



The Great War

Les Carlyon

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The Great War is Les Carlyon's extraordinary account of the Anzacs on the Western Front from 1916 to 1918. It combines a brilliant overview of this immense conflict with telling detail, stories, letters and diaries that breathe life into those terrible battles of 90 years ago. In **The Great War** Carlyon has produced a masterpiece that takes the reader from the generals formulating strategy, to the troops fighting cold, filth and the terror of sudden death in their trenches.

Written with the same narrative skill, humanity, vivid recreation and meticulous research that made **Gallipoli** a number one bestseller, Les Carlyon's astonishing new book is an epic that will stand as the lasting and definitive history of Australia's involvement in the Great War.

The Great War Details

Date : Published January 1st 2006 by Macmillan and Co Ltd, Sydney, Australia

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Author : Les Carlyon

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Nyree says

This book is amazing - I couldn't put it down it. When Carlyon starts telling you about folk you just wish "please don't die".

Aussie says

An account of the Australian Imperial Force on the Western Front, 1916-1918. Carlyon is a retired newspaperman and shows it by skilfully avoiding getting caught up in unit designations, instead relying largely on first-hand accounts of the kind that official histories omit on propaganda grounds. The looting and sometimes shooting of prisoners would be a case in point. The material is intrinsically compelling, and Carlyon adds a layer of accessibility.

Rosemary says

A well written and absorbing book despite it's daunting size. It left me alternating between being deeply sad to incredibly angry that the Generals and governments could be so inept and callous. Books like this should be required reading for all that we might remember the sacrifices that were made by so many.

Anna says

Despite the length of this book (and it is very long!), it wasn't a grind at all. Carlyon is a fantastic write who really knows how to write history. The personal histories of the men and women involved were very moving.

Sarah says

"We are lousy, stinking, ragged, unshaven, sleepless. Even when we're back a bit we can't sleep for our own guns. I have one puttee, a dead man's helmet, another dead man's gas protector, a dead man's bayonet. My tunic is rotten with other men's blood and partly splattered with a comrade's brains...Courage does not count here. It is all nerve. Once that goes one becomes a gibbering maniac." - Lieutenant John 'Alec' Raws, 4 August 1916, quoted in The Great War

On the 28 February 1916, 28-year-old farm labourer, Edwin Gale, from Yacka, South Australia, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. A week later his older brother, Samuel, followed suit. The brothers were sent to the Western Front, the former as part of the Infantry, the other as a Gunner. They lived through some of the harshest conditions imaginable, surviving gas attacks and endless defeats. Neither saw the end of the war: Edwin died on the 21 October 1917 from wounds he received during the (disastrous) Passchendaele Campaign; his brother, Samuel, was killed in action on the second day of the German 'Kaiserschlacht'

Offensive, five months and one day after his younger brother (22 March 1918). Their widowed mother lost both her sons. The brothers are buried in Belgium, in separate cemeteries not so far apart, but still thousands of miles from home.

If Edwin and Samuel weren't two kinks in my Family Tree, I probably would never have read Les Carlyon's The Great War, but as it was (and still is), I needed to know more about the battlefields of the First World War so that I could greater understand the lives of these two brothers during such a pivotal moment in history. As it turns out, The Great War was the ideal place to start.

At around 800 pages in length, The Great War is an epic collation of the people, places and events that made the Western Front during the peak of World War I. Its central focus is the young, adventurous Australians who volunteered to fight (for reasons known only to them) on the other side of the world, and the British military commanders and politicians who held their fate. It covers in great, horrific detail all the major battles: Fromelle, Pozieres, Passchendaele, Villers-Bretonneux, and then some lesser known ones as well. Not one hellish moment is skipped.

Yet this is not a book bogged down in technical detail; it is not simply "tactics" or a regurgitation of time and place. What makes The Great War such a phenomenal read is the effort that Carlyon has put into creating a personalised recollection, to make it feel as if it is the Fallen who are telling this tale. It contains excerpts from journal entries and letters, photographs and maps. It tells the stories of these men not only as they were during the war, but also what life was like before it and - if they were lucky enough to survive - what happened after.

Yet at the same time, The Great War does not glorify war or make heroes out of ordinary men, instead recognising that they were, in fact, just men. The The Great War may be an epic and phenomenal book, but it is also emotionally wrecking. It made me cry - a lot. It lays bare the horrors of war - the destruction, the desperation and the waste. The reader is thrust into the nightmarish existence of the rancid mud-flats that became the Western Front, and reminds one of the brutality that humans are capable of. It peels back the layers of legend and myth and reveals to the reader the true, human aspect of the war, and explains how a nation lost an entire generation of men - a loss that remains an absolute tragedy, even after the passing of nearly 100 years.

Charles Edge says

I gave this book four stars because the detail may put off many readers.

Written from an Australian point of view, it details not only the savagery and futility of this conflict, but also the evident incompetence and ignorance of the British Generals, Haig in particular. Unusually for an Australian history of this war, it is much broader than simply the Gallipoli disaster, and includes great detail about the Western Front. Thank goodness the General John Monash was eventually given command of Australian forces. Well worth a read, but it is very long.

Dulcie says

"Sprawling epic sometimes struggling to provide a consistent narrative voice" stands as a description both of

the conflict and of the book.

As the grandson of an Australian combatant I applaud the single minded focus on the AIF; more detail on the parallel lives of their foe would have given more balance in a work that does err on the side of ANZAC worship from time to time.

A positive contribution to the history of the war. Not exhaustive nor complete, yet this is a new narrative for a new generation.

'Aussie Rick' says

Another inspiring book by Les Carlyon, following on from his best selling account of Gallipoli comes this book, this time covering the Australian involvement on the Western front from 1916 till 1918. During this period the Australian troops fought in all the major battles, from the Somme to the breaching of the Hindenburg Line and become, along with the Canadian Corps one of the most feared and respected troops on the Western Front. During WW1 Australia's small population sent over 332,000 men to serve overseas and of those 215,000 or more became casualties, (of which 60,000 died). A casualty rate of 65 per cent! If you have an interest in the Great War then this book should be in your library.

Rdurie says

A fantastic read. Every Australian should read this to understand the sacrifices made by the Diggers on the Western Front.

Morris says

This is an excellent book giving a well written history of Australia's involvement in WW1. It is a wonderful companion to Les Carlton's Gallipoli and includes stories of famous and lesser known exploits of Aussies in WW1. Thoroughly recommended.

Wendy says

More precisely ww1 western front from exclusively Australian perspective. Exhaustive but I was hoping for something more balanced showing the enemies perspective.

Kathryn says

I found this book to be most informative - especially for someone who has little to no knowledge of WWI. I highly recommend it to anyone wanting to learn about Australia's involvement in the Western Front.

Sarah says

This book was very easy to read as far as war history goes. However I found the sporadic author notes confusing and without context. It was also only when I got to the end I discovered end notes which were not denoted throughout the book. Nor did they make a lot of sense, especially when trying to correlate them later.

However, the majority of the book was easy to read and written in a style that was both interesting and factual.

I have a particular interest in the 10th and later 50th battalion though there was little information, this is not the fault of the writer.

Excellent overview of the Great War!

Alastair Pearson says

Good. Very long.

Danielle Hircock says

Wonderful book, well-written, with an eye for detail and a strong connection with the corporeality of the war experience. Carlyon looks at both the microcosm and the macrocosm of the soldiers' world.

The narrative style encourages you to read it like a series of stories and makes you not want to put it down.

Thoughtful use of maps and photographs and interesting interjections into the main line of thought, by entries of soldiers' diaries and letters.

Writing in chronological order helps you to understand the sequence of events and understand how each event relates to the next and the previous.
