

WAR GRAVES

What can war cemetery headstone inscriptions tell us about families' attitudes to the loss of their loved ones?

There are over 30 000 Australian soldiers' graves in France and Belgium.

Most Australian headstones contain the name, age and date of death of the soldier. At the end of the war the families of those whose loved one had a known grave were invited to create a statement or epitaph to be engraved on the headstone. These epitaphs can tell us much about how the families felt about the loss of their family member. Were they angry? Did they think the loss was justified, or futile? What did they see as the main reason why their loved one died?

Look at this sample of inscriptions from Australian headstones on the Western front. See if you can find these ideas or values or attitudes in the inscriptions.

- Bitterness
- Bravery
- Civil duty
- Division
- Faith
- Family
- Loneliness
- Loss
- Love
- Mateship
- Memory
- National identity
- Patriotism
- Peer pressure
- Pride
- Religion
- Sacrifice
- Self-sacrifice
- Shame

HE DIED FOR AUSTRALIA
HIS NATIVE LAND
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
Private E. A. Newton,
26th Battalion,
22.4.1917 (24) (France)

BELOVED ONLY SON
OF P. & S. O'SHANNASSY
OF HASTINGS
AN ANZAC
Private Alan O'Shannassy,
58th Battalion,
15.7.1916 (21) (France)

ALSO IN MEMORY OF HIS BROTHER
6679 PRIVATE G. W. JACOB
50TH BATTALION 25.9.1917
(DIED AT SEA FROM GALLIPOLI)
Private J.G. Jacob, 50th Battalion,
7.7.1918 (22) (France)

I GAVE MY SON
HE GAVE ALL HIS LIFE
FOR AUSTRALIA AND EMPIRE
Private I.D. Hart, 60th Battalion,
27.11.1916 (30) (France)

GAVE HIS LIFE
TO BRING IN
WOUNDED COMRADE
DEEPLY MOURNED
Private L.C. McMurdo, 31st Battalion,
26.9.1917 (17) (France)

FOR GOD,
FOR KING,
FOR COUNTRY
Corporal H.G. Rourke, 56th Battalion,
20.7.1916 (33) (France)

HE HEARD THE DISTANT COOEE
OF HIS MATES ACROSS THE SEA
Private W.C. Durrant, 25th Battalion,
17.7.1918 (40) (France)

A GOOD SON, A GOOD BROTHER
AND GOOD SOLDIER
Private J. Tarrant, 30th Battalion,
29.9.1918 (28) (France)

DEEPLY LOVED DEEPLY MOURNED
YOUNGEST OF
FOUR SOLDIER BROTHERS
Private W. H. Moore, 39th Battalion,
10.9.1918 (25) (France)

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
Sister H. M. Knox,
Australian Army Nursing service,
17.2.1917 (33) (France)

HE FOUGHT AND DIED
FOR HIS WIFE AND LITTLE SON
AND TO SAVE HIS COUNTRY
Private C.H. Dunstan, 12th Battalion,
17.4.1918 (?) (France)

MY ONLY CHILD DIES
THE EMPIRE LIVES
A LONELY MOTHER MOURNS
Private W. H. Hicks, 53rd Battalion,
8.12.1916 (?) (France)

ONLY THOSE
WHO HAVE LOVED AND LOST
CAN UNDERSTAND
WAR'S BITTER COST
Gunner T. Pentney, Field Artillery,
12.9.1918 (39) (France)

REST HERE IN PEACE
YOUR PARENTS' HEARTS
ARE BROKEN
MUM AND DAD
Private H. R. Barron, 3rd Battalion,
9.4.1917 (19) (France)

LOVING DADDY OF KENNETH,
MARJORIE AND JOYCE
Lieutenant M.A. McGuire,
11th Battalion,
9.7.1918 (32) (France)

DURING THE GREAT WAR
SHE GAVE HER LIFE
FOR SICK AND WOUNDED
AT ROUEN
Louisa Riggall, Australian Red Cross,
31.8.1918 (?) (France)

WITH CHRIST
WHICH IS FAR BETTER
Lieutenant H. Q. Ridley,
48th Battalion,
12.10.1917 (34) (Belgium)

I MUST GO
I AM ASHAMED TO BE SEEN
WITHOUT A SOLDIER'S UNIFORM
Private A. K. Mallyon, 48th Battalion,
3.5.1918, (?) (France)

IT IS MEN
OF MY AGE AND SINGLE
WHO ARE EXPECTED
TO DO THEIR DUTY
Private W. H. Rickard, 28th Battalion,
4.10.1917 (25) (Belgium)


HE FOUGHT AND DIED
FOR HIS WIFE AND LITTLE SON
AND TO SAVE HIS COUNTRY
Private C. H. Dunstan, 12th Battalion,
17.4.1918 (Age unknown) (France)



Australian Victoria Cross recipient
 (© Ryebuck Media)



Malseed Family Grave, Condah, Victoria
 (© Ryebuck Media)

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