

## “A Man’s Lot”: Marriage, Military Service, and the First World War

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The study of personal experiences of British and Australian soldiers during the First World War can be further developed through a discrete analysis of married men’s interactions with wartime masculine ideals. This article seeks to provide a preliminary insight into such interactions through the case-study of two officers serving on the Western Front in 1916 and the correspondence they wrote to their wives throughout their military service. British Lieutenant Max Shaw and Australian Lieutenant Cecil Mills both voluntarily enlisted and served in France in 1916. Once they departed their homes to commence training, they immediately began corresponding with their wives, which can be seen as attempts to mediate a clashing sense of domestic and military loyalties. As these men transitioned from a civilian to a military lifestyle, their lingering domestic identities and the importance of their marriage within their sense of manhood continued to influence their adoption of a military identity.

The Bachelor ’e fights for one  
As joyful as can be;  
But the married man don’t call it fun,  
Because ’e fights for three-  
For “Im an” “Er an” It  
(An’ Two an’ One makes Three)  
'E wants to finish ’is little bit,  
An’ ’e wants to go ’ome to ’is tea!<sup>1</sup>

The opening verse of Rudyard Kipling’s 1903 poem “Married Men” presented a dichotomy of married and single men within a military context. The bachelor is presented as a man with no dependents; the consequences of his death are dismissed, allowing him to engage in battle with greater confidence and a diminished sense of concern. Contrasted with this is the married man whose domestic life, represented by Kipling as the “three”, his wife and child, render him an incapable warrior owing to the effects his death would have on his family. There exists within this construction of contemporary soldiering ideals a clash of loyalties. A greater challenge to these loyalties of married men would arrive in August 1914 when Britain went to war, prompting the greatest mobilization of the British and Australian populations, which generated changes to the gendered identities of men whose sense of manliness, affirmed by their domestic and work lifestyles, was increasingly fixed to their decision

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<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The Married Man,” in *The Five Nations* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1903), pp. 188–90.

to enlist or remain at home. This article examines how married men engaged with these gendered ideals of duty as aspects of their personality through a comparative case study of two urban officers, one from Britain and the other Australia whose similarities and differences offer insight into the experience of this clash of loyalties.

As Britain and Australia entered the twentieth century, men were encouraged by broader social norms to focus their masculine identity on the building and maintaining of an independent, domestic world that orbited the ideals of marriage, the care of their children, and their work. The militarism that pervaded British and Australian cultures was an idealization of adventure and heroism; it was a distant, imagined, and latent construction within contemporary masculinities that had limited avenues of real expression in the civilian world.<sup>2</sup> Unique to Australian conceptions of a national identity was that of the “Bushman” ideal that applauded the nation’s strong rural background and untamed frontiers, orientated around the ideals of loyalty, civic involvement, democracy, mateship, and an easy-going attitude.<sup>3</sup> With the outbreak of the First World War, these militaristic elements of masculine identities became a dominant force within hegemonic wartime conceptions of masculinity, creating contention about many men’s prioritization of their domestic world in the face of the national crisis. Married men in Britain and Australia, both with volunteer armies, faced a lingering and gradually intensifying pressure to enlist in the army in support of the war effort.<sup>4</sup>

The challenge this posed to many married men can be described as a clash of loyalties. Their responsibility within the home, compounded by their emotional desire to not be separated from their wives and children, contended with a wartime assertion that military service was the ultimate expression of manliness and an expectation of all able-bodied men. In an alternative response, duty as a male citizen expressed through enlistment was contiguous with that of being a husband. The interaction of men with these competing wartime discourses were subjective and complex. Many men asserted their manhood through their military service, while others consented to enlisting and serving abroad but refrained from making their military service an explicit element of their masculine identity. The use of a case-study approach allows for an intimate, first-hand analysis of how two married men chose to enlist in the service of their nations and empire during wartime and the emotional resources they utilized to cope with the stress and trauma of warfare in France.

The British Lieutenant Maximilian Shaw and the Australian Lieutenant Cecil Beaumont Mills were two men who volunteered for military service in pursuit of what they believed to be a man’s duty.<sup>5</sup> Maximilian Shaw, born 1882, was husband to Amy Shaw, née Politzer. Educated at one of Britain’s public Schools, Harrow, Shaw then studied in Germany at the University of Freiburg. He initially worked as a miner in Mexico then began work at the London Stock Exchange in 1910 and married Amy in 1912. From 1912 until October 1914, Max and Amy Shaw shared a home in London

<sup>2</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), pp. 1–8; John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1999), pp. 170–94.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Irving, *To Constitute a Nation: A Cultural History of Australia’s Constitution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13–15.

<sup>4</sup> Laure Ugolini, “The ‘Recruiting Muddle’: Married Men, Conscription and Masculinity in First World War England,” *First World War Studies*, Vol 9, 1 (2018), pp. 73–92.

<sup>5</sup> Max Shaw’s archival materials are located within the Liddle Collection, University of Leeds, Leeds, LIDDLE/WW1/ADD/014; Cecil Beaumont Mills’ archival materials are located within the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, PR00932.

and raised two children — John and Geoff. Cecil Mills was born in 1881 at Shellharbour, New South Wales, and attended Auburn Public School. Unlike Shaw, Mills was not an internationally educated man but they did share a field of occupation: finance and banking. Mills was a banker until he enlisted in 1915. He married Effie Sara Burne in June 1913 and had one son in March 1915. These two men offer similar yet unique insights into how married men from the British world understood their military service and how their marriages framed their actions as soldiers. Both men were prolific writers throughout their military service which included a significant amount of down time when in training and in France. Their service differed in experience of proximity. For Shaw, the war was near to his home. Furthermore, his father and mother resided in Nice in Southern France, a place he frequented in the years leading up to the war making him familiar with the landscape. Embarkation for France was not a unique and alien experience for him. For Mills, the decision to enlist carried with it the guarantee that he would not return home to Australia and likely not see his wife and child until the war had ended. For Australians, distance was a dominant theme in their perception of the war.<sup>6</sup>

The scholarship of the mid-to-late twentieth century presented the experiences of combat during the war as having altered the psyches of soldiers serving from 1914 to 1918. The First World War was unprecedented in its carnage to the British and Australian peoples. As soldiers moved into the trenches, experienced combat and witnessed the deaths of friends and foes alike, they were forced to alter their personality to cope with such extremities. Eric J. Leed argues that such alterations pushed soldiers away from their civilian lives: “[t]he personality adapted to the vicissitudes of war seemed to be wholly incommensurate with that individual who had grown up in civilian society”.<sup>7</sup> The war, to Leed, was a matter of “radical discontinuity” within the psyches of men.<sup>8</sup> Such discontinuity has been presented by Alfredo Bonadeo as a consequence of the regression within men when faced with combat: “[t]he trenches and the battlefields returned twentieth-century man to a kind of life that had very little to do with civilization. In the trenches and on the battlefields, twentieth-century man fought, died, survived, and changed for the worse”.<sup>9</sup> For George L. Mosse, men did not revert in war to an animalistic state, despite the stresses of combat eroding men’s capacity to cope, but encouraged an exaggeration of the importance of masculine values, such as male camaraderie, sacrifice, courage, and manliness.<sup>10</sup> Men were placed into an all-male environment in which those in uniform constituted the masculine of their nation and those at home the feminine, understood to be passive and unfamiliar with the realities of war.<sup>11</sup> Such a dichotomy between home and front, between soldier and civilian, was commonly expressed within the literature of the war and has been presented as a source of contention between the two as soldiers

<sup>6</sup> Bart Ziino, “‘Always Thinking in the Other Part of the Globe’: Australians and the Meanings of Wartime Correspondence,” in *Proximity and Distance: Space, Time and World War I*, eds. Romain Fathi and Emily Robertson (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2020), p. 149.

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Alfredo Bonadeo, *Mark of the Beast: Death and Degradation in the Literature of the Great War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 107–110.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107–08.

struggled to convey their experiences to their loved ones.<sup>12</sup> The consequence of this struggle was civilian incomprehension and soldiers' frustration, a growing chasm in the emotional experiences of both during the war, rendering soldiers incapable of reintegrating back into their civilian lives after demobilization.<sup>13</sup>

The reality of the individual soldiers' experience of the war and reintegration with the civilian world was far more complex than the aforementioned brutalization and alienation theses contend. Soldiers retained strong links to their homes which "remained the touchstone for all their actions".<sup>14</sup> Men occupied the trenches but retained strong links with their families at home, drawing upon them as emotional resources. As Michael Roper has argued, men on the Western Front and beyond were deeply reliant upon their mothers, sisters, and wives to raise their spirits in the face of war's extremities of experience (sudden terror, prolonged boredom).<sup>15</sup> Soldiers pushed to sustain their pre-war cultural and social rituals and behaviours despite the "anomie" of the battlefields of France separating them from their families.<sup>16</sup> Most relevant to this article was men's continued correspondence with their wives throughout their military service, blending the civilian and military identities in attempts to sustain both. Men separated from their home were avid writers, seeking any opportunity to write letters, and send postcards and telegrams to their families, and constructed an image within their minds of returning to their family life after the war.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on examples from Austria-Hungary, Christie Hammerle argues the idea of returning home, as well as the idea of home itself, dominated the correspondence of soldiers demonstrating the strength of their pre-enlistment identity in the face of war's corrosive effects.<sup>18</sup> Martha Hanna's several works on the correspondences between Canadian and French soldiers and their wives have revealed one consistent theme throughout their letters: the home remained a source of emotional strength in the face of overwhelming pressures born from competing masculine ideals and the effects of military service on the Western Front.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to the British World, a developing trend explores the intersection of married men and the First World War. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau's epistolary history of Harry Logan (Canadian) and Gwyneth Murray (English)

<sup>12</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 83–95.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 7–9.

<sup>16</sup> Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *Understanding the Great War, 1914–18* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), p. 36; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 14–46.

<sup>17</sup> Martha Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights: Canadian War Wives during the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Christie Hammerle, "'You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?' Private Correspondences during the First World War in Austria and Germany," in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945*, ed. Rebecca Searle (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 172–75.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Hanna, "A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War 1," *The American Historical Review*, Vol 108, 5 (December 2003), pp. 1338–61; Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Martha Hanna, "The Couple," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Vol 3, pp. 6–28.

demonstrated one married couple's use of sex and sexuality in their wartime correspondence as a means of continuing their relationship in face of their separation.<sup>20</sup> As soldiers moved closer to the front and away from their partners, they looked to the various means available to share their experiences as effectively as they could, while simultaneously protecting their loved ones from the grim realities of war. Alex Mayhew examined the British people's favour of postcards and their visual representation as a means of sharing the sights of France and Belgium, and of themselves through photo-capture postcards.<sup>21</sup> Roper, too, assesses the postcard as a valuable means of maintaining links between front and home for soldiers and their families, asserting that although generic, "they nonetheless conveyed deeply personal meanings for the writer and recipient".<sup>22</sup> The British soldiers' experience of sustaining his marriage through correspondence lacks any direct analysis with several works instead incorporating the topic into broader analyses of the British army more broadly.<sup>23</sup> For Australia, the predominance of unmarried soldiers in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) obscured the contributions of married soldiers and their place within the wider discussions on military masculinities during the war.<sup>24</sup> Kate Hunter has contributed an insightful article into the correspondence of one New Zealand couple and their attempts to sustain their relationship through correspondence, asserting that examining married men contributed to the broader understanding of subjective experience during the First World War.<sup>25</sup> This article seeks to fill a niche left, namely a comparative analysis of those soldiers whose marriage shaped their personal expressions of their manhood within their correspondence, contributing to an understanding of subjectivity and war.

### Letter Writing and Contemporary Masculinities

Embedded within letters are conscious and unconscious expressions of emotion that reveal an individual's considerations of their own identity. Emotions are fundamental in the expression of gender and the writing of letters was a means of expressing emotional experiences.<sup>26</sup> Corresponding to a wife or child was a means of coping with the stresses of separation as well as digesting their experiences of the day. Men often employed letter writing as a tool of relaxation and as a means of mentally escaping from the realities of the war. Writing from a crater in a wooded area in France, Shaw wrote to Amy of a sense of serenity that made him think of home: "If it were not for silly noises in the air mostly our aeroplanes, I might be in the woods at [home]".<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *Bodies, Love, and Faith in the First World War: Dardanelle and Peter* (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 191–238.

<sup>21</sup> Alex Mayhew, "'A War Imagined': Postcards and the Maintenance of Long-Distance Relationships during the Great War," *War in History*, Vol 28, 2 (2019), pp. 301–332; Michael Roper, "Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War," *The Historical Journal*, Vol 54, 2 (June 2011), pp. 421–51.

<sup>22</sup> Roper, "Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience," pp. 421–51.

<sup>23</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*; Anthony Fletcher, *Life, Death, and Growing Up on the Western Front* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> L. L. Robson, "The Origin and Character of the First A.I.F., 1914–1918: Some Statistical Evidence," *Historical Studies*, Vol 15, 61 (October 1973), p. 743.

<sup>25</sup> Kate Hunter, "More than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915–1919," *Gender & History*, Vol 25, 2 (August 2013), pp. 339–54.

<sup>26</sup> Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), pp. 149–50.

<sup>27</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, 03 June 1916.

Furthermore, letters acted as a means of mutual support between the soldier and his home.<sup>28</sup> Soldiers became anxious when they did not routinely receive letters from home or news of their own letters being held up arrived, as Hammerele has demonstrated: “delays and interruptions of the postal service resulted in a feeling of insecurity that went much deeper and often led to conflict [between couples]”.<sup>29</sup> The limited nature of letters, in that they are exclusively the written word, requires a developed analysis of language and context. Letters were written at specific times, in suitable environments, about considered topics; soldiers often wrote in fields, dugouts, and trenches surrounded by the sights, sounds, smells, and pressures of war.

The letters Mills and Shaw wrote home were regulated and influenced by contemporary conventions on writing styles, a lack of a suitable vocabulary and cultural repertoire of language to describe events, as well as personal and official censorship that stopped them from true expression. In his work on the emotional survival of British soldiers during the First World War, Roper explains that the immediacy of letters did not equate to accuracy nor did they offer insight into the true emotional experiences of war: “proximity to events does not mean the sentiments expressed in letters or diaries were transparent. What these men experienced was sometimes too disturbing to take in; the very ability to think was under attack”.<sup>30</sup> John Ellis expressed a similar argument about men’s inability to effectively describe what they were experiencing: “the average letter or postcard from France was a very trite, stereotypical document”.<sup>31</sup> Such attacks on the genuine expression of feelings were often embodied by the prying eyes of military censors whose invasion into the privacy of enlisted and commissioned men’s letters forced, or even allowed, men to avoid discussions of sensitive topics. As David Englander has discussed, military censorship of mail was a feature of the British Army Postal Service from the early stages of the war which pushed the responsibility onto a soldier’s unit commander (the platoon Lieutenant in most cases).<sup>32</sup> In addition to the eyes of the censor, the reading of Shaw’s and Mills’ letters reveals that the addressees, their wives Amy and Effie, were not the only audience. The Victorian tradition of letters being a “shared family commodity”, a document to be read amongst the members of a household and beyond, restricted the kinds of genuine emotional expression men wished to convey.<sup>33</sup> Both Mills and Shaw tried to circumvent the public display of their affections and anxieties by writing separate pages that clearly stated that what followed was exclusively for their wives’ eyes only. Although these men navigated this prohibiting landscape, they also faced pressure from wartime discourses on the acceptable expression of masculinity and manliness.

### Motivations for Enlistment

The outbreak of war in Britain and Australia generated a mixture of responses from the populations of both countries. Max Shaw was of middle-class origins and status in 1914. In late July, as news gradually reached the British public of the war between

<sup>28</sup> Ziino, “Always Thinking in the Other Part,” p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> Hammerle, “You Let a Weeping Woman,” p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> John Ellis, *Eye-Deep in Hell: Trench Warfare in World War I* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> David Englander, “Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War,” *War in History*, Vol 1, 3 (1994), p. 304.

<sup>33</sup> Christie and Gauvreau, *Bodies, Love, and Faith*, p. 95.

Austria-Hungary and Serbia potentially pulling in all other European powers, Shaw was writing to his wife of the effects this was having on their financial position. As a stock broker in London, Shaw had access to the international market and felt a growing pressure as the British and world economy reacted to war, writing to his wife: “although a good many people were hammered today, we got off very well indeed. I daresay some will go tomorrow, but I hope we get out as well tomorrow as today”.<sup>34</sup> The coming of war did not bring an exaggerated enthusiasm but concern about his future ability to provide a secure financial environment for his wife and children. Many Britons responded to the outbreak of the war with similar feelings of apprehension and anxiety.<sup>35</sup> Despite the apparent effects the war was having on his family’s financial position, Shaw chose to enlist into the British army in October 1914, during the first initial recruitment surge.

Few letters survive during Shaw’s period of training from July 1914 to early 1915, forcing us to formulate an understanding of his motivations through subsequent letters and contemporary discourses that cultivated the latent militaristic elements of masculine identities. Shaw’s decision to enlist was ultimately a matter of conforming to emerging hegemonic masculine ideals which placed enlistment as a fundamental expression of manliness. In 1914, there were a plethora of reasons why a man chose to enlist into the army, risking life and limb, including practical reasons such as employment and wage earning, or more emotionally based motivations such as service to King and Country, adventure, and conformity to a growing pressure placed upon men to enlist lest they be ashamed.<sup>36</sup> Shaw fell into the latter camp. His motivations for enlistment were predicated on a desire to perform his duty as a man. Throughout some 120 letters, he makes few references to why he enlisted. The most direct and revealing references are contained in a passing mention in June 1916, two months after arriving in France and nineteen months after enlisting, where he stated that “I would love to come home, give anything for it and admit it is rather rotten out here, but it is a consolation of some sorts to know that it is a man’s lot”.<sup>37</sup> Embedded in this passage was the expression of a desire to demonstrate to his wife the masculine nature of his work as a soldier. This conscious expression hints at an unarticulated belief that his service in France was necessary while simultaneously presenting his service as one of sacrifice by means of separation from his family. For Shaw to not be in the army and in France, and instead being at home in London where he wished to be, was a matter of not being manly, as demonstrated by his declaration that the work in France was “a man’s lot”.

To further understand why Shaw would enlist and voluntarily separate himself from his family, it is necessary to understand the considerable social and cultural pressures men faced throughout the opening months of the war. In May 1915, the middle-class oriented periodical *The Windsor Magazine* published a piece on the story of a married man, a bank clerk, navigating his way through the streets of London and the subsequent pressures he faced from seeing soldiers, posters, and the wife of a soldier

<sup>34</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, 29 July 1914.

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 9–30; Adrian Gregory, “British ‘War Enthusiasm’ in 1914: A Reassessment,” in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–1918* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), ed. Gail Braybon, pp. 67–85; Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>37</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, 12 June 1916.

whom he knew. In the article, the question is posed: “was he (the clerk) possessed of a real honest longing to fight for his country? Would he be any good if he did go? Was he — was he a coward?”<sup>38</sup> The clerk’s fixation on the notion of cowardice was prominent in the motivations for men to enlist. The discussion of duty and its competition with the domestic is presented to the clerk when his mother explains to him that “It’s the unmarried men they’re asking for”.<sup>39</sup> This article itself reaffirmed to its readers that married men approached the notion of duty through enlistment differently to their bachelor counterparts, owing to the perceived duty to their wives. In the case of this clerk, his experience is juxtaposed with his friend, Bert Smith, who had enlisted although he was married: “Bert Smith was at the front now. His wife had a letter from him. She had come down with shining eyes to tell them about it”.<sup>40</sup> A clear expression of the gendered approach to war is revealed: Bert Smith’s war service filled his wife with pride and was envied by the clerk, whose own wife expressed that Kitchener “won’t want you”.<sup>41</sup> Those men who did not enlist were presented within recruitment campaign materials in effeminate manners that undermined their claim to masculine virility. Manliness became increasingly associated with enlistment.<sup>42</sup>

The story of Mills’ enlistment deviates somewhat from the narrative of Shaw. The outbreak of war and the subsequent raising of the first contingent of the AIF saw the prioritization of young, single men with prior military service being selected to fill the twenty thousand spaces made available, as Charles Bean wrote in the official history of the war:

The force was to be drawn, as far as possible, from men who had undergone some training: half of them were to be men then serving in the citizen army of Australia—mainly youngsters in their twentieth year and upwards; the other half were to be men not then in the forces, but who had once been in the militia or had served in the South African or other wars.<sup>43</sup>

Between August 1914 and July 1915, over 50 per cent of the total enlistments in the AIF were men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, demonstrating the commitment to mobilizing a fighting force predominately constituted by a cohort of bachelors. As L. L. Robson has commented, “in the first period of the war there were significantly few married men and significantly many single men”.<sup>44</sup> The early war period was marked by a prevalent understanding in Australian society that married soldiers were legitimately excused from the pressures to enlist owing to their domestic commitments. Such notions ensured that married men were temporarily excused from the broader discourse placing military service at the apex of masculine behaviour until manpower needs grew.

Cecil Mills enlisted in October 1915. Writing from his troopship departing Melbourne for Suez in October 1915, he described to his wife the purpose of his enlistment, presenting himself as dutiful and proud of his decision yet remorseful of having to leave his wife and child: “I’m not what one would call a religious man, but

<sup>38</sup> E. M. Bryant, “His Call to Arms,” *The Windsor Magazine*, London, Vol 41 (May 1915), p. 818.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 817.

<sup>42</sup> Meg Albrinck, “Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal”, in *Picture This: World War 1 Posters and Visual Culture* (Lincoln and London, 2009), ed. Pearl James, pp. 324–26.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson LT, 1941), 11th ed., Vol 1, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> L. L. Robson, “The Origin and Character,” p. 743.

I've always been able to distinguish right from wrong and though I've not always done the right thing I don't think there are many actions of mine that will count against me".<sup>45</sup> Although presented in ambiguous terms, Mills describes his enlistment as "the right thing", a fact which he believed would count in his favour should he meet his end and be forced to confront God with the decision. Such an expression placed his enlistment within the realm of civic duty as a man and as a citizen of Australia demonstrating his loyalty while also asserting the decision as one contiguous with that of a good husband.<sup>46</sup> It is necessary to consider the purpose of such a justification of military service to his wife, who surely felt a deep sense of anxiety for her now enlisted husband. In the same letter, Mills preceded the above with a passage on his departure from his wife, noting her physical expression: "I saw the same look in many women's faces when they were saying goodbye to their men, that was in yours when you said goodbye to me last Tuesday afternoon. Women do all the suffering in silence".<sup>47</sup> Embedded within this letter is Mills' expression of a sacrifice shared with his wife tied to a sense of duty defined by their gender: women suffered in silence while men marched away to war. Mills' personal understanding of a good citizen was tied to his military service and the concurrent emotional suffering he would endure as a consequence of his separation from his wife.

Embedded within the recruitment campaigns of the British World was a belief that going to war could be a matter of defending one's home and family, an ideal adopted distinctly by Mills and used to justify his departure to his wife. Following his embarkation, Mills linked military service and family in an attempt to assuage the intense feelings of anxiety he believed his wife to be experiencing: "I know Dearie you will have many a lovely hour before I come back to you and it is very brave of you to let me go so willingly to take my share in the war to fight on behalf of you & the boy".<sup>48</sup> The grammatical construction of this letter, with the opening being an acknowledgement of Effie's emotional suffering, matched with the timing of its composition, the day he embarked the troopship, revealed Mills' desire to justify his enlistment and departure through framing his military service as a means of defending Effie and their son. Many soldiers, as Hanna has demonstrated, enlisted for practical reasons, such as wage earning, but Mills was idealistic in his framing of the family as a motivation.<sup>49</sup> Mills was not unique in this regard, as Rollet has contended. The framing of the home as a legitimate motivation for going to war within wartime discourses often competed with concurrent, pre-war idealisations of the home as a legitimate reason for excusing one's self from military service.<sup>50</sup> Mills represented a cohort of Australian soldiers whose decision to enlist transformed their roles as husbands and fathers into a justification for going to war rather than a reason for choosing to remain at home.

### Adopting a Military Identity

As soldiers entered into the world of the military, they were exposed to a new lifestyle and pressured to cultivate a military stance or identity. The beginning of this process

<sup>45</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 30 October 1915.

<sup>46</sup> Irving, *To Constitute a Nation*, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 30 October 1915.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights*.

<sup>50</sup> Rollet, "The Home," pp. 315–17; Bart Ziino, "Eligible Men: Men, Families and Masculine Duty in Great War Australia", *History Australia*, Vol. 14, 2 (2017), pp. 202–203.

coincided with enlistment as men agreed to enter into the military, taking an oath of service and donning the khaki.<sup>51</sup> The next step was engagement with a military routine through military training and the subsequent, and arguably more defining and anticipated, action of departure for service overseas.<sup>52</sup> This process was a gradual, liminal experience of transitioning from domesticity and a civilian life to one curated by military necessity and tradition, cultivated through exposure to military life and the practice of directed violence. However, despite the pressures and potential disconnection from their civilian lives their newly adopted routines created, men persisted in sustaining their civilian lifestyles throughout their military service both as a means of coping with military life and as a way of ensuring their domestic masculinities survived the war.<sup>53</sup> The transitions of Mills and Shaw to military life were almost incomparable. Mills' exposure was mediated by the experience of separation, exacerbated by distance. His journey from Victoria to Suez took four weeks, and he then moved to France several months later. Each step Mills took closer to the trenches in France was a step further into foreign land away from his wife and child. For Shaw, his transition to military life took him from London to Falmouth, some 500 km away, and then to France, a place of residence for his parents and where his honeymoon took place in 1913. While the experience of distance was notable for Shaw, in that he was physically separated from his wife and children, the proximity of France to England ensured rapid communication with his family.

Both Shaw and Mills departed their homes and arrived in training camps to develop the skills and attributes of a soldier. Little information exists on Shaw's training regime in Falmouth, nor are there details of the Sixteenth Reserve Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, and their encampment in the town. As a consequence, all that remains and is accessible are the brief letters Shaw wrote to his wife throughout those early days of transition. In January 1915, Shaw arrived by train and was immediately exposed to an alien, all-male environment that generated considerable apprehension about his decision to leave. Writing to Amy the day after his arrival, Shaw likened his arrival in Falmouth with his experience of being sent to boarding school: "Last night I felt a little boy who has just gone to school and wishes he were home again, as he does not know a soul and feels rather out of it".<sup>54</sup> Military life was an experience that most civilian men in 1914–15 could not equate to anything they had endured throughout their work and domestic lives. Shaw described and processed the event of arrival through an experience he found appropriate. What followed Shaw's arrival was a preoccupation with having his wife and children move from London to Falmouth to stay for the duration of his training in the region.

The amalgamation of Shaw's domestic and military lifestyles through the presence of his wife and children in Falmouth interrupted the process of adopting the martial identity required by the army. The first letter written by Shaw from Falmouth spoke of the situation concerning other officers' wives residing in the town: "you will be glad to hear that several officers here are married and have their wives down and live with them but of course one has to get leave, but I believe it is always obtainable".<sup>55</sup> The

<sup>51</sup> Ilana R. Bet-El, *Conscripts: Forgotten Men of the Great War* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 1999), p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> Bet El, *Conscripts*, p.64; Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), pp. 28–29.

<sup>53</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 23; Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>54</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, January 1915.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

traditional understanding of military life being a departure from the women in a man's life is contradicted by Shaw's testimony of officers in his battalion being billeted with their wives. Shaw did not conform to the standard training experience as asserted by Bourke: "during wartime, men were removed from their mothers, wives and female loves".<sup>56</sup> Shaw's military training departed significantly from the contemporary norm of separation occurring from the moment men enlisted, a feature which was likely eroded as the British army transitioned from a volunteer to a conscript-based enlistment process.<sup>57</sup> As the prospect of having Amy and their children move to Falmouth became a reality, the correspondence Shaw wrote became dominated by his efforts to organize accommodation. After his arrival, Shaw wrote of his efforts to find suitable accommodation for his family: "before dinner I wandered around in the dark and hunted up the addresses that might suit".<sup>58</sup> Outside of his duties and somewhat relaxed training regime, as his letters suggest, Shaw routinely looked through the available accommodations he could find but discovered that billeted soldiers and officers were filling up the suitable apartments and houses. In a subsequent letter, the scarcity of available accommodation was pressing Shaw to lower the standards he held: "I have been trampling for about three hours [...] but wherever you go you get the same answer: officers and soldiers are billeted here, but the worst of all difficulties was to find two big bedrooms".<sup>59</sup> The influx of recruits into the British army from August 1914 to January 1915 was marked by the severe lack of available accommodation for the men.<sup>60</sup> Despite this, Shaw managed to find a suitable apartment which he regarded as substandard, jokingly informing Amy that she would need to "rough it a bit as a 'soldier's' wife".<sup>61</sup> Having left to pursue a military life, albeit temporarily, Shaw did not wish for it to disrupt his marriage nor his positions as husband and father, a matter demonstrated by his immediate maneuvers.

Shaw felt a constant pressure to justify his enlistment to his wife, referencing a personal sense of duty. Given the considerable time between this letter's composition and Shaw's initial enlistment, it is odd that he would seek to justify this matter. However, in a separate letter, Shaw revealed that he had chosen to transfer from the Sixteenth Reserve Battalion, a training unit in Falmouth where he was able to take a role to train men, to the Twenty-Sixth Bankers Battalion with whom he deployed to France. This transfer was likely a point of contention between Shaw and Amy, given the growing knowledge of the intensity of combat and mutilation of men who served. Despite the knowledge of the risks, Shaw justified this decision by claiming "I have had my little bit and would be very happy back with the 16th, but I would not be with them without having been out except with a very uneasy conscience".<sup>62</sup> Shaw demonstrated in this passage a clear connection between active duty service in France and his conception of an acceptable wartime masculinity, summarizing this in an explicit expression of military service as a masculine duty: "Billy, I would love to come home, give anything for it and admit it is rather rotten out here, but it is a consolation

<sup>56</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> Bet-El, *Conscripts*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>58</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, January 1915.

<sup>59</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, January 1915.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914–16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 194–6.

<sup>61</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, January 1915.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Undated.

of some sorts to know that it is a man's lot".<sup>63</sup> To have not served in France despite the opportunity would have contradicted his personal idealization of manhood. Despite asserting this connection, he did not find enjoyment nor did he care for the lifestyle, as suggested in his statement that "all I want is you and the kids, and then they [his commanding officers] can keep their M.C.'s [Military Cross] and their stars all to themselves. That is [...] not some grapes or temper but just really what I think and feel".<sup>64</sup>

The socialization of a man into his unit, both small (section/platoon/company) and large (battalion and beyond), was complicated by his personal details. Married men were typically older than their bachelor counterparts, as Roper argues when discussing the composition of the British army, which often rendered their socialization more complex.<sup>65</sup> Age was a significant element in men's perception of their fellow soldiers, as Tammy Proctor demonstrated through the example of the French soldier Louis Barthas: "[a]s a mature, married man, Barthas sought out comrades like himself [...] They shared news of their wives and children, but they also reminisced about civilian life before the war".<sup>66</sup> For British soldiers, such as Shaw, it was the same. Upon meeting the men of his battalion in Falmouth, Shaw noted that "[t]he other subalterns are very young, about 18 to 25 years".<sup>67</sup> Shaw's preoccupation with having Amy and the children reside with him during his training also appears to have interrupted the initial socialization apparent within the initial training regimes of the British army, a common element among married men who often felt alienated from their bachelor, and often younger, counterparts. As he himself noted, the ability to reside with his wife and children removed him from some activities thereby detracting from the socialization he would otherwise be involved in: "[t]he officers all mess together bar the two married ones who only have to turn up once a week".<sup>68</sup> The act of communal eating, a dominating element of the soldier's experience when on active duty, was removed from the routine of those married soldiers.

At the front, Shaw became attached to a fellow officer, Captain Robinson, who was also married and of a similar age group. In a letter to a member of Shaw's family named Bertie, he relays news of Robinson's wounding which caused Shaw grief: "I am frightfully sorry to lose him as he was the only person in the battalion that I was in the slightest degree intimate with".<sup>69</sup> Such a relationship was built on several factors: Robinson's age, his role as an officer of similar rank, and his marriage. The environment of the Western Front, dominated by millions of men with few available avenues of physically engaging with women beyond established brothels and local populations, forced men to seek male friendships as one means of coping with the intense and alienating nature of combat while simultaneously alleviating boredom and loneliness. Shaw's association with other soldiers was heavily influenced by his status as a married man with many of his references to other soldiers in his letters home being mentions of their own marital status: "[t]he amount of oldish married men on meets here is surprising" and another letter from July 1916 affirmed his own feeling of

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 June 1916.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Undated.

<sup>65</sup> Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Tammy M. Proctor, "Gender and Age," in *Gender and the Great War*, eds. Susan Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 117.

<sup>67</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, January 1915.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1915.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 July 1916.

longing through the men under his command: “letter censoring time for me. About half the men here are married and when I read their letters I realise that a good many of them long nearly as much as I do for [their] wife”.<sup>70</sup>

Mills adopted the role of soldier with greater enthusiasm than Shaw. Mills’ departure from Australia marked the beginning of a transitional period which can be described as the commencement of “active-duty soldiering”, a phrase employed by Bet-El for British soldiers departing for France, that demanded a perceived fortification of men’s emotional constitution.<sup>71</sup> Once aboard the troopship *Euripides*, Mills would not hear from his wife for over a month, a reality which confronted him with a clear delineation between his civilian and military lifestyles. For Australians, much like New Zealanders as Kate Hunter explores, “time and distance were of enormous concern and consequence”.<sup>72</sup> Despite the pressure of such distances, Mills was cautious during this transitional period of the expressions he penned to Effie, avoiding explicit displays of sorrow and sought to sustain an essence of masculine certainty. This is directly displayed in his condemnation of a fellow officer, a younger married man whose departure from his wife overwhelmed his emotional wellbeing: “He is only a youngster, left a young wife and baby at home, was naturally very down hearted upon coming away and this nurse was of course very sympathetic and he is now constantly looking for sympathy and gets it”.<sup>73</sup> The description of this young officer infantilizes him, as he is described as “[sitting] at her feet for hours a night & has his hair played with”.<sup>74</sup> Such a display of longing which rendered the man, to Mills, as a child did not fit the contemporary idealization of what constituted a masculine, military identity with its inherent notions of bravery and sacrifice.<sup>75</sup>

Mills’ prewar experience as a banker was a constant theme throughout his letters, helping him to constitute this alien environment through a familiar topic. During his transportation, the Officer Commanding of the Sixth Reinforcements tasked Mills with accounting for all the coin passing through the ship’s canteen, as well as the pay accounts for both officers and men. The sense of pride Mills attached to this work was clear, demonstrated through his ridicule of the commanding officer’s mismanagement of the monies:

Besides all the [men’s] money he has he also takes the Canteen money and locks it up for safe custody and is consequently responsible for it & that is where the discrepancy appears to me to be [...] the O.C. has adopted me as his accountant. It is a pity he did not take me from the start.<sup>76</sup>

Australian men, as well as British, attached a deep emotional importance to their work and was central to their expressions of manliness. Here we see Mills demonstrating such a sense of manliness through his work, comparing himself to the men around him.<sup>77</sup> This sense of pride was carried into the completion of his work as an officer, often bragging about his proficiency as a leader and as a physically fit man. Following a pack march with gear upwards of 25 kg, Mills described to Effie the ease

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 03 June 1916; *Ibid.*, 13 July 1916.

<sup>71</sup> Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Hunter, “More than an Archive,” p. 341.

<sup>73</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 16 November 1915.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1870–1920* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 221–23.

<sup>76</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 16 November 1915.

<sup>77</sup> Josh Tosh, “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth Century Britain,” *History Workshop*, No. 38 (1994), p. 185; Wise, “Job Skill,” pp. 104–105.

with which he handled the task: “we left camp out on the desert with our packs up it was pretty tough marching. My pack weighed about 60 lbs but I had no difficulty in humping it along. Am beginning to think there are lots of chaps less physically fit than I am”.<sup>78</sup> Again, Mills can be seen comparing himself to the other soldiers that surrounded him, presenting his own virility against theirs in a form of competitive masculinity.

The cultivation of a military identity was a comparative process with enlisted and commissioned men compared against those who remained at home, as well as against those who had experienced combat. As Mills arrived in Egypt, he transitioned from the environment of the troopship, a space in which he commanded respect as a feature of his rank, into a world of men who had served in Gallipoli. Seeing and engaging with these men had confronted Mills with a reality of military service: he was perceived as a lesser soldier for not having yet seen combat. Writing to Effie, he spoke of this distinction amongst the men: “we reinforcement officers are not looked on with much favour by the original numbers of the battalion. They have been in action and we have not, so we have a pretty cold time”.<sup>79</sup> By January 1916, veteran soldiers were dispersed throughout the untested units that were being reorganized for deployment to France. This was, as Gammage has argued, to facilitate a knowledge-share amongst the men thereby developing the combat effectiveness of the untested men, a decision which had enraged many veteran soldiers who did not wish to be separated from the men and units they had served with.<sup>80</sup> Mills engaged with the veterans whose combat experience had elevated them within the eyes of other Australian soldiers and civilians, and had seemingly enflamed Mills’ desire to see combat.

### Violence, Death, and Home

As Shaw and Mills were exposed to combat on the Western Front, initially through experiencing artillery bombardments and the sights of mangled corpses then eventually progressing to both participating in the Battle of the Somme, they became increasingly reliant upon an idealised image of home to sustain their emotional well-being and reinforce their sense of manhood in the face of industrial warfare. Aggression and a desire to kill was not a frequent point of discussion throughout Shaw’s letters to his wife, instead avoiding the topic almost altogether. When there is mention of the conduct of violence, it is either veiled by indirect and playful language where Shaw emotionally distanced himself from the act itself. However, Shaw never explicitly recalled his own actions; rather, he capitalized upon planned actions, describing an intent to “get someone in the eye to settle up Fred’s [his brother-in-law] account”.<sup>81</sup> Such expressions of anger, here given on account of a family member’s wounding, were rare for Shaw. He strived to control his emotional expressions throughout his letters.<sup>82</sup> Such a reluctance to revel in the stories of soldiering contradicted some contemporary beliefs that presented violence as a means of expressing virility. Men were tempted to elaborate on the actions of themselves, their units, and their country’s fighting forces as a means of expressing their manhood.<sup>83</sup> For Shaw, this was not the case. His overriding

<sup>78</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 12 March 1916.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 09 January 1916.

<sup>80</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Bertie, 22 July 1916.

<sup>82</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *Understanding the Great War*, p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 36.

concern for the emotional wellbeing of Amy prompted him to self-censor his own writing.

Death was a constant reality of service on the Western Front which created considerable anxieties for the wives of men serving. For Shaw, his letters often had to allay the apprehensions and fears of Amy, whose letters regularly asked for details about the casualty lists and the numbers of casualties in Shaw's sector. Writing in an undated letter, Shaw responded to one of Amy's questions: "As regards officers, we have lost a few lucky fellows who have gone home through sickness and one with a damaged knee through one accident [...] you see there is nothing to worry about".<sup>84</sup> By 1916, the physical mutilation of soldiers' bodies was known by the civilian populations as men returned from the front bearing the wounds of the destructive weaponry brought against them. Furthermore, newspapers throughout the world presented casualty lists that seemed endless. There was evidence of the war's physical cost throughout Britain and Australia, as Bourke suggests: "[m]ass mutilation was there for all to see".<sup>85</sup> Shaw was bound to a promise to be an "Honest Indian", in his words, when writing his letters to Amy. Despite this, the reality of Shaw's military service and a keen desire to mitigate any anxieties often prompted him to omit or lie about the dangers of his time in the trenches.

The desire to return home dominated Shaw's letters, a feeling that provided him with an emotional resource to overcome the exhausting nature of military work in France. The construction of the home as a fantasy from which men drew considerable emotional stimulus was a common feature for many married men whose idealisations were regularly discussed in letters to their wives, acting both as reassurances that they would return and that they had not forgotten home.<sup>86</sup> In writing to Amy, Shaw relayed one such message when he claimed "everyone is possessed of one great longing for this rotten war to stop and get home to blighty. The batchelors [sic] yearn for Bond Street, and we others — well, what do you think we yearn for?"<sup>87</sup> Short of ending the war, the prospect of temporary leave back to England was a motivating factor for Shaw; leave was "valued beyond the power of words".<sup>88</sup> Throughout 1916, military authorities had restricted men's leave almost entirely, a fact not lost on Shaw but one he refused to pass on to Amy. Writing to Bertie, Shaw explained that his desire for leave was unachievable for the foreseeable future: "Personally, I have had enough of this damned rotten life especially as leave is now non-existent and does not look like reopening for the next few years, only I have not mentioned this fact either in my letters to Amy".<sup>89</sup> At the time of his writing of the letter, the Battle of the Somme had been underway for three weeks, with the British army operating at a scale "unparalleled in British history".<sup>90</sup> Leave was a faint ideal that provided some semblance for Shaw to return to his home in England, albeit briefly, a desire he routinely articulated.

Violence, death, and the home were mental devices within the construction of men's sense of manhood, experienced in unique ways by many soldiers. Shaw's disconnection from the warrior ideal of agency in the action of violence was not shared by Mills

<sup>84</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, Undated.

<sup>85</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Hanna, "The Couple," p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Amy Shaw, 06 June 1916.

<sup>88</sup> Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), p. 167.

<sup>89</sup> Max Shaw, Letter to Bertie, 22 July 1916.

<sup>90</sup> Bourne, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 65.

during his initial exposure to the Western Front. During his first march through the French countryside, Mills was immediately gripped by the devastation of the landscape from the German artillery. The feelings of anger directed at the Germans were complemented by a desire to fight: “I hope I can personally kill a few Germans, it would not worry me in after years”.<sup>91</sup> This passage was an explicit expression of a military stance towards the German people; Mills’ employed his abhorrence at the devastation wrought on the French countryside as a justification for an aggressive expression of his manhood. This stage of his expression of agency in the action of violence was a “before” period, typified by Bourke with the dominance of imagination.<sup>92</sup> The direct reference to Mills’ personal desire to kill, and the use of that explicit term, separated him from Shaw in what he believed constituted an acceptable expression of manliness to his wife. Mills would use his letters to Effie as a means of expressing his sense of pride in the application of violence throughout his time in France.

The combat effectiveness of the AIF was a source of pride for Mills who cited their aggressiveness compared to their British counterparts. Upon arrival in a section of trenches, Mills makes the observation that “[o]ur chaps strafe a good deal more than the Tommies did and as a natural consequence the Huns strafe us more in return”.<sup>93</sup> The presence of a national identity within Mills’ construction of his manhood was expressed through his observations on his fellow soldiers’ fighting capabilities. This was not unique to Mills but was a constant theme within the letters of Australian men writing home: “[m]en who once had persistently worn English uniforms now clung to their Australian issue until long after it was tattered to rags, and by late May wounded in Cairo were objecting to using the British Soldiers Club because of its name”.<sup>94</sup> The ruthless aggressiveness of many Australian troops was also expressed to Effie in one description of a trench raid carried out by Mills’ brigade which he described: “our brigade carried out quite the most successful raid yet “perpetuated” on the Germs [sic] by the Australians. They strafed the soul out of them. Killed everybody in their front line trenches that they did not want to take prisoners”.<sup>95</sup> Mills’ descriptions of combat between May and August 1916 were marked by the notable anonymity of those killing and those wounded. Such anonymity allowed him to source feelings of pride and entertainment, as well as a blanket of emotional security for Effie who would be concerned for her husband if he was in combat, from the actions while identifying with the assailants because of their shared national identity.

Mills’ attitude towards combat changed in August 1916 when his unit moved into position prior to their involvement in the Battle of Pozières and after an assault on a German trench on 1 August, changing from anticipation to apprehension and disgust. In the final letter Mills would write to his wife he recorded feelings of disgust that contradicted those idealistic notions of combat as desirable: “[w]ell old Dear, we know what war can be now. It is something more awful than any of us imagined”.<sup>96</sup> Exposure to the scale of slaughter present on the Somme altered Mills’ perception of warfare, marking a transition to Bourke’s “after” component of the experience of combat in

<sup>91</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 03 April 1916.

<sup>92</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 03 April 1916.

<sup>94</sup> Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p. 85.

<sup>95</sup> Cecil Mills, Letter to Effie Mills, 06 July 1916.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 02 August 1916.

which soldiers experience a “separation from the self during battle”.<sup>97</sup> Exposure to the combat at the Somme instigated a feeling of fear, much like that expressed in his letter written 30 October 1915 in the case of his death, which he turned to letter writing to convey. The expression of this feeling of fear was sanitized for Effie’s sake, a common factor in men’s correspondence.<sup>98</sup> The explicit description of the scenes he witnessed and the strains he endured are not detailed. Rather, he merely expressed his feeling and passed over those details that would creep into the mind of his wife like so many throughout the war. It was not unusual for soldiers to shield the addressees of their correspondence, particularly women, from the brutality of the Western Front, one definitive point suggesting the development of a mental chasm between home and front.

### Conclusion

Kipling’s distinction between soldiers who were married and those who were bachelors was justified when consideration is given to the complexity of their personal lives that may have impacted their ability as soldiers. However, Mills and Shaw were two soldiers whose stories were devoid of malingering and shirking that Kipling attributes to men in their circumstances. Both moved through the routines and demands of wartime armies, offering themselves for service voluntarily while seeking to sustain their relationships with their wives while abroad. Both Shaw and Mills were killed in action during the Battle of the Somme. Shaw was killed on 15 September during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, and Mills was killed in action on 4 August during the Battle of Pozzières. No records exist of the details of Shaw’s death beyond a snippet from a private memorial book claiming he was “fighting very bravely and gallantly leading his men before he was killed”.<sup>99</sup> For Mills, the months following his death were a continuous struggle on his wife’s part to determine the details of her husband’s death which were summarized abruptly: “As above soldier is reported is killed in action, it would appear he died instantly”.<sup>100</sup> Their deaths represented the greatest clash between the demands of the war and the needs and wants of their families with the former consuming their lives.

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<sup>97</sup> Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 220.

<sup>98</sup> Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 21.

<sup>99</sup> Unknown, *The Stock Exchange Memorial of Those Who Fell in The Great War 1914–1918* (East Sussex, 2001).

<sup>100</sup> Unknown, Letter to Sara Effie Mills, 03 October 1916.