A family portrait of the Lookers, probably taken just before Harold and Arthur left for Durban, South Africa, in July 1903.

Presumptive identification, left to right –

Front	***Middle***	***Rear***
Eudora (b: 1888) 15 years	Mary (b: 1879) 24 years	Harold (b: unknown ?Tas)
Lynnette (b: 1891) 12 years	Fanny Rosina (b: abt 1854) 49 years	Ffie (b: 1883) 20 years
William (b: 1893) 10 years	Frederick Keith (b: 1885) 18 years	Arthur (b: 1882) 21 years
		George (b: 1850) 53 years
		Fanny Margaret (b: 1887) 16 years

Shining a Dim Light upon the Darkness

…
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

– Rudyard Kipling, *If*

Now if you load your rifle right
And if you fix your bayonet so
And if you kill that man my friend
The one we call the foe
And if you do it often lad
And if you do it right
You'll be a hero overnight
You'll save your country from her plight
Remember God is always right
If you survive to see the sight
A friend now greeting foe

No you won't believe in If anymore
It's an illusion
It's an illusion
No you won't believe in If anymore
If is for children
If is for children
Building daydreams

– Roger Whittaker, *I Don't Believe in If Anymore*

We don't know of the Looker family's attitude to Great Britain's declaration of war on Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire on 4 August 1914, or of Australia's similar proclamation in a special Commonwealth Gazette of the following day. However, in respect of their political perspective we can be certain of two important points.

First, despite historically having an important role as Australian Federalists in the late Nineteenth Century, like most Australians the Lookers identified as British subjects

and saw themselves as loyal members of the British Empire. At that time and for decades later, Australian nationality could only be conceived of within a wider context of also being British. Australian nationalism of the type we conceive today is a relatively recent product: born in the 1940s, adolescent in the 1970s, coming of age with the *Australia Act 1986 (C'wlth)*, and probably only confidently mature upon the opening of the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Second, they did not have the benefit of hindsight that we enjoy today. The Great War and its child, the Second War World, have since etched themselves into our collective culture and individual consciousness. In contrast, the most brutal conflicts of which Australians in that day had direct experience, Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901) and the Boer War (1899-1902), were savage yet limited in scope. People still truly believed in unrivalled British supremacy on land and sea, tinged with an unshakeable assumption of cultural superiority expressed in racial terms. When the nation tripped into the Great War, they genuinely believed that the troops would be home by Christmas; some Australians were concerned that it would all be over before they had a chance to join the fighting.

The young men of the Looker family had some direct experience of the Empire as a global enterprise. Arthur and Harold Looker, the two eldest sons of William Robert Looker Snr, spent several years seeking their fortune in South Africa, Rhodesia and Portuguese Mozambique in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Describing his experience of the voyage to South Africa, in the ship *Aberdeen*, Harold Looker wrote in August 1903:

> *The last Sunday divine service was held on deck and was conducted by a missionary who was going out to the Zambesi district, it was grand to hear so many voices joining in the hymns. The reading table was draped with the Union Jack.*
> *…*
> *[Describing Durban]*
> *All down at the foot of the Berea is flat. Nearly every house here has a little hut at the back for Kaffirs who help in the house, some of them make very good servants, they get from 15/– to £2 per month and food.*
> *…*
> *There are hundreds of Australians over here, some are in very good positions. I think there will be a big opening out in Australia soon and then a lot of her scattered children will return to their native land, with new energy and new ideas and broader minds together with a little money.*

Here, too, is Arthur describing a 1907 visit to the resting place of Cecil Rhodes, then in Rhodesia and now Zimbabwe, steeped in the myth of Empire:

> *Next morning I left Falls at 8.45 for, Bulawayo reaching there 7 o'clock next morning. Spending Friday in renewing my acquaintance with Bulawayo I took the train at 8 a.m. on Saturday for Matopos. This station was reached about 10 o'clock & arrangements made at Hotel for conveyance out to World's view and Rhode's Grave 7 miles. The conveyance was supplied in the shape of a 4 mule wagonette with two yelling natives as driver and whip holder respectively. About a mile from the Hotel a 14 foot or so wire fence is seen. This encloses a game reserve which contains specimens of all game in South Africa, except of course lions, leopards, rhinos & elephants. I saw giraffe, zebra, waterbuck, sable antelope & several other animals myself. Further on still the farm buildings of Rhodes' estate are seen & again further a narrow defile is passed thro having an entrance through a stone wall & two large iron*

gates bearing the remarks "The Rhodes Matopos Park". A similar arrangement is passed through at the other end of this park & then the road becomes a little more hilly & finally stops before a giant granite boulder. At a yell from the chauffeur a nigger appears from nowhere and conducts the visitor on foot along a winding track gradually ascending for about a mile, the country being composed of granite Kopjes and great boulders. As one begins to wonder how much further 3 or 4 boulders somewhat larger than the rest appear in sight & on rounding the corner of one the resting place of South Africa's greatest man is at one's feet. A plain flat granite tomb surmounted by a bronze plate bearing the words "Here lie the remains of Cecil John Rhodes" and that is all. The simple grandeur of the whole scene is most impressive. About 50 yards on the further side of the hill is placed the Shangani Monument which was erected to commemorate the gallant stand made by Lieut. Wilson and his men at the Shangani River during the Matabeli War. It is built of granite and is about 18 feet high and on each of its four sides is a bronze plate showing in relief the figures of the men who died and at the base the following words in brass letters are let into the stone "To Brave Men". There is also a small bronze tablet bearing the names of those who fell. This monument beside Rhodes' grave and the wonderful panoramic view for a distance of about 40 miles obtained from this spot make a lasting impression in one's memory. On returning towards the spot where the mule team was left a notice is passed bearing the words "This ground is consecrated".

"…the resting place of South Africa's greatest man" is a strong endorsement of Rhodes: megalomaniac, possible war criminal, and an unabashed Imperialist who wrote in his 1877 essay *Confession of Faith*, "I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race." The reality of the Matabeli War had been substantially different to the myth. That conflict would nowadays be seen as a British war – or more accurately a corporate war – of aggression by Rhodes' British South Africa Company using Maxim machine guns, against an African tribal king whose warriors fought with spear and some rifles.

Such was the mind of the Empire's young men at large, and the Lookers in particular. Enculturation into this myth was intrinsic to the very functioning of Empire.

The myth also ingrained in them Victorian ideals such as 'gallantry', teaching what it meant to fight with selfless fortitude for a greater glory: a quaint ideal that would be tested to failure in the coming Great War. That conflict's scale and destructiveness would afterwards make it impossible for a soldier of the modern, industrial age to be any more conceived of as 'gallant' in the way that the mercenaries of the British South Africa Company had been. However, that post-War view was years in the coming and serves to highlight the dangers that hindsight brings for those trying to understand what would unfold over the coming decade. It would be anachronistic and unfair to hold the Lookers to account for their culturally-determined views at the apogee of Empire. Yet it is important to understand the mindset that drew hundreds of thousands of Australians to war seven years later.

At the outbreak of war, Arthur was 33 years old and managing The South African Timber Company offices in Beira, Mozambique. The outbreak of war, in close proximity to German East Africa (Tanganyika) and German Southwest Africa (Namibia, Figure 1), was bad for business in Rhodesia and Mozambique. Seeing local economic depression looming, Arthur made his way to Durban to join up as an anti-aircraft gunner with South Africa's Heavy Artillery Brigade in about December 1914.

Figure 1 – The European carving of Africa, 1914

In a letter to his mother of October 1914, Arthur opines:

> *…it would be a good experience for me, besides somewhat of a change from office work of which I have been heartily sick since my return from Australia… I am glad to hear Will [his younger brother] has gone with one of the Australian Expeditionary Forces – it will be a fine experience for him and he will see a bit of the world… in the meantime you are not to worry about me or about Will either. I reckon we can both look after ourselves.*

Speaking of the local German response to war he notes, "There is a British port, Walfisch [Walvis] Bay, right in the middle of the German coast line [of German South West Africa] and this has of course been occupied by British troops for quite a long time." At that time, he could not have known that a little over two months later he would be manning anti-aircraft defences at that very port, surrounded by sand dunes of the Namibian desert and receiving their fresh water from Cape Town 1,200 kilometres away.

The brother that Arthur referred to in his letter was William Robert Looker, known as 'Will' or 'Bill', and the youngest of the family. He had joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), on 7 August 1914, the day after Australia's proclamation of war had hit the newspapers: so swiftly that he was assigned service number 917. He was 20 years of age, employed as a station hand, and proffered his "military experience" as three years in school cadets. Will had signed up so soon that the Army hadn't had the time to raise units to accept recruits, and he had to return on 17 August to join the 5th Battalion, AIF, which had only been raised five days prior. The administration of

throwing hundreds of men together so quickly must have been a shambles. The unit established camp at Broadmeadows (Figure 2), and rapidly commenced individual training and battalion manoeuvre.

Figure 2 – Will at an Open Day at the Broadmeadows Camp, Sept 1914.

After two months of organisation and training, Will's 5th Battalion embarked at Melbourne on 21 October 1914 aboard His Majesty's Australian Transport *Orvieto* A3, an ocean liner of the Orient Steam Navigation Company that had been temporarily taken up from trade for use as an Australian transport. The liner was made flagship of the first Australian convoy to the Middle East and, along with Will, embarked Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges and his staff. En route to Egypt, in the vicinity of the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean, the escorting warship HMAS *Sydney* peeled away from the convoy to engage and sink the German raider *Emden* on 9 Sept 1914. 53 German Prisoners Of War were brought aboard Will's *Orvieto*; the *Emden*'s gun can still be seen at the South Eastern end of Hyde Park in Sydney to this day.

The convoy arrived at Port Said in the Egyptian Sinai on 1 December 1914 (Figure 3), and sailed on to disembark the troops in Alexandria on 3 December. Within a day or two, Will was based as Mena Camp, 10 miles from Cairo, where training continued in earnest. The 5th Battalion war diary also notes that, "Men were put on the Imperial Scale of rations and this was not sufficient. Later on a messing allowance of 6d. per head per day was made and this amount expended to supplement the issue ration…" Will and his mates were obviously big eaters in comparison to what the British Army was accustomed.

For Will, Egypt seemed to be a waypoint on the road to France and the Western Front. In late February 1915 he wrote to his sister Lyn:

> *We have got our sailing orders at last & expect to leave here in a little over a week now though we are liable to be called away within 24 hours notice any time. The 3rd Brigade of infantry is to leave here tomorrow & Monday & I think*

our turn will come about Saturday. We do not know yet where we are going but it is generally expected Marseilles. There is a possibility of us going to Assyria to have a go at the Turks but I think it will be France.

He was quite wrong, both on account of receiving a movement order and his coming destination.

Figure 3 – HMAT *Orvieto* (A3) at Port Said, Egypt, 1 December 1914

As the battle preparations of Will's unit were drawing to an end after two months outside of Cairo, back in Melbourne his brother Frederick Keith Looker ('Keith') signed up for A Company, 22nd Battalion on 3 April 1915. Keith was a bank clerk eight years Will's elder, joining at the age of 29.

After some delay in the news, due to the mail, about July 1915 Arthur wrote to his mother Fanny:

I am sorry to hear Keith has gone as a private – he ought to have been able to fix up a commission. The private soldier has a lot of hard and dirty work to do – no doubt it does one no harm really but I got very fed up acting as a common labourer at times. …You mustn't worry about Will, Keith or myself – we are all fairly hardy & I know from my own experience that to be under shell and rifle fire is not so serious as one would think. If one of us gets hit that's bad luck but there's a good sporting chance that one may never get a scratch.

Will was about to put Arthur's theory to the test. On 4 April 1915, his unit left Mena Camp at Cairo and the next day embarked on the SS *Novian* at Alexandria, to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force: the Gallipoli campaign was in the offing. After two weeks at the forward base at Lemnos in the Aegean, the Battalion boarded transports on the evening of 24 April 1915 and inched their way under cover of darkness towards the Gallipoli peninsula in modern Turkey. The force hoped to achieve a surprise, unopposed amphibious landing and rapid advance towards Istanbul. Neither ambition was remotely successful.

Frustratingly, the Battalion war diary for this critical month seems to be missing. However, it is known that 5th Battalion, including Will Looker, landed at ANZAC Cove on the morning of 25 April 1915. The landings were a chaotic mess from the very beginning. Rather than being landed on the wide, open beach to the south, facing gradually rising hills, an error of navigation meant that the troops were dropped on the narrow beachhead of a place that would come to be known as ANZAC Cove. The terrain rose steeply through a series of sharp, alluvial ridges and weathered gullies. Moreover, the Turkish Army observed the ANZAC land and had them under fire from the very first moments of the operation.

Will landed with the second wave of landings sometime in the morning, after sunrise. By this time, the battlefield was in a state of utter confusion, with the initial landing forces attempting to seize the initiative from the Turks' spirited defence. The planned objectives were rapidly abandoned in favour of securing key terrain, and Will's 2nd Brigade manoeuvred up on to the 400 Plateau (Figure 4, Figure 5). There they dug in under observation of the Turks, soon receiving a high rate of artillery fire using airburst shrapnel. It wasn't until the early evening that a message was successfully sent to the Royal Navy ordering counter-battery fire that silenced the Turkish guns.

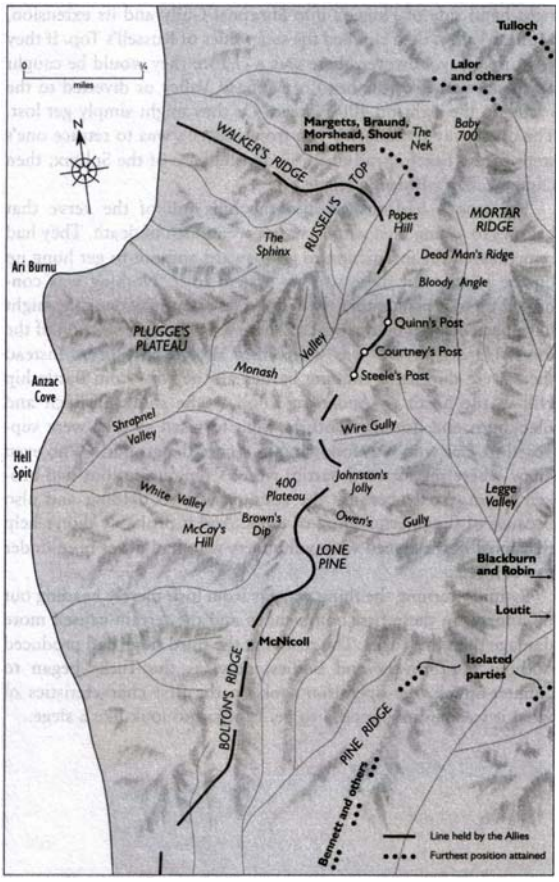
Charles Edmund Lyle Young also landed at ANZAC Cove on this, the first ANZAC Day. Son of the Pacific trader, linguist and adventurer, James Lyle Young, C.E.L. Young was thus a cousin of Eudora's husband John Raymond. He had been a farmer near Auckland, New Zealand, and joined the 16th (Waikato) Company of the Auckland Regiment at the start of the war. In the developing battle, his unit was sent to take the vital terrain of Baby 700, a feature that dominated ANZAC. However, with poor knowledge of the terrain, they followed a circuitous route up Plugge's Plateau, which proved to be impassable, and then back down into Shrapnel Gully before continuing their ascent via Russell's Top. It was while climbing to the head of Shrapnel Gully that C.E.L. Young was killed in action on that first day, 25 April 1915, at the age of 23 years.

Almost a year later, James Young was still trying to prove to the New Zealand probate courts that he son was dead, and was slowing amassing evidence through sworn statements of officers who had fought at ANZAC that day. Charles' Platoon Commander reported that:

> *I John William PEAKE of Rotoorangi in the provincial district of Auckland do swear*
>
> *1. THAT I am a lieutenant in the 16th (Waikato) Regiment Auckland Infantry Brigade*
>
> *2. I knew the said deceased. He was my platoon sergeant and he was with me when we reached our final position at Gallipoli on the 25th April last and as we were extended over ground covered with scrub it was impossible to see one another.*
>
> *3. I was wounded and sent word down the line for the deceased to take charge. A reply was brought back to me that the deceased had then been killed. The Major of our Company told me afterwards in hospital that he had been killed before I was wounded*

Figure 4 – ANZAC Cove: View of 400 Plateau to left, where Will entrenched on the first day at ANZAC, photo taken from Plugge's Plateau, viewing south-west

Figure 5 – Positions at ANZAC Cove at the end of 25 April 1915, care of Les Carlyon's history *Gallipoli*



And another junior officer of the Company recalled:

> *I ALFRED RICHARD HATT of Tuakau near Auckland a Lieutenant in the 16th Auckland Infantry who went via Egypt to Gallipoli make oath and say*
>
> *1. I WAS a Lieutenant in the same Company as the deceased. I firmly believe that he was killed on the day of the landing at Gallipoli and from enquiries I*

made and the information I got I believe he was buried at Plugge's Plateau near Walker's Ridge at Gallipoli with several others.

2. He was killed about the 25th April last in the afternoon.

3. The last I saw of deceased was in the morning of the 25th April last on board the "Lutzow", a transport from Alexandria to Gallipoli - we landed that day I saw Young go ashore - never saw him again. We went straight into action. About one hundred and seventy of his Company were killed that day out of two hundred and fifty. The next I heard about him was on the night of the 25th. I was on the beach and enquiring about the Company generally. I asked about Young and was toId by several of the wounded of my Company who knew Young that he was shot through the head at about 2.30 that afternoon and killed instantly. He was leading his platoon when killed; all his officers had been killed or wounded. About the middle of May there was an armistice for burying and several of my men told me that they had seen Young buried with the others on Plugge's Plateau and they showed me the place where he was buried. I have heard nothing of him since and am satisfied that were he still alive I should have heard of him

Commonwealth War Graves were established at Gallipoli during a battlefield clearance after the war and Charles is now buried at the Lone Pine Memorial, only a few hundred metres from where he died.

Less than two weeks after C.E.L. Young's death, Will's brigade was redeployed from ANZAC Cove to support the British landings at Cape Helles. Will's battalion saw heavy fighting there 8-11 May 1915 at the Second Battle of Krithia, during which the 2nd Brigade's strength was reduced by one third, killed or wounded, through an attack that had been ordered at short notice and with inadequate supporting fire. Severely battered and with nothing to show for their blooding at Krithia, Will's formation was then returned into the front line at ANZAC Cove on 17 May.

While Will was involved in the Battle of Krithia, on 8 May, Keith's 22nd Battalion embarked a liner HMAT *Ulysses* A38 in Melbourne for their transit to Egypt. Keith, too, spent some two months training in Egypt and while there was promoted to Lance Corporal on 31 July, probably on account of his age and maturity.

Will fought at ANZAC over the five weeks to 21 June, when the 5th Battalion war diary simply states that the unit was "In trenches." Other sources show that formation commanders were admonishing their officers to improve the defences at ANZAC, putting more emphasis on deep, protective entrenchment rather than inadequate parapets. With this in mind, it would seem that Will became a little careless about how high his head stood with respect to the parapet, as he suffered a bullet wound to the scalp. It is likely that a Turkish sniper had seen Will's hat appear as a target of opportunity and taken a well-aimed shot; Will was lucky that it took only a little skin rather than blowing the head from his shoulders. Bloody and concussed, he was admitted to a field ambulance at ANZAC, but was well enough to return to duty five days later on 26 June 1915.

Perhaps it was this experience that came to mind when, on 13 July, Will wrote to his sister Lyn of other near-misses, which were clearly plentiful at ANZAC:

I didn't finish this the other evening. Things got a little willing in the shell line for a while. A bit of Jack Johnson landed on the parapet about 20 ft away

from me and covered me with dirt etc. but did no harm. We also had a pretty lively time yesterday morning for an hour or two with shell fire.

While there are only occasional ones coming across it has an amusing side anticipating where they will land but when they start throwing 3 & 4 at a time & they appear to be landing everywhere at once it gets beyond a joke. It is really wonderful some of the narrow escapes you see. When the clouds of smoke & dust clear away fellows emerging of it a little pale & dusting their clothes but very seldom hurt.

We do not have as good knowledge of Arthur Looker's experience of the War, as he had joined the British Army in South Africa and his service records were among those destroyed by German bombing of British Government archives in 1940. We rely mainly on limited family correspondence and the London Gazette to trace his service.

Back in Walvis Bay, his anti-aircraft H Battery had made itself redundant by shooting down the last German Army aircraft in German South-West Africa. Being a logistical burden at the end of a long water supply chain, the unit was returned to South Africa and Arthur was transferred to another unit of the Heavy Artillery Brigade, O Battery, camped at Rondebosch outside of Cape Town. In his usual hardy style, he wrote of German South-West Africa:

We had a fairly hard time of it in South West, principally owing to bad arrangements regarding food. We lived for most of the time on bully beef & biscuits, the shortage of water did not matter so much – we got one gallon a day for cooking, drinking & washing and after a while got quite used to going without a wash. However altho [sic] I lost a good bit of weight it was mostly superfluous flesh & I returned to Capetown feeling very fit, & hard and am glad I had the experience. The climate is delightful at the last place we were stationed in S.W. – dry as a bone day & night. I slept outside for weeks on end, of course there is not a blade of grass and no water – all gravel & sand and stony Kopjes – a truly desolate country.

Writing from the trenches of Gallipoli on 29 July, Will gives some hint of what was occupying family time on the home front. Eudora's 'kid' here is Bryce Young, who would be called upon to visit much the same neighbourhood, to fight similar people a quarter of a century hence:

You have been very good writing to me so often lately. I have been getting a letter from you almost every mail. If you could see how much I appreciate them I am sure it would spur you on to further efforts to cheer your little soldier brother up & write every mail. Dora is the one who has deserted me lately. She used to write pretty regularly to me in Egypt but I suppose the kid is taking up most of her time nowadays. If I get back I will know quite a lot about babies. I get well primed as regards weights etc. every letter from both of you now.

We are still in the firing line but there is not much doing. It is getting a bit monotonous now. With the exception of the artillery fire of both sides which sometimes gets pretty lively towards evening there has not been much doing for a good while. I think Abdul, as the boys have christened the enemy, almost invariably gets the worst of these little evening pleasantries.

If Will was growing tired of the monotony in trench life, his boredom was soon relieved. On 6 August 1915, the Australian 1st Brigade conducted a bloody assault on the Turkish trenches at Lone Pine. After an initial success in occupying the position, the Turks' counter attacks were determined. Will's battalion were sent into the captured trenches, to relieve the exhausted 1st Brigade units on 9 August. The 5th Battalion war diary describes the conditions under which they would defend the position at the tail end of a Middle Eastern summer (Figure 6):

> *Position at 1830. Trenches in a bad state as dead men all over the place and beginning to decompose. Enemy bombing heavily all night.*

Will and his unit were themselves relieved after two days of fighting, on 11 August.

Figure 6 – Bodies of Australian soldiers in Southern Trench at Lone Pine, 8 August 1915. These are the conditions that Will encountered when his unit occupied the position over the subsequent days, 9-11 August.

It was at about this time, on 20 July 1915, that Margaret Effie Looker ('Ffie', Figure 7) transferred from the Australian Army Nursing Service after eight months' service in Melbourne, to the AIF's 2nd Australian General Hospital. She was a certified nurse of 12 years' experience at a time when it was considered compulsory for nurses to be single women. This tradition may have been due to the perceived conflict between the shift work of nursing and a mother's family responsibilities for, in an age without reliable contraception, motherhood almost inevitably followed within a year of marriage. Ffie was still unmarried at 32 years of age.

Within a fortnight of her transfer, on 4 August 1915, she boarded the Royal Mail Steamer *Orontes* for Egypt. The voyage occurred during the monsoon, and was marked by rough seas and dreadful seasickness throughout passengers and crew.

Figure 7 – Staff Nurse Ffie Looker

On 30 August, Keith's battalion embarked HMT *Scotian* B22 at Alexandria, Egypt, for transit to ANZAC Cove via the island of Lemnos, which served as the forward operating base for the Gallipoli campaign. After two days at sea a nearby troop ship in the convoy carrying Australian troops, HMT *Southland*, was torpedoed in the Aegean Sea near Lemnos. The 22nd Battalion war diary noted how easily the unknown submarine could have attacked Keith's *Scotian* instead, "We are particularly lucky to have escaped notice."

Keith's 22nd Battalion landed at ANZAC Cove on 5 September and occupied "Rest Gully", awaiting their move into the forward trenches. Inspecting the forward lines prior to taking up position, the Commanding Officer noted in the war diary:

> *General Holmes took me around the 5th Brigade lines and showed us dead unburied bodies 10 yards from trench – there 3 weeks… several bodies buried in trench. Pair Turkish feet protruding and skull visible. Stench and flies awful…*
>
> *Saw many dead Turks in front of B Company and several of our men from attack 3 weeks ago lying in front of A Company lines.*

On 6 September, Keith's Battalion moved forward (Figure 8) to occupy the trenches at Lone Pine, where Will had fought only a month before.

There, they found much the same unsanitary conditions that the CO had described, surrounded by decomposing corpses that could not be recovered from positions exposed to Turkish fire (Figure 9). In the stalemate of trench warfare at ANZAC, the battleground had become an open graveyard occupied by the living and slowly picked over by vermin and shell fire.

Keith's following month in the trenches was marked with regular shelling, sniper fire, erecting and destroying obstacles, and Turkish ruses of rifle fire and rattling or

display of bayonets. The Australians took the offensive through sapping the enemy trenches, and the Turks likewise counter-sapped.

Figure 8 – Keith Looker's 22nd Battalion waiting to relieve 6th Battalion at Lone Pine, 6 September 1915

Figure 9 – Australian dead, killed in No Man's Land at Lone Pine on 6 August 1915, lie unrecovered one month later when Keith Looker's 22nd Battalion relieved the position and this photograph was taken.

In conditions such as these, living in the open weather for months on end, and eating the poor-quality hard rations of the day, the men's health began to suffer. From Egypt, Ffie Looker reports conditions of dreadful dysentery on the Peninsula.

On 4 September, Will was promoted to Lance Corporal and five days later his 2nd Brigade was withdrawn from ANZAC to refit at Moudros, on the Aegean island of Lemnos. The 20 officers and 386 other ranks of the 5th Battalion was about 40 *per cent* of their fully reinforced battle strength, and the Battalion's war diary suggests that the remaining men were in poor condition by this time.

Will was admitted to No.3 Static Hospital at Moudros on 16 September: his service record only records 'teeth', which might suggest a serious dental infection, abscess, or perhaps injury. However, there is some hint that his sister Ffie was expecting him to be admitted to a hospital in either Moudros or Egypt as early as 9 August, but no such admission is noted in his service record. Later, Ffie would find that half of Bill's teeth had been lost or removed. However, he mentions nothing of this in his characteristically upbeat letters.

Although it had been planned that Will's 2nd Brigade would return to ANZAC Cove on 24 October 1915, it instead had to be isolated on Lemnos with numerous cases of diphtheria. As 5th Battalion was heavily reinforced during their quarantine on Lemnos, Will was promoted to Corporal on 3 November 1915. 2nd Brigade did not return to ANZAC until 16 November.

South of the equator and failing to gain a commission in the Heavy Artillery Brigade, Arthur discharged from the South African Expeditionary Force and made his own way to England. Departing from Durban, he arrived at Plymouth via a commercial steamer *Kildonan Castle* on 17 September 1915, and immediately joined a home service battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment as a Second Lieutenant (Figure 10).

Figure 10 – Second Lieutenant Arthur Looker, Cambridgeshire Regiment, in England sometime between mid-1915 and April 1917.

Meanwhile Ffie, on arriving in Egypt, was unpleasantly surprised to find herself transferred from 2nd Australian General Hospital, which was well-equipped for interesting trauma medicine and offered ready access to Cairo, to No. 4 Auxiliary Hospital at Abbassia. This was a 300-bed isolation hospital in the middle of the desert for soldiers with infectious diseases. With the concentration of people that war provides, particularly during extended ocean transport, and the limited immunisation

technology at the time, conditions were ripe for epidemics among the troops. Ffie's days were spent nursing hundreds of men with mumps, diphtheria, typhoid, measles, meningitis, dysentery, and scarlet fever. Some had dreadful complications and serious disease, some were co-infected with multiple diseases, but most men recovered rapidly and had to spend long, boring days in the isolation hospital out in the desert until their nominal period of infectivity had passed.

Ffie's letters show that her extended periods of isolation were punctuated fortnightly with day leave in exotic Cairo, and numerous rumours of delicious content but dubious accuracy. Later, in the trenches of France, Australians would refer to such rumours as 'furphies' after the "Furphy & Sons" brand of water cart that afforded their distribution. Rumour, it seems, fills the vacuum left by media censorship:

> *I got a day off yesterday and asked for a pass for Harvey from 10 till 10 pm we took the Beira tea basket & went to Cairo 1st we went to the Intermediate Base to see if there was any news of Bill... Then we went through some mosques glorious buildings thousands of years old the walls all inlaid with mother of pearl & alabaster & magnificent Persian carpets on the floor we climbed into the tower of one & saw the Pyramids & inner city miles & miles away. We were going to the water works but missed the train we had lunch about 6 courses 4/– went to the zoo had afternoon tea there went for a sail on the Nile. The zoo is glorious so green more like gardens & beautifully kept & bonza giraffes. Then we had dinner 6 courses 5/– & got back at 6 pm Harvey enjoys the food part but I think while we were waiting for the tram at No. 1 we change trams there we saw hundreds of wounded going in to No. 1 in ambulances 800 I believe the train stops at the front & they take them in ambulances to the wards at the back entrance the ambulances are great.*
>
> *…I don't think I quite realised what it would be like here we are not very free. The Egyptian papers have practically no news all censored, so we don't know much – There was a rumour here that the Morea was torpedoed & all souls lost there were nearly 100 nurses on board from here & convalescent patients so every one was in a great way we haven't heard whether its true or not yet another rumour was that the Dardanelles was forced but we don't know what to believe.*

And from another letter:

> *Two of the Drs. (Capt) took me to the native bazaar & it was most interesting. We went to the Scent Bazaar too – a fat old fellow squats down on a magnificent Persian carpet with hundreds of bottles of scent all round him – we sat down in front & he dabbed our sleeves with all kinds of scents & which were about 10/6 for 2 teaspoonfuls, it was delicious scent but we said we'll come tomorrow.*

And from a third we see that the tourist's lot in Cairo has not changed in nearly a hundred years:

> *On my last day off Friday I had a great day – went into Cairo, had lunch & went to the dead city about 3/4 hr from Cairo, a huge place all ruins which had been covered over & they are excavating. We found some old pottery & 2 skulls – a guide insisted upon following us to show us the way which we knew & then demanded 4/–, a great argument ensued – we ended by giving him 2 bob to keep quiet – we drove into Cairo in a carriage & didn't know what to do with the skulls as they were not wrapped up & didn't like to carry them round*

the streets so we bought a newspaper, wrapped them up & left them at the chemist's – we saw temples & tombs by the thousand & Coptic Churches ever so old & which ever way we went natives followed us & demanded baksheesh, it's a fearful pest & nearly drives you dotty, if you walk in the streets of Cairo they follow you for miles with post cards, baskets, beads etc. & bunches of roses & try to bargain with you & when you get on the Heliopolis tram it's simply swarmed with natives with chocolate, oranges, papers, fans, they are so persistent too, if you happen to meet their eye that's the end of it.

In stark contrast to Ffie's combat with Egyptian touts, Keith remained in the fighting trenches at ANZAC. The 22nd Battalion war diary notes that the early evening of 22 October saw heavy rain fall and a cold snap. The autumn weather was closing in on the exposed men, and again rain fell all night on 24 October. Two days later, on the 26th, Keith was admitted to a field ambulance at ANZAC with an influenza-like illness: non-specific symptoms such as muscle aches, fever, and possibly a sore throat or cough or uncontrollable shaking.

Rather than being a transient infection brought on with the weather, his illness was serious. By 2 November he'd been evacuated to St George's Hospital on the Mediterranean island of Malta, where the most serious casualties of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force were treated. Keith deteriorated rapidly and developed jaundice, yellow pigmentation of the skin and eyes that can be a sign of liver failure.

Figure 11 – Keith Looker, probably in Egypt during June or July 1915.

The medical staff treating him could not have known what disease was making their patient so desperately ill: they did not have the serology tests or laboratory equipment needed to identify an infecting organism. Today, we can only make guesses about the sort of infection that Keith may have caught in the hostile

environment and unsanitary conditions of the trenches. Perhaps he'd developed a fulminant liver inflammation from a faecal-borne Hepatitis A Virus, still prevalent in the Middle East to this day, or maybe leptospirosis from rodent urine.

It is a moot point. Keith Looker (Figure 11) died on 15 November 1915, and was buried the next day in the Pieta New Military Cemetery on Malta, Block D, Row 6 or 60, No 5. One might at least be thankful that he received the rapid and dignified burial that so many soldiers at ANZAC had been denied.

Back in Australia, on the day Keith was buried and not knowing that his brother was dead, Harold Looker sent a telegram to Army administration in response to their cable that Keith was dangerously ill:

> *I beg to acknowledge receipt of your telegrams of even date reading as under. I confirm my telephone message to your Captain Lean asking him to at once cable Malta enquiring for a progress report. I have acquainted my mother of the contents of the above telegram. I will be glad if you will as in this case send all future communications to me at the above address as arranged with your Mr. McIntosh as my mother is an elderly lady and in rather delicate health. Yours faithfully, H. Looker, Railway Avenue, Caulfield East.*

Three days later the Lookers in Melbourne were notified of Keith's death. It was not until early 1916 that the family received his death certificate and June of that year that they received a package of his personal effects. They are the pathetic accoutrements of a field soldier: a bible, a book and pencil, fountain pen, letters – likely many that they had written – and post cards, a cigarette case and pipe with tobacco pouch, two handkerchiefs and a small cloth bag. Keith's death revisited them for months with each Army communiqué, parcel, or administrative task.

Despite being a nurse in Egypt, Ffie still had not heard of Keith's death a fortnight later when she wrote:

> *I suppose you have heard by now Keith is at Malta – just in case you haven't I'll give his address No. 10 Ward A Group St. George's Hospital, Malta – his letter was 3 weeks old when I got it, so of course you probably knew before I did. I wouldn't be surprised if he were bound for Australia – there has been a lot of jaundice & a lot of the men have been invalided back, it would be just as well as the life at the Peninsula in dreadful.*
>
> *I haven't heard from the boys lately but had a note from Alby Alder to say he's got the tin of chocolate & biscuits I sent Keith & was keeping it for him. I wrote and told him to eat it as I hoped Keith wouldn't have to go back – I'm getting a bit worried about Bill I haven't heard since he was at Lemnos*

In the event, Ffie did not hear of her brother's death for a nearly month after:

> *There is no mail this week but I am writing – I didn't hear from Keith or Will for so long so I went to the Intermediate Base on 12/12/15 & heard of Keith's death. It was a great shook to me as I had been there so often & never seemed to expect anything & as he had written to me from Malta & said he would probably be there for a week or two. I thought he was out of danger – it was Will I was worrying about as I haven't heard from him since the beginning of October. & I've written & sent things several times & haven't heard a word.*

Poor old Keith, he was such a good boy too. I hope he didn't suffer much. I am writing to the Sister of the ward at Malta & if I hear anything will send the letter on. He died just 10 days after he wrote to me & the letter was 3 weeks old when I got it & I was thinking he would be comfortable & out of danger then they say it's a splendid hospital with every comfort but I do wish they had brought him to Egypt. The letter I had from Alda was written on the 16th November – so it's all very sad.

They say it's fearfully cold at the Peninsula now & hundreds of cases are coming back frost-bitten. I hate to hear the [casualty] trains come in, there have been 2 or 3 every day lately – we can hear them whistling & then puffing & puffing up the hill about 5 or 6 min away. They make a good noise as there is an engine at each end.

We don't know how or when Will found out about Keith's fate. Six weeks after Keith's passing, at ANZAC Will's unit was involved in the most successful military operation of the entire Gallipoli campaign: a textbook amphibious withdrawal that caught the Turks largely unawares. On the evening of 11 December 1915, the 5th Battalion was evacuated from ANZAC Cove to Lemnos and then, after a few days reorganisation, on to Alexandria, arriving on 6 and 7 January 1916. The Battalion made bivouac at the Tel el Kabir Camp, where over the coming weeks large numbers of men rejoined the unit from being sick or wounded.

The now-veteran battalion spent the next few months in Egypt. Around 21 January, Will was able to visit his sister Ffie at Abbassia, seeing her for the first time since he'd departed Australia fifteen months before. She reported home on his health, reprising some of the wounds he'd received at Gallipoli:

I think I told you Bill came to see me, he looks well & seems bigger. I was in bed the evening he came with a bad cold... Bill left me his old hat to keep, it has 2 bullet holes through it – he has lost 1/2 of his teeth which somewhat mars his looks which is a pity but can't be helped…

On the evening of 24 January, 5th battalion was suddenly scrambled and entrained at 2 a.m. for an unknown destination. It transpired that there had been a report of "hostile troops" approaching Eastern Egypt. By 29 January, the battalion was entrenching at the forward firing line of the Canal Zone yet there were no further reports of enemy troops. Perhaps the generals were jumping at shadows; or perhaps they were very wisely creating a threat for these battle-hardened and traumatised men to focus upon, rather than allowing them to degenerate into a dissolute and drunken rabble in some garrison camp near Cairo. While developing their defensive position near the Suez Canal, the battalion had ample time for reorganisation, drilling and training. Will himself was promoted to Lance Sergeant in late February, and attended a two-week course at the School of Instruction that had been established at Zeitoun.

The Australians might have stayed in Egypt indefinitely, fighting the Ottoman Empire in the East, were it not for the German attack on Verdun, France, on 21 February 1916. It was battle on a vast scale: it would continue for the next ten months and claim 371,000 French and 337,000 German killed, missing and wounded. This strategic shift on the Western Front was a major factor in the decision to redeploy the ANZAC to France.

By mid-March 5th Battalion had moved to a staging camp, and Will was promoted to Sergeant. On 30 March 1916 the unit embarked aboard HMT *Briton* for travel to Marseilles to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the Western Front.

Arthur, too, had recently been sent to the Western Front. The 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment, to which he belonged, was comprised of four battalions: 1st Battalion was the front line unit, while the other three were home service units that acted to raise, train and rest reinforcements for 1st Battalion. On 23 March 1916, Arthur was transferred from 3rd Battalion, the home service to which he'd originally been posted, to 1st Battalion on the Western Front.

Ffie, meanwhile, was bound in the opposite direction. With the lull in the Eastern theatre that came with withdrawal from Gallipoli, her work load had diminished and she had a chance to travel to Luxor on four days' leave. In an era that still had not seen Tutankhamen's tomb, one can sense the excitement that discovery of ancient Egypt still offered; even more so for an intelligent woman who never expected to have an opportunity to see ancient treasures first hand. Ffie writes of Luxor:

> *…where all the wonders of Egypt are: Temples & ruins of the ancient Pharaoh & the tombs of the Kings & Queens of Ancient Egypt – thousands of years old & some of them in good preservation & only been discovered a few years. I left here at 8 p.m. & travelled all night & got to Luxor at 9 a.m. – it was a fearful journey nothing but dust there were 4 of us in the carriage so we were half lying & half sitting but got there at last – one has to ride on donkeys to see most of the sights we would start about 8 a .m. & get back to lunch at 1 p.m. – The tombs are marvellous & some of the hieroglyphs are in perfect order the colouring is wonderful & a lost art nowadays. In one tomb there is the mummy of King Amenhopt II [i.e. Amenhotep III] beautifully preserved & his 3 servants 2 women & one man – their hair is all there in good order its simply marvellous. The mummies have been removed from most of the other tombs – we saw huge statues of Rames [i.e. Ramses] the Great & temples it was simply wonderful & very hot. I had my goggles & thick veil on & the Sun was burning hot we rode for miles across the desert & came to a huge hill nothing to be seen & then came to the tiny entrance to the tombs which are buried under the hill & rubbish put on top of them so they wouldn't be found – we sailed down the Nile to the orange grove & had a feast of oranges & drove through the irrigated land & saw the natives drawing all the water from the Nile by hand as they have been doing for thousands of years – I'll send some photos soon & for about 10 miles wide along the bank of the Nile there are beautiful green crops of barley & all sorts of green stuff. All the rest of the land is simply desert sand it's wonderful. Going up in the train we went through miles & miles of poppies red & white & heliotrope grown for opium – The sunrise was beautiful all sorts of shades first behind the palms & then big So slowly rising up & little native villages dolled here & there – I think I saw more wonders in those 4 days than I've seen all the rest of my life. After I got back I went straight to this new Hospital No. III AGH about ½ way into Cairo from No. 4 Aux. – it's a huge barracks & I'm waiting for orders. I don't know where we are going but I'll write when I know – we stay here every third day on call otherwise are free so we are getting a good rest.*

Ffie was indeed bound in the opposite direction: within six days of writing this letter she had received orders to return to Australia and embarked aboard HMAT *Demosthenes* (A64) at Port Said on 19 March 1916. Ffie arrived back in Melbourne on 16 April.

In France, Bill's battalion continued their training in earnest over the next month until, on 29 April 1916, they took to the front line trenches for first time against the Germans. In the Fleurbaix sector, the casualties immediately began to mount once more.

The battalion was constantly in and out of the forward trenches, first at Fleurbaix and then at La Grand Monque, taking up the line for two weeks at a time.

It was during this time in Europe that Will had the opportunity for some well-deserved leave in England, probably where he had his portrait taken around May 1916 (Figure 12), and Wales where he seems to have visited one 'Lloyd' family with his mate L Langford.

Figure 12 – Will Looker, sometime between February and November, probably May 1916

Unfortunately, Britain may also have been where he had a liaison with a lady who was not in an entirely pristine state of health but who, in all likelihood, was quite professional in her work. Will returned to France in June 1916 and was back with the battalion in the trenches of Fleurbaix when the symptoms must have started. He probably hung on as long as he was able, being a responsible Platoon Sergeant, but simply had to seek medical attention as soon as the unit was relieved from the front line. The very next day, on 11 June, he reported to a field ambulance and was admitted to hospital with a "venereal disease". A letter to the family in Melbourne from Arthur would later euphemistically describe this as "slightly wounded": it seems that the trenches were not the only front of the War.

Will's treatment lasted 40 days, and he was not discharged until 25 July 1916. By that time, 5th Battalion had already been engaged in the Battle of Pozières on the Somme for two days, and Will was forced to wait for an opportunity to join them. His absence from battle gives a unique twist to the slogan, "Make love, not War."

Will rejoined 5th Battalion on 3 August, arriving back as they were withdrawn from the forward trenches of Pozières. A week later the unit paraded in the rear areas, as the Battalion's war diary notes, "Road lined by troops of brigade whilst His Majesty 'The King' passed through, followed by presentations of Military Medals by Army Corps Commander." Before long they returned to forward trenches at Pozières, for six days of extremely bloody fighting from 16 to 21 August 1916.

Arthur, too, had made his way to the Western Front with the Cambridgeshire Regiment and was fighting there as a platoon commander, though our sources do not describe this in detail. On 20 July 1916, at a feature on the Somme front left by the explosion of a huge German mine one month before – Red Dragon Crater at La Bassée – Arthur led an action for which he was Mentioned In Dispatches and would later receive the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), with the citation:

> *2nd Lt. Arthur William Looker, Cambs. R. For conspicuous gallantry when leading a raid on the enemy's trenches. In face of heavy fire he forced his way through uncut wire and ran up and down the enemy's parapet firing in their faces. Though wounded in both hands, foot and abdomen, he refused assistance till quite close to our own trench.*

On 26 August he wrote to his mother Fanny from the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, on the banks of the Thames in Millbank, London:

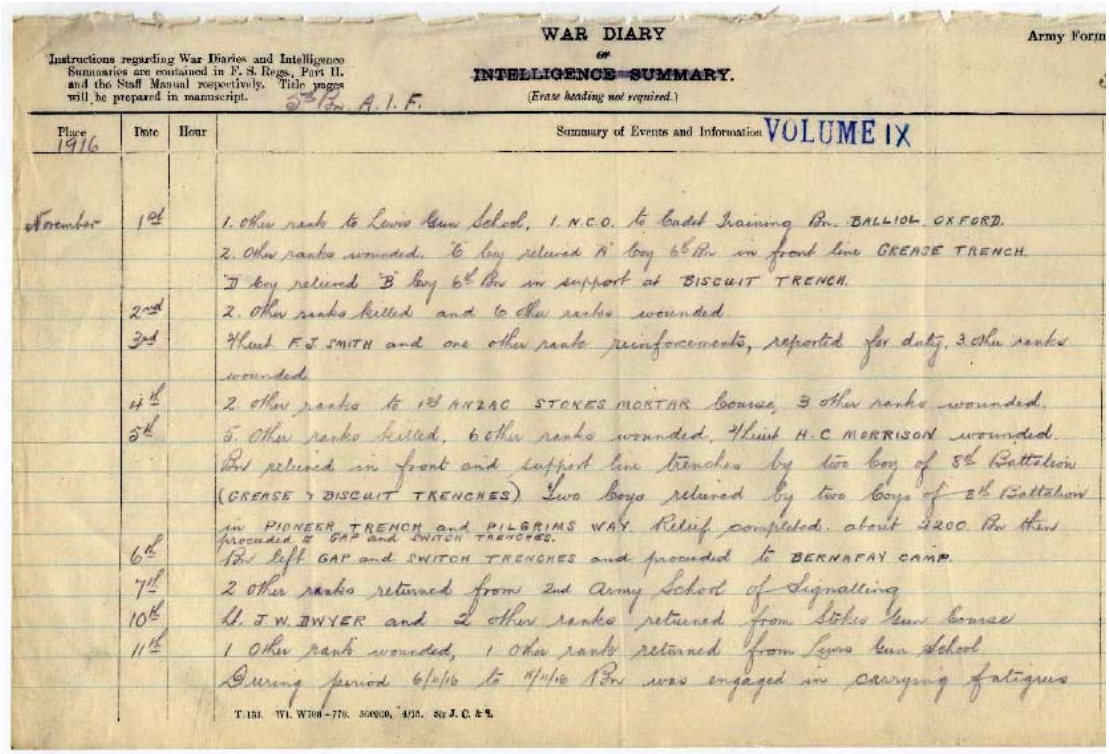
> *I am getting on very well indeed & am looking forward to being able to get out of bed in a week or two – at present I can get out & sit about but as I can't walk yet and cannot manipulate either a wheeled chair or crutches I feel rather helpless so don't get out very often – Had my foot & hand x-rayed last week & it shows that my foot had every toe broken but one, instead of just the big & little toes as I thought, so no wonder it hurt a bit. However that is all over now practically – the foot is healing up wonderfully and getting back into right shape & I think eventually will be just as good as ever it was.*
>
> *I have only two leg wounds now that are being dressed daily & they are rapidly healing – the others are all healed up. My right little finger thro [sic] which a piece of shrapnel went is quite healed up tho still a little stiff in the joint, that is only a matter of time. The two fingers on the left hand – that is the second and third – have had the knuckles blown out & bone pulverised but they are doing well. They may remain stiff, but surgery has reached such a pitch now that they may be able to make joints on them later on when they are thoroughly healed. In any case I am lucky to have saved the fingers at all so am not doing too badly. My old tummy wound too is practically quite healed and I feel very fit indeed and am eating & sleeping well. The grub here is very good & everything is so clean & neat that except for the fact that I can't get about much I am quite enjoying my stay here.*
>
> *…The people here certainly go to a lot of trouble in looking after strangers & they can't do too much for Australians.*

By this time Ffie had joined a new hospital unit that was being raised in Melbourne for service overseas, 14th Australian General Hospital. It was originally established as a 1,040-bed hospital for service in France but was rapidly replanned at half this size when its theatre of operations was changed to Egypt. Ffie was one of its 30 nurses, all of whom had previously served with the AIF overseas. She embarked aboard No 1 Australian Hospital Ship *Karoola* on 19 August 1916 for her passage to Egypt and after brief stopovers in Adelaide, Fremantle and Colombo, the vessel arrived at Suez on 20 September. Ffie was soon back in her old haunts at Abbassia, where the Hospital established itself to provide the medical services for the entire AIF in Egypt.

In France, Will's 5th Battalion continued to hold the front line for periods. They relieved 8th Battalion in the forward trenches at Ypres in Flanders from 13 to 26 September 1916, and then returned to Support Trenches in the vicinity of Pommiers, in the Somme front on 29 October 1916.

It was here on the Somme that Will's luck finally ran out after such a long exposure to front line combat. On 3 November 1916 he was wounded in action, suffering severe shrapnel wounds to his left arm, left knee and right thigh. The 5th Battalion diary (Figure 13) merely notes, "3 other ranks wounded", which suggests that the unit had not been involved in any large-scale action and was simply holding its position in the trenches.

Figure 13 – 5th Battalion Diary, 3 November 1916, "3 other ranks wounded"



WAR DIARY
or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Army Form

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

5th Bn. A.I.F.

VOLUME IX

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
1916			
November	1st		1 Other ranks to Lewis Gun School, 1 N.C.O. to Cadet Training Bn. BALLIOL OXFORD.
			2 Other ranks wounded. C boy relieved A boy 6th Bn in front line GREASE TRENCH.
			D boy relieved B boy 6th Bn in support at BISCUIT TRENCH.
	2nd		2 Other ranks killed and 6 Other ranks wounded
	3rd		2/Lieut F.J. SMITH and one other rank reinforcements, reported for duty, 3 Other ranks wounded
	4th		2 Other ranks to 1st ANZAC STOKES MORTAR Course, 3 Other ranks wounded.
	5th		5 Other ranks killed, 6 Other ranks wounded, 2/Lieut H.C MERRISON wounded.
			Bn relieved in front and support line trenches by two boys of 8th Battalion (GREASE & BISCUIT TRENCHES) Two boys relieved by two boys of 8th Battalion in PIONEER TRENCH and PILGRIMS WAY. Relief completed about 2200 Bn then proceeded to GAP and SWITCH TRENCHES.
	6th		Bn left GAP and SWITCH TRENCHES and proceeded to BERNAFAY CAMP.
	7th		2 Other ranks returned from 2nd Army School of Signalling
	10th		Lt. J.W. DWYER and 2 Other ranks returned from Stokes Gun Course
	11th		1 Other rank wounded, 1 Other rank returned from Lewis Gun School
			During period 6/11/16 to 11/11/16 Bn was engaged in carrying fatigues

T.151. Wt. W708-776. 500000. 4/15. Sir J. C. & S.

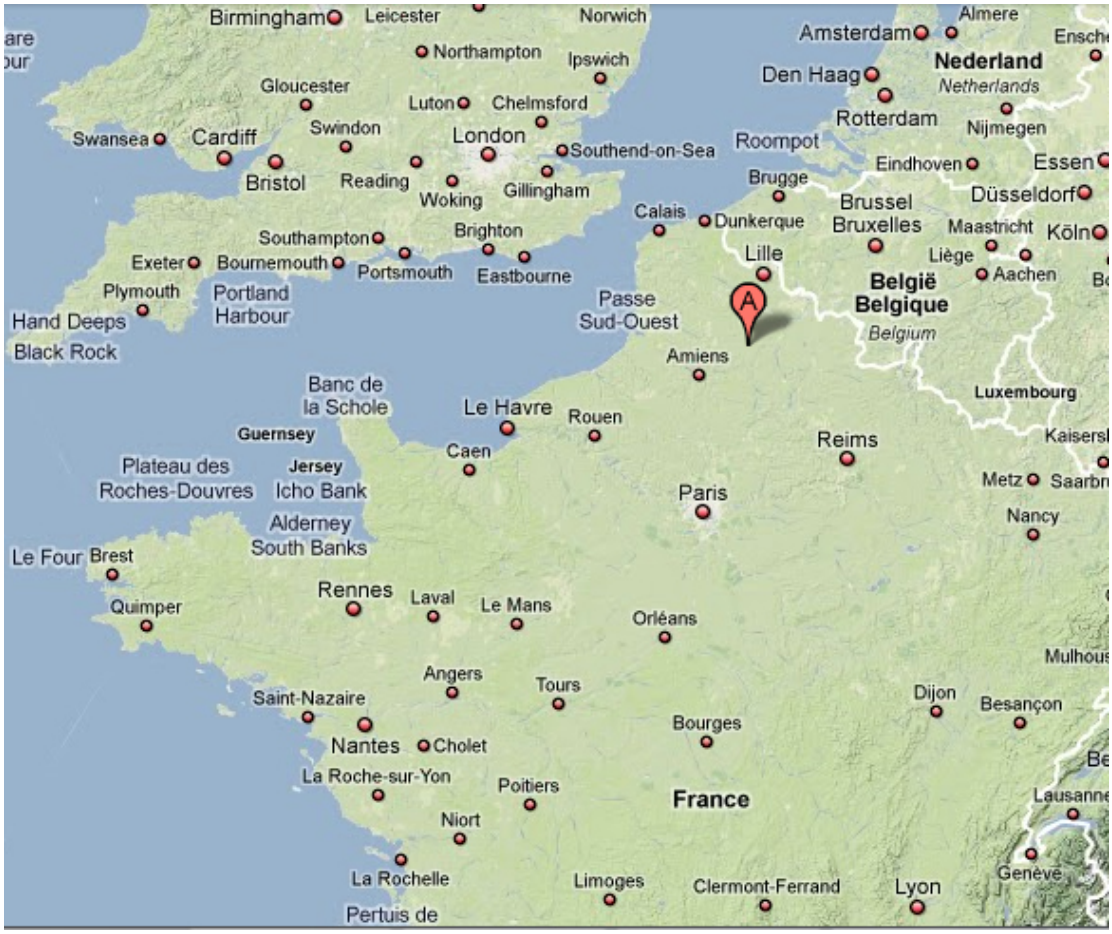
Arthur was on extended convalescence leave in Torquay, Devon, when he received news of Will's injury and was given permission to visit Rouen. He would later report what had happened to Will:

> *…they were down in the Somme district right in front of Bapaume* [Figure 14] *& as the trenches were very muddy he had burrowed into a hole in the parapet & got in there to sleep & was in fact asleep when a stray shell*

dropped right into the trench & burst about 2 yards from him. His left leg was badly smashed & he also had wounds in the fleshy part of the right leg between the knee & thigh & a piece had gone thro the upper part of left arm – these two were just deep flesh wounds, no bones being touched.

The testament of infantrymen from the Great War often reveals their fear of artillery shells and shrapnel, which often inflicted a higher energy, chaotic and destructive injury that rifle or machine gun fire. Will's wounds were extensive, serious, and soiled with cold Somme mud.

Figure 14 – Bapaume, France, near where Will was wounded 3 November 1916



Some eight months later, Ffie happened upon a wounded Australia soldier who had been with Will when he was injured:

…he said he was on the spot when Will was hit & another boy was hit at the same time & was temporarily blinded but is back now with the regiment – He said Will was his favourite platoon Sgt. & was a great favourite with everyone – they had to carry him on a stretcher 2 miles through mud & freezing cold to the dressing station…

Three days after his admission to No. 12 General Hospital, Rouen, Will's left leg was amputated above the knee. Arthur continues, but misidentifies the amputated limb:

He was brought by various stages per ambulance and hospital train to the No. 12 General Hospital at Rouen & there they first operated to remove a piece of shrapnel which had remained in his right leg & then the following day

amputated the leg. When I saw him he was quite cheerful altho [sic] he said he was still suffering a bit of pain in the stump but that he was well looked after & had everything he wanted. I went to see him again in the afternoon of the day of my arrival & he seemed quite comfortable & talked of being ready for transfer to England as soon as the pain in his leg had abated a little.

On 12 November, one Dorothy Newton, a family acquaintance from Melbourne on nursing duty in France, wrote to Will's sister Lynette Kerferd:

The poor boy has been very badly hit but is doing very well indeed now & in the very best of spirits. I thought it best to write to you instead of your mother. I thought the shock to her would be very great & that you could tell her more easily than I could explain in letter…

…I am most awfully sorry to have to write to you this awful news but I know the information obtainable from the Defence Dept is vague & I know how very much everyone wants to try & find out as much as possible so thought this letter information would please you.

Will wants you to cable some money to him on the arrival of this letter, he thinks he might need it when in England…

Will was planning for convalescence in England, but he would never need the money. Three weeks after the amputation, in the early afternoon of 27 November 1916, Will Looker died in Rouen of his wounds. He was buried in Grave O. II. V. 5. at the Saint Sever Cemetery Extension in Rouen, France.

Arthur was present when Will died:

The next day I was getting him some tobacco & several small items he wanted round the town when they sent from the Hospital for me saying he had had a sudden haemorrhage that morning from femoral artery & altho the nurse was at his bed when the haemorrhage started & was able to stop it almost at once he was so weak & run down that he was in a state of collapse when I got there & tho they did all they could to rally him he died that day at 1 p.m.
…
I am very glad & you will all feel it too that I was able to get over & see him.

…I stayed till the funeral which was 2 days later & was carried out with full military honours – the last post being sounded & 3 volleys fired over the grave… he is buried there beside many another good man & true who has given up his life for his country.

Now dear Mother this will be all very sad reading for you but I hope you will have some measure of consolation in the thought that will died for the Empire & his own great country – a brave soldier & full of grit to the last, like a true Australian.

Just as in the 'gallantry' of Arthur's own DSO citation, we read echoes here of that myth of Empire, first illustrated through Arthur's thoughts at the grave of Cecil Rhodes. The path of Empire seems strewn with graves. We read here, too, the first glimmer that the Imperial myth was being substituted with another: one more suited to the young Commonwealth and which would remain with us to this day, that of the "true Australian." Yet, reflecting on such myth-making more charitably, one might

also consider it indispensible. For how else could one endure seeing one's young brother or son mutilated in a violent contest of states and still maintain the mental health required to live a flourishing life? Myth is a filtered prism that allows one to look upon the glaring realities of life without being blinded too severely.

Ffie did not hear of Will's death until December, and later reported from London:

> *[Arthur and I] went & had a good dinner & he told me all about Will – he said he was in a hospital for 14 days & had his leg off about 10 days & everyone thought he was getting on well – but had to have an anaesthetic for his dressings – he haemorrhaged but not much & was so worn out he collapsed & Arthur was sent for but he was unconscious for a while when he came & did not recover. The day before he kept saying to Arthur, "I'm so glad to see you."*

"I'm so glad to see you." Will was 23 years old.

After Arthur's discharge from hospital he had spent two months on convalescence leave in Torquay, probably October and November 1916, followed by another month in London. Although free to remain on leave, he became bored and restless. Perhaps some of this was a reflection of Will's recent death, which must have plagued Arthur's mind in those long, undistracted days of convalescence. Arthur returned to his battalion earlier than required, around January 1917, and was given a position as a Company second-in-command, which required only basic administrative duties of him. It is possible that his combat injuries now limited him to service in the Regiment's home service battalions, the 3rd and 4th, rather than service at the front.

On 16 January 1917 Ffie was transferred from the Middle Eastern theatre, and embarked the Hospital Ship *Essequibo* at Alexandria bound for London. As the 14th Australian General Hospital war diary notes:

> *Many of the Sisters who came with this unit, had already done service in Egypt and were promised a transfer to a cooler climate when an opportunity arose. This promise was fulfilled in January 1917 when the "Kaiser I Hind" arrived from Australia with sixty reinforcements on board – fifty one of whom were retained for duty here – the remaining nine together with the twenty six from this unit and twenty five from Choubra Infectious Hospital left for England on 16-1-17 by the H:S: "Essesquibo", Sister F. Lowe being in charge.*

If Ffie's motives for transferring out of Egypt were to seek the comfort of "a cooler climate", in due course she may well have come to regret that decision. During her short time in England, she went on a shopping spree to outfit herself for the cold of a European winter. She also took the opportunity to meet with Arthur for a brief reunion dinner in London, before embarking for France on 8 February 1917.

She was only a day or two in France when she received an unexpected taste of the War at Amiens (Figure 14), about 10 February:

> *We left Boulogne about 1.30 a.m. & as the train was 4 hours late we missed our connection [at Amiens] & had to stay the night. Fancy only 19 miles from the firing line & at 9 pm they had an air raid, we stayed in a hotel near the station the 1st one we came to & this same station was what they were after – all the air craft guns were going all night & you never heard such a din I can tell you I was scared we were in the top story of a ramshackle hotel so soon got down to the basement, I was in bed when they started & lights were flashing everywhere – It was funny in the cellar among the potatoes – they*

stopped for 2 hours & we all lay down on the floor in the sitting room & then they started again & kept on till 4 am & bits of shell were falling through the roof outside the windows – we had to leave at 5.30 am to get the train & had to walk over a mile to the next station to catch the train, no vehicles at that hour. About half way the guns started again we scuttled like rabbits but nothing more happened we were there too soon as the train left at 7 a.m.

Ffie arrive that day at her new unit, 11th Static Hospital, Rouen, France.

Within a fortnight of living there in the field during the European winter, Ffie had caught influenza with a superimposed tonsillitis and spiking temperatures of 39 degrees Celsius. On 23 February she was admitted to her own hospital. A week later she wrote home:

I've been in bed for a week – with a throat & cold, but am well again now & will probably be up in a day or two – I arrived at the sick sisters Hospital as a stretcher case, & laughed at 1st I felt so well but the next 2 days I had an awful time & never want to be sick again. They were all so good to us here & it is beautifully warm & cosy & every comfort & good food & wine 2 – twice – a day – The sun has been shining for 2 days so perhaps it will be warmer this month – I must hurry up & get better as there is plenty – too much – to do – Four of us went to each hospital & the sister who came with us got sick suddenly & died in 12 hours like Willie Downie [Ffie's cousin], we got a great shock it was so sudden. She had a military funeral & there were about 10 large wreaths from the different Hospitals, she was buried in the same cemetery as Will. I went to his grave, the cemetery is not finished yet so they won't let you do anything to the graves but the corporal there said he would have it fixed up & I could get plants in a week or two.

…There are hundreds & hundreds of graves with a little wooden cross over than & there were the remains of a wreath & pot plant somebody had put there. I'll get some nice plants – it's only about five min. from our Hospital out the back way. Things will be very quiet here as there is no time at all for recreation, the last week the convoys were coming in and going out all day & night, it was very strenuous…

However, she was not able to shake her illness, which progressed to chronic bronchitis with a severe cough. On 21 March 1917 she embarked the Hospital Ship *St David* as a sick case, to return to England for convalescence. Somewhere along the evacuation chain or in another hospital, she caught measles, which caused neuralgia and an intractable ear ache. For some weeks she was temporarily deaf in her left ear.

About this time in March 1917, soon after rejoining his unit, Arthur (Figure 15) received his DSO from the King. As he wrote to his mother, Fanny:

I forgot to tell you I went up to Buckingham Palace to get my D.S.O. from George a few weeks before I joined this Battalion. …the show went off quite well & the old boy was very affable. There were about 30 others there & after the investiture we had to run the gauntlet of the press photographers outside. While they collared one fellow I managed to slip past.

With the prestige of a DSO, Arthur was promoted to Lieutenant and in April transferred to another home service battalion in the Regiment, 4th Battalion, as temporary Captain and given command of a company. The unit was housed under

tents at Thoresby in Sherwood Forrest, Nottinghamshire, and Arthur, as company commander, benefited from use of a horse (Figure 16).

Figure 15 – Lieutenant Arthur Looker, DSO, in a portrait taken sometime after March 1921 when all of his campaign medals had been dispatched.

Figure 16 – Arthur Looker, 4/1st Cambridgeshire Regiment, on horseback during a route march in England, probably the Sherwood Forrest between April and July 1917.

At the beginning of May, Ffie was still convalescing from her illness:

> *St. Albans about 30 miles from London staying at Mr. McIlwraith home of McIlwraith & McEachran the shipping people. He and his son have both lent their homes to be used as convalescent homes for Australian Sisters.*

However, by mid-May she had recovered sufficiently to return to active duty and returned to France, arriving back at the 11th Static Hospital in Rouen on 27 May 1917:

> *I'm working in a part they call the Cabbage Patch which it was before the tents were put there, about 100 of them & very comfortable too. Nearly all the patients are Australians & most of them either have or had trench fever [a louse-borne bartonellosis related to cat-scratch disease, highly prevalent in the lousy trenches], which seems to leave them with aching legs for weeks*
>
> *Yesterday the 3 of us had an afternoon off & went to Rouen, but it was Whit Monday & all the shops were shut. The American nurses have arrived in Rouen. I believe the American orderlies got a good deal of jeering at as they informed the British they came to win the war for them & were told they were rather late.*
> *…*
> *I went over to Will's grave yesterday & it is covered with pansies & forget-me-nots which Sisters McGregor & Miller planted while I was away, wasn't it good of them. I picked a few & pressed them for you & will enclose them. The authorities will not allow any stone crosses to be put up till after the war. I asked but they said it was absolutely forbidden.*

After two months, on 22 July 1917, Ffie was posted No. 1 Australian General Hospital in Rouen, only 5 minutes down the road from her 11th Static Hospital. 1AGH was a huge 1,040-bed hospital and here Ffie returned to the unending task of caring for the sick and injured. The 1AGH war diary shows that Ffie was one of 68 nursing staff, and that the hospital had a throughput of about 1,500 medical admissions and 650 wounded that month alone: illness was about two and a half times more incident that combat injuries.

And it was here at 1AGH that Ffie herself was wounded, though through accident rather than malice. On 25 October 1917 she was admitted to No. 8 General Hospital with a laceration of her left hand, which severed a nerve:

> *Once again I'm an invalid. I cut my hand on a bottle I was opening – the bottle broke & cut my thumb & 3rd finger not much of cuts but in an awkward spot & I believe I cut the tendons & nerves, anyway they gave me chloroform & tied the nerves it took about an hour. Col. Dunhill did it, it was good of him to take so much trouble as they were only small cuts about an inch, anyway I'm getting a good rest – I'm in an awfully nice room here at the Sick Sisters Hospital its a study in green & pink & like a private hospital – dainty trays & hot water bags ad lib., chicken & wine for dinner no doubt they look after you well when you're sick it's a great change after running around in the eternal rain & tents.*

Ffie was back on duty by 2 November, and had the opportunity to take two weeks of leave in England at the end of December.

Back in England, by mid-1917 the decision had been made to disband Arthur's battalion and distribute its strength among another regiment. On 21 July 1917, Arthur was posted to yet another home service unit, 2nd Battalion of the 4th Norfolk Regiment. Being limited to home service units by his combat injuries must have rankled Arthur, who was always cognizant of his prospects for promotion. Possibly through cap-badge loyalty but more likely wanting to escape the career *cul-de-sac* of home service, Arthur was not interested in starting afresh in a new regiment.

Rather, he decided upon a return to South Africa, which offered him some prospect of field service. He'd heard of a regiment there known as the King's African Rifles: a fighting formation of native Africans, officered by Caucasians. Victorian racial ideas were still alive and well, reflected in the relative wealth and education of Africans and Europeans at the time. In this way, racial prejudice played into socioeconomic status and effectively prevented an African from obtaining a commission. It also assured that the essential competencies of planning and organising military force remained exclusively in the hands of Europeans, undermining the capability of potential native revolutionary movements: racism was central to the function of Empire.

Arthur liked the idea of returning to South Africa and field service enough that he was prepared to accept a drop in rank, from temporary Captain back down to Lieutenant, to achieve it. Higher pay in the colonial army made the sacrifice easier.

Arthur was duly accepted into the African force and went on to complete two months of formal training in England, followed by another five weeks of leave, before embarking for a long, six-week voyage to South Africa. They took a route through the Atlantic, the Suez Canal not being in use, and the submarine threat probably forced them almost to the North American coast before they come back east to Sierra Leone, Cape Town and finally Durban. It was a port with which Arthur was intimately familiar, having based himself out of the town on and off since 1903.

A short time after joining his new unit in Durban, they embarked for a journey up the coast to the East Africa theatre and began training their raw, native recruits. His next letter of March 1918 was written from Nairobi, British East Africa and now Kenya (Figure 1):

> *It is rather hot here in the middle of the day but quite cool night & morning. It is only one degree south of the Equator but being about 6000 feet above sea level the climate is not bad, the sun is very strong during the day & one must wear a helmet, even if only outside for a minute. Some days when it is clear we can see in the south Mt. Kilimanjaro 125 miles away & in the north Mt. Kenia 95 miles off, both snow capped all the year round. There has been an unprecedented drought here lately & there has been practically no rain since October last consequently everything is very dried up and dusty.*
>
> *…Sometimes on Sunday I go out shooting early in the morning. There are plenty of Zebra, Hartebeeste, Thomson's Gazelle and Grant's Gazelle within a few miles of camp also Hyaenas, Jackals & an occasional Rhino handy. Coming up in the train we saw any amount of buck of all kinds – herds of literally hundreds – and several giraffe as well. I am very fit indeed but will be glad to get down to the front – it gets a bit monotonous up here & I don't care much for Nairobi.*

In early April 1918, Arthur's unit – 1st Battalion, 3rd King's African Rifles – left Nairobi and made their way via train, boat, car and foot into the southern part of German East Africa, near its border with Mozambique. Arthur gives some feel of the country:

On the way up we passed thro some wonderful looking country, forests & banana & rubber plantations – mahogany & ebony trees & giant grass – very pretty but very unhealthy country to stop in. Where we are camped however is quite a healthy spot overlooking a long valley, towards, the Portuguese border. The camp is surrounded by tremendous rocky Kopjes & is very picturesque. I was appointed Bombing Officer on my arrival but have had very little to do yet as some of our companies are away out on detached posts 25 or 30 miles from here.

…We live in grass huts which the niggers are very expert at building – these huts are quite watertight and are very cool. They make a framework of bamboos or sticks & thatch it with grass – no nails or rope at all are used but they use the inside of a certain kind of bark which is very strong & makes a good substitute for rope. The framework is all tied up with this, then the grass woven in somehow, making a very good hut.

There is no wagon or motor transport here so when we move everything has to be carried by porters – these fellows will carry 40 or 50 lbs on their heads all day without any trouble.

Their adversary was an exceptionally capable German, General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, who had been conducting war against the British on the smell of an oily rag since the outbreak of war in August 1914, yet achieved victory after victory against them. Now, almost four years later and as the war in Europe was finally being decided in the Allies' favour, von Lettow continued his astute campaign. The German General kept the British chasing him around Eastern Africa, tying down their numerically superior forces in a strategically insignificant theatre. There were always 'rumours' among the British officers that they would be bound for another front, perhaps Mesopotamia – if only they could finish off that damned German.

Ffie was still dealing with the grim realities of the Western Front in 16 June 1918:

We got quite a lot of 'Aussies' in lately & they greatly appreciated the Australasians [newspapers] & bullies [The Bulletin magazine] I passed on to them – poor things they were all gassed but were nearly all right again except for awful coughs – they seem so bright & jolly after the Tommies who are very nice boys but very quiet...

During the last offensive for 2 nights the guns during the bombardment were terrific in the distance of course about 3 times as far as Dandenong so you can imagine, but most nights are quiet…

This ward is composed of three marquees & has 56 beds & there is an orderly on with me – most of the work consists of receiving cases & evacuating them to England, we often get 20 in the night & send out 9 or 10 – sometimes a couple of convoys arrive but when the Cambrai push was on they came in all the time night & day – we are not really awfully busy now.

Exhausted with the demands of nursing large numbers of patients with infectious diseases and trauma, Ffie was again able to take a couple of weeks' leave from 6 to 23 September 1918. Travelling through Kent, London, Dublin and Killarney (Figure 17) provided a change that helped rejuvenate her. After her return to 1AGH she was promoted to Sister, the nursing rank between Staff Nurse and Matron, on 1 October 1918.

Figure 17 – Ffie on leave Friday 13 September 1918, third from the right during a wet horse ride on the Cape of Dunloe, Killarney Lakes, Ireland.

Only 21 months since he sustained major orthopaedic injuries in the trench raid, Arthur was now regularly covering 30 to 40 kilometres per day on foot. Here he gives some idea of the campaign's pace: an immensely different war to that he'd known on the Western Front, this was a mobile war in the tropics:

> *I'll give you a typical day – rise about 5 am (just before daylight) porridge & coffee if one is wise & the food is available – march off at 6.30 – halt every hour for 10 minutes probably up till 11 am when we rest perhaps till 1 pm having covered about 12 miles or more – go on again at 1 pm till about 5 pm when we camp for the night having done another 12 miles perhaps – By 6 pm it is quite dark but if there is a good moon and we are in a hurry to get to a certain place we may go on again about 9 pm for a few hours. We carry all our food by porters & get water from the streams along the road. Most of the villages are 30 or even 50 miles apart & in some cases connected by fair roads, in others just by bush tracks. As a rule the village, which at its best has been but a collection of mud & grass huts, has been burned by the Portuguese or by the enemy so we rarely camp in the villages themselves but in the bush nearby. It has been touch & go several times recently whether we caught the Hun but he has always managed to slip off. He may be cornered anytime now or it may last here another year – nothing much can be done in the rainy season which starts in a month or two.*
>
> *I am glad to hear you are keeping well but hope you are looking after yourself & not doing too much Red Cross meetings, etc. – Sorry to hear Harold has not been too fit lately and hope he is alright again now.*

It is not clear how much Arthur knew of Harold's health. His brother had recently married in Tasmania, on 19 December 1917, but Harold deteriorated rapidly. By the

time Arthur was writing his brother must have been very ill indeed. There would've been month after month of unexplained weight loss, fatigue, intermittent night fevers, and a progressively worsening cough. Eventually, spots of blood would show with the coughing. Back in Melbourne, the newly-wed Harold was battling pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of 36 years, just as his grandfather had at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Harold died on 23 July 1919, having been married for less than two years and leaving no children.

By August 1918, Arthur saw the end of the war in sight and had fallen prey to a soldier's most dangerous past time – fantasising of the future. It is fascinating to read what he favoured as the most promising path:

> *I think of coming back to Australia after the war is over to settle down on a small farm & raise hogs & other things but of course cannot make any definite plans yet, I am however hanging on to the dough with that end in view. I don't think I should care to stop in the army unless the end of the war sees me in a senior officer's job. There is one other thing which is worth watching & that is shipping – there will be a big boom in that business after peace is declared & good money to be made out of it so it may be worth taking a break at that for a year or so before settling down on the land.*

The skilful Von Lettow kept the British chasing after him for the remainder of the war, and Arthur would never see a Middle Eastern theatre of operations. Towards the end of October 1918, he wrote:

> *We just finished a trek of 960 miles [1,540 kilometres] returning from Portuguese East Africa to the very place in German East we originally started from and got orders to go by sea to Dar-es-Salaam & then to another place up country.*
>
> *… I don't know when this show will be over but it can't last long now. We did not get into any of the fighting in Portuguese territory but were very close to the enemy several times and he always manages to slip away. It looks very much as if the European situation will finish it up for us here before we get a decisive fight with the Hun. He won't stand to fight here but treks all over the place as hard as he can get.*

Our record of Arthur's service ends here, unsatisfactory and without closure, much like the war itself. General Von Lettow-Vorbeck returned to Germany in early March 1919, and paraded in triumph through Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, undefeated in the field. That was true enough for Von Lettow's tropical forces, but after the Great War the myth of field victory was also applied to the German Army at large. Over the coming decades it would contribute to Germans' growing sense of inequity, militarism and ill-judged overconfidence, sowing the seeds of war less than a generation later.

The Armistice of 1100 hours, 11 November 1918, was a welcome relief for everyone, though that relief was tinged with either joy or defeat depending on one's side. In truth, both sides must have felt as much grief as elation. Ffie wrote of the Armistice in a letter of 23 November:

> *What do you think of the good news, I expect every one was very excited when the news came through – people went quite mad here & syrens & whistles were going all day & processions of all descriptions. Its a long dreary wait now though till things are finally settled, & we are just as busy as ever as the men are coming down with influenza, the poor old boys are not looking*

forward to that march to Germany with full packs, some of them will find it too much after the heavy fighting, isn't it a pity you cant have peace in a few days instead of having to wait.

There are all sorts of rumours going about here, that we'll be moving in a few days to Sutton Veny on Salisbury Plains & no one is looking forward to it very much as to put it mildly its a cold dreary place 3 or 4 hours journey from London, but I expect we will all be home in 6 months time, won't it be great – to get back to the sunshine & everyone one knows – we are all trying to get a few days to Paris, but to be na poo – I am glad I did what I did.

…I didn't think the war would last so long, but thank heaven it's over now.

"Na poo" was contemporary Army slang for 'finished' or 'ended', a bastardisation of the French "il n'y a plus", meaning "there's no more".

Within six weeks of the Armistice being signed, the combatants returned to their respective homes, though some Allied units moved forward to occupy sections of Alsace and the Rhineland. At least one rumour had proven true: Ffie's 1AGH was indeed withdrawn from France to the dreary English plains of Salisbury. She arrived at their new camp at Sutton Veny on Christmas Day 1918, and wrote soon after of suffering yet another European winter:

We've been having an awful time here with the frost – it's been very severe & lasted almost 10 days, pipes burst all over the place & all the taps were frozen & we couldn't get any water & you can't imagine how cold it was, one's fingers became useless & chilblains on one's feet made matters worse – medicines froze & then we got some awful coal (anthracite I think) & it wouldn't burn & gave practically no heat & fires kept going out. Altogether we've put in a miserable time since we've been here.

I've been on night duty a week now. We were all inoculated against flu this evening. It is very prevalent here, isn't it awful to think of the poor boys who have gone all through things only to die after the war is over.

We are quite busy here as they are collecting all the Australians from hospitals all over England & sorting them out for embarkation home so we are always full, over 1500 beds I think & then we get the men from the camps which are all round here, quite a lot get sick a few days before they are to go on the boats…

Everyone hates this part [Salisbury Plain] as when it isn't freezing, it's rainfall & there's absolutely nothing to do & nowhere to go. They say it's nice in the summer, but I don't ever mean to spend another winter in England.

By this time, the concentration of people for war across the globe, and their extensive international travel, had provided idea conditions for spread of a pandemic strain of influenza. Known as the 1918 Spanish 'Flu, in absolute terms this was the most lethal natural disaster known to man, killing somewhere between 50 and 100 million people between 1918 and 1920, eclipsing the destruction of the Great War itself. There are some theories that this pandemic strain of influenza had already been circulating in the winter of 1917, and it is possible that it was pandemic 'flu that had killed the nurse in twelve hours and made Ffie so sick in February 1917. Being nurses, they had both worked at a hub of infection transmission, and would likely have been among the first exposed to the disease in the pandemic's early phase.

By early 1919, sitting on the Salisbury Plain and awaiting her return home, Ffie became increasingly disheartened with the pace of demobilisation:

> *The boats are delayed leaving for Australia on account of the strikes – isn't it awful I though(t) we would all have been home long ago when the armistice was signed in November, it's a long drawn out affair – we don't get letters nearly so often now as we used to…*

She was able to take leave for two weeks at the end of March. When she still hadn't left England by the middle of the year, she was given some leave and sent on a driver training course. This is where Ffie first learned to drive and maintain a car. By mid-October 1919 she secured six weeks' leave to travel across Continental Europe. Throughout the War, she'd been eager to visit Paris. Though only a two-our train trip away in Rouen, she had always been forbidden from doing so, but she was now able to fulfil that ambition. Seizing such a rare opportunity for an Australian in the age of the ocean liner, she travelled on to Lyons, Geneva and on to Italy via train, before tracing her way back up to Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp. It was in the Low Countries that she had her first opportunity to see what the War wreaked on the front lines and beyond:

> *It seems so funny to think the Germans were in Brusselles for 4 years – they didn't touch the place because they thought it would belong to them & everything is going just the same.*
>
> *I came up through the devastated regions – well so named – there are a few people living there in some huts among the ruins but very few houses built up again. How those poor people can go back & live amongst a ghastly shattered village I can't imagine. I never saw anything so desolate. It was snowing & drizzling & some of the poor beggars got out of the train carrying pictures & looking glasses but not many of them seem to have gone back & I don't know how they could face the winter there with all those ruins round them. The winter here is a ghastly affair – 7 months of rain, mud, sleet & snow day after day & you never see the sun.*

In her travels, Ffie reports a dysfunctional society shattered by the War, with extremely inflated prices, food shortages that caused even the middle classes of Paris to eat a starvation ration, insufficient small currency so that stamps were substituted for change, war areas devastated and in ruins, rear areas impoverished after being stripped of all resources to fight the war.

It was in this economic context that the Allies made a profound miscalculation of their own self-interest and set upon a policy of forcing Germany to pay war reparations through the Treaty of Versailles, condemning Germans to poverty for a generation and sowing the seeds from which National Socialism would spring only a few short years later. Versailles assured that the European War had not ended; the beast was only sleeping, dormant from temporary exhaustion.

However, Ffie's service in Europe was finally over. The nurses of No. 1 Australian General Hospital had their photograph taken (Figure 18) at the end of their service together at Sutton Veny, England. Three days later, on 2 December 1919, Ffie finally embarked the Hospital Ship *Shropshire* as one of its nursing staff, for a voyage home. She did not arrive back in Australia until 22 January 1920, and was finally discharged on 30 April 1920 after four and a half years of active service. During her absence, she had lost three brothers and endured years of nursing men with terrible

illness and dreadful, mutilating wounds. She had experienced something of those threats herself. Yet she had also seen the culture and history of Egypt, travelled through Western Europe, and learned to drive a motor car at a time when all of those things were far from universal. She had survived the 'flu pandemic, the greatest known natural disaster, and the Great War, a human-made disaster of epic proportions.

Figure 18 – Nurses of No. 1 Australian General Hospital at Sutton Veny, England, on 30 November 1919. Sister Margaret Effie Looker is seated at the front left.

It seems that Arthur returned to Australia soon after the war ended, to settle at Richmond, Tasmania, with one of his maternal uncles: a Dickson. Perhaps he had plans of taking over the "Glen Ayr" farm. By 1922, he was living as a farmer on the 'Clifton' property at Coppington, Tasmania, with his mother Fanny Rosina.

On 11 September 1924, at the age of 43 years, Arthur married Sarah Dunbattew in Tasmania. However, his health was also deteriorating and they had less than two years together. Arthur died of kidney failure at the Lookers' family home in Melbourne on 7 April 1926, only 45 years old. Perhaps Arthur had developed visceral tuberculosis or septicaemia from an infected kidney. He, too, left no children.

Since the start of the war, their mother Fanny Rosina had experienced the death of all four sons, whether through battle injury or illness. The male line of Lookers after George Arthur had been extinguished. Ffie would never marry, but continued to serve her 'boys' as a nurse in the Repatriation Hospital at Caulfield: perhaps she, too, was haunted by the suffering she witnessed at war. Along with the families that

other Looker sisters bore, ours is their closest line of descent for this lost generation: if they do not appear in this history then they are wiped from history altogether.

The sisters, whether Ffie with her very personal experience of war, or Eudora who carried its emotional scars forward into another conflict, might claim for themselves the thoughts of Vera Britain who wrote in her contemporaneous *Testament of Youth*:

> *I detached myself from the others, and walked slowly up Whitehall with my heart sinking in a sudden, cold dismay. All those with whom I had really been intimate were gone. Not one remained to share with me the heights and depths of my memories. As the years went by and youth departed and remembrance grew dim, a deeper and ever deeper darkness would cover the young men who were once my contemporaries… The war was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return.*

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

– Rudyard Kipling lost his son Jack in the War