



Commonwealth Members of Parliament who have served in war

Over the years, many Commonwealth MPs have served their country in times of war. This Parliamentary Library paper refers to some of them, noting where they served, what they endured, and the acknowledgment they received for their service.

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Abbreviations

Honours, orders and decorations

AFC	Air Force Cross
CB	Companion of the Order of the Bath
CMG	Companion of Order of St Michael and St George
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DSC	Distinguished Service Cross
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
KB	Knight Bachelor
KCB	Knight Commander, The Most Honourable Order of the Bath
KCMG	Knight Commander, The Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George
MBE	Member of the Order of the British Empire
MC	Military Cross
MM	Military Medal
OBE	Officer of the Order of British Empire
VC	Victoria Cross

Parties

ALP	Australian Labor Party
CDP	Christian Democratic Party
CP	Australian Country Party
FSU	Farmers and Settlers Union
FT	Free Trade
LCL	Liberal Country League
LIB	Liberal Party of Australia
NAT	Nationalist Party
NPA	National Party of Australia
PROT	Protectionist Party
UAP	United Australia Party

Serving their country

Word has been received that Corporal W. J. Johnson, ex-MP for Robertson in the Federal Parliament, had been killed in action in France. He was 50 years of age, and leaves a widow, the daughter of Mr William Burrell, of Curra Creek, a married son, and a daughter 14 years of age ... the announcement that he had been killed in action came as a shock to his relations. The dead soldier spent the greater part of his life in the Orange district, and was a man of strong character. When he defeated Mr Henry Willis for Robertson he traversed the electorate on a push bicycle.¹

It is a noteworthy aspect of the history of the Commonwealth Parliament that many of its members served in times of war. William Johnson (MHR, Robertson, 1910–13; ALP) was one of the oldest former Commonwealth MPs to volunteer, in August 1915, at an age (48) when he might have chosen to help the war effort at home. Johnson died of wounds at Etaples, France on 30 July 1916, having previously been wounded at Pozieres.

The respect earned by men and women who have seen war service, and the regard in which they are held, was demonstrated less than a year after Johnson's death, when the first returned servicemen from World War I were elected to the Commonwealth Parliament. John Lister (MHR, Corio, 1917-29; NAT) served at Gallipoli with the 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance before falling ill and being repatriated. Hattil Foll (Senator, Qld, 1917-47; NAT/UAP) served at Gallipoli with the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade and was invalided home in September 1915.

Some men with service in colonial wars had entered Parliament before the outbreak of World War I, and more with World War I service followed. Not long after World War II, men who had served in that war also were elected. Veterans of subsequent conflicts, including the Malayan Emergency, Korean War and Vietnam War, have been elected. Many have risen to Cabinet positions. While not able to name them all in this Research Brief, we honour the service and sacrifice of all MPs who served in times of war (Chart 1).

Many served

Of those Commonwealth MPs who were elected before 1970, a remarkably high percentage experienced war service—some before entering Parliament, some while they were members, and some after they had left the Parliament (see Chart 1). Although the total number is uncertain,² at least 265 (30.2 per cent) of the total membership of the Parliament between 1901 and 1970 gave war service at some stage of their lives. Of the total membership since Federation, at least 286 (19 per cent) did so. Since 1970, twenty-one, or 3.4 per cent of the total membership, have done so.

With thirty-four of the fifty new Coalition members elected in the enlarged Parliament in 1949 having served in the recent war,³ it is not surprising that the number of MPs in Parliament with war service reached a peak between 1955 and 1969. Over half the Parliament during these years had served in some way (Chart 1). In fact, in the early 1960s there were

still two Boer War (1899–1902) veterans in the Parliament—Donald Cameron (Senator, Vic, 1938–62; ALP) and George Lawson (MHR, Brisbane, 1931–61; ALP).

As might be expected, the background and war experience of MPs who served varied greatly:

- Harold ('Pompey') Elliott (Senator, Vic, 1919–31; NAT) served in the Boer War and World War I. He landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, and commanded the 15th Brigade on the Western Front. Awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and mentioned in despatches in the Boer War, in World War I he received the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), was appointed a Companion of the Order of Bath (CB) and Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG), mentioned in despatches seven times, and honoured with the Russian Order of St Anne and French Croix de Guerre;
- Charles Lamp (Senator, Tas, 1938–50; ALP) was a sapper in the 9th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers on the Western Front in World War I;
- Charles Davidson (MHR, Capricornia, 1946–9, Dawson, 1949–63; LIB), served in the 31st Battalion on the Western Front in World War I, and in World War II commanded the 42nd Battalion in New Guinea, for which he was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and was twice mentioned in despatches;
- Ewen MacKinnon (MHR, Wannon, 1949–51, Corangamite, 1953–66; LIB) served in the militia and then in World War II, was an officer in the 2/31st Battalion, fighting in Syria and New Guinea, including on the Kokoda Track;
- Lance Barnard (MHR, Bass, 1954–75; ALP) was in the 2/8th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, and was wounded at El Alamein in 1942;
- Nigel Bowen (MHR, Parramatta, 1964–73; LIB) served with the Army's 43rd Landing Craft Company in New Guinea;
- Fred Osborne (MHR, Evans, 1949–61; LIB) was a RAN Volunteer Reserve officer attached to the Royal Navy, awarded a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for anti-submarine operations off Norway in 1940, and a bar to the DSC for command of HMS *Vanquisher*;
- Jim Killen (MHR, Moreton, 1955–83; LIB) enlisted in the RAAF in World War II and trained as an air gunner, but the war ended before he could see active service; and
- Kevin Newman (MHR, Bass, 1975–84; LIB) was an officer in 2RAR/NZ (Anzac) Battalion in Vietnam during 1967–68.

Others, including a Prime Minister, have served in the forces of other nations, before either moving back to Australia or emigrating here. Examples include:

- Australian-born Al Grassby (MHR, Riverina, 1969–74; ALP) was living in England at the start of World War II, and lost his father during an air raid, before joining the British Army; and
- British-born Peter Nugent (MHR, Aston, 1990–2001; LIB) served in the Royal Air Force (RAF) for 24 years, including active service in the Malayan Emergency in 1957.

The youngest

As far as can be ascertained, the youngest future MP to serve in war was James Page (MHR, Maranoa, 1901–21; FT/ALP). Page joined the Royal Artillery as a gunner boy at the age of 16, serving in the Zulu War of 1879.

The oldest

The oldest former MP to lose his life in war was Arnold Wienholt (MHR, Moreton, 1919–22; NAT/CP). He was a veteran of the Boer War, serving with the 4th Queensland Imperial Bushmen, and World War I, serving with the British Army in East Africa, where he was awarded the DSO and Military Cross (MC) and bar. In the 1930s, he travelled to Ethiopia as a war correspondent reporting on the Italian invasion, and this led him in World War II to volunteer again, at the age of 62, for British special operations in Ethiopia. He was presumed killed in action as a guerrilla officer in August 1940. Wienholt and William Johnson (p. 5) were the only Commonwealth MPs to have lost their lives in wartime action.

The honour of oldest MP in uniform during wartime possibly belongs to James O’Loughlin (Senator, SA, 1907, 1913–20, 1923–25; ALP). After long militia service, in August 1915, aged 62, he embarked as Officer Commanding Troops on a ship carrying reinforcements to Egypt, and went on to England. After returning four months later, O’Loughlin took troops overseas at least three more times, landing back home for the last time in March 1917, having turned 64.

Prime Ministers

Several Prime Ministers (PM) are among those MPs who served.

The war record of Stanley Bruce (MHR, Flinders, 1918–29, 1931–3; NAT/UAP; PM 1923–9) is a reminder that many Australians joined up in the United Kingdom during the two world wars. Bruce was commissioned in the Worcestershire Regiment and was seconded to the Royal Fusiliers. He fought, and was wounded, in the Gallipoli campaign.

Earle Page (MHR, Cowper 1919–61; FSU/CP; PM 1939) served in the Australian Army Medical Corps as a doctor in hospitals in Egypt and England, then five months with the 3rd Casualty Clearing Station in France in 1916–17, before securing his early discharge.

Early in World War II, upon losing his place in the Menzies Government, Harold Holt (MHR, Fawkner 1935–49, Higgins 1949–67; UAP/LIB; PM 1966-7) decided to volunteer,

enlisting on 22 May 1940, and was soon preparing for overseas deployment as a gunner with the 2/4th Field Regiment. On 13 August three ministers were killed in an air crash at Canberra, following which Prime Minister Menzies asked Holt if he would return to government. Holt agreed and his war service ended.

John McEwen (MHR, Echuca, 1934–7, Indi, 1937–49, Murray, 1949–71; CP/LCL; PM 1967–8) enlisted in August 1918, but World War I ended before he could serve overseas.

John Gorton (Senator, Vic, 1949–68; MHR, Higgins, 1968–75; LIB; PM 1968–71) was a RAAF fighter pilot during World War II. Posted to a British squadron (135 Squadron, RAF), on 21 January 1942 he participated in a dogfight against Japanese fighters over the Strait of Johore, but while landing, his Hurricane tipped over and crashed onto its back. Gorton's face smashed against the gunsight, breaking his nose and two cheek bones, and wounding both arms. Evacuated on one of the last ships out of Singapore, he survived its sinking and was rescued. He later flew Kittyhawks with 77 Squadron at Darwin and in New Guinea, before becoming an instructor in fighter tactics.

William McMahon (MHR, Lowe, 1949–82; LIB; PM 1971–2) was called up in 1940 and served in a militia infantry battalion and a machine-gun training battalion, before becoming a staff officer on the HQs of Eastern Command and the Second Australian Army. He volunteered to serve overseas but was medically downgraded, and he resigned his commission in late 1943.

Gough Whitlam (MHR, Werriwa, 1952–78; ALP) served in the militia before joining the RAAF. He trained as a navigator and was posted to 13 Squadron, flying Ventura bombers. After anti-submarine patrols off the New South Wales coast, during 1944–45 he flew on patrols and bombing missions from bases in the Northern Territory, Morotai in the Netherlands East Indies (modern Indonesia) and the Philippines.

Where they served

The Parliamentary Library is aware of at least 14 MPs who served in colonial wars before Federation. Cyril Cameron (Senator, Tas, 1901–03, 1907–13; PROT), a veteran of the famous march to Kandahar in the Afghan War of 1880, also served in the Boer War, before participating in the Anzac landing in 1915.

At least 123 MPs served in World War I—approximately one-third of the 1946–49 Parliament were World War I veterans. They served at Gallipoli, on the Western Front and in the Middle East. Some served in the British forces. John Dedman (MHR, Corio, 1940–49; ALP), for example, enlisted in the British Army, served at Gallipoli and France, then transferred to the Indian Army, with which he served on the North-West Frontier and in Iraq.

At least 169 MPs served in World War II. Their service was varied—including the battlegrounds of North Africa, Greece, Malaya, New Guinea and Borneo; the skies over Europe, the Middle East, Darwin, Asia and the Pacific; in naval battles and convoy escorts in

the Mediterranean and the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans; headquarters, base duties and training in Australia and elsewhere; and as prisoners of war.

At least two MPs served in Korea, at least two in the Malayan Emergency, and at least six in Vietnam, including former National Party leader Tim Fischer (MHR, Farrer, 1984–2001; NPA), a National Serviceman who graduated from the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, and served as a platoon commander and transport officer with the 1st Battalion during 1968-69. The only Vietnam veteran currently in Parliament is Graham Edwards (MHR, Cowan, since 1998; ALP), also a 'Nasho', who served in the assault pioneer platoon of the 7th Battalion, RAR, in 1970 until badly wounded in a landmine explosion. Andrew Murray (Senator, WA, since 1996; AD) knew 'the smell and look of death' serving in the Rhodesian Air Force during the civil war of the 1970s.⁴

At least 30 MPs participated in more than one conflict. One such was John Gellibrand (MHR, Denison, 1925–8; NAT) who participated in the relief of Ladysmith in the Boer War (1900), went ashore at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, and later commanded the 6th Brigade and the 3rd Division in France where he was a distinctive figure, usually wearing an old 'Aussie' tunic topped by a soft felt hat, and 'living as simply as his men'. 'Gelly' was wounded on several occasions.⁵

Why they served

The historian Bill Gammage has made the point that men (and women) had 'a thousand personal and particular reasons for enlistment'.⁶ This certainly applies to the men being discussed in this paper. (While many women have served in uniform in wartime, especially during World War II, the Parliamentary Library is not aware of any female Commonwealth MPs who have served in war. Some have served in peacetime forces or performed voluntary civilian 'war work'.)

According to Stanley Bruce's biographer, the future Prime Minister believed that it was 'an unquestioned duty' that he should give military service for his country, a view with which most of these men would have agreed.⁷ Prime Minister Hughes spoke of William Johnson's (p. 5) death as 'a fitting end to a life passed in devotion to what he conceived to be his public duty'.⁸ Many Australians spoke of their duty to serve, and during World Wars I and II this was linked very much to the British connection that was central to their thinking. Granville Ryrie (MHR, North Sydney, 1911–22, Warringah 1922–7; LIB/NAT) expressed a view that most Australians once took for granted:

... if the Empire is at war—I do not care what the cause of the quarrel may be or who created it—we, as an integral part of the British Empire, are at war and must take our own part in it.⁹

The few who were already MPs when war broke out seem to have felt a pressure from the wider society that was unique to them, and their circumstances, although the advanced age of many politicians limited the number who could seriously consider enlisting. Others had

personal reasons or religious and political beliefs preventing them from enlisting. That this could be a hard decision, and one that took courage, was later acknowledged by one MP who did not serve:

I was too young for World War II, too old for Vietnam and too scared for Korea.¹⁰

Granville Ryrie (pp. 9, 11, 18) was a militia officer as well as an MP when Australia went to war in 1914. On 4 August of that year he wrote to his wife saying that, ‘after thinking for 11 hours’, he felt he had to volunteer. Confessing that he was ‘worried to death about it’, and ‘would do almost anything’ to avoid leaving her and their children, he pinpointed the basis for his decision:

... I couldn’t look men in the face again, especially some of my political opponents whom I have accused of disloyalty, if I didn’t offer to go. I simply cannot hold back.¹¹

Early in World War II, Harold Holt (pp. 7–8) felt similarly:

The Government has made a call to the young men of Australia to serve with its overseas forces. As the youngest member of the House, I could not feel happy in my position if I were not prepared to make some sacrifice and take an active part.¹²

When the recently-returned Adair Blain (MHR, Northern Territory, 1934–49; IND) addressed the House of Representatives on 26 September 1945, he stated his confidence that:

... I can go back to my electorate and tell the people that I did not ask them to do what I was not prepared to do myself.¹³

Tom Uren (MHR, Reid, 1958–90; ALP) put it a little differently:

I wasn’t full of patriotism, but I wanted to be able to say at the end of the war that I was a returned soldier.¹⁴

In addition, some men had no choice but to serve. Those who did not volunteer for service in World War II were liable to be called up, while during the Vietnam War some were called up for National Service. While their reasons and motivations for service may have been different, they nonetheless answered the call.

Choosing not to leave Parliament

Some Commonwealth MPs retained their seats while performing their war service; various state MPs did the same. At least ten Commonwealth MPs—with an average age of 43—served in the AIF during World War I.

- Percy Abbott (MHR, New England, 1913–19; LIB/NAT) raised the 12th Light Horse Regiment, commanded the 10th Light Horse at Gallipoli, and after serving in France went

back to the 12th in the Middle East, and was awarded a CMG and mentioned in despatches;

- Reginald Burchell (MHR, Fremantle, 1913–22; ALP/NAT) served with the 4th Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company in France;
- William Fleming (MHR, Robertson, 1913–22; LIB/NAT/CP) was on the staff of the Australian Army Service Corps Training Depot in England, and on one occasion took reinforcements across to France;
- David McGrath (MHR, Ballaarat, 1913–19, 1920–34; ALP/UAP) served with the 1st Divisional Train, Australian Army Service Corps, in France, until repatriated in early 1918;
- Edward Heitmann (MHR, Kalgoorlie, 1917–19; NAT) sailed for England in August 1918, arriving too late to see action;
- James O’Loughlin (p. 5) served as Officer Commanding Troops on voyages to Egypt and England;
- Alfred Ozanne (MHR, Corio, 1910–13, 1914–17; ALP) served with the 3rd Divisional Train, Australian Army Service Corps, in 1916-17;
- Granville Ryrie (pp. 9, 10, 18) commanded the 2nd Light Horse Brigade at Gallipoli and in the Sinai and Palestine campaigns. He was awarded a CMG and CB and later knighted (KCMG), mentioned in despatches five times, and awarded Egypt’s Order of the Nile;
- Cornelius Wallace (MHR, West Sydney, 1917–19; ALP) enlisted in September 1918, but the war ended before he could embark for service overseas; and
- George Yates (MHR, Adelaide, 1914–19, 1922–31; ALP) was a gunner in the 13th Field Artillery Brigade on the Western Front during 1918, but fell ill and was evacuated before the war’s end.¹⁵

Of these, Abbott and Ryrie had previous war service (Boer War) and militia service, while Burchell, O’Loughlin, Ozanne and Yates stated on their enlistment forms that they had militia experience.

During World War II, several more serving MPs decided to enlist:

- Adair Blain (pp. 10, 13, 18) served with the 2/12th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, in Malaya. He was captured at Singapore, enduring captivity there and in Borneo, and finally was released in September 1945;
- Thomas White (MHR, Balaclava, 1929–51; NAT/UAP/LIB), a veteran of World War I, joined the RAAF. He commanded a flying school and then in England filled senior

administrative and training posts, and surreptitiously flew on several sorties as a second-pilot, before his discharge in 1944;

- Harold Holt (pp. 7–8) enlisted in May 1940, but was soon recalled to office;
- Keith Wilson (Senator, SA, 1938–44; MHR, Sturt, 1949–54; UAP/LIB/LCL) was a ‘Rat of Tobruk’, serving with the 2/7th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, in North Africa and in Borneo; and
- William Hutchinson (MHR, Indi, 1931–37, Deakin, 1937–49; UAP/LIB) served in his home area with the 16th Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corps.

These men retained their seats while serving, though Wilson’s electoral defeat brought his Senate career to an end in 1944.

Abbott, Ryrie and Yates in 1917, and Blain in 1943, were re-elected unopposed in the elections of those years, though not all Australians believed that such men should retain their seats while in uniform. Yates and Blain both referred to criticism that was levelled at them while they were absent,¹⁶ while Yates was accused by a fellow MP of having made ‘political capital’ out of his enlistment.¹⁷

Prisoners of War

Some MPs were captured and became prisoners of war.

In 1900 Cyril Cameron (pp. 8, 18) was held captive by the Boers for some time, before escaping to freedom.

In 1915, Thomas White (p. 11), who was one of the first pilots of the Australian Flying Corps, was captured in Mesopotamia and taken to Turkey. He escaped to Russia in 1918, and in England met his future wife, Vera Deakin, daughter of former Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, and founder of the Australian Red Cross’s Wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau. White was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and twice mentioned in despatches. He published an account of his remarkable war service, *Guests of the Unspeakable* (1932).

Several of those who served in South-East Asia during World War II suffered incarceration by the Japanese. The majority were captured at Singapore, starting captivity at the infamous Changi prison, and in many cases prisoners were shipped to places of far worse horror, such as the Burma-Thailand Railway:

It is terrible to see someone dying with cholera, particularly a comrade.¹⁸

The words of Tom Uren (p. 10) remind us that many experienced great hardship in their time of trial. Uren was a gunner in the 2/1st Heavy Battery, Royal Australian Artillery, captured in

Timor and moved in 'hell ships' to Java, Singapore, the Burma-Thailand Railway, and finally Japan.

Others sent to the railway included Charles Anderson VC (MHR, Hume, 1949–51, 1955–61; CP) of the 2/19th Battalion, George Branson (Senator, WA 1958–71; LIB) of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, and Reginald Swartz (MHR, Darling Downs, 1949–72; LIB) of the 2/26th Battalion. Swartz's leadership and care of his men in captivity resulted in his appointment as Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE).

Alexander Downer (MHR, Angas, 1949–64; LIB), a staff officer with HQ 8th Division, was incarcerated at Changi for the duration of the war. After a period at Changi, Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes (MHR, Chisholm, 1949–70; LIB) was shipped to Taiwan and later Manchuria with the Senior Officers' Group. He was awarded an OBE and mentioned in despatches for his 'inspiration' to other prisoners. He secretly wrote a series of poems that were later published as *Slaves of the Samurai* (c1946):

No civil convict in a concrete cell
Endures a fraction of the human hell,
To which the captured soldier is condemned
For months and years, which seem to have no end.¹⁹

The emotion expressed in Kent Hughes's words is a reminder of the impact of captivity on the many who suffered it.

Others were POWs in Europe, where they suffered up to four years of confinement and often long forced marches ahead of advancing Allied forces in the winter of 1944–45. Justin O'Byrne (Senator, Tas, 1947–81; ALP), a Spitfire fighter pilot in 452 Squadron, RAAF, was shot down over France in 1941 and endured captivity as a POW in Germany until May 1945.

The personal impact of war

The ex-POW Adair Blain (pp. 10, 11, 18), who experienced Changi, Sandakan, Kuching and Outram Road prisons, gave a hint of the psychological impact of his incarceration when addressing the Parliament on his return:

My mind is still very much in splints ... but this welcome has already had the effect of loosening the bandages.²⁰

For many ex-servicemen, memories of war were bitter, though the impact on individuals could be very different. Downer (see above), for example, in referring to his former captors, warned his fellow MPs of the need for vigilance against a nation he called a 'gifted, but semi-civilised, people'.²¹ By contrast, shortly after William Gibbs (Senator, NSW, 1925; ALP) returned home from the war in early 1916 after falling seriously ill at Gallipoli, he became active in the formation of the Returned Soldiers' No Conscription League.

Many endured illness and injury caused by war service. Roland Green (MHR, Richmond, 1922–37; CP) served in the 6th Battalion until losing a leg at Menin Road, Belgium, in September 1917. John Gorton's 'craggy face' was a legacy of the plane crash at Singapore in January 1942 (p. 8). Graham Edwards lost his legs in the landmine explosion in Vietnam in May 1970 (pp. 9, 19, 20).

There are also the mental scars of war. A particularly sad case was 'Pompey' Elliott (p. 6), whose suicide in 1931 at the age of 52 is considered to be partly attributable to his war service.²²

For valour

The act of volunteering is itself a courageous act, for it cannot be predicted just where it will lead, and what its consequences will be. This applies to all who have answered their country's call, but the valour of some has been sufficient to earn a tangible recognition by the awarding of a medal.

Victoria Cross

On 24 July 1900 at Vredefort during the Boer War, Neville Howse (MHR, CP, Calare, 1922–29; NAT) 'went out under a heavy crossfire and picked up a wounded man and carried him back to a place of shelter'. Howse's action earned him a Victoria Cross (VC). His heroism later was seen at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915, when he took personal charge of the evacuation of wounded men,

... giving and disregarding orders in a manner quite shocking but strangely productive of results. Shells and bullets he completely disregarded ... To the wounded he was gentleness itself.²³

Charles Anderson (p. 12), who was awarded the MC while serving with the British Army in East Africa during World War I, received the VC for his leadership of a force cut off by the Japanese in Malaya in January 1942. He was commanding the 2/19th Battalion, and with all other brigade and battalion commanders killed or wounded, took charge. Much courage and determination was shown by the Australians and Indians under his command as they endeavoured to fight their way out—during one attack, led by Anderson, his troops are reputed to have sung 'Waltzing Matilda'.²⁴ Barely a quarter of his men survived the four-day fighting withdrawal and break-out from the surrounded village of Parit Sulong.

Other awards

Many other wartime awards have been given to men who have been parliamentarians at some time in their lives, and some of those are noted here. Other than those honoured with the VC, the most highly decorated were two generals who became politicians, Gellibrand (p. 9) and Thomas Glasgow (Senator, Qld, 1920–32; NAT).

Gellibrand served in the Boer War, and was a senior staff officer at Gallipoli, before serving on the Western Front in command of the 6th and 12th Brigades and finally the 3rd Division. He was awarded a DSO and bar, made a CB and knighted (KCB), mentioned in despatches seven times, and received the French Legion of Honour and Croix de Guerre and the US Distinguished Service Medal. The war historian C. E. W. Bean said of Gellibrand that he was 'one of those officers whose bravery was conspicuous'.²⁵

Glasgow served in the Boer War and was awarded the DSO and mentioned in despatches. In World War I, he commanded the 2nd Light Horse Regiment at Gallipoli and then on the Western Front the 15th Brigade and lastly the 1st Division. He was awarded a CMG and CB and knighted (KB), mentioned in despatches eight times, and awarded the French Legion of Honour and Croix de Guerre (twice).

For his actions at Suvla Bay in 1915, Stanley Bruce (p. 7) was awarded the MC. He later was awarded the French Croix de Guerre avec palme, with the following commendation:

... les officiers ... qui se sont distingués, soit par leur bravoure, soit par des faits d'ordre militaire, ayant valu une mention personnelle ... ('Officers who were outstanding either because of their courage or who had shown military initiative which would have earned them a citation').²⁶

Geoffrey Street (MHR, Corangamite, 1934–40; UAP), 1st Battalion, was wounded in the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, but was back on the peninsula in time for Lone Pine; he later served on the Western Front, and was awarded the MC for actions in 1917.

Richard Casey (MHR, Corio, 1931–40, La Trobe, 1949–60; UAP/LIB) served at Gallipoli and was a staff officer in the 8th Brigade on the Western Front, where he was awarded the MC and then the DSO, and twice mentioned in despatches.

Ted Mattner (Senator, SA, 1944–6, 1950–68; LIB) served on the Western Front as a gunner in the 6th Field Artillery Brigade. His bravery on occasions when his battery came under fire gained him the Military Medal (MM) at Ploegsteert in March 1916, the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) at Hooge in June 1917, and the MC at Zillebeke in October 1917.²⁷

Also at Hooge was William Spooner (Senator, NSW, 1950–65; LIB), a stretcher-bearer of the 5th Field Ambulance who dashed into no man's land under heavy fire to attend to a badly wounded man, earning him the MM.

In World War II, Henry 'Jo' Gullett (MHR, Henty, 1946–55; LIB), a 'Thirty-Niner' (as those who enlisted in 1939 were called), served in the 2/6th Battalion and fought in Australia's first battle of the war (his part in the action was depicted in Ivor Hele's famous painting, *2/6th Battalion attack on Post 11 at Bardia*), as well as in Greece and New Guinea, where he was awarded the MC for actions in the battle of Wau. He was then sent to the UK, and on D-Day (6 June 1944) landed at Normandy with the Royal Scots. He published a stirring account of his war service, *Not as a Duty Only* (1976). 'Jo' Gullett's father, Sir Henry Gullett (MHR,

Henty, 1925–40; NAT/UAP) was the Minister for Information and had served in World War I as a war correspondent, soldier and member of C. E. W. Bean's official history team.

Many airmen who trained under the Empire Air Training Scheme were posted overseas to serve with the Royal Air Force. Thomas Drake-Brockman (Senator, WA 1958, 1959-78; CP/NCP) flew bombers over North Africa before going to Bomber Command in England, and was awarded the DFC flying Lancasters of the famous 460 Squadron, RAAF, over Germany and France. Charles Falkinder (MHR, Franklin, 1946–66; LIB) was a Mosquito pilot of 109 (Pathfinder) Squadron, RAF, marking targets for the heavy bombers by dropping flares, for which he was awarded the DSO, DFC and bar. David Fairbairn (MRH, Farrer 1949–75; LIB) was also awarded the DFC as a pilot in 4 Squadron, RAF. The Spitfires and Mosquitoes of 4 Squadron flew photo-reconnaissance sorties over the target areas.

David Hamer (MHR, Isaacs, 1969–74, 1975–77; Senator, Vic, 1978–90; LIB) was a gunnery officer on ships in the Mediterranean Sea and in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. He was awarded the DSC for bravery when HMAS *Australia* came under sustained attack from Japanese kamikaze dive-bombers in Filipino waters in early 1945.²⁸

Another decorated in the final campaigns of World War II was Adam Armstrong (MHR, Riverina, 1965–69; CP) who was awarded the MC with the 19th Battalion and mentioned in despatches with HQ 11th Division while serving in New Britain.

David Thomson (MHR, Leichhardt, 1975–83; NCP) graduated from Duntroon at the end of World War II and was in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan before the Korean War, in which he was awarded the MC with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR).

Peter White (MHR, McPherson 1981–90; LIB), another graduate of Duntroon, served in the Malayan Emergency and then in the Vietnam War, being awarded the MC while serving with the 2nd Battalion, RAR.

Some awards were given to men who had not been directly involved in battle, yet who had given immeasurably to the cause. Such a one was Reginald Burchell (p. 10) of the 4th Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company, awarded the MC for his actions in March 1918:

For unceasing devotion to duty in controlling the railway operations involved in the evacuation of wounded, troops and rolling stock from the Etricourt–Roisel–Chaulnes sections. He was continuously on duty for three days and nights [5/3–7/3 1918?] and his care and watchfulness in handling the traffic with limited facilities rendered possible a successful evacuation, and saved engines and rolling stock from falling into the enemy's hands.²⁹

A few performed 'special duties'. Frederick Chaney sen. (MHR, Perth 1955–69; LIB) was awarded the Air Force Cross (AFC) for his command of 16 (Air Observation Post) Flight, RAAF, in Borneo in 1945, supporting 'Z' Special Unit by flying and landing behind enemy lines in his small Auster aircraft.

In sight of home

The service dossiers of two World War I serving politicians show how the exertions and length of service could lead some soldiers to become agitators – or at least to practise their political skills. In one instance, it was due to a breakdown of health and discipline, and in another it was while railing against delays in getting home.

Warrant Officer David McGrath (p. 11), who appears to have suffered some form of breakdown while serving in England, returned home on the *Llanstephen Castle* in February 1918. The OC Troops reported that he was one of the ‘disturbing elements’ on board, being ‘a nuisance wherever he was, and having no idea of discipline and soldierly bearing’. Quite what this involved is not recorded in his dossier, but allowance was given for poor health. After a rest, McGrath reported that he was ‘keeping very well and improving in health’, and returned to parliamentary duties.³⁰ He narrowly retained his seat in 1920, after a contested result against a fellow returned serviceman.

Gunner George Yates (p. 11) was on a troopship that arrived at Adelaide in January 1919. The South Australian troops among them were soon expressing their frustration at the length of time they remained in quarantine within sight of shore, and Yates—himself still an MP—took the lead in meetings called by the troops and, speaking on their behalf, threatened to take possession of some boats to go ashore. Yates was court-martialled, and while his defence argued that he and the others were merely expressing their hard won rights, ‘not as soldiers, but as citizens as well’, Yates was found guilty of ‘conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline’, in that he had encouraged the troops to mutiny.³¹ He was sentenced to 60 days detention. Yates retained his parliamentary seat, for the sentence did not fall foul of section 44 (ii) of the Australian Constitution, which would have seen him stripped of the seat if the imprisonment had been for one year or longer.³²

The response of Parliament

Over the years, some MPs have been fortunate enough to experience directly the appreciation of the Parliament for their service. Senator Cyril Cameron (p. 8) served at the Gallipoli landing, though ill-health forced his evacuation within four months. When visiting the Parliament in Melbourne on his return home, his presence in the gallery was noted by President Givens. The President broke with precedent by proposing that:

...with the concurrence of the Senate, to show him a mark of honour by inviting him to occupy a seat on the floor of the Chamber.³³

Cameron was duly seated on the right of the President. Senators gave Cameron ‘a rousing reception’, cheering him ‘again and again’. Senate officials know of no other such event occurring in the Senate’s history.³⁴ A sign of Cameron’s gratitude for this recognition was the fact that this event was still included in his final *Who’s Who in Australia* entry published in 1941.

Sir John Gellibrand (pp. 9, 19) was widely admired by fellow MPs. On one occasion the House of Representatives was congratulated by an MP for having amongst its members ‘so distinguished a soldier’.³⁵ Alfred Ozanne’s (p. 11) words prior to his embarkation for overseas were greeted rapturously by members of both houses at a dinner in Queen’s Hall in Parliament House, Melbourne:

If they asked him, ‘What did you do as a legislator responsible for Australia’s part in the war? Did you stay in your soft cushioned seat, drawing your salary, and asking others to give up their lives so that you might stay here in safety?’ he wanted to be in a position to say, ‘No; when my country asked me to do my duty I heard the call, and I went.’ (Cheers.)³⁶

Adair Blain (pp. 10, 11, 18) was still in Changi camp hospital when the POWS were liberated in August 1945. In the following month he addressed the House of Representatives, and saw clearly the regard in which he was held by his fellow Members:

Federal members stood and cheered when the member for the Northern Territory took his seat in the House ... Ministers and party leaders grasped him by the hand. His uniform, on which there were a double row of service ribbons, was old and rumpled.³⁷

Deaths of former parliamentarians are routinely referred to in speeches to Parliament, with their war service seen as worthy of note. For example, in a condolences speech in February 2002, Prime Minister Howard referred to Sir Frederick Chaney’s wartime flights over Borneo and his award of the AFC ‘for courage, skill and resourcefulness’, and also of the service of Gordon Freeth (Liberal, Forrest 1949–69) in New Guinea flying Beauforts (with 6 Squadron, RAAF).³⁸

Their impact upon the Parliament

MPs who were servicemen prior to their entry into the Parliament have tended to be very involved in policy debates in relation to such areas as repatriation, conditions for returned servicemen, defence and foreign affairs. For example:

- Cyril Cameron (pp. 8, 12) rarely spoke in the Senate, but when he did it was usually on defence matters, where his views were regarded highly by his colleagues;³⁹
- Returned servicemen Neville Howse VC, Thomas Glasgow, Geoffrey Street, John Dedman, Eric Harrison (MHR, Wentworth, 1931–56; UAP/LIB), Athol Townley (MHR, Denison, 1949–63; LIB), Shane Paltridge (Senator, WA, 1951–66; LIB), John Gorton, David Fairbairn, Lance Barnard and Jim Killen all served as Minister for Defence (and Street died in this capacity, in the aircraft crash outside Canberra on 13 August 1940);
- Other ex-servicemen served periods as Ministers for Air, Army, Navy and Repatriation;
- Granville Ryrie (pp. 9, 10, 11) has been described as an MP who felt ‘an enormous sense of responsibility to veterans’;⁴⁰

- In his First Speech to Parliament, Graham Edwards (pp. 9, 13, 20) warned the Government that it would:

... find it hard to hide the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Minister for Defence from some of the issues relating to veterans that I intend to raise here today and in the future.⁴¹

Apart from the impact of their war service upon their views of national policy, it is clear that ex-servicemen brought a camaraderie to the Parliament. Jim Killen was one Member who believed that the high proportion of ex-servicemen in his first Parliament was an important factor in explaining what he saw as the mateship that crossed party boundaries.⁴²

Their impact upon Australian society

In addition to their parliamentary vigilance in certain policy areas, war service MPs have often occupied themselves in their local communities with valuable work related to their experiences. Many have joined the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) and other ex-service organisations, of course, but other activities have been of great importance, and very varied in nature:

- Herbert Collett (Senator, WA, 1933–47; NAT/UAP) commanded the 28th Battalion at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, then after the war wrote his unit's history and was WA State President of the RSL in 1925-33. While in the Senate he sat on joint committees investigating ex-servicemen's benefits, and was later Deputy Chair of the Ryde District Soldiers' Memorial Hospital;
- Roland Green (p. 13), who lost a leg in World War I, was a founder and first Vice-President of the Limbless and Maimed Soldiers' Association;
- Sir John Gellibrand (pp. 9, 18) formed the Remembrance Club in Hobart in 1923, which was the genesis of Legacy, caring for widow/ers and children of ex-servicemen/women;
- Josiah Francis (MHR, Moreton, 1922–55; NAT/UAP/LIB) served in the 15th Battalion on the Western Front in World War I and later chaired the appeal for the Anzac Memorial Chapel, Duntroon;
- Percy Abbott (p. 10) maintained an active interest in the welfare of returned soldiers in the Glen Innes and Tamworth districts;
- Archibald Allan (MHR, Gwydir, 1953–69; CP) served in the 2/1st Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers during World War II, and later worked with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission;
- Don Devitt (Senator, Tas, 1965–78; ALP) served in both the Army and RAAF during World War II, after which he was active in the Citizen Military Force, or militia, in the early 1950s;

- Frederick Chaney (pp. 16, 18) was the first World War II veteran to head the RSL in his home state of WA; and
- John Bradford (MHR, McPherson, 1990–8; LIB/CDP) was a Vietnam veteran who developed an interest in military history, and became an advocate for retrospective recognition of Australian military endeavour that he believed to have been neglected—such as for Far East prisoners of war.

In conclusion

With the departure of Graham Edwards (pp. 9, 13, 19), the last remaining veteran, from the Commonwealth Parliament at the 2007 election,⁴³ the Parliament may have reached a milestone in its history. When may another veteran of Australian military service sit in one of its chambers?

Further reading

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Endnotes

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3. A. W. Martin, 'Sir Robert Gordon Menzies', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 15, 2000, p. 358.
4. Senator Andrew Murray, Senate, *Debates*, 17 September 2001, p. 27194.
5. C. E. W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France 1916*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1939, pp. 601–2.
6. Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1974 (1985 edn), p. 10.
7. I. M. Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1989, p. 11.
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10. Reputed to have been stated by the Hon. John Wheeldon (Senator, ALP, WA 1965–81).
11. Vincent, op. cit., p. 71.
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13. Aiden Blain, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 Sept 1945, p. 5914.

14. Tom Uren, *Straight Left*, Random House, Sydney, p. 14.
15. Yates was in France when the war ended and was participating in House of Representatives business by mid-1919, though strangely the AIF Nominal Roll records that he was killed in action on 10 December 1918.
16. George Yates, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 August 1917, pp. 960–1; Blain, op. cit.
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24. Lionel Wigmore in collaboration with Bruce Harding, *They Dared Mightily*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2nd ed. 1986, pp. 137–9.
25. A. W. Bazley, 'Sir John Gellibrand', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, 1981, p. 637.
26. Cumpston, op. cit., p. 12.
27. Frank Bongiorno, 'Edward William Mattner', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 15, 2000, p. 332.
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40. Vincent, op. cit., p. 198.
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42. Don Woolford, 'Jim Killen: the feisty, urbane Joker in the old Liberal pack', *Canberra Times*, 13 January 2007.
43. Ben Ruse, 'War veteran MP to retire at next poll', *West Australian*, 26 January 2006.

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Chart 1: Number of Commonwealth MPs with war service

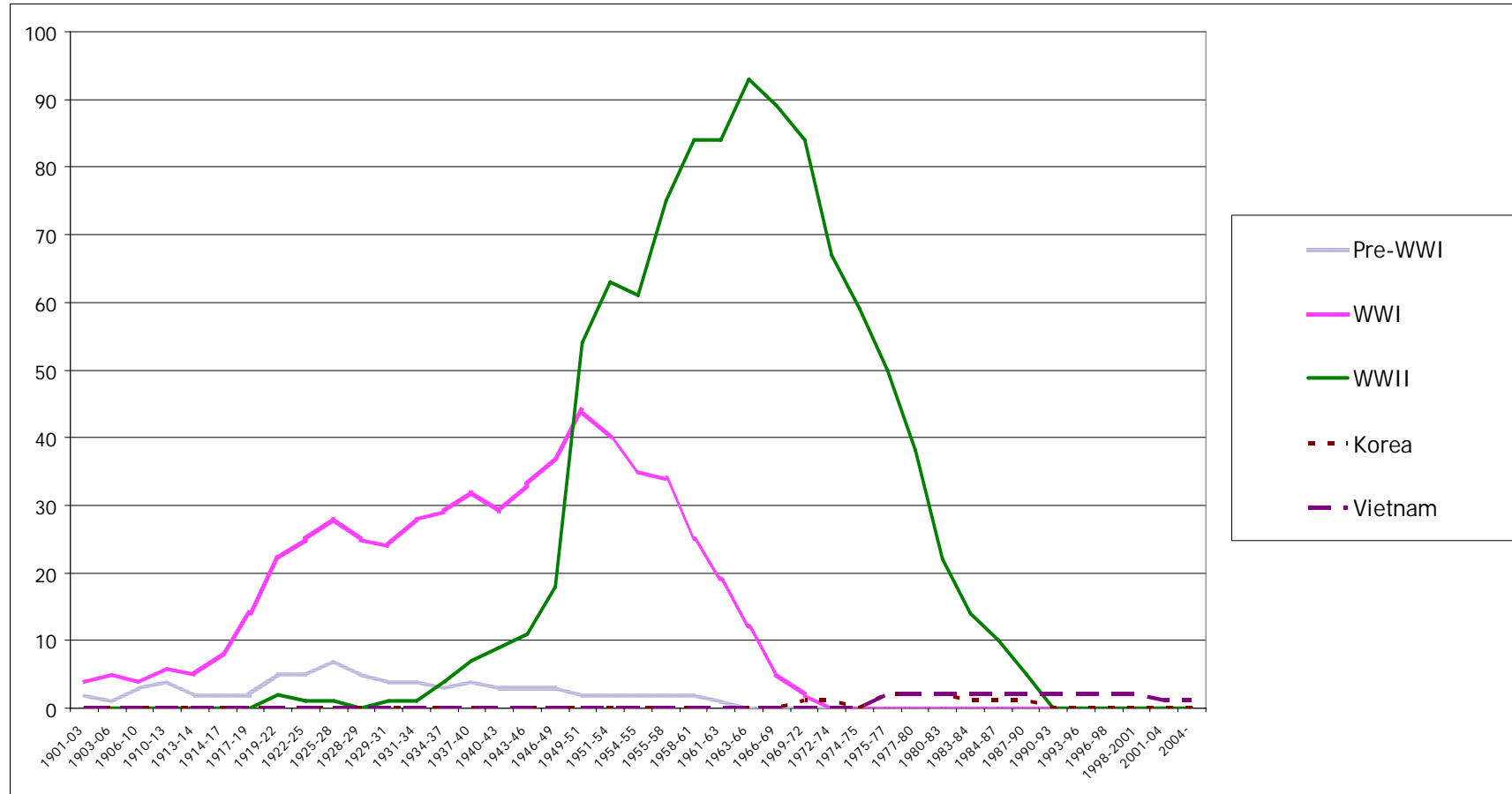


Chart 2: Percentage of Commonwealth MPs with war service

