty much that was it. So I felt very much like I was shoved into the deep end and when people

refer to me as an author it kind of makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable because I happened to just write something. I don't see myself as an author per se.

AA So, I am tempted to ask what's the next project but I know that at the moment you have got a child, a baby and I believe you are teaching too.

LH Yes he is one year old. I am a history teacher so I have just gone back for a little while. That takes up a whole lot of my time. There are a lot of people that are kind of like are you going to a Second World War one. That's kind of been at the back of my mind, it will be a much larger undertaking because by the Second World War we had a larger population in this area. We had Ingleburn Army Camp up and running so there was a lot of people that came through there for their training. So yeah maybe when I retire and I've got a couple of years where I can just do nothing but that maybe that will be something I can do.

AA You've got a fair while before you retire I would say.

LH I can put a couple of years in just doing bits and bobs maybe along the way but just not at the moment, my son keeps me very busy.

AA I'm sure. Any other sort of areas that you would consider writing about other than military?

LH Yeah, I actually started a novel when I was in Year 10, as you do, about a little girl, who, you know, quite a popular area for teenage novels at the moment so the holocaust in Germany. She didn't realise that she was Jewish because it was so far back in their ancestry and her father joins the Nazi Party and things like that. Her whole world was to change very abruptly. Something along those lines.

AA That's interesting, right. Well I thought we might discuss a little bit of what's in the book and I've been doing a bit of research myself. One of the families that I was looking at was the Williamsons. Now this is a little bit of a Saving Private Ryan kind of a theme isn't it?

LH Absolutely yeah. You would be amazed at how heart wrenching it is and the letters from the mother when she was trying to get one of her boys back home. They are actually in the service records so you can actually sit there and read what she wrote to the Army to get what was sent home to her. That's the only reason why I know all this because service records are kind of higgledy piggledy so they are written by the army for the army so there are three sections. There's like the attestation papers when you go up to your depot or camp and you're signing up they put your name down there. They don't even ask your date of birth it is just age, your job, if you have served in the cadets or anything like that, have you a criminal record, and then you agree to the oath. You have a medical examination that's pretty much it. The next bit is you are assigned to such and such unit, were you promoted, were you wounded did you go to hospital and that's it. The next bit is correspondence. So any sort of letters or things that you wrote even after the war were shoved in there. Whether or not they were kept is another thing, so like medical records sometimes they were destroyed or they were lost or letters they were lost as well and things like that. So it just really

depends on what was kept by whoever was keeping the service record at the time. Those letters from their mother was actually kept in there so that is the only reason why that I know that part of the story.

AA So were they very strict in, like did they follow up ages and all that sort of thing?

LH Yes and no. Earlier on in the war they were much more strict obviously because in 1914 they thought it was going to be over by Christmas. If you didn't get out on the battlefield you were going to miss out. So as eager in muster as they were, if you showed up and you were under the age of 18 they would tell you to bugger off. If you could kind of fake your way like you looked older and you just said you were 18 a lot of people filling in the forms just looked the other way or they just didn't second guess it. Because as I said they don't ask for a date of birth, not everyone had a birth certificate back then so it really just your word of honour that they accepted. Likewise the age cap was 45, if you showed up and you were 48 or 50 as many men did join up and they were that old, they got through. A lot of them through the rigorous training and things like that they were like yeah you're over 45 aren't you, off you go.

AA Would that have changed a little bit? Would they have got a little bit more blasé or lenient as the war went on?

10 mins

LH Absolutely, they were under strict quotas to try and get those recruitment numbers up. They were desperate. There were so many instances where divisions and units were under strength, even half strength to the point where we had five divisions at the start of the war, early on in the war. They collapsed that down to four just to fill the gaps. So they really wanted as much men as they can and we had two conscription referendums which failed, they didn't get passed so that anyone aged between 18 and 45 were to be forced into military conscription. Britain had the same thing, but we said no so they were very desperate to get as many men as they could. So they went from, we want six foot guys to if you're smaller that is better for the trenches anyway. You've got a bit of asthma you'll be alright, you look like you are actually 16 but you say you're 18 so no worries, come in. The same with Aboriginal indigenous soldiers as well. A lot of them were turned away at the start of the war, a lot of them were accepted because they were just so desperate to fill those ranks.

AA So they were turned away at the start of the war.

LH Absolutely, depending on where you went obviously. It wasn't written into policy that they weren't allowed to serve, they were encouraged not to serve. This isn't for you, you're not going to be a good soldier you don't take orders very well, the men don't want you in their unit. That sort of traditional racist kind of attitude, it was definitely there. A lot of indigenous personnel did get through and they proved their country very well, they fought very bravely but they underwent a lot of racism and suspicion when they were trying to undertake that journey for themselves.

AA How terrible, just terrible.

LH Unfortunately, not too much has changed.

AA So getting back to the Williamsons. I would love to see those letters from the mother.

LH Absolutely, they were heartbreaking. So basically the Williamsons were three brothers and a father that all served if you can believe it. They were part of a family that lived out in the Sydney suburbs and they came to Campbelltown for a bit where a couple of the boys were born including Basil and Roy. They grew up here, they attended the Jubilee celebrations made a lot of friends and things like that and then they moved further out to Sydney for work to Leichhardt I think it was, and then they all joined up. Basil and his older brother Wallace were keen as mustard. So basically when war was declared on 5 August 1914, the 5th for us, the 4th for England, a couple of days later they went straight down to the army camp and they joined up. Wallace was assigned to Field Ambulances. Now Field Ambulances aren't like an actual ambulance. They did have ambulances motorised ambulances, but they weren't – it was an actual unit, they had stretcher bearers and water carts and medical personnel as well as the ambulances and they were kind of an intermediary between the first aid or aid posts that were close to the front lines and the casualty clearing stations. So they did a lot of triage, they dressed wounds and like yeah you're right to go back to the front lines or you're a bit more serious we will take you on to a casualty clearing station or hospital. So he started doing that.

Basil was assigned to a special unit, it was called the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force. Now these are the first units in the First World War for Australians to actually experience fighting. We tend to think it was Gallipoli, that's not the case, it was the ANMEF and they went to the German New Guinea which is what we call Papua New Guinea now. So basically back in the day Germany had colonies and they had Germany New Guinea they had the Bismarck Archipelago which contained the Solomon Islands and things like that. So they had those particular islands and territories and they had a lot of wireless stations and naval ports there and they were right on our doorstep so it was very very important. We were given the orders by Britain, you must seize those, we can stop German naval vessels from communicating with each other and use those ports ourselves. So they were sent over there including Basil as part of the infantry and we were very successful, we got those islands, got those wireless stations, to the point where they were like, okay we don't need you any more and they sent him back home and he was demobilised, the whole unit was demobilised at the start of 1915 and Basil was actually quite upset about that. He was like, stuff that, I am going to join up again so he joined the AIF the Imperial Force in March 1915 basically like a month after he got home. So you can imagine his mum, Sarah finally gets him home and then turns around and he's like, yeah, I'm joining up again. At this point casualty numbers for Australian troops are very very low so it wouldn't be anything to truly worry about.

15 mins

Basically a week after Basil got to Liverpool camp his father William Wallace Williamson, can't get any more Scottish than that, joined him there. So at Liverpool camp they started training and were both assigned to the same company within the same battalion, the 18th Battalion, and you can tell they knew something was in the wind so they were planning the Dardanelles campaign which was to be Gallipoli. So after a couple of weeks of training they were on a ship out to Egypt straight on to Lemnos Island and from Lemnos Island headed over to the shores of what was to be Anzac Cove for the Gallipoli landings.

AA It would have been fairly rare for a father and a son to go off at the same time and be in the same ship.

LH Same ship and same unit. It was odd for Australia, in Britain not so much. Britain had their whole volunteer basis was based on these things called the Pals Battalions. They wanted entire sport clubs, entire classes, entire companies and labourer sectors to join up together and fight with your mates. Here not so much because it kind of depended on what date and what kind of camp you signed up in to what unit you get placed in. It was just pure luck, unfortunately you might think it's a bit unlucky because a couple of days after they joined after the August campaigns Basil was shot in the head, at Hill 60. This would have been close to William watching his son being hit in the head because Wallace was there as well with the field ambulances. Don't know if he was called up to help to take his body, he was still alive. They carried him down all through the ridges, the massive ridges up and down the valleys to the beach where he was seen to. His wounds would have been dressed and he would have been given a card saying that you either go to a hospital on Lemnos Island or we're going to take you straight to a hospital in Alexandria back in Egypt. Because it happened in the August campaign there were so many wounded there was just not enough ships, not enough nurses, not enough medical staff to deal with it. So he actually waited on the beach for a couple of days and then he succumbed to his injuries.

AA And the father with him when he passed away?

LH He probably would have been up in the lines depending on his commander. He may have let him go down on the beach with him but they would have been too busy and hectic. As you can see what happened with William later, I reckon he probably would have stayed and did his duty. After his son passed away the weather at Gallipoli turned bitterly cold. You don't think that because you see the pictures of all the soldiers in their shorts and the flies and things, but winter was horrible, just as bad as on the Western Front. They didn't have the gear to keep themselves warm. They didn't think they were going to be there that long so they didn't have the equipment that they needed as well. So it was bitterly cold, men froze to death in the trenches, like on sight duty, waiting for the enemy, with their guns stuck in their hands, that's how badly they froze. So he actually developed a condition called nephritis which is an inflammation of the nephrons in the kidneys. There's a couple of reasons for this. So his age he might have lupus or something like that which they didn't really know about back then but more common would have been he didn't really go to the toilet very often, it would have

just been too cold. Where the latrines were, were quite often under Turkish sniper fire and commanders did that on purpose so the troops wouldn't lollygag, they'd think they'd lollygag out in the latrine, so they quite often didn't go, they didn't have enough fresh water so it was really wreaking havoc. Basically from that you're going in to the early stages of kidney failure, your body is not able to dispel the waste, his legs, his face, his fingers were all swollen. He would have been in terrible pain. He could have easily considering his age been asked to see a doctor and get invalided out. He stayed on until they were all evacuated out and he was finally admitted to a hospital in late 1915 early 1916 back in Egypt, and they said you're too far gone, we're going to invalid you back home. So Sarah would have got the news that her husband was coming home after the terrible news about Basil being killed. But unfortunately he is sick and still required treatment. He gets admitted to the 4th General Hospital in Randwick which was a military hospital at the time and in July he passes away from nephritis complications.

AA As you are telling me this I am thinking how keen he was and how keen they were to go away and having no idea of what was going to happen.

LH And just his staunch stubbornness in wanting to stay. You find that a lot amongst the Anzac troops at Gallipoli because this is the first time their mates were really killed in such a large scale and they were told that they had to evacuate. A lot of them were buried there and so they've got to walk away with their tail between their legs and leave their mates there behind in enemy territory and probably with his son being buried there he didn't want to go. Because if I stay and we win he would have died for something. If we turn and run well he didn't die for anything. Not to say that was the case but it may have been what he was thinking.

20 mins

AA We don't know where Basil is buried.

LH No, a lot of troops who were killed at Gallipoli, their gravesites have been lost. Because we withdrew and because of the such fierce fighting and close quarters up and down all these ridges there were all these makeshift kind of cemeteries, not only on the beach but also up on the ridge where a lot of the fighting took place. So when we left, those cemeteries just got lost, further bombardments just destroyed them and it was years, like into 1919, 1920 before we could go back in and bury them properly. So a lot of the bodies just happened to be lost so unfortunately his was lost and then we've got our little baby Roy – little cheeky Ronald.

AA I was just about to ask you about Roy.

LH Yeah, during this time, so we've got poor Sarah lost Basil, has lost her husband, and Wallace is still on the Western Front now not too sure what is going to happen to him and we've got little Roy who is really annoyed that he is not in on all the fun and he has been trying to enlist. He tries to enlist in 1916, so this is after Basil has been killed, it doesn't stop him he wants to join. He joins up he is 18 years old now. In the First World War for the Australian Army if you are aged

between 18 and 21 you need your parent's permission to actually go overseas. You can train and join up but once you're going to be assigned to go overseas you need your parents' permission. So they wrote home to Sarah and Sarah's like, hell no you're not going, get back here. She refuses so they have no choice but to discharge him. Then William comes home, he passes away. Still does not stop him, a month later he tries again. This time he gets in now it's unsure because his records are quite weird, because he signs up with different names. This is how you can tell he is trying to hide the fact from his Mum. He signed up with different names, different jobs, his birth year, sometimes they're not consistent, so he finally gets through and goes overseas. So I don't know if Sarah actually knew he was going or she is like I've written to the army and they are going to send me back Wallace now that William has passed away so I've got one son coming back, Roy you can go but I don't think she was that type of lady I think she would have stopped Roy from going. Roy goes over and gets wounded, he gets shot in the arm in the hand during an attack at Bullecourt and gets surrounded by gas. He is unable to put on his gas mask so he cops a full load of gas, gets taken back to hospital and has to have surgery on his arm, they remove a bunch of shrapnel, he's vomiting and having coughing fits so his lungs got a good dose of the gas. They have been quite badly scarred. He is in hospital for a number of months and then they send him home and after the medical review board they were like yeah you are unfit to serve any more, ok you're discharged. So you've got a bit of soldier play, got wounded served his country, it still wasn't enough for him. He joined up again in 1918, I don't know how he passes the medical review board but in 1918 we were very very desperate. Our volunteers have started to dry up and the Germans in a last ditch effort to try and win the war have launched their Michael Offensive and they were just obliterating in just a matter of weeks, they had crossed the Somme offensive which took months for the allies to gain, that territory was just gone. They were desperate to get as many men as they could so that is probably why he was able to sneak his way in. Unfortunately for him, the war ended while he was at sea so his troop ship was recalled and he was sent back home. While he is doing so he contracted the deadly Spanish Influenza virus, so a massive pandemic like Covid that was happening at the time. He got back home and he was quite sick, he was quarantined in Paddington, because they were very big on quarantining people in Circular Quay and a few other places around Sydney at the time. Because his lung tissue was so badly scarred from that gas attack he simply could not fight it. He was drowning in his own fluids and he passed away at the beginning of 1920 and was buried at Waverley beside his father. So poor Sarah, lost Basil, husband is next, at least she got to say goodbye, wrote to the army to get Wallace sent back, did her best to try and stop Roy from going off. He snuck around and got off anyway and because he was so stubborn and wanted to enlist again contracted the influenza virus and passed away. So she lost two sons and a husband.

AA I wonder what happened to Sarah in the end. I wonder what became of her, what the rest of her life was like. How much did this affect her?

LH She packed up, didn't want to live in the family home anymore and she left and moved to Vacluse. Unfortunately I don't know what happened to her if she remarried or if family took her in or what happened.

25 mins

AA I might do a bit of research and see if I can find out what happened to her.

LH Unfortunately part of that timeframe constraint was I couldn't really utilise the Sydney Morning Herald and family trees for people especially family members of the soldiers. I didn't have time for the soldiers themselves, let alone family members.

AA You could make a movie about it.

LH Absolutely it's right up there with Private Ryan.

AA You could have made a movie on saving Private Williamson. That was a fairly full on story. Another one that I was looking at and I know you're keen to talk about was the Longhurst family. Because the Longhurst family is such a prominent family in Campbelltown's history. I didn't realise that they went through a similar experience.

LH They were connected to so many military personnel. So basically the Longhurst family originally came from Kent in England. The grandparents of the soldiers in question came out here, they took their children with them in the 1880s and four of the children of them were brothers, Mark, George, Robert and William. They were all builders out in the Parramatta area. When the 1890s hit them we had a recession at the time so they kind of lost a lot of work. So they decided to turn around and pick up some homestead selections that were being sold off in droves by the government to try and get people to settle out in our rural areas. One of them was pretty much what we have at Kentlyn and East Minto now and they just snatched it up. So pretty much the reason why we have Georges River Road in Kentlyn is because George took up a selection there and they named their farms Kent farms after Kent where they came from in England.

AA So Georges River Road is named after George Longhurst.

LH It was actually called the National Park Road to begin with and because they were the only family there they could pretty much do whatever they wanted. So they renamed it themselves Georges River Road.

AA It's not named after King George then.

LH So they started developing farms out there, small farms, mainly orchards and between the four brothers they made a tiny little nest egg. So you had I think it was James's mum and dad, they bought Richmond Villa which is that little old building outside the car park in Lithgow Street outside the RSL car park. They also bought Fairview a property on King Street which is just kind of just down from the cop shop. It's no longer there but it was near where those new apartment buildings have been built. So they did quite well. They became prominent members of the Campbelltown community, were in on all the socials and things

like that, so when war came about they had no reservations really about doing their bit.

There were three cousins, so we had James join up, Stephen and William or Gus. So James, he joined the 36th Battalion and he fought at Messines. That was a horrible battle in Belgium, in a lot of mud, a lot of destruction, but successful. That was a bit tough for him he actually went AWOL, so Absent Without Leave for a couple of weeks. No real punishment given there, so they kind of let that slide, part of that was probably the knowledge that Stephen his cousin had been killed in action. Unfortunately he fought at the Battle of Ypres in Belgium and continued fighting the next year but he was gassed at Villers Bretonneux in 1918 and succumbed to those injuries about ten days later. So that was one of the first deaths for the family.

Then you had Stephen who likewise joined up.

AA You're doing very well to remember all that you have!

LH I get them all mixed up! Then we've got Stephen. Stephen was the son of George and Eliza, he actually went to East Minto Public School and he worked on the family farm. He joined up in April 1916 and joined the 54th Battalion. It was a very interesting battalion the 54th. did a lot of fighting, carried a lot of the weight and again he was sent over in 1917 one of the deadliest years of the war, and at the time the Germans were struggling to fight the war. They asked for peace numerous times and the allies said no because they were not in a good enough position to bargain for anything, so they said no. So to conserve their manpower they reduced all their lines from being all curvy and things like that to a straight line where they put concrete bunk houses in and machine gun nests and barbed wire, it was insane. It was called the Hindenburg Line and so the allies were ordered to give chase and grab all that land that they gave up, which was basically nothing but old trenches and dirt basically and cost a lot of lives and he was ordered to attack the line with his unit and they attacked at Bullecourt in May, the second battle of Bullecourt and unfortunately he was killed in action there. So they lost Stephen, lost James, and we've got William.

30 mins

William was actually quite lucky. He was a tradie, so he had trained as a carpenter and because of his training skills he was actually signed not to an infantry unit but to the field company engineers. They were responsible for building waterways, laying pipes, putting electrics in, building dug outs, roads or hospitals and makeshift things like that. So he was close to the lines but not attacking trenches so that actually probably saved his life.

AA So that was Gus.

LH That was Gus, William Augustus.

AA I had the pleasure to interview Gus's daughter Coral some years ago in the Library. Now that I know more about her father and her uncles and relatives I

would have liked to ask for more about that but she was a wonderful lady and I really enjoyed interviewing her.

LH Lovely family of four girls he was able to have. The reason why the Longhursts are so entrenched in military history is because their siblings married other ex-veterans and Gus himself, so he married Emily Hagan who was the sister of William and Walter Hagan who both served in the First World War. Sadly she lost Walter at Passchendaele as well. So there is that connection, two of his sisters married soldiers. His brother married Doris Andrew sister of Bert Andrew who served overseas. They were all interconnected. So basically in the war years the Longhurst family lost two first cousins, they lost a son-in-law, they lost sisters and brothers-in-laws of their children's husbands and wives. It's quite insane to imagine that a family would experience that and then at the same time they would continue to show up to town meetings, continue to go to knitting circles, they were going along and supporting gala days and fetes to help support and provide money for the war effort that kept on going. They didn't let it get them down.

AA Is there any other story that stood out when you were doing your research?

LH A number! For the Campbelltown side of things one was Patrick Tyrell who was from Ingleburn actually. He basically joined up with his best mate who became his brother-in-law funnily enough. They served near the same units sometimes on and off the same unit. Unfortunately his best mate, his brother-in-law, his sister's husband was killed in action and then he himself was gassed and wounded. So he was to be invalided home. Unfortunately when that happened his wife became very ill with the knowledge of her own brother that was killed and her health just gave out. So while he was on the ship coming home, she passed away. They had a little baby girl who barely knew her father before he shipped out. So he got home finally to meet his little girl and unfortunately, I don't know if he would have received a telegram along the way wherever he stopped or when he stepped off the ship he found out off his parents and his mother and father-in-law that she had passed away. What's interesting about this story is you watch movies and it's all about the battles, the guns and the bullets and the blood but you kind of forget that these guys had lives. They had families, they had jobs that they put on hold to undertake this. They were in these trenches going through this horrible ordeal and at the same time their family were struggling to eat. Sometimes they lost their jobs. Their family was moving, their children were being born that they never got to meet. There were all these horrific circumstances happening for them amidst the bombs dropping.

AA They were so brave, they did brave things.

LH Absolutely brave things and they didn't complain. They were of the old generation you just got on with it, you just did what was asked of you, and they would come home and they didn't go oh well when I was you know, that happened, ok I have to continue for my family what job have I got to do, I've got to return back to my job and need to get a house and so forth.

AA I guess back then at the time of the First World War it was for King and Country wasn't it too. Things have changed a little bit now I guess. If people were called up to go to war now they might have more sort of reasons for not going. But then you were proud to serve the King and Country.

LH Absolutely or join with your mates or that would be the only way that you could travel. Travel was a thing for the upper classes to do. So many reasons for them to join up, but doing their duty was absolutely an unquestionable part of that, they had to do their duty. Gotta fight with my mates and see the war through and a lot of them did. They re-enlisted after coming home, or they re-enlisted in the Second World War when it came around. They saw that duty and that loyalty to their mates as paramount.

35 mins

AA They wanted to make their family proud. I know one of the people that I have sort of had a bit of a look at and I know you know the story is the Steeles. I think his father passed away while he was overseas.

LH Absolutely, so the Steeles were a brother and sister. Very unusual for this time, so he joined the military and she joined as a nurse obviously. They came to Campbelltown in the late 1890s, their father was a Presbyterian Minister and his wife Amy had passed away and that kind of took a lot of toll on him so he asked to be transferred to a new parish and they came to St. David's out here. They resided in the Manse which is actually still standing surprisingly on Lithgow Street.

AA It is a beautiful building, a lovely old building.

LH So they were there for a number of years. Alexander got a fairly good job offer, he was a manager at the Government Bank and so when war came about again he enlisted fairly early, fought at Gallipoli, went on to the Western Front. Because he was a very well educated man with very good clerical skills he was actually transferred to the Ordnance Corp. They were in charge of shipping missions and seeing that they got to where they were supposed to. So a lot of nit picking and documents and ticking off inventory and that sort of stuff for him and he was really, really good at it so during that time that his uncle was contacting the army to let him know that his father had passed away. They left Campbelltown because he was so ill and they moved to Burwood and his sister went along. She was obviously nursing their father at the time. He didn't ask for leave, he didn't ask to come home just said ok I am going to make my dad proud and indeed he was promoted very, very quickly to Warrant Officer First Class and served well and came back home.

While he was doing that his sister after the father had passed, I think she saw an opportunity, my dad is no longer around, my brother is still serving I want to help the soldiers, and she decided to use her nursing skills for good and joined the Australian Army Nursing Service and was sent overseas. Unfortunately she was sent to Salonica in Greece, a horrible environment. It was tepid and arid and a lot of kind of still water placements so a breeding ground for mosquitoes. So

subsequently she was affected with malaria and that is just a horrible disease because you can never get rid of it and she just kept getting bouts of it to the point where they're like, you are going to be sick for seven or eight months tying up a hospital bed and you can't do your duty so we're going to invalid you back home.

AA You would think that she would be happy about that wouldn't you.

LH No, she was actually quite disappointed. She was trying to stay. If you look at her service record she was going to hospital with malaria. My grandfather had malaria from fighting in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War and it's a horrible disease. It just really knocks you over basically and so she was in hospital for a week and she would find the strength to go back out and go on the wards. Ward nurses during the First World War they worked hard, you're talking 15 hour days of constant misery being responsible for the lives of anywhere from 50 to 150 patients under your care for that day. If the doctor asked you how much medicine that guy over there in that bed has, you've got to know your stuff and they really worked really hard. Nurses from the First World War and the Second World War, they don't get enough credit for the amount of effort that they did because they didn't complain about it, they didn't make a big noise about it, they just got on with it and they were given very little respect. They weren't considered proper army personnel so unfortunately a private who was in a medical unit was given more responsibilities or asked more questions other than them even though they were medically trained! It's mind boggling today but that's how it worked back then.

AA It's not just the hard work but the sights that they would have seen. The things that they would have had to have dealt with.

LH There were horrific wounds. It was an industrial war so you have boys coming to you with no limbs, you have wounds that were the size of a basketball with their organs coming out, bits of their face would come off and they are looking to you for comfort so you would have to be very stoic while you hold their hand. I can't imagine holding someone's hand for a couple of hours knowing that they are not going to make it and try to keep their spirits up. It would just be soul crushing for them and they have to get up and do it to the next patient and the next patient and the next patient.

40 mins

AA You are definitely right in saying that they didn't get the recognition that they deserved. We might finish with, is it the Donaghey family? They also had a little bit of a story too didn't they?

LH Absolutely, pretty much POWs in the First World War aren't really discussed. It's all about the horrible German camps in World War Two but there were a lot of POWs in the First World War and a lot of where they came from is where Samuel actually fought. So basically when our troops came from Egypt over to start fighting on the Western Front it was right before the Somme campaign was to start on 1 July and the allies were worried that too many German troops were

going to be in the area where they wanted to fight so they wanted to have all these little distraction battles to try and draw some troops away and that was what the Battle of Fromelles was all about. Unfortunately they didn't have enough equipment, enough training there was no goal it was just go over there and make some noise. So they sent some troops over and boy did they send some troops over. You've got to imagine that fighting at Gallipoli was a lot different to fighting the Germans on the Western Front. So they really didn't have any experience of that yet. So a lot of them were overrun and when they had to withdraw anyone who was kind of wounded or they couldn't carry back or they weren't fast enough were left in German hands and that is what happened to Samuel. He was actually shot, fell in a German trench and was captured by the Germans when they pushed the Australians back.

AA Right, and as a prisoner of war how would he have been treated?

LH Fairly well compared to other conflicts. The only problem was for Germany at that point in the First World War they were starting to run out of resources and manpower. So basically any prisoners of war were put in that kind of spot. So Samuel himself would have started working in mines, cutting down trees for lumber and that sort of thing. So they were really put to work and unfortunately because of the blockade, the allies had blockaded Germany, so Germany is a landlocked country and they had to rely on importing goods for not only manufactured goods but for foodstuffs as well. The allies were really effective at stopping that to try and get Germany to surrender which effectively is basically what happened. The Germans were so miserable, they didn't have enough food to feed themselves or their army let alone providing enough food resources for POWs as well. So you would have got fed but probably not a good calorie intake to last so you became quite sickly during his tenure as a prisoner of war. While he was a prisoner of war sadly his brother was killed in action as well. He died of a gas attack. So more likely, I have no proof, he would have got a telegram through the Red Cross informing him that his brother had passed away. Imagine you can't do anything, you can't hug your dad or your mum, can't see your friends he is stuck in this camp.

AA So he's going through what he is in the prisoner of war camp and then he gets the news

LH ...that his brother's been killed.

AA That would have been so difficult. Okay, Lauren it's been so interesting, you know so much, I am so impressed by your knowledge.

LH I am quite happy with what flooded back!

AA You don't even look at your notes so I am extremely impressed and as I said I was extremely impressed with ANZACS of Macarthur. You've done a fantastic job and I've really enjoyed talking to you.

LH Oh, thank you very much. It was great having a chat. It's been a while so it's good to talk about our boys going off to war and our girls as well.

AA When you have finished your next book I will get you back.

LH That could be 25 years away. Yep.

AA Thank you very much for being part of our Curious Campbelltown podcast.

LH No worries, thanks for having me. It's been great.

AA We will catch up soon. Thank you Lauren.

LH See you later.

AA Bye.