

ARTICLE



Recordkeeping in the First Australian Imperial Force: the political imperative

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ABSTRACT

Recordkeeping systems develop under the influence of their environment. An organisation's compilation of records, their form, content and dissemination can be in response to external factors. How the recordkeeping administration of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) developed, expanded and changed over time is illustrative of the influences on the creation of records. The administration of the First Australian Imperial Force, including its recordkeeping, developed in an environment of heated political debate in Australia over that nation's participation in the war and two failed attempts to introduce conscription. Circumstances in late 1915 combined to force a reluctant Australian government to intervene in the detail of AIF records administration in Egypt despite the government's expectation that involvement at such a level in AIF management abroad would be unnecessary. This article examines the circumstances at work in Australia that led to such an intervention. It describes the events leading to the decision and traces the causes for the decision to factors in the political, social and military context.

KEYWORDS

First Australian Imperial Force (AIF); recordkeeping; volunteer force; World War I; military administration; Senator George Pearce

Introduction: 'the insistent demand of the Australian public'

To recruit, train and put into the field the several hundred thousand members of the First AIF was an extraordinary achievement for Australia, which had only come into existence as an independent nation state in 1901. Extraordinary also was the creation of the organisation and administrative processes to manage this force, then unprecedented in Australia's history. An essential task facing Australia's new force was the creation of the recordkeeping system to maintain details of the AIF's personnel which has left a legacy of 376,000 personnel files in the National Archives of Australia.¹

In November 1915, the Australian Minister for Defence, George Foster Pearce, issued instructions for the creation of a new unit within the First AIF recordkeeping administration in Egypt.² The officer in charge of the Australian Intermediate Base in Cairo, Colonel Victor Sellheim, was instructed by Australian authorities:

to organise a Central Inquiry Bureau ... for the purpose of dealing with certain special information which they desire to be forwarded to them daily. This step has been decided upon at the insistent demand of the Australian Public to get accurate and speedy information regarding casualties in much greater detail than is given in the British Services.³

The circumstances of the Australian government's intervention in AIF recordkeeping in Egypt is the subject of this paper.

In late 1915, the Australian government was acutely sensitive to issues that might affect public morale and voluntary enlistment and give opportunities to the political opposition to criticise the government. Some in the government may also have been concerned about the vote of women and their influence over voluntary enlistment. The Australian government for most of 1915 believed that administration of the First AIF overseas was the responsibility of the British authorities. Nevertheless, there was a growing perception of an administrative vacuum in Egypt where no-one represented Australian interests in relation to the AIF personnel there. With mounting casualties arose problems that might shake public support for enlistment: the failure of the postal services, problems with administration of hospitals overseas and the struggle of the AIF records administration to deliver timely and accurate information of AIF casualties. These problems attracted the interest of both friends and foes of the government. The political opposition in Australia used these issues to criticise the government's administration and could play the ultimate card in asserting that failure to provide information to relatives at home would affect enlistments. Disquiet within government ranks may have initiated the inquiry by journalist Keith Murdoch who exercised personal influence over Pearce to act and urged him to impose a solution from Australia. This took the form of the special unit, created in the recordkeeping section at the Australian Intermediate Base in Cairo, that subsequently moved to London and became part of the AIF personnel administration there.

The recruitment problem: 'have we done all we can do?'

A singular aspect of the First AIF was that it was a volunteer force. Despite two attempts to introduce conscription the AIF remained throughout World War I reliant on volunteer enlistment. Those under 20 years of age required written permission from their parents to enlist, so it was necessary to persuade not just potential recruits but also their families. Maintaining enlistment levels became a main preoccupation for the Australian government and especially for Senator George Pearce as the Minister for Defence. In his recollections after the war Pearce refers several times to the difficulties of maintaining enlistment levels and remarks: 'recruiting campaigns were only less exacting than political campaigns.'⁴ In the face of declining enlistment in early 1915, enrolling depots were opened for longer hours and recruiting meetings and private recruiting campaigns were initiated.⁵ In June 1915, the UK government advised the Australian government that 'every available man that can be recruited in Australia is wanted' and Pearce asked at a public meeting: 'Have we done all we can do?'⁶ Enlistment peaked in July and August 1915 (36,575 and 25,714) with numbers not matched for the duration of the war. It declined for the rest of 1915 to 9,119 in December.⁷

The government was vulnerable to criticism on the recruitment issue. It had promised in 1915 to have 300,000 troops in the field by June 1916, which necessitated the immediate raising of an additional new force of 50,000, announced by Prime Minister William Hughes in November 1915,⁸ in addition to the monthly quota of 9,500 urged by the British Army Council.⁹ Pearce noted that the government after 'serious thought' as to how the additional number was to be raised had decided on 'a personal appeal to every

eligible male.’¹⁰ In October 1915, one Member of Parliament raised the problem of recruitment:

Australia has done well but before the struggle is ended, it will have to do a good deal better ... it ought not to stop short of carrying out in its fullness the promise of the late Prime Minister [that] we would not stop until we had given our last man and our last shilling ... The recruiting figures of the last week or two show conclusively that the number of volunteers coming forward is not sufficient ... I have had considerable experience during the recruiting campaign ... but the further I have gone the more I have become convinced of the increasing difficulty of getting men to come forward ...¹¹

Censorship: ‘the public mind should not be disturbed’

In these circumstances, the government was sensitive to public perceptions of the conduct of the war and particularly to the treatment of AIF personnel. In April 1915, enlistment reached a low for that year (6,250) and the issue was raised in Parliament. It was suggested the decline was due to the conditions and treatment of soldiers invalided to Australia from Egypt and that the decline would continue if returned soldiers were treated badly.¹²

The concern for maintaining enlistment found expression in the government’s use of its powers to restrict public debate. The War Precautions Act passed on 29 October 1914 had given new powers to the Minister for Defence and his department, especially regarding newspaper censorship.¹³ One of the rules for press censorship prohibited the publication of statements ‘likely to prejudice recruitment.’¹⁴ The government continued throughout the war to seek to suppress publication of matters deemed detrimental to recruitment.¹⁵ In 1917, it went so far as to ban a temperance publication as it took all its ‘horrible examples’ from members of the AIF, so demonstrating, according to Senator Pearce, that ‘for a father, a son or a husband to enlist as a soldier was to become a drunkard ... to imperil not merely his own moral character but the moral character of his wife, his daughter, and his home.’ Pearce explained: ‘we are at war, and this country has to depend for its recruits upon voluntary enlistment. Every publication of this kind therefore has to be viewed not merely from the stand-point of the moral object of its author, but from that of whether it will or will not prejudice recruiting.’¹⁶

Concern over the effect of public perceptions on enlistment was acute in late 1915. In December, Prime Minister William Hughes, wishing to suppress certain newspaper reports, wrote to Pearce: ‘If this recruiting campaign is to be successful as it must be if we are to avoid a very serious alternative it is essential that the public mind should not be disturbed by complaints about hospital treatment, camp troubles or news of the war ‘and enjoined Pearce to ‘issue instructions to the censors accordingly.’ The Deputy Chief Censor ordered state branches to submit reports of complaints about defence administration to the Censor for enquiry before publication ‘in view of certain disparaging criticism, often of an exaggerated character and directly tending to weaken discipline and discourage recruiting.’¹⁷

The home front in 1915: 'a terrible and unrelieved anxiety'

Recordkeeping in the AIF became a public and political issue in late 1915, the year in which Australia first experienced the cost of large-scale warfare. Bart Ziino has surveyed the year 1915 through diaries and letters and characterises the dominant response to the Gallipoli campaign in Australia as 'a terrible and unrelieved anxiety.'¹⁸ In the absence of official news, relatives were plagued by rumours and doubts. Ziino quotes Nellie Fisher whose sweetheart had left with the first contingent: 'No sooner did the news come that you had landed at Egypt than a rumour went round here that 130 had been shot by the enemy without having had a chance to defend themselves.'¹⁹ He also quotes one mother: 'We are passing thro' a time of terrible anxiety just now . . . We do not know where you are nor how you are . . . we keep hoping and trusting all is well with you, our dear, dear son'. The early casualty lists contained mostly the names of officers which caused Nellie Fisher to question the true state of affairs: 'I have been thinking of you very much this week, up till today the total is 59 killed and 37 wounded and nearly all those are officers so there must be a terrible lot of privates wounded that we have not heard of.' Frank Tate noted: 'the first casualty lists have been published and there is gloom everywhere. The wildest rumours are being circulated.'²⁰ Ziino gives examples of the rumours of mass captures and massacres. John Melvin wrote to his son, not knowing he had been killed on the day of the landing: 'We are hungering for some little news of you, if only the formal printed post-card.'

Despite censorship some private letters from soldiers to their families 'described the brutality of war' and these private accounts circulated as rumour or in the press 'feeding anxieties about the progress of the war and the safety of loved ones at the front.' The returning wounded told stories of the realities of war and their physical appearance bore witness to these.²¹

News of casualties brought mixed reactions. One person noted that although the losses were 'dreadfully heavy,' 'the world is ringing of the bravery of the Australians.' A father said of his dead son that 'he heard the Empire's call and died a glorious death.' Eleanor Moore of the Sisterhood of International Peace thought the casualty lists brought home 'a sense of the horror and cruelty of war.'²²

The immediate effect of lengthening casualty lists and news of fighting was an upsurge in enlistment, with July 1915 seeing the highest enlistment for any month of the war. However, there was also a growing awareness that the war would not end soon.²³ From September rumours circulated of poor planning and provisioning at Gallipoli and by November the Gallipoli campaign was being spoken of in terms of 'a blunder.'²⁴ It was in this context of anxiety for family members on service, a growing awareness of the cost of war and failing confidence in swift victory that the government faced the issue of providing relatives with information on casualties.

The postal service: 'an inert mass of congealed incompetency'

In 1915 the postal service was a topic of public concern. Families found it difficult to maintain contact with relatives in the AIF abroad. The return ship journey between London and Adelaide averaged 50 days.²⁵ With the Gallipoli campaign came to attention the problem of the post and complaints appeared in newspapers about the postal service. By 12 August 1915, the total inward mail to Egypt had reached 1,163 bags per week and in

one 29 day period in July and August the post office had to deal with 8,973 bags of outward and inward mail.²⁶ By 1916, mail for the troops handled by the army postal service in the UK had reached a weekly average of 11 million letters and 875,000 parcels.²⁷ The postal service has been described as ‘one of the least successful areas of administration early in the war and one which led to many well-deserved complaints.’²⁸ One of those complaining was the Australian commander John Monash who remarked on delays in mail, thefts and non-arrival of parcels.²⁹ In September 1915, the journalist Keith Murdoch was in London after visiting Australian troops at Gallipoli.³⁰ He complained to Australia’s High Commissioner in London of ‘the inert mass of congealed incompetency in the Postal Department.’³¹

The failure of official information: ‘no news is good news’

The issue with the most potential to affect public morale was the availability of official information about casualties. Once the AIF went into action at Gallipoli the rate of casualties began to overwhelm the AIF records administration.³² Overworked medical staff failed to maintain the paperwork to notify post office officials of the location of wounded men.³³ There were delays with British hospitals informing the Australian High Commissioner in London of Australian wounded sent to Britain. The High Commission had to increase staff and office space due to the increasing number of inquiries from family members.³⁴ Peter Stanley documents the incidence of delayed notification of casualties and its effect on families of AIF members in his study of AIF soldiers who died in the first wave to land at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.³⁵ Examining their AIF personnel files, he found extensive delays (up to several months) in notifying families of the death of a relative. In this time, families might have received incorrect information or no information at all. The files showed ‘repeated examples of how messages [to the families] were delayed or never delivered.’³⁶ Lillian Shirley wrote to the Department of Defence on behalf of her parents: ‘It is over 4 months, please try to trace our boy for us.’ Mary Gordon lost two sons, one died three months after the other, but she did not know this as her younger son was for months notified only as ‘missing’. Her brother telegraphed the Base Records Office in Melbourne: ‘Kindly reply mother in agony [of] suspense.’ Walter Scott had not heard from his son since a few days before the landing at Gallipoli but had received official notification that his son had been wounded but ‘not reported serious.’ The father wrote to Base Records in September 1915 asking why ‘have [I] not been informed as to his location or progress towards recovery? Kindly cause enquiries which may relieve my anxiety.’ When he wrote this his son had already been dead for over five months.

Sometimes families would learn of the fate of relatives through private letters or from fellow soldiers or in other ways before receiving official notification. Two case studies documented by Peter Stanley are instructive examples. In June and August, the Defence Department reported that a Sergeant Backman was missing. In response to his sister’s inquiry Defence advised that he had not been reported as a casualty: Defence had even cabled the AIF administration in Egypt and received the reply that there was no report on Backman. In fact, the soldier had been dead for months, as private letters to the family from his friends indicated. His sister wrote to the Minister for Defence that soldiers had reported Backman’s death and remarked ‘any thing like that we ought to have heard before now’ and her mother was ‘nearly out of her mind with grief.’ In February 1916,

a clerk in Base Records in Melbourne wrote: 'So far as the records show he may still be alive.' Backman was only officially posted missing five months after his death.

The parents of William Payne received news in late April 1915 that he had been wounded. In response to their inquiries, Base Records replied: 'Egyptian authorities advise me to assume that the absence of further particulars may be accepted as indicative of satisfactory progress.' Mrs Payne complained that she had received no news for four months and that 'the suspense of uncertainty is terrible.' Confirmation came in the form of the return of a letter which the parents had posted to their son months before, marked 'killed'. The aunt of one soldier neatly summed up the unsatisfactory state of affairs when she wrote to Base Records 'It's not a private party's duty to inform families.'³⁷

Such cases filtered into the press and into Parliament. One Member of Parliament stated in Parliament that he had received a letter from his brother in the AIF with news that he had been four weeks in hospital prior to any official notification; he mentioned another Member whose son had returned to Australia wounded although the family had received no official notification, and went on to cite two further cases that had been brought to him of families provided with late or incorrect information.³⁸

Some could afford to send cablegrams overseas to gain news of their relatives but for most, with the problems with the mail, the newspapers became the cheap and primary source of information through the published casualty lists. In October 1915 it was said in Parliament of a father seeking information about his wounded son: 'But that the father was well off and could afford to send a number of cablegrams he would not have got the information that he did through private sources.'³⁹ A report of September 1915 mentioned that in New Zealand the cable company had granted concessional rates to the Defence Department which made cabling so cheap that 300 private cables were sent weekly to Egypt from New Zealand; in contrast, less than 150 cables were sent per month from the Australian state of New South Wales with a larger population than New Zealand and more soldiers on duty overseas.⁴⁰ The Department of Defence in Australia issued 466 casualty lists throughout the war, almost weekly, which listed soldiers killed, wounded captured or missing.⁴¹ The importance of the casualty lists for relatives to obtain information is evident in correspondence of the period. Joy Damousi provides examples.⁴² One correspondent wrote: 'It is an awful moment whilst reading the casualties ... We just live from morning to night and night to morning in the hope and trust that no news is good news ...'⁴³

A sign that Pearce understood the importance of maintaining the flow of information to families of AIF personnel was his visit in June 1915 to Base Records in Melbourne where AIF personnel records were maintained. In company with the Adjutant-General and the Secretary for Defence, Pearce came to inspect 'the arrangements made for keeping the records of the men at the front.'⁴⁴ Base Records Office was established in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, on 20 October 1914 to maintain AIF personnel records which were updated with information received from the front. Base Records also compiled the casualty lists and despatched telegrams to next of kin when a soldier was reported wounded, killed or missing. Its staff grew in the course of the war from under 100 to over 300⁴⁵ and dealt with a mass of correspondence.⁴⁶ Major James Lean, the officer in charge, became well known publicly as much correspondence was issued under his signature and official press notices relating to Base Records mentioned him by name.⁴⁷ In 1915, Base Records was described in one press report as 'the link between

the men on active service and the authorities and relatives at home ... besieged all day by a constant stream of visitors seeking information about the men serving with the colours.' An inquiry room was staffed for 12 hours each day and by September 1915 was receiving an average of 660 visitors a day.⁴⁸

Politics: 'the painful effect of suspense'

In July 1915 Pearce was forced to publicly defend Defence administration. In Parliament, he stated:

as honourable Senators know, there have been complaints for some time, not merely with regards to letters being sent to and received from the Dardanelles and Egypt but also in connexion with cables and with the news as regards the disposition of the wounded.

He reported that he had contacted the base in Egypt: '... informed them of the complaints made in Parliament and in the press and I called for a report, informing them of the suffering entailed on relatives.' He admitted: 'we have found that wounded men have sent letters to their relatives in Australia from hospitals in England, while we in Australia had not been informed that the men had been sent to England at all, and consequently we were not able to advise the relatives.' Pearce detailed the processes and difficulties of communicating information about casualties, claiming that Australian staff in Egypt could only pass on the information they received as 'they themselves have no knowledge whatever of the men who are wounded, killed or missing.' Pearce claimed that telegrams were despatched to the relatives as soon as information was received, however he stated: 'I know there have been one or two instances where, through some mistake, or owing to some carelessness, telegrams have not been sent, but exceedingly few cases have occurred where the Defence Department have received a notification and have not sent it on to the relatives before the casualty list has appeared in the press.'⁴⁹

The government's defence of its administration appeared on 2 September 1915 in the *Argus* which reported Pearce's statement that Base Records:

... came into personal association with the relatives of Australian soldiers under circumstances which demanded the utmost tact and sympathetic attention. The Department, fully realising the painful effect of suspense, was doing its utmost to obviate any delay in communicating to those concerned tidings received affecting their soldier relatives. It had to be borne in mind the Minister added, that we were wholly dependent on the authorities in Egypt for reports respecting our soldiers.⁵⁰

On 29 October 1915, the government was again under pressure in Parliament over the notification of casualties and this time the link was made to recruitment. The Member for Richmond referred to 'the existing method, or lack of method, of notifying casualties to the relatives of those who have gone to the front ... In many cases that have come under my own notice the notification of a casualty has reached the relatives weeks after the casualty actually happened.' He went on to cite further cases of late notification and claimed that the 'failure of official information' was adversely affecting recruitment:

If there is one thing more than another that at present is retarding the recruiting movement in this country, it is that relatives of soldiers at the front, once they are wounded, have the

greatest difficulty in ascertaining what has happened to them ... We know that when a parent has an experience of this kind, the story passes from mouth to mouth and is more and more exaggerated. This tends to retard recruiting.

The discussion concluded that the fault lay not with Base Records in Melbourne but rather with 'the methods adopted for collating information at the front and sending it to Australia' as the information received at Base Records 'is weeks old, and is of no use whatever, or no information at all is forthcoming.'⁵¹ The situation appeared to require an overhaul of AIF administration overseas, but this was not something the government had been prepared for.

AIF administration overseas: 'the British machinery'

Involvement in the detail of AIF administration abroad was not contemplated by the Australian government early in the war. A former Australian senior officer commented in 1924 that at the outset 'we thought ... administration would fall almost entirely on the British machinery.'⁵² Major General Bridges, as General Officer Commanding, AIF, had advised Pearce in 1914 that an AIF administrative and logistics structure in Egypt was not necessary because responsibility for maintenance and supply of the AIF rested entirely with the British War Office.⁵³

During most of 1915, in answer to criticism of administration of the AIF, Pearce maintained the position that administration was the responsibility of the British War Office. In a debate in Parliament on 7 July, he stated: 'The disposition of the wounded, the compilation of the casualty lists, and the distribution of those casualty lists have nothing to do with the Defence Department in Australia.' He claimed: 'the conduct of the war was not the responsibility of the Defence Department in Australia but of the War Office' which commanded the forces sent from Australia. 'We can make our recommendations of course, but, after all, we can only advise; we cannot direct the disposition of any of those troops.'⁵⁴

The Australian government's response in August 1915 to complaints about the management of Australian military hospitals in Egypt clearly shows it regarded its responsibilities at that time as limited. The government referred the problem to the British Army Council because, as Pearce told the parliament, 'all our military formations in Egypt are under the control of the Army Council', including the hospitals which although organised in Australia, were 'in active service and therefore under the control of the Army Council.' The Australian government subsequently accepted the recommendations of a British inquiry into management of the hospitals even before receiving the details of the report.⁵⁵

In late 1915, it was becoming apparent that there existed for the AIF in Egypt an administrative void which the Australian authorities could not ignore. Colonel Richard Fetherston, Director-General of medical services for the AIF, charged by Pearce in September 1915 to investigate problems with Australian medical units, made a tour of inspection of Egypt, Gallipoli and England and reported of Egypt that 'there was really no one in charge of AAMC [Australian Army Medical Corps]' and no Australian officer 'with authority to act on matters solely Australian.'⁵⁶ The situation with AIF administration in Egypt was such that Pearce did not know at the end of 1915 how many AIF reinforcements were in Egypt.⁵⁷ Pearce's public position that AIF administration was a British responsibility was proving to be untenable.

AIF Base, Cairo: 'an intermediate organization'

There were two organisations in Egypt responsible for collating and disseminating information on Australian casualties. First, was the Australian Records Section, Alexandria, with a small staff of AIF personnel within the British Third Echelon establishment. The second organisation, AIF Intermediate Base, Cairo, was established by Pearce's orders on 14 January 1915, only with the approval of the UK War Office, it should be noted, because the British were too busy to be involved in routine details of AIF administration. The commander of the AIF, Major-General Bridges, recommended the establishment of the Intermediate Base because 'the staff of this division is fully occupied in training and administering the troops' and there was consequently an urgent need for 'an intermediate organization to conduct routine correspondence with the Department of Defence and the High Commissioner's Office, and to co-ordinate questions of pay and equipment affecting the separated components of the Australian Imperial Force.'⁵⁸ The commanding officer of the Base was Colonel Victor Sellheim.

At Cairo, information was maintained on the attestation papers, and on cards created for each soldier. These were kept up to date by entering information received from the Australian section at 3rd Echelon in Alexandria.⁵⁹ Colonel Sellheim wrote in November 1915: 'At the present time there are actually over 110,000 Attestation Papers in my possession, which are available for inspection at any time.' The Records Section in Cairo dealt with all records of casualties and answered inquiries. With mounting numbers wounded and killed, the Base was increasingly pivotal in relaying casualty information. Sellheim reported 478 enquiries received in October and that the number of enquiries was constantly increasing.⁶⁰

Facing the problem of official casualty information: 'meagre, inadequate and unsatisfactory'

By July of 1915, the inadequacy of the existing AIF administration to furnish information on casualties was becoming evident. On 6 July, Colonel Fetherston, Director General of Medical Services for the AIF, wrote in a memo forwarded to Pearce:

The particulars which have been received from Egypt as to the wounds and subsequent progress of soldiers have to the present been very meagre ... very inadequate and unsatisfactory ... I think it is essential that some fuller particulars should be available

Fetherston suggested a small corps of medical officers be despatched to Egypt and England to visit hospitals and send full details to Australia.⁶¹ Later in July, the Defence Department's request for more information on the return to duty of sick and wounded received the response from the AIF records section at Alexandria that 'your request involves enormous amount clerical labour ... regret impossible cable full information as requested.'⁶² Further indications that official channels of information were inadequate were the activities of the Red Cross. In August, a Red Cross representative wrote from Cairo to Lady Helen (wife of the Australian Governor-General Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson) that the only way to locate a wounded man was to inquire at each hospital.⁶³ In October, the Australian Wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau of the Red Cross was established in Egypt.⁶⁴

In July, Pearce commissioned the journalist Keith Murdoch to report on the state of postal services and arrangements for reporting casualties. The circumstances of this show the pressures on Pearce. The initiative came not from Pearce himself but from two members of Parliament (not named) who approached Murdoch with the suggestion he report on AIF administration in Egypt since he was travelling to London on business. Murdoch informed Pearce the following day that he had asked the parliamentarians not to embarrass Pearce by ‘any public agitation’ and that he believed an investigation was warranted as ‘members of Parliament and the public are much concerned over postal mistakes and delays and also delays in the issuing of casualty lists.’⁶⁵ Pearce agreed to the investigation and issued a press release that inferred it was his own idea.⁶⁶ The episode suggests that the parliamentarians were members of the government frustrated with Pearce’s inaction over these issues. In his memoir Pearce refers to ‘the malcontent section of the party ... those Federal Labour men who were most lukewarm in their support of the war efforts were most energetic in exploiting to the full the grievances, real or imagined, of the soldiers.’⁶⁷

Murdoch reported to Pearce in September 1915 that the means employed to obtain information about the condition of wounded had been ‘only partly successful’ and that ‘a great deal of distress can be alleviated by despatch of fuller and more prompt information.’ He found that Australian casualty lists cabled from the Australian section in Alexandria were late and inaccurate and that there was ‘a large traffic’ in private correspondence which should have been unnecessary were the government providing full information to relatives. Murdoch recommended: ‘The anxiety of relatives to be informed of the whereabouts and condition of wounded soldiers should be relieved as far as practicable’. He saw the main difficulties as ‘collection of information’ and ‘expense’. He suggested, among other things, that all cables on casualties be sent via the AIF Intermediate Base in Cairo and that a mobile expert medical corps be despatched to visit all hospital wards and relay information about the wounded. He reported:

Concerning collection of information, I discussed the question fully with Colonel Sellheim, with officers commanding hospitals ... and it was agreed that the hospitals here and elsewhere could supply the information ... It was agreed also that Australian mothers had a perfect right to the information.⁶⁸

Of undoubted influence on Pearce was the separate, personal letter Murdoch sent to him forcefully setting out his views. Murdoch urged that ‘the mail question must be seriously faced’ and complained that he had weeks ago sent to the Department several cables relating to the postal service and information on the wounded, ‘each concerning an urgent matter’, which had not been acknowledged. He disparaged Sellheim and concluded ‘you cannot get initiative from old Sellheim and you must do the job yourself in Australia.’ Murdoch added an annotation to the letter that Sellheim ‘has messed up everything he has touched.’⁶⁹

The Minister intervenes: ‘a very valuable report’

If Pearce had initial reluctance to involve himself at this level, Murdoch’s report and private correspondence moved him to action. On the covering memo, Pearce noted ‘a very valuable report’ and listed two actions as urgent, one concerning the postal service

and the second concerning 'news of wounded'. For the latter, he ordered a meeting to consider Murdoch's report, to be chaired by the AIF Adjutant-General and attended by the Deputy Director General Medical Services, the Officer in Charge of Base Records Melbourne (Major James Lean) and Mr Mitchell, the organiser of the Red Cross Enquiry Bureau. The meeting, held on 9 November, recommended that the AIF Intermediate Base in Cairo send regular updates on wounded and that a Central Casualty Bureau be organised there to collate information on casualties. The text of the cable to the Intermediate Base drafted by the meeting shows the level of commitment to addressing the situation: 'The Minister approves of additional staff ... Whatever difficulties occur regarding interference with regulations of hospitals will be represented by Minister to the Imperial Authorities on your recommendations.' On this occasion, there was no prior referral to the British War Council for advice or approval. Between receipt of Murdoch's report in September and the meeting on 9 November, Pearce had faced severe criticism in Parliament (29 October) over the failure in notifying relatives in Australia about casualties, with the claim that this threatened voluntary recruitment. This no doubt added urgency to the matter and may account for the decision to establish a permanent Central Casualty Bureau within the AIF Intermediate base at Cairo, rather than the mobile medical corps proposed by Murdoch.

Instructions for organising the Central Inquiry Bureau, as it was now officially named, came from the Minister for Defence to the Intermediate Base on 14 November.⁷⁰ Sellheim would not have appreciated this level of intervention. After the war he stated that one of his problems in administering the Base was 'the interference of the Defence Department, Melbourne, and its sometimes unsympathetic and even hostile attitude towards the Base.'⁷¹ Nevertheless, the order to establish the Bureau was emphatic and, as Sellheim expressed it, 'at the insistent demand of the Australian Public to get accurate and speedy information regarding casualties in much greater detail than is given in the British Service ...'⁷²

Brigadier-General Robert Carruthers, Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General of the AIF, inspected the Intermediate Base in December 1915 and recorded the following about the new Bureau, showing his understanding of the political aspects of its establishment:

The A.I.F. is composed mainly of men holding good positions in Australia who have relinquished them for the period of the war to join the Force. The people of Australia demand to be kept in the closest touch with their men in the field and to be informed immediately should any member go into hospital. They insist on this and can bring political pressure to bear on the Defence Minister which he cannot disregard. He has therefore issued orders that every admission to hospital and progress returns for all serious cases shall be cabled to Australia. It is necessary for some organisation to undertake the collecting and transmission of this information and in order to do this, it must keep a record of every individual member of the Force ...⁷³

Women's suffrage: 'the sentimental vote of the women'

When in his report of September 1915 Keith Murdoch remarked that 'Australian mothers had a perfect right to the information,'⁷⁴ he touched upon another factor in the situation in Australia in 1915, women's suffrage. In 1902, the Commonwealth

Parliament passed legislation which enabled women 21 years of age and older to vote at elections for the federal Parliament and to stand for the federal Parliament. Did the circumstance of women having the vote make the government particularly concerned about the problems of providing information on casualties in 1915? This is an important question, as women's right to vote distinguished Australia from most of its imperial allies: in New Zealand women had been allowed to vote in national elections since 1893; in the UK women could vote only in local elections.

Cultural attitudes of the time might have encouraged the authorities to regard women as particularly sensitive to news of war casualties and consequently as a 'weak link' in public support for recruitment. Joan Beaumont has remarked that 'World War I did not transform prevailing ideas about femininity in Australia' and that 'traditional gender stereotypes were . . . reinforced by the war – that is, Australian men were expected to fight while women remained at home “waiting and weeping”'.⁷⁵ Joy Damousi notes that it is 'overwhelmingly the case' that in Australia correspondence from soldiers was to their mothers rather than to their fathers.⁷⁶

The depiction of women as especially under the sway of emotion is evident in published material of the time. A pro-conscription pamphlet from 1916 is an example:

Not all anti-conscription women are the shrill self-assured determined ones in evidence at meetings. There are many of them silent, timid, unhappy . . . struggling with the question “Shall I vote to send another woman's son to the trenches?” They are the women in whom sentiment holds stronger sway than reason and who must not be blamed that this is so, since it is a matter of constitution . . .

The pamphlet quotes the saying 'Appeal to sentiment in a woman and you'll win every time' and prevails upon women to ask themselves 'is my sentiment going to prevent me from voting to send the sons of these women to the trenches?'⁷⁷ The newsletter of the Sailors' and Soldiers' Fathers Association of Victoria in 1918 urged mothers of soldiers not to give way to 'weakness or despair' and encouraged them to resist such emotions and 'steadfastly refuse to entertain thoughts that depress them' and 'resist with their will power any suggestion of depressive thoughts just because by doing so they are not playing the enemy's game for him'.⁷⁸ A newspaper report of September 1915 describing the scene at the Enquiry Office at Base Records in Melbourne where 'hundreds of sorrow-stricken relatives' sought information about soldiers named in the public casualty lists notes: 'they are mostly women who visit this enquiry room. Occasionally a man is to be seen but usually it is the women, the mothers, the sisters, the sweethearts, that takes upon herself the sorrowful task of making these final inquiries'.⁷⁹ Writing in 1918 on the rejection of conscription in Australia, Prime Minister Hughes stated: 'How do I account for the Australian vote say you? Well Sinn Fein, I.W.W. selfishness and sentimental vote of the women; AND WAR-WEARINESS !!!'⁸⁰ The vote of women was widely held at the time to be responsible for the unsuccessful outcome of the two conscription referenda, however, the role women's voting played is still a matter of debate in academic literature.⁸¹

The growing voice in 1915 of women's organised opposition to the war should have given the authorities pause for thought about this new constituency. There were many women's organisations that came out in support of the war and conscription, mainly middle class women who 'spoke the language of imperial loyalty and militarism and

supported with a growing passion the official efforts to persuade men to enlist.⁸² It has been claimed that conscription was supported by most women's organisations during the war.⁸³ Nevertheless, women's anti-war groups were becoming prominent in 1915. Vida Goldstein formed the Women's Peace Army (WPA) in July 1915. The Sisterhood of International Peace started in Melbourne in March of that year. In November 1915, Adela Pankhurst and Cecilia John, after an extensive speaking tour, arrived in Brisbane to establish a branch of the WPA there. On 2 September 1915, the young Quaker, Margaret Thorpe, who was to play a leading role in anti-war activism, made her first appearance in Brisbane at the School of Arts.

Women's potential to influence was not due solely to their right to vote; the sight of a woman in mourning black was 'a daily reminder – to herself and others – that she was part of Australia's wartime sacrifice.'⁸⁴ Tanja Luckins has examined women's use of mourning black in Australia following the loss of relatives during the war, and concluded that the wearing of mourning black in Australia was more widespread than previously thought. She cites contemporary sources which remark on the 'increasing presence of mourning black in public' after the first casualties at Gallipoli. Luckins remarks:

As the death toll began to mount after Gallipoli, it became clear to commentators that death in war was not an abstract heroic concept; instead it had a stark presence on the home front. Importantly these women in black did not fade away – they kept growing in numbers.⁸⁵

Mourning black was 'a *material* trace' of loss. Women in mourning also wore ribbons, badges and brooches enclosing a soldier's portrait. These were potent symbols with the power to influence people. The pro-conscriptionists in 1916 avoided reference to mourning, whereas the anti-conscriptionists aimed their propaganda at those who had lost relatives and used the motif of mourning. Luckins instances the use of the image of the grieving woman in black in anti-conscription cartoons, handbills and posters, and suggests 'the woman in black and notions of loss and sacrifice' as an influence on the outcome of the 1916 conscription referendum.⁸⁶

The question is whether the Australian government was at all influenced by concern that a significant number of women might waiver in their support for the war. According to his memoir of 1951, Pearce was not at first concerned about women's support for the war and enlistment. Referring to the failure of the 1916 conscription referendum he says:

What we had not reckoned with was the silent opinion of many thousands of the relatives, particularly the mothers, of the men at the War. It was assumed that these would vote almost unanimously in the affirmative. But an appeal of a most ingenious nature was made to them. "Would you compulsorily send another woman's son to suffer what your son has suffered at the War?" Illogical as it was it went to the hearts of thousands of loyal women whose souls had suffered the anguish of bereavement and loss.⁸⁷

According to his recollection then, Pearce's concern over casualty information in 1915 would have been purely in relation to the immediate political situation: his aim was to shut down criticism of the government and the undermining of enlistments, not to shore up women's support for the war. Although Pearce appears in this quote to imply the whole government shared his disregard of the voting power of women (note the use of 'we'), this would not have applied to Prime Minister Hughes. Leading to the first conscription vote in 1916, Hughes spoke to women only gatherings, including addressing 'the largest gathering of women ever seen in Sydney at the Town Hall' where 'the women

rose and waved handkerchiefs and flags for several minutes.⁸⁸ Hughes published a pro-conscription manifesto to 'The Women of Australia' in 1916 in which he said:

In your hands lies the destiny of your country. You are to decide it by your vote ... For the first time in history the voice of woman is to speak directly to the greatest question that can confront any community ... The responsibility of Australia's decision rests upon Australian women.⁸⁹

It is possible that Hughes pressured Pearce to do something to improve the flow of information about casualties out of concern to maintain women's support for the war. Hughes became Prime Minister on 27 October 1915; on 29 October, Massy-Greene made the claim in Parliament that lack of information about casualties was hindering recruitment; on 9 November, Pearce convened the meeting which recommended the creation of the Central Inquiry Bureau at AIF Base, Cairo.⁹⁰ The sequence of events is suggestive of Hughes' influence. So is a reference in correspondence between Hughes and the Governor-General of Australia. On 15 November 1915, the Governor-General wrote to Hughes 'I would much like to talk with you on military and other matters' and proposed a meeting on 28 November. On 3 December, the Governor-General wrote to Hughes, presumably referring to their meeting: 'There is nothing against Sellheim in any letter I have received – the impression I conveyed to you was derived therefore from hearsay.'⁹¹ It is significant that the Australian Intermediate Base, Cairo, and its commanding officer, Colonel Sellheim, were part of the 'military matters' discussed. Administration of the AIF, far from being left to the British, was being considered by the two individuals at the highest level of the Australian government. It is an attractive notion that provision of casualty information and the new Central Inquiry Bureau established at the Base may also have been discussed and that AIF recordkeeping had, at least at this moment, achieved such prominence in government deliberations. The evidence therefore is suggestive, if not conclusive, that Pearce's intervention in AIF recordkeeping was influenced by Hughes's concern over the votes of women. Later in the war, Pearce showed more concern over women's opinions. In his defence in 1917 of the banning of the temperance publication for depicting soldiers as drunkards, Pearce remarked in Parliament: 'Can anybody say that the circulation of such a book among the wives and mothers of Australia to whose husbands and sons we are appealing to enlist, would not be prejudicial to recruiting?'⁹²

AIF Base, Cairo: 'an Australian agency'

Just when the Australian government was coming to understand the political importance of the AIF records administration, the British authorities were taking a different view based on considerations of efficiency. In late October 1915, the British authorities in Egypt proposed to abolish the Records and Inquiry Subsection at the Intermediate Base and incorporate it in Third Echelon of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, Alexandria, for the reason that there was no need for records to be kept at the Base when there was already an AIF records office in Melbourne. Sellheim, defending the current arrangements, presented himself as the representative of the Australian government in Egypt and 'responsible for the protection of its interests.' He referred to the 'peculiar and abnormal set of circumstances surrounding the employment of the Australian Imperial force in the Empire's cause' and argued that

administrative arrangements for British troops abroad did not exist for the AIF and that British administration could not always be utilised for the needs of the AIF especially for documenting movements of AIF casualties. Sellheim maintained that the Intermediate Base was 'very much in the nature of an Australian Agency.' Sellheim's main concern was of course that he had just been instructed by the Australian Government 'to organise a Central Inquiry Bureau for the purpose of dealing with certain special information which they desire to be forwarded to them daily ... I feel sure they will demur if any other arrangement is made and am personally of the opinion anything else would be inadvisable.'⁹³

By this time the Australian government had come to understand the importance for Australian interests of having some control over AIF administration. When Sellheim reported to the Department of Defence the British proposal and his response, he received the reply: 'the Minister desires to convey to you his commendation of the attitude taken by you in the matter ... your attitude and standpoint of view has the Minister's full approval.'⁹⁴

The Central Inquiry Bureau was transferred to AIF Headquarters, London, in 1916, becoming known there as C Records section. In addition to the recording and notification of casualties, C Records compiled the casualty lists for publication in the press. The section continued its role, begun in Egypt, of answering inquiries from the public. In November 1915, Base Records Cairo averaged 30 or 40 answers daily to public inquiries, by May 1916, C Records at Horseferry Road, London, was averaging between 80 and 100 letters per day; due to casualties from the fighting of August 1916 inward letters reached a daily average of 400, and daily notification of casualties reached the same number.⁹⁵ What began as the Central Inquiry Bureau in Cairo, formed in London an integral part of a comprehensive personnel recordkeeping administration for the First AIF which grew in size and complexity over the course of the war.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The creation of the Central Inquiry Bureau was seemingly a straightforward, even minor, organisational change within the recordkeeping administration. However, this decision about AIF recordkeeping was influenced by politics and public opinion in a situation in which Australia depended on volunteer enlistment to maintain its contribution to the war effort. War was the overriding context to First AIF recordkeeping: war which caused distress to families lacking news of their loved ones in a distant conflict and in 1915 made the Australian public for the first time aware of the realities of warfare and shook its confidence in swift victory.

Testament to First AIF recordkeeping are the AIF personnel files preserved by the National Archives of Australia. These files, apart from documents, occasionally contain artefacts which make material links to the soldiers and the war. One file has a small buff envelope containing fragments of singed uniform fabric, all that was recovered of a soldier killed by an exploding shell. This a poignant intersection of records of war with evidence of the human toll of warfare.

Notes

1. The First AIF personnel files are held in the National Archives of Australia as series B2455. All of the records have been digitised and can be viewed on the website of the National

- Archives: <www.naa.gov.au>. For the development of the First AIF recordkeeping administration see Paul Dalgleish, 'Keeping the AIF's Personnel Records', Appendix A in Jean Bou and Peter Dennis, *The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War, Volume 5: The Australian Imperial Force*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2016. For detailed documenting, using First AIF personnel records, of the failure of the First AIF administration to provide timely and accurate information on casualties from the Gallipoli campaign see Peter Stanley, *Lost Boys of Anzac*, New South Publishing, University of New South Wales Press Ltd., Sydney, 2014. For the operations of AIF Base Records in Melbourne see Carol Rosenhain, *The Man Who Carried the Nation's Grief, James Malcolm Lean MBE & The Great War Letters*, Big Sky Publishing Pty. Ltd., Newport, Australia, 2016: this is a study of Major James Lean who headed Base Records and the work of Base Records with extensive examples of Base Records correspondence found in the First AIF personnel files. For the activities of the Australian War Records Section established in May 1917 to collect and organise the documentary record of the Australian forces for preservation in Australia, see the following: Anne-Marie Condé, 'The Australian War Records Section', 2007, (available on the website of the Australian War Memorial: <www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/the-australian-war-records-section>); Michael Piggott, 'The Australian War Records Section and its aftermath, 1917–1925', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 8, no. 2, December 1980, pp. 41–50; Michael Piggott, *Archives and Societal Provenance, Australian Essays*, Chandos Publishing, Oxford, 2012 (see Chapter 8: War, sacred archiving and C.E.W. Bean); Simon Cooke and Anna Froude 'The Australian War Records Section', paper presented as part of the Australian War Memorial Summer Scholarship Scheme, 1989.
2. Despatch no. 8, Colonel Sellheim to The Honourable the Minister of State for Defence, 21 December 1915, p. 11, referring to cablegram no. W30124 of the 14 November from the Minister for Defence, AWM 25 99/5.
 3. Memo Sellheim to Major General Ellison, 30 November 1915, AWM 27 302/36.
 4. George Foster Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet: Thirty-Seven Years of Parliament*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1951, pp. 130, 136, 146, 147. 'The Minister for Defence in War Time', 31 August 1939, NLA, MS1927, Series 5, ff 2381–2382.
 5. LL Robson, *The First AIF A Study of its Recruitment 1914–1918*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p. 41.
 6. Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, Vol. XI of CEW Bean (ed.), *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1937, p. 292.
 7. Jean Bou and Peter Dennis, *The Australian Imperial Force*, Volume 5 of *The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2016, pp. 205–6.
 8. *Argus*, 26 November 1915; Robson, p. 61; Letter Pearce to Godley, 15 January 1916, Pearce Papers AWM 3DRL/2222, 10/1.
 9. Bou and Dennis, p. 61.
 10. Letter Pearce to Birdwood, 10 December 1915, Pearce Papers AWM 3DRL/3376 7/2.
 11. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives: Official Hansard, 29 October 1915, Massy-Green (Member for Richmond).
 12. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. 76, 28 April 1915.
 13. John Connor, *ANZAC and Empire: George Foster Pearce and the Foundations of Australian Defence*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2011, p. 49; Scott, pp. 72–3.
 14. Scott, p. 64: Under Regulation 28:1 it was an offence to spread false reports or make false statements likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, discipline or administration of the forces.
 15. Frank Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Australia, 1983, p. 126; examples of censorship pp. 121–4.
 16. Robson, pp. 157–8; Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. 83, 2712, 26 September 1917.
 17. Memo Hughes to Pearce, 4 December 1915; Circular to all Censors 11 December 1915, Pearce Papers AWM 3DRL/2222, 4/1; Cain, p. 107.

18. Bart Ziino, 'War and private sentiment in Australia during 1915', *The Latrobe Journal*, no. 96, September 2015, Victoria and the Great War, p. 93.
19. Ziino, p. 89, quoting Nellie Fisher.
20. The previous three quotes are from Ziino, p. 92.
21. Ziino, pp. 94–5; p. 100 a soldier writes 'this last fortnight has been a perfect hell on earth [...] we lost 600 men in a few hours.' (Errol Devlin to his mother).
22. Ziino, p. 94.
23. *ibid.*, p. 100 cites examples from personal correspondence.
24. *ibid.*, p. 94, 102.
25. Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss, Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p. 20.
26. Bruce Faraday, 'Half the battle: The administration and higher organisation of the AIF 1914–1918', PhD thesis, UNSW, 1997, p. 149.
27. Damousi, p. 20.
28. Faraday, p. 147.
29. *ibid.*, p. 148.
30. Keith Murdoch was the father of Rupert Murdoch, the Australian-born American media proprietor who founded News Corp.
31. Letter Keith Murdoch to Andrew Fisher, 23 September 1915, AWM Pearce Papers, 3DRL/2222, 5/8.
32. On 25 April 1915, British Empire and French forces assaulted the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. It was the first major combat of the war for the AIF.
33. Faraday, p. 150.
34. *ibid.*, p. 51.
35. Peter Stanley, *Lost Boys of Anzac*, New South Publishing, University of New South Wales Press Ltd., Sydney, 2014.
36. For examples of delayed notification see Stanley, pp. 175–83; see also Carol Rosenhain, pp. 51–9.
37. These examples are taken from Stanley, pp. 175–9.
38. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives; Official Hansard, 29 October 1915, Massy-Green (Member for Richmond).
39. *ibid.*
40. Report of Keith Murdoch, September 1915, NAA MP376/1, 564/4/258: the report mentions that the Eastern Extension Cable company did allow in Australia three free cables for relatives to inquire about seriously wounded soldiers but that this was little used, perhaps because the offer was not well known.
41. John Connor, Peter Stanley and Peter Yule, *The War at Home: Volume 4 of The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 2015, pp. 155–6.
42. Damousi, pp. 21–2.
43. Margaret Melvin to Jack, 12 May 1915, MS 12347, Box 3162/2, SLV. Quoted in Bart Ziino, p. 93.
44. *The Argus*, 7 June 1915.
45. Scott, p. 231.
46. See Dagleish, pp. 184–7.
47. Dagleish, pp. 179–81. Carol Rosenhain provides examples of Base Records correspondence found in the First AIF personnel files.
48. *The Argus*, on 7 June 1915; Rosenhain, p. 39.
49. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: Senate: Official Hansard: 7 July 1915 (Senator Pearce).
50. *The Argus*, 2 September 1915.
51. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives: Official Hansard, 29 October 1915 (Massy-Green).
52. Sir Cyril Brudenell White to the historian C.E.W. Bean, Bean Papers, AWM 38 3DRL606, item 255.

53. Memo Bridges to Pearce, 13 October 1914, NAA B539, AIF 112/2/278.
54. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: Senate: Official Hansard: 7 July 1915.
55. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary Debates: Senate: Official Hansard: 25 August 1915, 31 August 1915.
56. Fetherston 'Report of Inspection of Army Medical Services, Australian Imperial Force on active service', NAA B539, AIF239/8/72; telegram to Defence 26 October 1915, NAA, B539, AIF239/8/15.
57. Connor, p. 81.
58. Bridges to Department of Defence, 8 January 1915, NAA B539, AIF 112/2/341. Bridges was explaining why the British War Office had approved the base; see also Memorandum of the Formation, Organisation and Functions of the Australian Imperial Force Intermediate Base in Egypt: AWM 224, MSS562 Part 1.
59. CEW Bean (ed.), *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1937, vol. II, p. 415.
60. Report by Colonel Sellheim on the Records Section at Intermediate Base, Cairo, November 1915, AWM25 9/5.
61. Minute from Director General Medical Services, 6 July 1915, NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258.
62. Cable from Third Echelon, Alexandria to Defence Melbourne, 16 July 1915, NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258.
63. Letter from Adrian Knox, 16 August 1915, Pearce Papers AWM 3DRL/2222, 2/3.
64. Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation, Australians in the Great War*, Allen and Unwin, Australia, 2013, p. 96.
65. Letter Murdoch to Pearce, 1 July 1915, NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258.
66. Press Notice, 2 July 1915: 'The Minister has decided to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the early departure from Australia of Mr Keith Murdoch ... of securing his services to investigate and report on postal and cable arrangements in Egypt and also upon arrangements made for notifying the Department here of the disposition of wounded ...' NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258.
67. Pearce, p. 123.
68. 'A Report on Postal Services and Allied Subjects Connected with the A.I.F. in Egypt 13 September 1915', NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258; the suggestion of a mobile medical corps had been made to Pearce by Colonel Fetherston in his memo of 6 July and had been passed on to Murdoch (see note 52: NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258).
69. Letter Murdoch to Pearce 13 September 1915, Pearce Papers, AWM 3DRL/2222, 5/3.
70. Despatch no. 8, Colonel V.C.M. Sellheim to The Honourable the Minister of State for Defence, 21 December 1915, p. 11: 'The instructions contained in cablegram no. W30124 of the 14 November from the Minister for Defence, in regard to the organising of a Central Enquiry Bureau at this Base are being carried out', AWM25 99/5.
71. Letter Sellheim to Bean, 20 November 1923, AWM 3DRL606/255/1.
72. Letter Sellheim to Major General Ellison, 30 November 1915, AWM 27 302/36.
73. R A Carruthers, Note on the Australian Intermediate Base Cairo, 28 December 1915: AWM 224 MSS562 Part 1.
74. Report, Keith Murdoch, NAA MP367/1, 564/4/258.
75. Beaumont, p. 99.
76. Damousi, p. 47.
77. 'The Other Women's Son,' Ethel Turner, NLA MS 5913.
78. Our Empire: The Official Organ of the Sailor's and Soldiers' Fathers Association of Victoria, vol. 1, no. 4, 19 August 1918, quoted in Damousi p. 29.
79. *The Kyneton Guardian* (Victoria), 16 September 1915, cited in Rosenhain, p. 39.
80. Quoted in Damousi, 'Universities and Conscription, the Yes Campaign and the University of Melbourne' in Robin Archer, Damousi, Murray Groot and Sean Scalmer (eds.), *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2016, p. 95.

81. Murray Groot, 'The Results of the 1916 and 1917 Conscription Referendums Re-examined', in Archer, Damousi, Groot and Scalmer, pp. 131–2.
82. Beaumont, p. 100; women's organisations in support of the war are discussed in Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: Sexual Mythology in Australia 1914–1918', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 26–7.
83. Damousi, 'Universities and Conscription', p. 106.
84. Tanja Luckins, *The Gates of memory: Australian people's experiences and memories of loss in the Great War*, Curtin University Books, Freemantle, 2004.
85. Luckins, p. 57.
86. *ibid.*, pp. 63–4, 67.
87. Pearce, p. 138.
88. *The Argus*, 7 October 1916.
89. Hughes, Manifesto, NLA MS 5913.
90. Commonwealth of Australia, 1915, Parliamentary debates: House of Representatives, 29 October 1915.
91. Papers of W. M. Hughes, NLA MS 1538 Series 16, Folder 1, Items 1–674.
92. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. 83, 2712, 26 September 1917.
93. Sellheim to Major General Ellison, 30 November 1915, AWM 27 302/36.
94. Memorandum, 20 January 1916, AWM 25, 99/5.
95. MacLeod, pp. 6, 92, 87, AWM224 MSS563.
96. Dalgleish, Appendix 1, in Bou and Dennis.

Disclosure statement

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Paul Dalgleish worked in various positions at the National Archives of Australia from 1992 to 2012. For several years there he managed the First AIF Personnel Records. He became familiar with the contents of the records and developed a strong interest in the administrative processes and historical context of their creation. Since leaving the Archives, Paul has been researching and writing on the history of the First AIF personnel records. He contributed a section on First AIF recordkeeping to *The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War, Volume 5, The Australian Imperial Force* (Jean Bou and Peter Dennis, Oxford University Press, 2016).