War Music 1917

Geoff N Masters
1997

I had a good dream last night
And was home again
Everything was so plain
I was going down the street with you
When the guns woke me up.

Ted Mouchemore to his mother
France, 21 March 1918

My grandmother's teenage stitching is doing its work well.

The careful brown wool stitches that have kept the pages of her sheet music from separating for the past eight decades seem ready for at least another eighty years. The pages have yellowed a little with age, but they shout their red and blue message with all the urgency my grandmother saw when she first spotted them in John Watts' Music Store in 1917:

We Must All Fall In
(if we want to win)!

For Auld Lang Syne!
Australia Will Be There!

My grandmother kept her sheet music in the living room of her South Perth house. I remember seeing it when I visited as a boy. It had been collected over a lifetime, but much of it dated from her days as a girl in Albany, Western Australia.

My grandmother's living room was not intended for the living. It was quiet. The curtains filtered the light. It was not a room in which people sat and talked, not even adults, and it certainly was not a room for children. It was a special room with its own secrets.

The room was dominated by a photograph of my grandfather as a young soldier. The photograph stood in the centre of the wall facing the door and was the first thing one saw on entering. I did not remember my grandfather. This was as close as I got to him—when I ventured into my grandmother's hushed sanctuary to peer up at him in the half light, leather strap awkwardly on his chin, pensive expression frozen in time. My grandfather fought on the Western Front in 1917.

my grandfather

On the walls surrounding my soldier grandfather were my grandmother's magnificent landscape paintings. These were landscapes from another world. My grandmother painted them as a teenager in the south coast town of Albany, but there were no majestic waterfalls or wild deer in Albany; these were images from a still more distant place and time.

And, of course, there was her piano. From time to time my grandmother entered the room, placed her sheet music on the piano, and played. When she did, she brought startling energy and life to the room. But the transformation was fleeting, and on her exit

the room returned immediately to its proper hushed state.

I was told that my grandmother once taught piano lessons in this room. She taught her students to play the piano correctly, bolt upright, with a penny on the back of each hand. To my grandmother, there was a correct way for everything, and I was rather relieved not to have been one of her military piano students.

My grandmother's living room was special, there was no doubting that. Her soldier in uniform, framed oil paintings, and neatly stitched piano music were relics from an earlier time. If I had to put a date to that time, I would place it at 1917.

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In 1917 my soldier grandfather was in Europe. He was one of the many Albany boys who eagerly volunteered for service when war broke out. He was older than most of the lads who joined the queues to register, but my grandfather—Ben Mouchemore—was not about to let age keep him from an overseas adventure.

Ben's younger brother Ted was more typical of the boys who joined up. At 20 and the baby of the family, 'Teddy' registered for active service as a foot soldier. After practising with his mates in the Albany forts, Ted travelled to Blackboy Hill camp in the hills outside Perth where, on a parade ground cleared in the Australian bush, he exchanged stories of the war in Europe with the sons of wheat farmers from Merredin and Jerramungup and timber workers from Manjimup and the Shannon River. It was a woefully inadequate preparation for the horrors they would stumble over in the Flanders mud, but here they waited impatiently to be herded on to troop ships that would carry them to Europe.

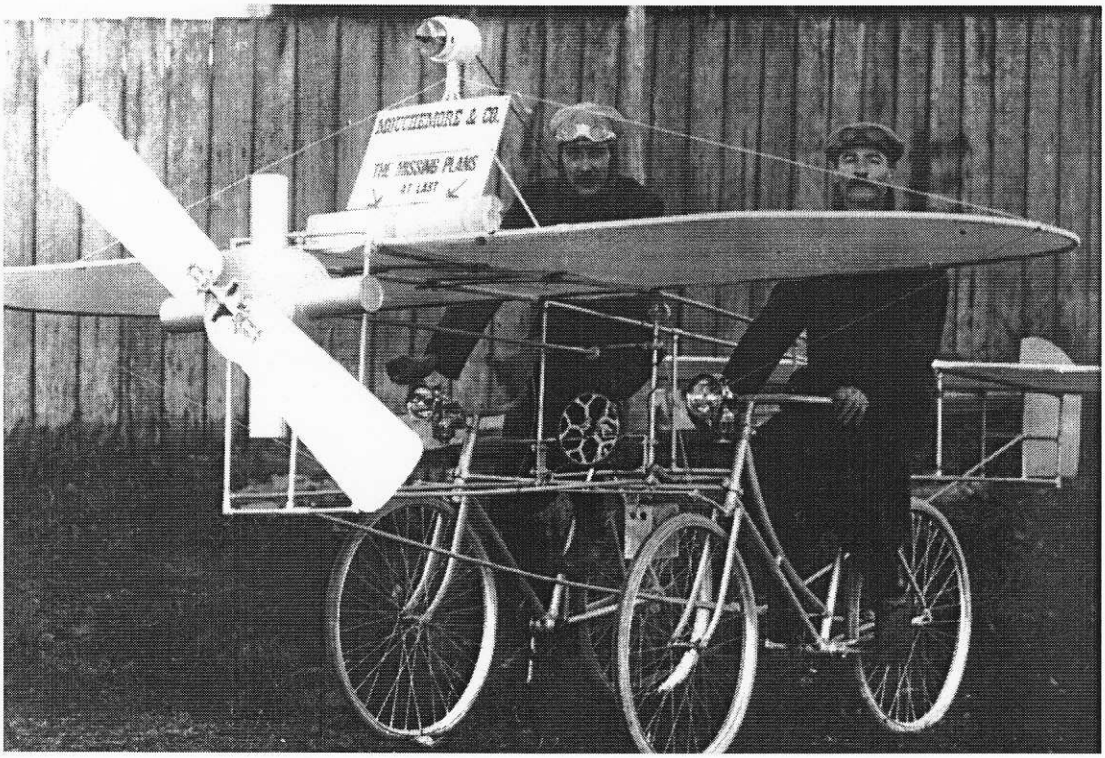
At 34, my grandfather was considered by the younger soldiers to be one of the 'old heads'. He had not had time to marry; he had been much too busy prospecting, mining, speculating, and pursuing his various businesses.

In 1910 he established Mouchemore & Co in York Street: a family business advertising itself as 'wheelwrights, blacksmiths, farriers, cycle builders, electrical engineers, galvanized ironworkers, tinsmiths, coppersmiths, and plumbers'.

In 1913, Mouchemore & Co won Best Tradesmen's Exhibit at the Albany carnival for an 'aeroplane' constructed from odds and ends in the company workshop.[1]

And later, at a time when many in country Western Australia were still pausing to marvel at passing automobiles, my grandfather made cars his specialty. He renamed the family company 'Mouchemore's Garage' and began servicing the growing number of vehicles in the district. He also established a mail run along the south coast and bought shares in local mining ventures.

When war broke out, my grandfather fixed on becoming a driver. He would drive vehicles, perhaps trucks or ambulances, along the roads of Europe. It was an irresistible opportunity for the son of a fisherman: a chance for adventure, for overseas travel, to use his mechanical knowledge, and to do his bit for the war effort without entering a trench. My grandfather went to Melbourne in 1916 to prepare for his role in the war.



prize-winning 'aeroplane' (1913)

In making the trip to Victoria, Ben returned to where he had lived as a boy.

Ben grew up in Queenscliff at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay where his grandfather, father and uncles were fishermen. Ben, his brothers and cousins were apprentice fishermen. They learnt to sail, to make and mend fishing nets, to read the weather and tides, and to catch and clean fish at the entrance to the Bay.

They also took part in lifeboat drills. As children, my grandfather and his cousins heard stories of shipwrecks and lifeboat rescues in the treacherous seas off Queenscliff. Ben's uncle, Dan Mouchemore, had been a local hero for his role in the lifeboat rescue of passengers from the *Gange* when it was wrecked off the town in 1887.

That was before Ben's father, Harry, and mother, Mary Ann, moved to Albany in Western Australia in 1896 and bought a house on the beach only metres from where, 70 years earlier in an effort to pre-empt the French, Edmund Lockyer pushed a flag into the sand and claimed the western half of the continent for England.

They took with them the twin fishing boats *Wild Flower* and *Wild Wave*, the family's savings sewn into the lining of 14-year-old Ben's coat, and began fishing on Princess Royal Harbour.

Harry's skills as a sailor quickly impressed the Albany locals. In February 1898 he entered the *Wild Flower* in a yacht race against the local favourites, and won. The *Albany Advertiser* reported:

> A finer race could not have been seen. On the beat to Michaelmas buoy the three first boats were within speaking distance the whole of the way. H. Mouchemore deserves his win for the skilful way he worked his craft, and on arriving at the jetty he was heartily cheered. The win was a general surprise.

Three years later Harry was in the local newspaper again, this time after abandoning a boat race he had been leading to rescue the crew of a capsized yacht:

> He practically had the race won when he forfeited all chance of the prize by a gallant action. When he reached the unfortunate *Gannet* at least two of the men were in a serious condition.

At a gathering in the town, the Mayor presented Harry with a gold medal. The *Advertiser* described it as a 'weighty one in the form of a fancy cross' and bearing the inscription 'Presented to Henry B Mouchemore for saving life, February 13 1901'.

Ben also raced his father's boats on the harbour. He sailed the *Wild Wave* in the first class division of the Princess Royal Sailing Club Regatta in 1910, 1911, and 1912, coming third on each occasion.

Ben's mother, Mary Ann, had been raised in the Barabool Hills outside Geelong, the daughter of a sea captain who had been commended for the good condition in which he delivered convicts to the Australian colonies, but who had given up the sea to farm in Australia. The claw-shaped tie pin presented to him for his safe delivery of convicts is still in existence.

When Ben arrived in Melbourne in 1916 he set about locating aunts and uncles he had not seen since he left for Albany at the age of 14, twenty years earlier. On 25 November he wrote to Mary Ann from the Royal Park Military Camp in Melbourne, making reference to an injury apparently suffered in training:

> *My Dear Mother*
> *Just a few lines to say how things are going. My nose is almost well again. I had the stitches out this week but I am afraid it will leave a scar. It seemed dead for some time. The doctor said the nerves were bruised by the bang ...*
> *I have not had a chance to go down to Geelong yet for the boats are not running on account of this coal trouble. But I am looking forward to having a look at them all before I leave, which I expect will be about the 7th or 9th of next month. We expect to call in at Fremantle for coal and troops there. 1500 left this camp last week by the Medic.*

On 7 December he wrote again.

> *Well Mother, Melbourne is not at all a nice place to live in - wind, dust and rain one day or the other. It has been blowing a gale today with terrible dust storms but looks like rain again tonight which I prefer to the dust for it affects my eyes very much ...*
> *So Ted was to sail on the end of the month. He will be ahead of me then. Mother, this suspense is killing. We are going through our drill all over again.*

Ben sailed from Melbourne for London on the troopship *Persic* on 22 December 1916. He was listed as a 'driver' with the Third Australian Auxiliary Mechanical Transport Company.

A week later the *Persic* sailed into Fremantle and took on Western Australian troops. Ben watched the uniformed soldiers file on board, but was unaware that his brother Ted was among them. Nor did he know that another brother, Barney, was on the wharf to see the *Persic* sail. Ted later wrote:

> *I could just see Barney, [but] not near enough to speak. I was sorry I could not speak to him. He was quite broken up I could see as we was leaving.*

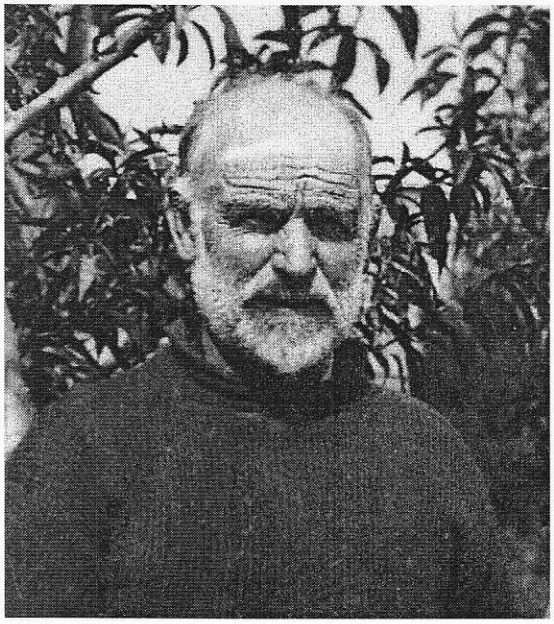
Ben and Ted learned they were both on board somewhere out at sea. Ted explained in a letter to their parents:

I had to put my kit bag down the hole and Ben saw the name and asked what his bag was doing there. It was mine.

He described the games being played on board, and the monotony of the ocean:

It is a very long trip. All I have seen is two or three birds and two flying fish... It has been lively weather so far. We haven't met any tin fish yet. They are no good to us. Old Bill would give his kids a holiday if he got us. It is just 4 o'clock hear now and it's about 9 or 10 at night there. It has just come on to rain.

Harry in the *Wild Flower*



Henry Brooks ('Harry') Mouchemore

Harry was born in Melbourne on 26 December 1856 to Elizabeth Caroline ('Caroline') Mouritz and an otherwise unknown sailor named Henry Brooks.

Harry's great-grandfather, Joseph Mouritz, was a member of the British Army who fought to quell the Irish Rebellion of 1798. But Mouritz deserted the army and joined the rebels. He fought at Vinegar Hill where the rebels were routed. That night, Mouritz and a Father James Quigley spent the night in the river under a bridge as the British soldiers crossed and recrossed looking for them. Mouritz escaped to America and was listed by the British as one of 45 wanted fugitives. Quigley headed for France but was captured at Dover and hanged.

Mouritz was later pardoned and returned to Ireland where he named his second son (Harry's grandfather) John James Quigley Mouritz (b. 1801) in memory of his hanged friend.

Harry's grandfather arrived in Australia from Ireland on the 'Queen Victoria' on 26 July 1841. He first lived in Gippsland, Victoria but later settled at 1 Neptune Street, St Kilda, Melbourne where he died on 22 January 1882 (house still standing in 1997).

Harry's mother Caroline appears to have arrived in Melbourne in 1840 with her father's elder brother, John Joseph Mouritz (b. 1795), the colony's first Baptist preacher. Mouritz established a farm on the site of the current St Vincent's hospital, and built the colony's first baptistery in the yard beside his house. He also authored the only almanac for the colony of Victoria for the year 1847.

Caroline married Thomas Longridge Wayth in St James' church Melbourne on 1 March 1843, soon after the church was completed (it still had a dirt floor), and before it was moved stone by stone from Collins Street to its current location beside Flagstaff Gardens. Caroline and Thomas Wayth had three children. Thomas died on the Victorian gold diggings in 1856, the year in which Caroline gave birth to Harry.

Harry took the name of his mother's second husband, Daniel Laverance ('Dan') Mouchemore, a fisherman and son of William Cole Mouchemore (sailor) and Grace Laverance of Dartmouth, England. Harry knew Dan as his father, and Ben knew Dan and Caroline Mouchemore as his grandparents.

Mary Ann's father, Charles Maxsted

Ben and Ted's grandfather, Charles Maxsted, was the son of George Maxsted and Ann Marley of Market Raisin, Lincolnshire. Charles' father was a lawyer who later became a King's Counsel. Charles was a sea captain commended for the good condition in which he delivered convicts to the Australian colonies. He married Sarah Snellings, a dairymaid from Somerset, and settled in the Barabool Hills outside Geelong. Upon his retirement from farming, Charles became a publican in Geelong.

This photograph still hangs in Mary Ann and Harry's house (1 Parade Street, Albany) which in 1997 was owned by their grandson, Mr Vic Mouchemore.

The *Persic* arrived in Devenport, England on 3 March 1917. Soon after, Ben was admitted to Delhi Hospital suffering from bronchitis. He was discharged on 18 March.

In England, Ted and Ben waited to be shipped to the front line in Belgium. On 16 April Ted wrote:

> *Today is the hotest 2 hours sun I have seen since I have been hear. It was lovely. We laid down on a hay stack and went to sleep. It was just like Australia again. But it did not last long.*

The following day he wrote again, this time complaining about the lack of news from home and anticipating his departure for the front:

> *I wish they would write. If they were hear and knew what it was like to get a letter from home, they would soon write....*
> *There was 100 of the 17/28 went the night before and a lot out of other companies, about 300 men all told. We are next. But don't worry. I'll be all right or it mite be a long time yet....*
> *Good Bye Dear*
> *I am your ever loving son*
> *Ted*
> *xxxxxxxxx*
> *Give my love to all and don't worry.*

Ted embarked at Southampton for France on 22 May 1917. My grandfather followed on 20 June.

Ben and Ted were being prepared to enter the war in Flanders in the area known as the Ypres salient:

> In military terms, a salient is a line of defence projecting into enemy territory. The Ypres salient had its origins in 1914 when the retreating British army, having been pushed over the French border, made a stand in front of the ancient town of Ypres. The British line held and as the whole of the Western Front stabilised and the years of trench warfare began, it became a salient surrounded by the German forces who occupied the high ground around it along a series of hills or ridges.... The salient's position was such that the Germans, looking down on it, could fire into and across it from both sides and, even more demoralising for the salient's defenders, drop shells into it from the rear. The nature of the Flanders plain also added to the nightmarish conditions. The plain had once been covered by the sea but had been reclaimed over the centuries by the establishment of an elaborate drainage system. As the German and Allied guns ripped the earth apart over a period of three years, the drainage system was destroyed. Rains did the rest and much of the ground over which the troops had to fight turned into a quagmire.[2]

The Australian 2nd Division was camped near Hazebrouk in French Flanders where they trained in a new method of attacking. On 27 June Ted wrote:

> *There is plenty of red curants and blackburys hear. I had a lot of them yesterday. It rained very hard last night--mud up to your boot tops this morning. It is a great country this... Thanks very much for the socks. They are just what I want. I have not got them yet. They will go to England first, and I will be lucky if I get them.*

In late July, Ben and Ted were moved north to Ypres (or 'Wipers' as the men called it) in preparation for the launch of the major offensive on 31 July.

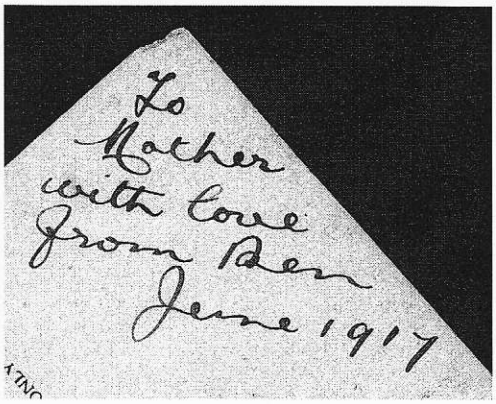
> At 4 pm on July 31, heavy rain began to fall—and it did not stop. Every shell hole and mine crater filled with water and virtually every ditch and stream had been dammed by shell-torn earth. Within a few hours, the entire battlefield was a morass. With great effort, men could walk, but guns, lorries and carts were hopelessly bogged. Supplies could not reach the infantry and nobody knew for sure where some units were because communications were badly disrupted.[3]

On 3 August, Ted wrote to his mother:

> *It has been raining ever since we came hear. We get a lot of marching. It nearly gets me down at times. The roads are bad. If it is not mud, it is hard stone and it is bad to march on... The people hear are Flemish. It is very pretty up this way. I don't think they will be short of flour this year. They are cutting their wheat and its pretty good by what I see of it... Their bread is flat and as big round as a big size frying pan, and some very long. But it is good bread.*

Ben watched the local women making lace and ordered a silk lace collar for Mary Ann. He paid 14 franks for it:

> *I saw the Flemish women making them close to our park and thought one would suit you, so I ordered one. They made them very fast. They have a board half round in front of them and a lot of bobbins with the silk on and they start throwing them about from left to right and from right to left, sticking pins up here and there, and before long you see the pattern forming.*



The front line in early August crossed Menin Road on the rise where Hooge Crater Cemetery now stands, and passed through Sanctuary Wood. Menin Road itself was little more than mud. The part of the road known by the men as 'Hellfire Corner' was under regular bombardment.

> Menin Road was a famous name in the Ypres salient, if only because so many soldiers left the ruins of Ypres through this gate in the city walls on their way to battle, and so many did not come back. The road travelled due East to the front line, and was the artery of the battlefield. Along it in both directions moved columns of men, wagons, ambulances, and guns.[4]

My grandfather drove a motorised lorry carrying ammunition. Horse-drawn wagons also were used, and 18-pounder shells were sometimes strapped to packhorses and taken through the mud.

War historian John Laffin wrote: 'The gunners themselves said that the bravest men were the artillery drivers, who day and night took their horse-drawn wagons through enemy barrages to get ammunition to the guns'.

Ben almost certainly would have driven trucks carrying ammunition through the ruins of Ypres and east along Menin Road towards the front. Because so much of the area was mud, there were few places trucks could be driven. Menin Road itself was under constant bombardment by the Germans and, as one commentator noted, because of the volume of traffic along this route, any exploding shell was likely to find a target.

In mid-August, under the cover of darkness, my grandfather and another truck driver were delivering fuses to the front when they ran foul of the mud and then German bombardment:

> *It was on the 15th of August, East of Ypres, at midnight.*
> *There were only two lorries loaded with fuses taking them to another battery which had run out. The other lorrie got bogged and we had just pulled him out and I was putting my load ready when a high explosive shell burst between us. I was in a bent position shifting a case of fuses, otherwise it would have caught me in the body. I lost a deal of blood which left me very weak and I could not keep anything upon my stomach for 8 days.*
> *It was a very narrow escape so they tell me. Just 1/16 of an inch more and I should have been pushing up the daisies in France instead of now waiting to be sent home when they see fit.*

loading ammunition, 1917

For my grandfather, the war was over. He had suffered a compound fractured skull in the explosion. He was taken to a hospital in France, then transferred to Dartford

hospital in England. It was seven weeks before he had recovered enough to sit up in his hospital bed to write to his mother.

3 October 1917:

I may come home for six months and then come back again. What I am most anoyed of is that I stopped one so soon. I was the first one wounded in our company.

But Ben did not return to Europe, and from the front line in Flanders, Ted saw Ben's injuries from a different perspective:

Yes mother, Ben is always unlucky.
But he is lucky in this place...
We are allways getting wounded,
and getting to England is lucky.

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Ben's hospital sketch

But in 1917 my grandmother was yet to meet my grandfather.

She was an 18-year-old living with her parents, and passionately caught up in the war. She saw the war through the eyes of a teenage girl living in an isolated town on the other side of the world.

For my grandmother and her girlfriends, being a teenager in Albany in 1917 meant buying the latest songs about the war, and playing and singing them to each other. John Watts' music store carried the latest musical releases. It also meant assisting the women of the town to prepare packages of clothing and food for the soldiers at the front; baking cakes for fund-raising bazaars; writing letters to the boys in Flanders; and mailing white chook feathers to the cowards who had not yet signed up.

One of the pieces of music my grandmother bought ('For Auld Lang Syne! Australia will be There') was advertised as Australia's Battle Song: the accepted song of the Australian Expeditionary Forces. It was 'sung before His Majesty King George V and Royal Party at Buckingham Palace, March 22, 1916' and also 'sung by the Troops on the Troopship *Southland* when it was torpedoed on September 22, 1915'.

Some of my grandmother's songs were pro-conscription. Australia was the only country at war without conscription. In 1917, a national referendum (referred to by opponents of conscription as the 'blood vote') divided the country. Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, addressed patriotic 'women only' rallies in an attempt to capture the female vote. Conscription had been rejected in a 1916 referendum, but the question 'Should conscription be brought in for military service overseas?' was put again in December 1917. Most soldiers at the front (including Ted Mouchemore), and the majority of Australians, voted 'no'.

Another of the songs my grandmother bought and played exhorted Australian mothers to 'keep smiling' and to not give way or sigh, reassuring them that their 'brave old boys' would come back home in the 'sweet bye-and-bye'.

On the front cover of her sheet music, my grandmother wrote the date, 1917, and above the date, her name: Erna Teschner. A very ***German*** name.

We Must All Fall In
(If We Want to Win)

From the trenches the boys are calling
To the man who stays at home
Why aren't you in the fighting line?
It's your job as well as mine
If the Country's call won't wake them
It's the Country's right to take them
For we've got to smash the Huns
We want shells and we want guns
And men to fire them and to make them

Keep Smiling, Mother

Keep smiling, mother, don't give way or sigh
The brave old boys will come back home
In the sweet Bye-and-bye
There's duty to be done, dear
But when they turn the tide
They'll come back again to the ones they love
Back to the old fireside.

Excerpts from my grandmother's sheet music, 1917

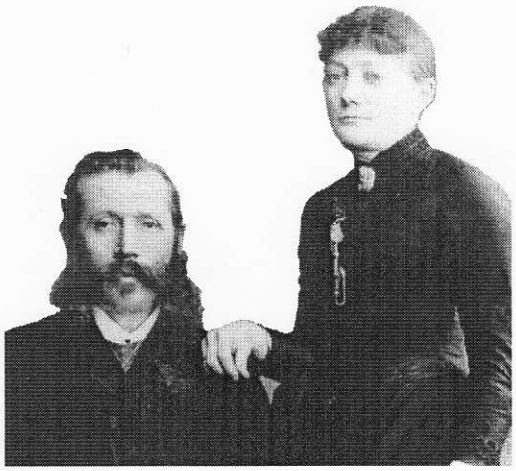
My grandmother was the only child of Ernst Teschner from Neuendorf, near Landsberg on Warthe in Brandenberg, Germany, and Emma Otto, daughter of Ferdinund Otto and Alvine Scheer of Kernein, near Landsberg. Ernst was born in Neuendorf on 27 March 1843; Emma was born in Kernein on 6 June 1860.

Ernst, who had been a farmer in Germany, set out from London for Australia on the sailing ship *Nourmahal* in 1868, arriving in Sydney on 16 November. From there he went directly to Queensland.

When Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1859, there were already 2,124 German-born out of the 28,000 residents within its borders. The new Queensland Government was impressed with the quality of these people, since through hard work, peaceful attitudes, religious fervour, and new patriotism they had brought a climate of industry, harmony and faith to the new colony. An Agent-General was selected in the person of Johann Heussler, a German merchant living in Brisbane, who was sent to Germany to promote Queensland migration. The incentives included free and assisted passages and land grants on time payment. In one of Heussler's first visits, he boarded a train in Berlin and stopped at many places on the line running north through Prenzlau and Stettin, then east across Pommerania to Danzig, returning westwards through West Prussia, Posen, and Brandenburg. Thus large numbers of people from these areas migrated in the 1860s and 1870s, so that by the census of 1881, of a total white population of 213,500 there were 12,000 Germans.[5]

Ernst was offered a land grant in Queensland, but did not take it up. There is very little trace of Ernst's movements in Queensland over the following 20 years.

But we do know that he returned to Germany after 20 years in Queensland and married Emma Otto in Kernein on 21 March 1889. Ernst and Emma left immediately for Australia, sailing from Bremen on the *Braunschweig* and arriving in Sydney on 8 July. They then boarded the *Arcadia* and sailed for Albany, Western Australia, arriving on 1 August.



Ernst and Emma Teschner

Three years after their arrival, two prospectors discovered rich alluvial gold not far from the town of Coolgardie in an arid region about 560 kilometres east of Perth. This discovery started the Western Australian goldrush. The following year, Paddy Hannan found gold in an area that became known as the Golden Mile, the most valuable deposits being at Boulder. Thousands of families flocked to the area, with 1 400 miners arriving in one week.

Ernst and Emma set out for Boulder on foot. At some point, they were joined by Emma's younger sister Elsie from Germany.

Like most new arrivals on the goldfields, Ernst and Emma probably lived in a tent when they first arrived. Whether they took all their belongings with them, or left some in Albany, is not known.

The belongings Emma brought from Germany included some fine jewellery, clothing and linen, a riding whip with an ivory handle in the shape of a horse's leg, and two large albums containing photographs of her family and friends. Her family—the Ottos—are believed to have owned or managed a coach inn in Kernein and appear to have been moderately wealthy.

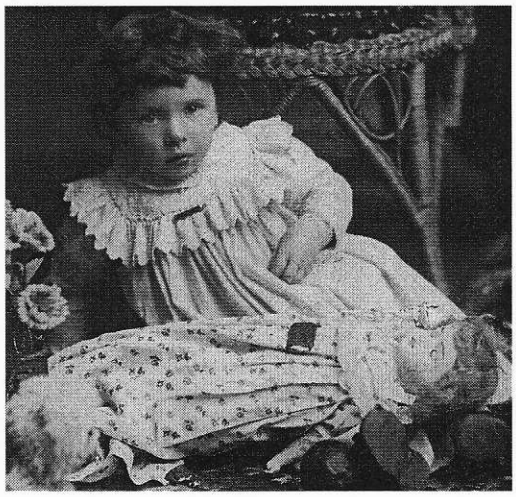
Nearby Landsberg was the site of a Prussian military base, and many of Emma and Ernst's relatives had been members of the Prussian army. They probably fought in the Seven Weeks' War between Prussia and Austria for leadership of the Germanic confederation in 1866. Military records show that a Karl Otto, a 23-year-old cavalryman from Landsberg, died in the Battle of Königgrätz on 3 July 1866 (a 'dull and rainy day').

One of Emma's photo albums was clearly older than the other. Many of its photographs were on metal: Daguerreotypes, perhaps from the 1850s. The clothing was from the middle of the century, and a number of Emma's relatives were in military uniform.

a Prussian relative?

By 1899, Ernst and Emma were back in Albany living in St Werbergh's Lane off Middleton Beach Road, directly below Dog Rock. Emma was expecting a child.

My grandmother was born on 3 October 1899.



my grandmother

As an only child, Erna led a sheltered childhood. Her parents spoke both German and English. When Erna was old enough to go to school, Emma and Ernst decided not to send her to a government school, but sent her to a convent to be educated by the nuns. The Teschners were not Catholics, but considered this preferable to a state schooling. Here, the nuns taught Erna to paint and to play the piano.

While her mother cooked and cleaned, Erna played the piano, painted in oils, and took photographs of her pets, friends and neighbours with her brownie box camera. She photographed her cat, her pet chicken, her mother in the yard, and her father spraying his fruit trees.

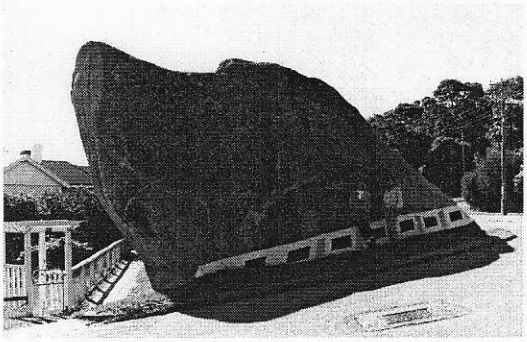
In her birthday book Erna wrote the birthdays of her schoolfriends, her Aunt Elsie, Uncle Jim Taylor and their daughter Lil, and of German relatives she had never met: 'grandfather' (Ferdinund

Otto), Aunts Alvine (Richter), Martha (Ebert), Alvine (Otto), Uncles Hermann, Julius, Paul, and Emil Otto, and cousin Greta Richter.

Many of my grandmother's girl-friends had brothers and cousins at the war. My grandmother had no brothers, and her cousins, if they were fighting at all, were fighting for Germany.

my grandmother's cousin Kurt

my grandmother at her easel



Dog Rock, Albany

In 1917, my great-grandfather was classified by the Australian government as an enemy subject. His file, still held in Canberra, is headed:

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL

Report on Person Believed to be an Enemy Subject

Name: Ernst Friedrich Teschner

Age: 73 years

Height: 5 ft 10 1/2 inches

Build: medium

Complexion: sallow

Marks: none

Does he speak English? Yes

Does his statement appear frank and truthful? Yes

Is he reputed to be anti-British in sympathy? No

"Sight not too good"

Ernst was required to report to the Albany police station before leaving the district.

In 1917, Harry Mouchemore and other men of the town gathered to read weekly news of the war displayed in a shop window. Ernst Teschner was not among them. He spent much of his time out of town living on his market garden in the bush, eight miles from Albany on the road to Perth, near the present Albany airport. When townspeople referred to him as German, he retorted that he was not German, but 'Prussian'.

With the news from the front came a steady stream of telegrams with news of more Albany boys injured or killed in the fighting. By the end of 1917, there were few families untouched by the war, and it was clear that a growing number of Albany boys would not be coming 'back again to the ones they love'.

For Ted, the war in Flanders went on.

On 23 August 1917, war photographer Frank Hurley wrote: 'The great howitzer and batteries were in full operation and the ear-splitting din was followed by the scream of a hail of shell which swept over our heads to the enemy lines.'

Yes mum, I turned 21.
I did not have a holiday.
We were out doing a stunt and at night I was on guard.
I would of liked to have been home.
But I will be there for the next.

On 16 September he wrote:

On church parade this morning you could hardly hear one another speak, and then a lot of Fritzs came over and we had to stop for a while. Dropped a few boms and went again.

In the early hours of 20 September, eleven Divisions prepared to strike the Germans on a 13-kilometre front. Ted was a member of the 28th Battalion which, with several other battalions, made up the 7th Brigade within the 2nd Division. In the early hours of the morning, as they moved into position, the 28th Battalion lost its way in the dark:

> Half way between the Birr-Cross Road and Hooge, the approach tracks for the 3rd Brigade and the 7th Brigade ran close together. The Germans were shelling this favourite target on the Menin Road with gas-shell and, despite all precautions, in the intense dark, the rain, and the shell-fire, the 28th Battalion got on to the 3rd Brigades' track, holding up for 35 minutes the 12th Battalion and those following it.[6]

The forward battalions were in place by 4:15 am, and the attack was launched at 5:40 am. The 2nd Division was at the centre of the assault force, just north of Menin Road along Westhoek Ridge. The Australian infantry advanced in a single line behind the heavy protective barrage of bursting shells. By noon, the 1st and 2nd Divisions had taken all their objectives and were at the western end of Polygon Wood.

Ted

Three days later, Ted wrote to his mother:

I surpose you have heard of our stunt.
I came out all right. It was not too bad. I came out yesterday morning....
The ground we went over was very muddy.
In places you would go down up to your waist
Had to pull one another out.
The ground was cut up a good bit with shell.

On the last day of 1917, Ted reflected on the fact that he had now been away from home for more than a year, and sent greetings to his nieces and nephews:

My Dearest Mother
Well dear, this is the last night of the year.
I surpose the bells are ringing the

old year out and the new one in.
I would like to be there.
Last new years day I was well at sea....
We have had a little snow but a lot of frost.
It is pretty cold on the feet and hands.
The wind is very cold....
How is the fishing going?
Pretty good I hope.
How are the little ones keeping?
Has Barney been to Denmark of late?
How are things out there?
How are the horses?....
I still have the old pen mum.
I am writing with it now.
Hoping this will find you in the very best of health as it leaves me at present.
Kiss the little ones for me.
Give my love to all at home.
so Good Bye dear
With love and kisses from your ever loving son
Ted
xxxxxxx
xxxxxx
xxxxx
Dont Worry

Early in 1918, Ted looked forward to the prospect of taking leave in England (or 'Blighty' as the soldiers called it).

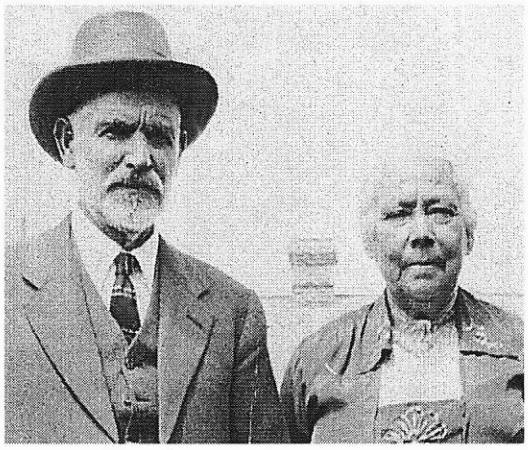
> Having collected pay and a new uniform from the AIF Headquarters in Horseferry Road, the digger on leave was free to explore London's tourist spots, have a "good feed" at a hotel, and go to the theatre. There was also a chance of an invitation to tea with society ladies or lunch and a stay in the country at a manor house.[7]

By 1 March 1918, Ted was writing from London. He had met a girl named Mabel in London on his last visit before being sent to the front and went looking for her house:

I gave them a great surprise.
She could not speak for the minute.
She is a very nice girl.
Her mother is dead and only brother was killed about two years ago in France.
I feel a big giant beside her.
She is only a little girl.
I can put her under my wing.
You would laugh to see me over hear getting lost.
If I am going to meet Mabel anywhere in town, I have to leave an hour before time.
If I am going up to the home I get in the Tube or bus.
They only cost a penny.
It will be hard to take when I have to go back.

After 14 days leave, Ted crossed the channel from Dover and then spent three days on a train returning to the front.

16 March:
They had two raids in London while I was there.
I did not get out of my bed.
They were calling me down, but it was too good to leave.
I was very tired....
I am pleased the horses are alright.
wish I was there for a ride.
It would do me now.
Let us hope it wont be long.



Harry and Mary Ann

While Ted was on the train, scouts of the 12th Battalion, from Tasmania, reported that a German attack was brewing. The German General, Erich Von Ludendorff was moving two Divisions each day from the Russian front to the Western Front along with an additional 1 000 heavy guns.

On 21 March, Ludendorff launched his attack. Ted wrote that day to his mother asking what Harry thought of the new fishing spot down the coast. Over the next four months, the German offensive inflicted massive allied losses.

1 Parade Street, Albany

During the first few weeks of the German attack, Ted was hit in the left elbow by a bullet. The bullet went straight through his arm:

I got it about 9 p.m. on April 15.
And my pal got one too.
He dressed me and I dressed him.
We walked about looking for the dressing station till 2 that night.
We come across some pommies camped in an old house.
We stayed there that night until about 7 the next morning.
There were some Aussies there.
One jumped on a horse and went and got a car and it took us to a dressing station.
My arm was like a football.
But I am verry lucky to be hear.

Ted's arm was operated on twice at the Third Australian General Hospital in France. He was transferred to England on 1 May and admitted to the Norfolk War Hospital in Thorpe, Norwich on 3 May. Ted immediately saw the prospect of being sent back to Australia:

I cannot straighten it or bend it right up.
My word dear, I would like to get home with it.
I would be the happiest man on earth....
I would not like to say I will get home, and wont say I will go back to France.
There will be no telling for a while.
I can work my fingers and rist now, but they are puffed up yet.

By 15 May, Ted was accepting that his injury was not serious enough to be sent back to Australia:

Well Mum, I think I will be unlucky
I don't think I will get home out of this wound yet.
I am going to try and work my head a bit
See if I cannot get home or somewhere.
They are sending a lot home now,
But I don't surpose I will have any luck.

Following the German offensive and the significant loss of territory between March and July, an all-out effort was made to recruit additional allied soldiers and to send all available men to the front. On 31 July, General Monash sent a cable to Australia:

> Nothing matters now but to see this job through to the end, and we appeal to every man to come, and come quickly, to help in our work and to share in our glorious endeavour.

Under these circumstances, Ted had no chance of being sent back to Australia. The date for the Allied attack (to be known as the 'Battle of Amiens') was set for 4:20 am on 8 August 1918.

> The Germans were taken completely by surprise and by 7:30 am the offensive had broken the Germans' line so thoroughly that much of their field artillery was overrun and captured. For the first time in the war, the support troops kept pace behind the assaulting wave... After years of struggle in the trenches the war on the Western Front had reached the stage of field fighting.[8]

On 11 August, a meeting of Allied Generals concluded that the Germans were on the run and

could now be driven from French and Belgian soil.

The following day, Ted wrote again from London:

My Dear Mother
Just a few lines to let you know that I am A1....
I want to go on a few days leave before I go back.
The next time I come to England I am going to Scotland
and try to get to Ireland.
I have seen a good lot of England now.
Mum will you please try and send me some socks....
How is all at home?
Give them all my love and kiss the little ones for me.
I dont surpose they will know me when I get back.
Well dear, I don't think there is any more I can say
so I will close for now dear.
With love and kisses from your ever loving son
Ted
xxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxx
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xxxxxx
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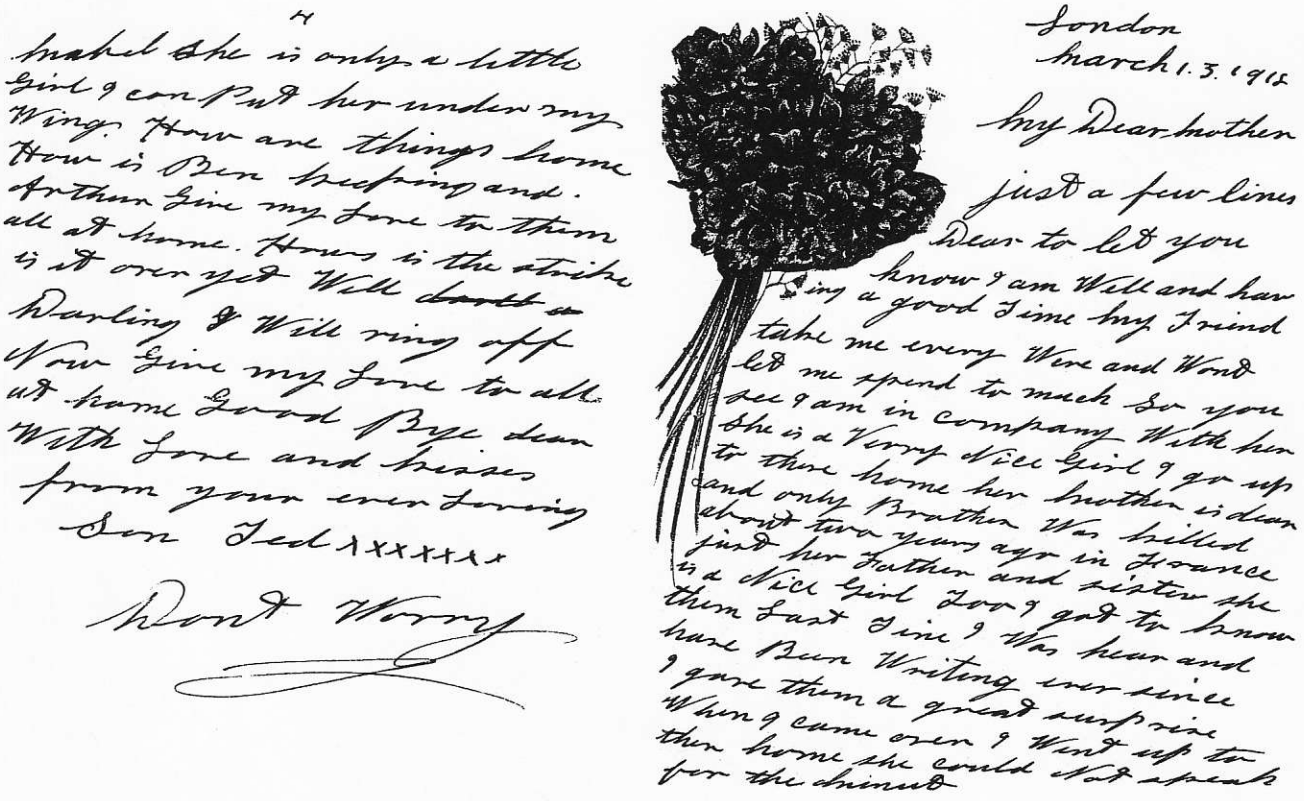
xxxxxx



Ted left Folkestone for France on 22 September and rejoined his unit on 28 September. During September, the Allied forces had advanced 20 kilometres. The Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, visited the Amiens battlefield during September and ordered that all Australian infantry be withdrawn for rest by 15 October.

Between 28 September and 2 October, the Australians advanced about 5 kilometres, taking Bellicourt and the Hindenburg Line. The Germans were now in rapid retreat. Ted re-joined his unit as it pushed towards Beaurevoir.

For the Australian 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions, the war was now over. The only Division remaining to General Monash was the 2nd. The last action of the 2nd Division would be to capture the Beaurevoir line.

On 2 October, Ted's unit reached the road between Gouy and Estrées. They may have sheltered at the old abbey at Mt St Martin. Behind the abbey is a gully which then rises to become Prospect Hill, held at that time by the Germans. In the distance to the right, beyond Prospect Hill, almost visible from the abbey, is Beaurevoir.

In the morning—twelve months to the day since Ben had recovered sufficiently to write to his mother and, back in Albany, Erna Teschner's nineteenth birthday—the 28th Battalion launched an attack on Prospect Hill. By noon the Allies had captured the entire Beaurevoir Line; the Australians had taken 1,000 prisoners and seized numerous machine guns. Within 48 hours, Australian involvement in the war was finally over.

✣✣✣

The telegram, now faded a little, arrived in Albany on 22 October, addressed to Rev S.B. Fellows:

Officially reported 6351 Edward Charles Mouchemore Killed in Action third October 1918.
Please inform father, Harry Mouchemore, Parade Street Albany

Military
Commandant

✣✣✣

On a few occasions as a boy, I stayed with my grandmother in Perth. She enjoyed having me stay with her. One night we sat up late, just the two of us, playing ludo. She saw through my attempt to let her win, calling me a 'gentleman'. And we talked.

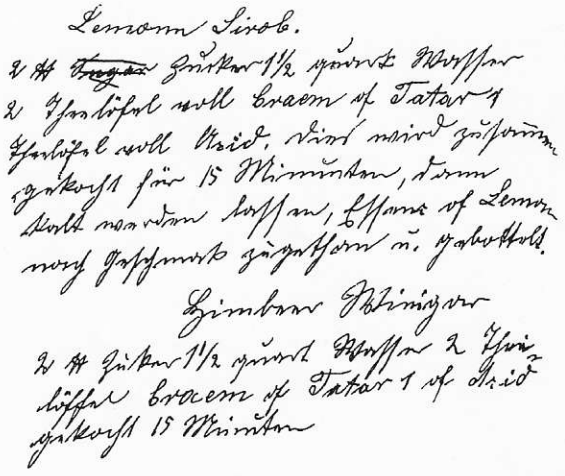
After hot chocolate, cake, and some discussion of the past, she brought out a cardboard box, removed the lid, and passed me an old photograph. 'This was my boyfriend, Frank', she said. Another faded army photograph. I remember thinking he looked a little ridiculous: young, bespectacled and wearing an over-sized army coat—one of the Albany boys. 'We might have been married if he hadn't been killed in the war', my grandmother said.

After the war, my grandmother married Ben: her returned soldier, wounded in battle. But it is not clear how well Mary Ann and Harry Mouchemore accepted Erna Teschner and her German parents.

Ted's death devastated Mary Ann. Long after Teddy died, she laid out his clothes on his bed in Albany. His letters and photographs, the telegram and black-edged condolensce cards were carefully kept, and are still carefully kept today. Ted was buried in the field across the road from the old abbey in a temporary burial ground, and after the war was reburied at nearby Bellicourt.[9]

For my grandmother, the war was never far away. My grandfather, perhaps because of his injuries, seems never to have fully regained his health. Ben's framed Certificate of Honourable Discharge hung in the hall outside my grandmother's living room. And there were times when my grandmother still became angry at some Albany boy who gave as his ridiculous excuse for not going to war that he had to 'look after his mother'.

Beside the bed where I slept at my grandmother's house was an old trunk in which Emma and Ernst brought their belongings from Germany on the *Braunschweig* in 1889. Emma spent the last decade of her life living with my grandparents in Perth. My mother called her by the German name 'Nunna'. Her old cookbook with its recipes handwritten in German still exists. I never heard my grandmother speak German, but she told me she could understand some German when it was spoken.



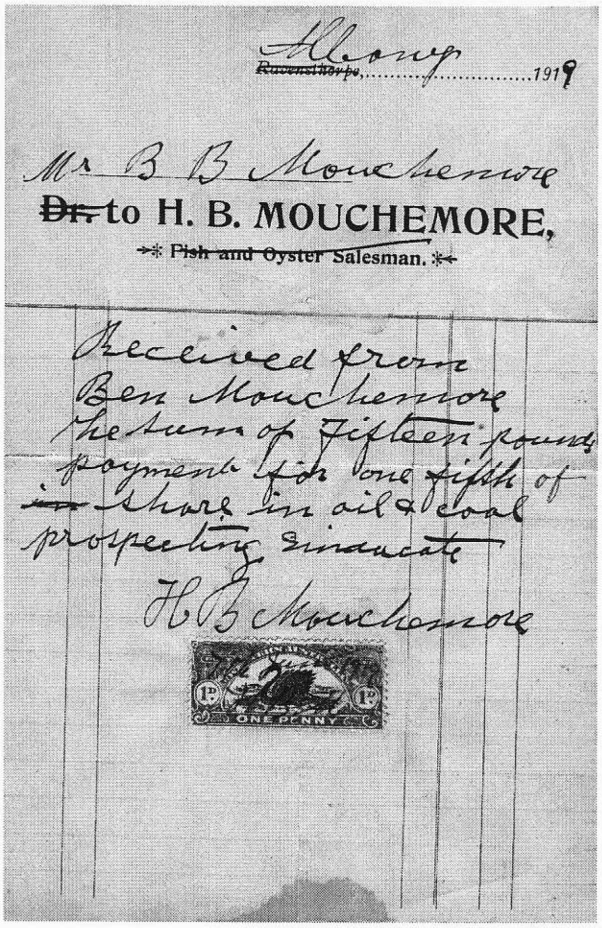
Today, my great-grandparents' birthplaces, Neuendorf and Kernein near Landsberg on Warthe, no longer exist. These renamed towns are now part of Poland. German historical records have been largely destroyed. The 12 000 volumes of the Landsberg Library of the Society for the History of the Neumark, established in 1890, perished in 1945.

On one occasion my grandmother showed me a box containing my grandfather's war medals. They certainly were impressive, but much more interesting to me was the older and more mysterious German Cross stored with them: the medal that my great-grandmother had treasured.

Late in her life—a life that spanned two terrible wars with Germany—my grandmother, with Germanic stoicism, dug a hole and buried her parents' old German photo album. Today my proud Prussian ancestors rest side by side in their military uniforms in the grey sand of a South Perth backyard.

✤✤✤

Teddy's tree, Mt Clarence, Albany



~~Ravensthorpe,~~ Albany 1919

Mr B B Mouchemore

~~Dr.~~ to H. B. MOUCHEMORE,

~~Fish and Oyster~~ Salesman.

Received from
Ben Mouchemore
the sum of Fifteen pounds
payment for one fifth of
~~in~~ share in oil & coal
prospecting sinducate

H B Mouchemore

ONE PENNY

1919 receipt

Ben and Ted's brothers Phil and Barney Mouchemore with three of Ben's children, Ashton, Darren and Lola (my mother) fishing in Albany

VICTORIA. No. 71953

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT VICTORIA

Certificate of Exemption from Compulsory Attendance.

I hereby Certify that Benjamin Mouchemore has been educated up to the standard of education required by "The Education Act 1890."

Dated at Queens Cliff this 24th day of August A.D. 1894.

Inspector.

By Authority: ROBT. S. BRAIN, Government Printer, Melbourne.

[1] An enlarged photograph of Mouchemore and Co's 'aeroplane' hangs in the conference room of the Esplanade Hotel, Albany (1997).
[2] O'Keefe (1986) *Hurley at War*. The Fairfax Library, p.8.
[3] Laffin
[4] Laffin p.29
[5] Mützelburg, O. (1989). *How to Trace Your German Ancestors*, pp. 53-54.
[6] Bean, EW
[7] Laffin, p.121
[8] Laffin, p. 120
[9] Ted Mouchemore was buried in the Mont St Martin British Cemetery, Gouy, with 21 soldiers from the UK, 15 from Australia, 2 from South Africa, and 2 German soldiers. He was later reburied in the Bellicourt British Cemetery between farm buildings and open cultivated country (Plot IV, Row N, Grave I).