

A thick dark blue vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the page. From its base, several thin, curved lines in dark blue and light grey extend upwards and outwards, creating an abstract, organic shape.

Mr Patterson

Glen Scholfield
2022

Mr Jack Patterson lived in the old bluestone cottage known as Sammy's Hut or simply 'the cottage' on our farm *Lynbrook* when I was a kid. He was Mr Patty to me. I vaguely remember when he started living there so I must have been about 5 or 6, that would make my brother James 2 or 3, mid 1950s.

My understanding was that an old man who had no home was coming to live in the cottage.

Prior to and after that, the cottage was used as shearers quarters – there were 4 single beds, dormitory style in the main/lounge room with the open fireplace. The 2 bedrooms, were used as storage space for old furniture etc.



Sketch by David Morgan, 1973

The cottage was built in the 1870s, a rabbitier's hut on Nareeb Nareeb, a large sheep station in the Western District of Victoria.

Sammy was a rabbitier, a bit of a character, as the story goes.

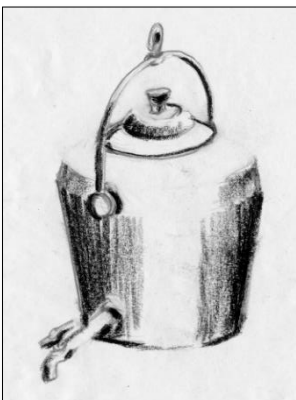
Sammy's Hut happened to be on the soldier settlement block my Dad was allocated to purchase, following his service in WW2.

Dad undoubtedly had some understanding and respect for what Jack, a survivor of WW1, had been through.

It surprises me now to think of Jack living there because there were no facilities in the cottage in the 1950s. The building was sound – 4 rooms of solid bluestone with an unlined corrugated iron skillion 'wash house' tacked on the other end - at the back. This room had a cement floor so it must have been added early in the twentieth century. There were no fixtures such as a bath or basin.

Some of the rusty corrugated iron roofing sheets were a bit loose creating great nesting opportunities for starlings. The roof leaked a bit, especially in the kitchen. The wooden floors were beginning to rot in places. The only running water was from a tap on the end of a foot long length of pipe, poking in through the corrugated iron wall of the skillion, at about knee height. I remember a white, chipped enamel bowl on a small wooden bench/shelf next to the tap and a 'used' piece of velvet soap stuck to this wooden bench beside the bowl. There was an oval galvanised iron tub near the tap – about 1/3 the size of a standard bath. A heavy old cement double wash-tub sat in a wooden frame. It drained out through a hole in the corrugated iron wall. I don't remember any signs of a clothesline in the yard.

A large hessian meat safe, big enough to hang a whole sheep carcase, sat against the bluestone kitchen wall in the skillion, near the kitchen door. A well-used meat block stood just outside the back door near the chimney. There was nothing in the kitchen – no benches, cupboards or sink but there was a dull silver coloured wood stove. Perhaps it was still usable when Mr Patterson was there.



Sketch by David Morgan, 1973

He didn't come to our house for meals and I don't remember Mum sending meals over to him. Now when I think of it, I don't know how he survived.

The cottage did have electric lights but no power points, no hot water.

The main room had a slightly grand feel to me as a kid. The high, wood lined ceiling was slightly vaulted. The wooden floor had a small 'secret compartment', a hinged section around 1.5 x 2 feet in size that opened up.

I understood that this dank cavity, about 1 foot deep with a bare earth base, was for the cool storage of food.

There was an open fireplace at one end of the room. A hook hanging down, just visible at the top of the opening allowed a big old cast iron kettle to be suspended above the fire. It was very heavy – maybe that's why it never moved far from the fireplace or the hearth.

My '50s memory is of the cottage surrounded by a wire netting fence, a smelly/aromatic Wormwood hedge at the back and a huge, sprawling Boobialla tree (visible in photo), good for climbing in, at the east end of the yard.

Nearby, an overgrown privet hedge threatened an old weatherboard lavatory. The door, heavy with age, dragged on the floor and didn't close properly. Inside was a flat wooden bench with a 'bottom' sized hole in the middle, dunny can below. It was home to many spiders and a trap for traveling grass in summer.

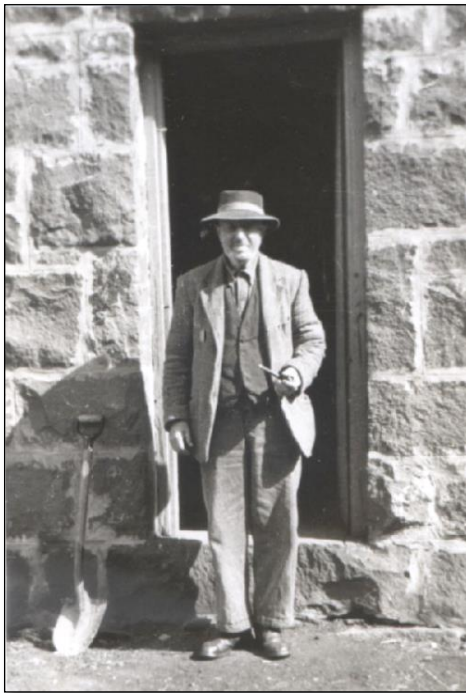
This garden enclosure was a good place to keep pet lambs.

I don't remember Mr Patty actually working on the farm for Dad. He didn't help with sheep work even though the sheeyards were only about 20m from the cottage. He may have been unwell.

I didn't see much of Mr Patty but he did engage with me just a bit to give me "matchy boxes". It seemed to me he had a funny way of talking.



Spring 1954, I am 4 years old.



1956, Mr Patterson is 73

He smoked a pipe and went through a few match boxes. I was sticking them together to make miniature pretend furniture like chests of drawers and a dressing table etc. By putting a small gold coloured (brass?) metal split pin in the end of the middle part that slid out, it looked like a round knob – the handle of the drawer.

I've got no idea where I learned to do that – maybe my first year (1956) at school?

Mr Patty was a quiet, retiring sort of old fellow, almost apologetic for his existence. He'd say "much obliged, much obliged", with a slight bow of his head before he'd shuffle away.

He did have a black, long curly-haired dog with long floppy ears. It must have been old and not very active. In fact, I only remember it because after the ambulance left, it stayed. His dog stayed by the front gate of our house yard ...waiting... He never returned.

It must have been a bit of a talking point with Mum and Dad – what to do about the bloomin' dog.

It wouldn't eat, wouldn't move. While his dog waited, I was told Mr Patty had died.

I remember being intrigued that a dog would wait for a person like that.

After a couple of days, Dad took the dog down the paddock – it was not spoken but I understood that he 'put it down' ie. shot it – as that's what farmers did in those days – to 'put it out of its misery'.

Then within a few days, I was surprised as Mum and Dad set about making a big heap of his clothes, the bedclothes and his few other possessions in front of the cottage and set fire to it. I was taken aback by this unusual event and must have asked why – I remember the reason being 'he had cancer!' Well that didn't mean much to me except I gathered it must have been something bad and maybe something catching.

Then all trace was gone. Mr Patty had been with us for 2 or 3 years maybe?

John Arthur George Patterson's death was registered at Hamilton, Victoria. He was aged 75, so his death occurred sometime after 20th October 1957, his birthday.ⁱ



Recently I found 4 items of Mr Patterson's belongings in a small, faded flourbag, in an old suitcase containing ancient memorabilia.

It seems Mum and Dad could not destroy his most personal possessions at the time.

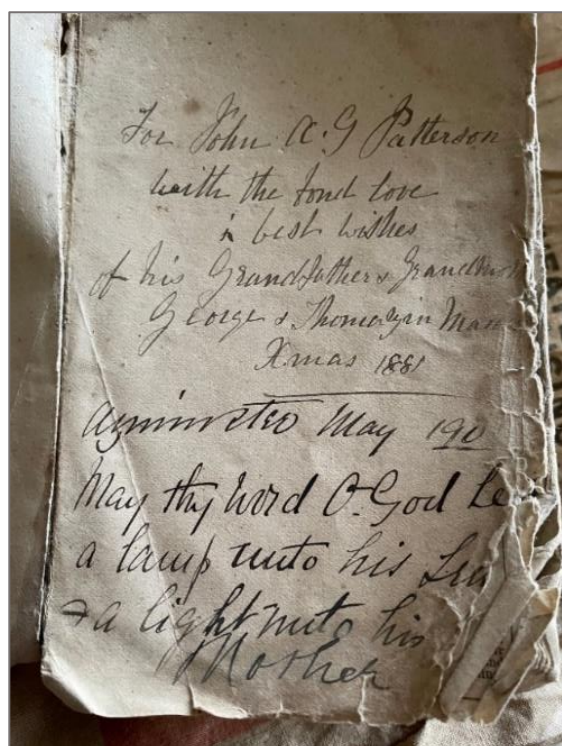
From top – clockwise:

1. A **leather razor strop** (manufacturers imprint: *Auto strop safety razor. Great West Rd. Middlesex Eng*).

2. The remains of a **leather wallet** with a rusted metal catch, rotted stitching and lining but containing 4 letters in their original envelopes, some 1944-45 tax stamps and a 1957 RSL membership receipt.

3. A leather bound **Common Prayer book** with the inscription: For J A G Patterson with fond wishes from Grandfather & Grandmother Oct 20th 1882. This would have been John Patterson's first birthday. The little book is in relatively pristine condition, showing no signs of use.

4. The **Holy Bible** with a very worn thin leather cover. This larger book has dog-eared pages, apparently from wear and tear due to its size. The pages appear unopened.



The inscription inside the Bible reads:

For John A G Patterson with the fond love & best wishes of his Grandfather & Grandmother George and Thomagin(?) Ma.....? Xmas 1881.

It appears to be from his maternal grandparents for baby John Patterson's first Christmas in the year of his birth.

The second entry, a prayer from his mother, may be a clue as to when Jack first travelled to Australia. It was customary for immigrants in the early days, to carry a Bible from their family.

Axminster May 190..?

May thy Word O God be a lamp unto his travels (?) & a light unto his life(?)

Mother.

Wallet Contents

The letters indicate Mr Patterson led an unsettled, itinerant lifestyle. The 4 letters from or about his family were kept for his whole life. The letters reached him years after they were sent, except for the first one, received while on active duty in France during WW1.



Letter 1: Dated 7 April 1918, from his Mother to Jack while he was serving in France during WW1. It informed him that they (his Mother & Father) had reluctantly sold the butcher shop business in Axminster.

Letter 2: From his sister Lucy dated June 10 but postmarked Sept 1935 from Croydon in Surrey (England).

It is addressed to Jack in Horsham but is forwarded several times, the most recent postmark: Murtoa 19 Au36 but then forwarded to the RSL Mortlake. It's not known when he received it.

Letter 3: A pale blue RSL envelope contains a brief handwritten letter from a Matron at the Darwin Medical Service. It informs Mr Patterson that his brother Frederick was admitted to hospital suffering pneumonia and pleurisy in December 1930 and died in January 1931. The only visible postmark is Streatham 18 August 1936.

Letter 4: Dated May 1929 from his Father containing family updates. The only visible postmark is 15 Aug 1933 Sth Australia.

Transcripts of the letters can be found in a separate document - file name: 'Patterson Letters & Stamps'.

Tax stamps on two 'Tax Deduction and Wages Record' sheets indicate Jack was working in the Western District on large station properties near Mortlake and Dunkeld in the 1944-45 financial year.

Each job is for a few weeks only. At this time he would have been 63 -64 years of age.


These items give scant clues to his general whereabouts and means of survival during the 1940s.

Jack seems to have had no permanent address.

RSL membership receipt 1957

The brief but significant details on this receipt give enough clues to unlock a critical part of Jack's life and could explain a lot about his lifestyle.

Victorian Branch Consecutive **H No 9482**

 **RETURNED SAILORS, SOLDIERS & AIRMEN'S IMPERIAL LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)**


Dunkeld Sub-Branch

RECEIVED from *J. Patterson*

Address *Dunkeld*

Regt. No. *795* Unit *3 A.S.C.* Front or Sea *Army*
on which served

the sum of One Pound (£1) being subscription for the year ending 31st December, 19 *57* For the above Branch

 (R. or N.)

NOTE: This receipt is uniform amongst sub-branches of the League in Victoria and is the only form accepted as proof of payment of subscription. It is issued subject to Membership Endorsement by the State Executive, Victorian Branch, R.S.S. & I.L.A.

(Date) *16/3/57* Badge No. _____ Clip Issued *16/3/57*

The renewal of his RSL membership at the Dunkeld branch suggests that being a paid up member was very important to Jack who was by then, 74 years of age.

His army identity - Service No 795 of the 3rd Company, Army Service Corps (ASC) may have meant as much or more to Jack than his distant family throughout his post WW1 life.

The details on this RSL Receipt provided the key to unlocking archival records of his WW1 service.

JACK PATTERSON IN WORLD WAR 1

Information from the **National Archive of Australia**ⁱⁱ allows some understanding of the wartime experiences of this itinerant Englishman who died a homeless man in the late 1950s, with no close friends or family.

Background

War was declared on 4 August 1914. Recruitment offices in Australia opened on 10 August 1914. The First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was the Army's main expeditionary force and was formed from 15 August 1914 with an initial strength of 20,000 men.

Those who enlisted in the earliest months were destined to fight on Gallipoli.

Military records for Service No 795 reveal **John Patterson enlisted in Ararat on 19 September, 1914.**

Age: 32 years and 11 months with fair complexion, grey eyes and light brown hair, distinguishing marks: 4 high vaccination marks on left arm. **Religion:** Church of England. **Trade:** butcher & driver. **British Subject:** 'Natural Born' (meaning not naturalised). Jack was **born in Axminster**, Devon, England. **Next of kin:** listed as his father and mother in Axminster plus 1 brother in Nhill and 4 other brothers and 3 sisters in England. **Previous military experience:** Volunteers, Devonshire for 3 months.

Jack's service officially began **7 October 1914.**

Rank: Private. **Position:** Driver.

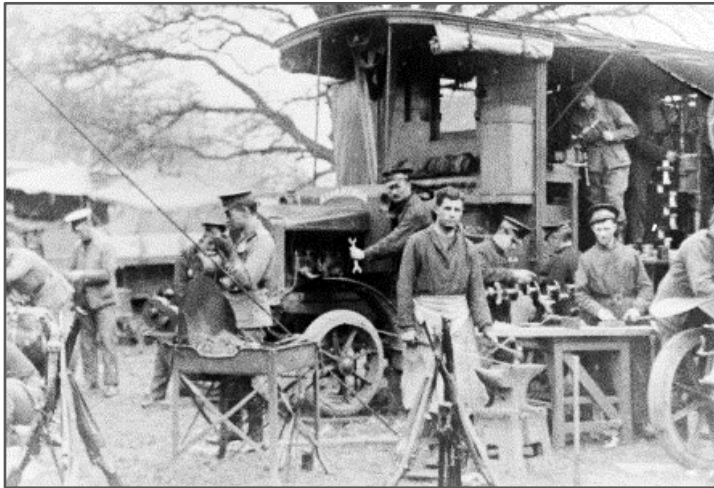
Unit: **No 3, Army Service Corps (ASC) First Divisional Train***

Jack was officially discharged on **23 March 1919**



1st Divisional Train

**Divisional Train = Logistical support for military operations accompanying each Division (formerly horse-drawn wagons forming a train).*



Archive photo: First Divisional Train, France 1916.

The AIF 1st Divisional Train was put together in 6 weeks. It provided food, water, ammunition, equipment & transport for the First Division.

John Patterson was one of the 1083 soldiers listed for the 1st Divisional Train: Headquarters First Division AIF.ⁱⁱⁱ

The 1st Divisional Train consisted of 4 Army Service Corps (ASC) Companies.

Jack was in the 3rd Co. ASC.

Jack was a 'Driver', the most common position (approx 80%). There were some 'saddlers' and the remainder were rank positions such as Corporal, Lieutenant, Sergeant, Captain etc.

Horses continued to be used throughout WW1 but as a Driver, Jack would have experienced the massive transition from horse power to motorised vehicles.

A Driver would need a thorough knowledge of handling and harnessing horses, carts and wagons and later the basics about driving and maintaining a motor vehicle.

As a member of a Divisional Train, the job was not to kill the enemy but to support the fighting men of your Division with transport and supplies.

First Division^{iv}

Archived files reveal Jack departed from Melbourne on HMAT 'Benalla' 19 October 1914, exactly one month after enlisting. Albany W.A. was the rendezvous point for the 1st Division of approx. 20,000 men and equipment, drawn from all states to represent Australia.

Supplies and transport included around 5000 horses, 600 horse-drawn vehicles, 310 bicycles, 8 motor cars and 9 motor-cycles.

Jack was on board one of the 38 troop and transport ships that departed Albany 1st November 1914. They headed across the Indian Ocean towards the Suez, believing they were going to England and from there to France to engage with the German army. But the 1st Division never got to England.

Gallipoli 1915

The overcrowded camps in England were deemed unsuitable to house more troops going into the 1914-15 winter. Turkey had recently entered the war, supporting Germany. The 1st Division was directed to disembark at Alexandria, Egypt which they reached on 3rd December 1914. They trained in camps near Cairo until March 1915, with troops from New Zealand thus becoming known as the ANZACS.

Far from going to fight the Germans in France, they were to engage with the Ottoman Army. It was to begin with a beach landing at a place called Gallipoli, led by the 1st Division.

Early in April, they were sent to the Greek Island of Lemnos (about 100km SW of Gallipoli).

Here Jack's 1st Division practiced beach landings then **landed at Gallipoli early on April 25th**. They suffered heavy losses. Additional support arrived in May and September but little progress was made.

During his 8 months of engagement at Gallipoli, Jack's records show he was admitted to No 1 CC Stat (febrile diarrhoea). Trans to Fleet Sweeper 21/7/15. Admitted to No 1 Stat Hosp 21/7/15. Re-joined unit from Hosp 2/8/15. (2 weeks) Diarrhoea was a common complaint along with jaundice and the common cold.

He spent another 2 months away from Gallipoli: Transferred from Anzac to Lemnos 10/9/15. Transferred from Lemnos onto Anzac, Re-joined 3rd ASC 9/11/15. This was just one month before the total withdrawal of the Australian troops on 8th December.

In that 8 months over 60,000 troops were involved, 26,000 wounded and 8,000 died.

Jack's records show they returned to Cairo in December then travelled to the Australian army training camp at Tel-el-Kabir, about 100 km away. From there they arrived at the Serapeum at Alexandria on 29th January 1916.

In February, AIF structures were reorganised, but Jack remained in the 1st Division, unit: 3 ASC.

They departed on 25th March to join the British Expeditionary Forces, arriving in Marseilles 1st April **1916**.

Western Front 1916-18

Now Jack was destined for the Western Front, to finally face the powerful Imperial German Army. The 1st Division spent nearly 3 years in northern France and Belgium and was the only Division involved in all the major battles.

From Marseilles, they travelled by train to northern France for training in front line trench warfare: shelling, raids, sniping and trench routine. In June 1916, Australia's Prime Minister Billy Hughes visited the 1st Division near Armentieres.

The first 'Battle of the Somme' began 1st July **1916** and Jack's unit entered the offensive mid-July at Pozieres.

Between 23 July and early September 1916, the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Divisions launched 19 attacks on German positions around Poziers suffering 23,000 killed or wounded while advancing just 2 km.



August 1916, Sausage Valley near Poziers.

EZ0113

During this time Sausage Valley was a busy thoroughfare. Being a Driver for the 1st Divisional Train, Jack would have been very familiar with this area as everything came through this valley to the front - all communications and supplies. Field kitchens can be seen middle distance with soldiers waiting around them. There are plenty of horses, various carts & wagons and a motor truck/wagon.

Imagine Driver Jack Patterson somewhere in amongst this action.

Then, Jack's record shows 12 days leave in England: 29 Sept to 5 October. A month later, transferred to Y Corps Rest Station 5/11/16 with "synovitis R knee", rejoined unit from hospital 9/11/16 (4 days later). His record shows this evacuation to hospital was later queried - in January 1917.

1916 had been devastating for the Australian forces. Over 10,000 died and 30,000 were wounded.

Jack and the 1st Division were involved in patrolling the front over the '**16-'17 winter**. "Those who survived the battles of Fromelles and Pozieres or served through the winter of '16 -'17 could never forget the horrors and suffering they endured." It was reported to be one of the worst winters in 50 years. It began snowing in December.

1917 was to be the most tragic year. It began in the muddy, frozen trenches of the Somme and ended in the slippery bogs of Belgium near the village of Passchendaele.

During that freezing winter the Germans had withdrawn to the Hindenburg Line which the British wanted to break. Jack was involved in the second Battle of Bullecourt in May '17 after the first, begun early April, failed.

Jack's 1st Division suffered heavy losses to capture a section of the German line. They held it for 5 days then were relieved by the 5th Division – finally the Germans retreated. The two Bullecourt battles shook the Australian's confidence in the British command. Serious errors were obvious to every-one.

In the **2nd half of 1917**, Australian soldiers suffered terrible losses in Flanders. July-November saw several battles in Belgium at places like Passchendaele & Ypres.



5 October, 1917

The Australian 1st and 2nd Divisions were involved in the victory at Menin Rd – deemed to be one of their greatest. Then heavy rain and muddy conditions doomed attacks and again heavy losses were sustained.

They were withdrawn early November in desperate need of rest. Some, including Jack had leave in London or Paris. He Proceeded on leave to UK from Belgium 22/11/17 18 days later Re-joined from leave 10/12/17.

Overall, in 1917, the Australian Divisions lost 40,000 killed and another 36,000 wounded.

The world was weary of war but there was no end in sight. All armies were exhausted.

In 1918 the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) were re-organised, bringing all 5 Divisions together.

Numbers in the AIF were getting low, Australia had voted NO to conscription in 1916 & 17. Some battalions were disbanded, a painful experience for men devoted to their units.

Jack remained with his original 3rd ASC (Army Service Corps) in the 1st Divisional Train.



Some members of the 1st Australian Army Divisional Train attending to graves in the cemetery.

Villers Bretonneux, France. 1918

In January 1918, Jack was among 120,000 Australian troops in Belgium and France.

Their units were rotated in defence of the muddy, frozen front-line trenches which they managed to hold for a couple of months over winter, despite poor physical health and low morale.

Jack was admitted to hospital sick 25/1/18, diagnosed with scabies the next day, then discharged to duty 3/2/18, 10 days later.

In March the Germans launched their 'Spring Offensive'. They re-claimed much of the land taken by Australian forces in 1916 and '17.



Archive photo:

Three Australian soldiers near right barricade horse lines, 5th Australian Divisional Train, near Amiens.

The eastern barricades were constructed for the protection of the animals against shell and bomb fragments.

Note the line of trucks moving along the road in the background and the carts to the left.

No doubt, Driver Jack would be familiar with this type of scene.

Somme, Amiens May 1918

In April 1918 the 1st Division halted the German offensive at Hazebrouck, a village in the north of France. Although every-one was exhausted, the 1st Division continued a spirited and active campaign for four months - into July.

During this time Jack received a rare and significant letter from his mother, dated April 7th 18, which he kept for the rest of his life. She outlines the dreadfully worrying time they've had since Xmas. Father didn't like the idea for a long time but now its done I think he feels glad. D Enslow is taking on the shop tomorrow the 9th. You would never believe all the writing it has meant introducing every man, woman & child's name and full address..... filling up the cards. There is more information about: the agreement.....will give us time to look around.....The Bristol people have been very anxious....What's your idea? Trust you are alright dear, Your loving Mother

Jack responded (amazingly) with a visit. His record reveals he was granted 14 days special leave to go to England in May. He left on 12th May and re-joined unit from leave 6 June – a period of 3 weeks! (instead of 2) This was noted as a Crime in the Field, He was Absent without Leave from 27 May.

15 days pay was forfeited for his unapproved additional absence of 7 days.



Archive photo:

Troops of the 5th Australian Divisional Train loading sacks and baskets of fresh vegetables at Camon, for despatch to the line.

The market gardens in the vicinity of Amiens were deserted by their owners. Australian troops took over their maintenance and the vegetables were added to the rations of the fighting troops.

Somme, Camon May 1918

By mid July the German 'Spring Offensive' had failed and their army halted. On 8th August the allies launched the 'Hundred Days Offensive' which involved 4 Australian Divisions at Amiens including Jack's 1st Divisional Train. The offensive continued for another 4 months.

Significant gains were made although most divisions were operating at less than 50% of their authorised strength. The final engagement for the AIF at Montbrehain on 5th October was highly successful but resulted in considerable casualties. However, it signalled the end of the war. Many veterans were now granted 'leave owing'.

Jack was granted 75 days leave with pay in England, starting 10th October. This was described as Special 1914 Leave owing since Gallipoli days in lieu of return to Australia.

The **Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918**, while Jack was still on leave in Axminster.

Jack had almost 3 months presumably in or around Axminster before returning to Australia. In her April letter announcing the sale of the butcher shop his Mother says: in the agreement we tried not go out until Michaelmas so that will give us time to look around.

Michaelmas, the 29 September, was an annual Christian holiday in England at the time. Presumably Jack would have been able to catch up with his parents in their new semi-retired situation. He was required... to report to Admin Hdqrs Axminster, Devon on 30 .12.18.

Just over 3 weeks later, Jack boarded the 'Delta' departing from Devonport, County Devon, 25th January 1919. Devonport (near Plymouth) was only about 100km SE of Axminster.

Jack disembarked 10/3/19 and was officially discharged on 23/3/19 at Melbourne, 4 years and 3 months after he had departed from Melbourne, to help defend England.

With the relentless hardship endured it must have seemed like a lifetime ago. He was now 37.

Queries and reflections

- Did Jack carry the Bible & prayer book with him all through the war? It seems he must have, as he had no other permanent address while away from Australia for over 4 years.
A Bible was commonly part of 'personal possessions' returned to next of kin when a soldier was Killed In Action.
- What did Jack as a Driver do at Gallipoli? Presumably working with pack horses, mules and perhaps carrying supplies to the trenches in person?
- Were Divisional Train soldiers armed?
- The Divisional Train vehicles (horse-drawn and motorised) must have been obvious targets. The troops couldn't survive without the vital supplies delivered by their Divisional Train on a daily basis – surely that would make them predictable targets?

This danger must have been more extreme with the increased use of aircraft later in the war?



Hellfire Corner on the Menin Road was constantly under observation and notorious for its danger. Most movement was at night when the road was crammed with traffic, guns, pack animals and troops. The neighbourhood was piled with the wreckage of all kinds of transport destroyed by direct hits. The bodies of horses, mules and men were often seen lying where they had been killed by shellfire. Such was the danger, traffic was forced to move quickly, as the wagons are doing here. Hessian camouflage has been erected on the corner to hide movement from German observers.

Flanders, Belgium September 1917 illustrating the risks Driver Jack would have encountered.

- In the 4 years of WW1 (1915–18), a new style of warfare emerged. Jack's job as Driver would undoubtedly have changed from those first Gallipoli days. No longer totally dependent on rifles and bayonets, the troops were later armed with a new array of weapons from light machine guns to grenades and light mortars.

The Driver's role would have had to evolve to service these changing needs.

But the mud would still be a major challenge to all transport whether by 4 legs or 4 wheels.

No doubt this mule team struggling in the mud would be a familiar experience for Driver Jack.

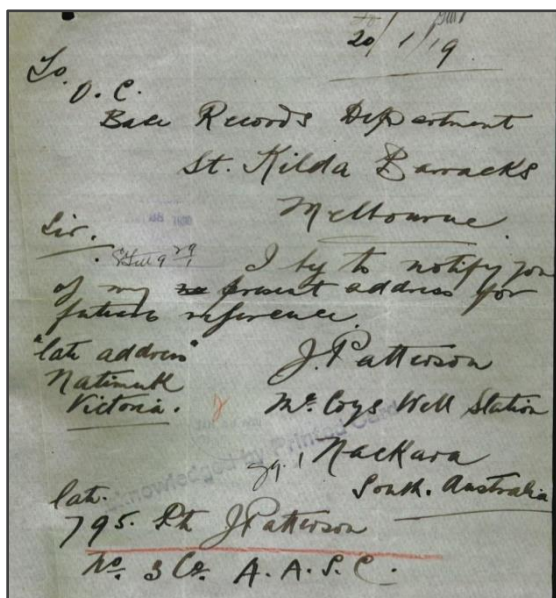


Belgium, October 1917

JACK RETURNS TO CIVILIAN LIFE 1919

(Below are selected images and brief numbered summaries sourced from letters and notes available in the archive files for J. Patterson)

Before Jack departed from Devonport, England he had a plan.



1. On file is a handwritten letter to the Records Department, prior to his departure from England, dated 20/1/19notify you of my present address for future reference.

J. Patterson McCoy's Well Station, Nackara, South Australia (Nackara is near Peterborough on the Barrier Hwy)

'late address' Natimuk Victoria.

We can only suppose that Jack had teed up a job in rural S.A. through a mate in the service.

2. The following year a letter is received from J. Patterson, McCoy's Well Stn, Nackara S.A. dated 25/4/20 re the **1914-15 Star Medal**. Jack wants to notify change of address to Hallett P.O. South Australia.

(Hallett is 32km north of Burra on the Barrier Hwy)

Mystery of the Medals

3. Jack was entitled to 3 medals commemorating his service during WW1.

It is obvious they were important to him. There are several letters in the archives' file from Jack notifying change of address in relation to receiving his medals.

It is quite a saga and indicative of his itinerant lifestyle.

It may also reveal something very tragic.

MEDALS AND DECORATIONS <i>File 667</i>						
(Surname) <i>PATTERSON</i>	(Christian Names) <i>J.</i>					
Regl. No. <i>795</i>	Rank <i>Pt</i>	Unit <i>1st B.T.</i>				
MEDAL OR DECORATION.	RECEIVED FROM BASE RECORDS.		HOW DISPOSED OF.			
	Date.	List No.	How.	When.	Receipt No.	By whom.
1914-1915 Star ..		<i>3632</i>	<i>53/6 4/M.D</i>	<i>7/8/20</i>		
British War Medal, 1914-1919 ..		<i>194</i>	<i>R.P. W. Knot</i>	<i>7/4/21</i>		<i>W</i>
Victory Medal, 1914-1919 ..		<i>194</i>	<i>R.P. 799</i>	<i>19/4/22</i>		<i>W</i>

4. On file is a receipt for the **1914-15 Star** dated 5/7/20 issued by the 3rd Military District (Vic).

However, it has been received and signed for by a Lieut. Col of the 4th Military District (S.A.).

Where is Jack? Is he unable to sign?

Why is a senior military person signing now that Jack is a civilian?

Received One 1914-15 Star for No. *795*
 Rank *Pt* Name *Patterson J.*
 Unit *3. ASC*
 (Signature) *H. Dwyer*
 (Witness) *H. S. B...*
 Place *4 M.D. 53/6*
 Date *5/7/20*
 National Archives of Australia NAA: B2455, PATTERSON JOHN

Less than a year later Jack has moved from remote rural South Australia to rural SW Western Australia near Mt Barker, inland from Albany.

5. 3/3/21 Jack writes to the Records Dept, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne

I see by the W.A. papers the **British War Medal** is being issued. .

Please forward to J. Patterson c/o Mr I. Williams, Carbarup Siding, Via Mt Barker W.A.

6. 8/4/21 Receipt for **British War Medal**. This is definitely Jack's signature. Witness: Isaac Williams JP

7. 7/5/22 Jack writes to Medal Distribution Office, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne

Sir, seeing that the **Victory Medals** are being distributed I try to have mine forwarded to me. In doing so you will oblige.

Your truly, J. Patterson c/o Mr W Nairn, Popanyinning W.A.

(Popanyinning is a small wheatbelt town approx. 100 km SW of Perth on the Great Southern Hwy towards Albany)

8. This envelope is on file at the Records office.



Despatched just over 3 months after his request, post marked 1 Sept 22 Melbourne, it is a registered letter addressed to Jack as requested.

But Jack never received his **Victory Medal**.

In 3 months he had moved on – clearly leaving no forwarding address. The envelope shows the letter returned to Base Records in Melbourne, received 7 July 1925.

Did Jack's Victory Medal sit in this envelope at Popanyinning for 3 years before being returned?

Was Mr W Nairn keeping it for him, expecting Jack to return.....shortly?

We will never know. Jack is next heard of from Boulder, near Kalgoorlie in W.A.

9. About 18 months after Jack's last letter of request to the Medals Department, a handwritten letter dated 8/9/23 from the Boulder RSL W.A., The Soldiers Rest, Lane St, Boulder is received by the Medals Department, Victoria Barracks Melbourne.

.....The above mentioned ex-soldier desires that any medals due to him be forwarded to him c/o the above address please.

"Any medals" – does this imply that Jack doesn't have the 2 medals he is known to have received?

It does suggest that he is keen to pursue the matter and is enlisting help for the first time. It may also imply some uncertainty in Jack's mind about the whereabouts of some of his possessions.

If the medal's saga is confusing for us to understand, try to imagine what was going on in Jack's mind and the frustration he must have been experiencing at the time.

Were there mental health issues or episodes involved?

10. 2/10/23 A brief reply from Base Records to Boulder RSL re medals request by J. Patterson states that "the Star and British medals were issued and receipts received. The Victory Medal was issued 19/8/22 to the Popanyinning address".

11. Two years later 8/7/1925 another letter to Boulder RSL W.A. from Base Records announces that "the Victory Medal despatched to Popanyinning has been returned unclaimed to this office. (see envelope No 8 above) If still in touch with Mr J Patterson please request he fill in enclosed form and send to this office to re-claim the medal and it will be forwarded to him."

12. The final archive record is dated 30/4/56 confirming three medals had been issued. Jack Patterson was living on our farm in Victoria, aged 73 when this record was filed.



As far as we know the 1914-15 Star medal didn't turn up in Jack's personal effects after his death. It's debatable as to whether he ever received it – the receipt (image p. 12 above, No.3) was signed by a Lt Col on his behalf in July 1920.

The British War Medal had been returned.

The Victory Medal was returned unclaimed.

Despite all his efforts, tragically Jack's medals slipped out of his grasp.

He had no tangible evidence of those intense years of his involvement in that prolonged theatre of war.

Connection with family

From his enlistment we know that Jack was one of 9 children, he had 5 brothers and 3 sisters.

Clearly Jack did not communicate regularly with his family.

They seemed to go their own ways as his sister **Luce** in her 1935 letter says "not much family news for we all seem to go our own way now-a-day." "**Mary** (of Axminster) does not keep us up in home news much..... It is strange how in such a short time we have so lost touch with our home of 50 years or more..."

Jack had an (older?) brother **Frederick** in Australia. Fred was in Nhill when Jack enlisted and died in Darwin January 1931 with "no friends". Maybe he was a loner like Jack. His sister Luce refers to Fred: "if it were not for dear old Fred's hard savings" and later "dear old Fred's hard work"

Maybe Fred helped support his ageing parents?

From Jack's father's 1929 letter and sister Luce's 1935 letter we learn that **Lucy** & Norman had 2 girls (Betty 17 & Gwen 21 in 1935). **Charl** is described as having a hard time making ends meet but his wife does her best and the 2 children both have scholarships. **Bob** who was in Cape Town unemployed in 1929 had returned by 1935 with his wife and 2 children. Cousin Harry had fixed them up with a good home and Bob is working with another brother **Bill** – the business supported by Cousin Harry. There are comments about Bob settling down at last and Bill being a steadying hand on him.

George always was a bit secretive wasn't he, didn't like the idea of being tied down and never seems to think his own people worth bothering about. There is also mention of **Kate** and family living at Sydenham.

Jack's father seemed to enjoy his later years from his letter of 1929: "Old England just now is looking beautiful Flowers Grass and Trees and Birds." It sounds like he is buying and fattening steers, but hardly making enough money to cover the rent "but it gives me an interest in something. I can't do much only walk out there..... "

In her letter of 1935 his sister **Luce** announces "Nearly a year ago next month dear old Father passed out and it has been a very unsettling timeas the dear old soul used to say you can't please everybody Luce. Somebody is sure to be put out...." Later in the letter she reveals "I have got the sideboard which used to be in the upstairs drawing room at Victoria Place and the Grandfather clock..." Clearly the Father's death led to the dispersal of their parents possessions.

She reassures Jack that he had not been forgotten: "I wish you had known him better. There is no-one today anywhere near like him & the older he got he seemed to be more understanding & a great love for us all. He so often talked of you & never a hard or unkind word."

We don't know when **Jack's mother** died, but we can see by Luce's letter of 1935 that she had died before their Father in 1934. In her 1918 letter to Jack his Mother came across as a very anxious, 'highly strung' personality. Writing about her own family in 1935 Luce says "...been a bit on the sick listNone of the four of us ever seemed to be too fit, the (2) girls are just too much like their Father and Mother, nervy."

Perhaps anxiety is a characteristic trait in some members of the Patterson family?

Making a life after the army

There is an implication in the post war family letters that Jack is not making enough of his life regarding both employment and settling down/family.

In 1929 (the start of the Great Depression) his father writes: "wish you had a....and you were settled tosomething.....time now you are letting your best days slip along. I can't help think.....a chance for you (if you try)."

He goes on: "over a million unemployed in England....One half are those who don't want to work but live on the Dole.....loaf and grumble.....seems to be spreading over the world laziness and strikes."

In 1935 Luce writes: "Just as dear Mother would say don't go and be a goose & get rid of the little nest egg before you have got it Jack." She mentions others in the family finding times are hard and then says: "I believe you are the only one who has the amount to make good with. So after dear old Fred's hard work and Fathers don't let it slip through your fingers. I know I believe we all love spending & how jolly hard it is to keep any these days, still the rainy day may come."

Later in the letter she enquires: "What are you doing with yourself. I suppose a bit of all sorts as you would say, but we don't hear of you settling down to a home of your own & can picture you smiling at the very thought of being tied up."

It doesn't seem to cross their mind that perhaps Jack couldn't settle down.

From the Military Archive letters, tax stamps and envelopes of letters in his possession we can see frequent changes of address and employer during the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s until his death.

Only one is a street address (Horsham), the others are c/o RSL branches (Boulder, Mortlake) or c/o an employer at other locations (Nackara & Hallett S.A., Carbarup Siding Via Mt Barker & Popanyinning W.A., Carranballac, Skipton, Mortlake & Dunkeld in Victoria), c/o hotel (Aberdeen/Burra S.A.) or c/o Post Office (Hallett, Murtoa, Streatham). These are only the addresses we know of.

This paints an overall picture of someone who does not want to, or cannot, arrange independent or settled living.

Jack had no base in Australia. He'd been an itinerant rural worker prior to enlistment. There was no strong and connected family to return to, no established former business or farm to slot back into.

He was on his own.

Reflections

In all 334,000 Australians served overseas during WW1. The AIF sustained approximately 210,000 casualties, of which 61,519 were killed or died from wounds.

Jack was one of the survivors but at what cost? Was he a long-term casualty?

Much has been written about the 'broken generation' of WW1 veterans.

During the war, so many developed a mental and/or emotional detachment in order to survive the constant personal barrage and loss of mates around them. They didn't feel entitled to bereavement, since so many others were suffering too. For the sake of those around them, they 'just got on with it'.

Back in Australia there was little support for returned servicemen. Many were broken and shattered in body and mind. Only other veterans could understand what they'd had to strive for and endure during those years.

For some, the stoicism that got them through the boredom, drudgery and life-threatening experiences of the war, may not have helped in adaptation to civilian society. After the regimented, selfless and highly disciplined teamwork essential in an army unit, it was now necessary to function as an individual.

It is also worth remembering that Jack was older than the average soldier, being in his early 30s. Jack turned 33 a month after enlisting in September 1914 and was 37 when discharged in March 1919. He experienced over 4 years of almost continual battle service at a highly significant period in his life.

At a time when many young men are consolidating their careers and settling down with a partner, Jack was living a nightmare. From his beginnings at Gallipoli to the final days on the Somme, he would have endured terrifying and tedious hardship – both physical and emotional. This may go some way towards explaining why Jack could never settle, lived a life of constant movement and died virtually alone.

Jack's military identity seems to have been the only constant in his life after WW1.

It is not hard to imagine that for Jack belonging to the RSL gave him a more immediate and significant feeling of connection than to distant family members in England.

On a personal note, I feel glad that Jack could live his final years in Sammy's Hut. Despite having little or no amenities (in our view) when he was there, it was safe and quiet – a snug little place. Having lived within its solid stone walls for a few years in my 20s, I believe the cottage is one of those places that exudes a sense of stability and calm – a sense of being held.

Peace at last, Mr Patty

ⁱ Births, Deaths, Marriages Victoria. <https://bdm.vic.gov.au>

ⁱⁱ National Archives of Australia. <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au> B2455 Patterson, John.
Item ID 8008707 (38 digitised pages)

ⁱⁱⁱ Virtual War Memorial Australia <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people> or units

^{iv} Australian Army Journal Vol IV, No 1. Military History – The Forgotten First by Lt Col Robert Stevenson