

From Soldier to Citizen: Social Repatriation and Shell Shock in Melbourne, 1915-1933.

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List of Acronyms

DoL:	Department of Lunacy
DoR:	Department of Repatriation
ESO:	Ex-Service Organisation
MMB:	Military Mental Block
RCC:	Red Cross Committee
RSSFA:	Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Fathers Association
RSL:	Returned Services League

Introduction

Repatriation: The act or process of restoring or returning someone or something to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship.
– Merriam-Webster Dictionary¹

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When we speak of repatriation, we mean an organized effort on the part of the community to look after those who have suffered either from wounds or illness as the result of the war, ...there should be a sympathetic effort to reinstate in civil life all those who are capable of such reinstatement.
– Senator Edward Millen²

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How do you turn the soldier into a citizen? This was the question facing the Australian people during the First World War and the years proceeding it. There were 264,000 Australian servicepeople who returned from the theatres of war between 1915 and 1919:³ 156,000 of them had been wounded.⁴ Bringing them back to Australia was a logistical feat, and new legislative infrastructure to support their reintegration creaked under the weight of the demand. Repatriation, however, was more than the provision of pensions, the settlement of land and administration of medical care. At its core it was a social process, posing questions of governmental responsibility, citizenship and identity.

The repatriation of disabled men, particularly those with shell shock, a colloquial umbrella term for various war-related mental illnesses, was an especially difficult task.⁵

¹ *Merriam Webster*, under “repatriation”, Accessed September 15, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repatriation>.

² Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. July 18, 1917, 183 (Edward Millen, Senator). <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1917-07-18%2F0014%22>

³ “Returned First World War soldiers disembarking in Melbourne,” National Archives of Australia, accessed June 26, 2025, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/student-research-portal/learning-resource-themes/war/world-war-i/returned-first-world-war-soldiers-disembarking-melbourne>.

⁴ Craig Tibbetts, “Casualties of War,” Australian War Memorial, last updated April 11, 2025, <https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/article2>.

⁵ For origins of the word “shell shock”, see: Michael Tyquin, *Madness and the Military: Australia's Experience of Shell Shock in the Great War* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019), 12, 15.

Returning to civil employment was complicated by their condition, and the contemporary psychiatric explanation of moral and hereditary causation shifted the blame from the event of war to the patients themselves.⁶ Taboo and a rhetoric of mistrust permeated the treatment of these men by governmental authorities, which were considered generally “unsympathetic”.⁷ However, studying repatriation only by tracing these men’s interactions with the Department of Repatriation (DoR) consequently frames them as isolated historical subjects.⁸ It neglects the ways their treatment and return to civil life touched their communities and reflected broader societal shifts in inter-war civic ideals.

With the *Soldiers’ Repatriation Act 1917*, the Australian Government defined repatriation as a state responsibility, but this did not mean that non-governmental groups were not concerned with repatriation activities.⁹ The DoR’s policy-driven approach was simply not sufficient to deal with the social ramifications of repatriating shell-shocked men. Non-governmental groups were instrumental in managing these social ramifications, but their interests were not exclusive to reintegration. They also had vested interests in the social re-shuffling and redefinition of civic norms that accompanied the conclusion of the war.

This thesis explores non-governmental responses to the challenges of reintegration through a process I describe as social repatriation. Social repatriation, as a topic of historical enquiry, I argue, moves away from traditional understandings of repatriation as a solely material affair carried out by the Australian Government, and recognises that non-governmental and local groups were actively invested in the symbolic, identity-based

⁶ Michael Tyquin, *Madness and the Military*, 16.

⁷ Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War* (University of New South Wales Press, 2009), 4.

⁸ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 23.

⁹ Soldiers’ Repatriation Act 1917 (Cth.), AustLII, https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/asra1917371917381/asra1917371917381.pdf

reintegration of returned men into Australian society.¹⁰ It treats repatriation as a process and period of social change after the disruption of war, acknowledging that “reinstatement) in civil life” was therefore a social issue that was contested between and amongst the state and the people, and hence could not be solved solely through financial assistance.¹¹

The definition of social repatriation is two-fold. Firstly, it decentres the DoR as the sole arbiter of returned men's reintegration into civil life. In recognising that non-governmental groups were deeply invested in facilitating this reintegration, it allows us to see repatriation as "a vehicle for the transmission of social and cultural values", where multiple actors grappled with the changing inter-war world and the requirements it placed upon them as citizens.¹² Secondly and relatedly, by removing the study from the confines of Departmental analysis, we can transcend the DoR's limited definition of repatriation as a primarily monetary and medical affair, and move to one that views social relationships as important to civil life, particularly in the transition from war to peacetime.

Fundamentally, social repatriation asks the question: how do you turn the soldier into a citizen? Different groups had different answers, calling into question notions of identity, social connection, community, and for the purposes of this study gender. Further, as Marina Larsson has argued, a community-based view of repatriation is essential to understanding the ways that not just returned men, but the communities around them, and the Australian nation as a collective, made sense of and recovered from the war.¹³ This thesis builds on and extends this argument by applying the concept of social repatriation as a distinctive method of studying inter-war Australia.

¹⁰ This thesis uses the terms “returned men”, “returned soldiers” and “ex-soldiers” interchangeably as this is how they were generally referred to in primary literature. The term “veterans” was not used in Australia at this time.

¹¹ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 1917, 183. (Edward Millen, Senator).

¹² Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: War, Return and the Re-Shaping of Australian Culture*, 2nd ed. (Sydney University Press, 2020), 103.

¹³ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 18.

Social repatriation took many forms and affected a diverse range of people and groups, but this thesis uses shell-shocked men as a case study, focusing on how non-governmental groups appealed to the gendered and identity-based concerns of these men throughout reintegration. It explores the ways the government discursively constructed the shell-shocked man as a failed masculine citizen and locates social repatriation in the efforts of non-governmental groups to push against this construction. It traces the ways these efforts impacted some of the most severe shell shock cases – those admitted to the Military Mental Block (MMB) of Mont Park Hospital for the Insane in Melbourne – between 1915 and 1933.¹⁴ The first repatriation ships arrived in 1915, and with them returned the first shell shock patients, some of whom stayed in the MMB which had just been acquired by the military that year. Coinciding with this was the *Mental Treatment Act 1915* (Vic) which distinguished soldier-patients from civilian cases, a critical point in the social repatriation of these men. By 1933, all ex-soldier cases were transferred to Bundoora Repatriation Hospital and Mont Park became a purely civilian institution once more.

Literature review

Joan Beaumont aptly stated that “war and citizenship are old bedfellows”.¹⁵ War intensifies the debates about what the citizen owes the state, and what the state owes in return. Repatriation demanded that Australians grapple with the latter. If, as Stephen Garton contends, repatriation was a process fraught with social and cultural issues, then social repatriation provides a means of navigating the diverse social responses to questions of

¹⁴ Note that the actual building that the military patients resided in changed over the period of study. The Military initially took over the Laundry Workers Block, but patients were moved to the new “Chronic Block” in 1917 when building was completed and then later (sometime between 1919 and 1920) they were moved to Wards “M” and “N”. I have used the term “Military Mental Block” to maintain clarity throughout the thesis; Ilya Bircanin and Alex Short, *Glimpses of the Past: Mont Park, Larundel and Plenty* (National Library of Australia, 1995), 6,8,9,10.

¹⁵ Joan Beaumont, “Australian Citizenship and the Two World Wars,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 53, no. 2 (2007): 171.

identity and citizenship.¹⁶ In examining the social repatriation of shell-shocked men, this thesis is situated at the intersection of several highly developed fields of historiography, namely those that consider repatriation and welfare, gender in inter-war Australia, shell-shock, and non-governmental groups in early-twentieth century Australia.

Studies of repatriation and welfare in Australia are few but comprehensive from an administrative perspective. Brian Dickey and Michael Jones have each traced the development of the Australian welfare state from the colonial period to the post-war period, however, discussion of repatriation after the First World War remains situated firmly in the actions of the DoR.¹⁷ Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees, offer perhaps the most comprehensive outline of the DoR's policies from the Department's inception to the 1990s, but they also provide an insight into the multiple and unique meanings repatriation had in the Australian context.¹⁸ "Repatriation" referenced not just the return of servicemen to Australia, but was a label for the collection of policies designed to reintegrate them into civilian life.¹⁹ As Phillip Payton explores in a history commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the question of which benefits repatriation should include was contested prior to the conclusion of the war.²⁰ However, Payton stops short of any critique of the DoR, instead highlighting the ways it collaborated with non-governmental organisations such as the Red Cross to address the repatriation system's deficits.²¹ Garton's works have perhaps contributed the most to the broad exploration of repatriation as a social phenomenon, beginning to decentre the actions of the DoR and defining repatriation as a "vehicle for the transmission of social and cultural

¹⁶ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 77.

¹⁷ Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia* (Thomas Nelson, 1980); Michael Jones, *The Australian Welfare State: Evaluating Social Policy* (Allen & Unwin, 1996).

¹⁸ Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees, *The Last Shilling: A History of Repatriation in Australia* (Melbourne University Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Lloyd and Rees, *The Last Shilling*, 2.

²⁰ Note that the Department of Repatriation changed names to the Department of Veteran Affairs in 1976; Philip Payton, "Repat": *A Concise History of Repatriation in Australia* (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018), 3-18.

²¹ Note that the Department of Repatriation changed its name to the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 1976; Payton, "Repat", 37-41.

values”.²² In light of this, the definition of repatriation as proposed by Lloyd and Rees becomes broader again, encapsulating the social beliefs, actions and behaviours of non-governmental groups that also sought the reintegration of soldiers into civil society. In this respect, the works of Melanie Oppenheimer, Martin Crotty and Joan Beaumont are particularly informative, tracing the roles and motivations of the inter-war Red Cross, the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RSL), and voluntary women’s groups, respectively.²³ Each of these groups had differing ideas about their civic responsibilities, and in the case of the RSL, the rights they were owed in return.

On the topic of the non-governmental repatriation, Marina Larsson’s research on the role of the family in caring for disabled returned men was particularly useful. In *Shattered Anzacs*, Larsson argues for studying returned men as people “whose lives were intertwined with those of their kin”, rather than as isolated individuals as they were treated by the DoR.²⁴ In this way, studying repatriation from a top-down perspective neglects the diverse ways the Australian population was engaged with and impacted by repatriation. Whilst Larsson uses the family as a point of analysis, familial contact with non-governmental groups such as the Royal Sailors and Soldiers’ Fathers Association (RSSFA), ex-service organisations (ESOs),

²² Garton, *The Cost of War*, 103; Stephen Garton, “Return Home: War, Masculinity and Repatriation,” in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Stephen Garton, “Demobilization and Empire: Empire Nationalism and Soldier Citizenship in Australia After the First World War – in Dominion Context,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 1 (2015): 124–43.

²³ The Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League of Australia was often shortened to RSSILA; however, the group underwent several name changes over the course of its existence, most notably it was called the Returned Soldiers’ Association (RSA) when it was established in 1916, and some sources still refer to it as this. I have followed the convention set by Garton referring to the group by its more well-known acronym, RSL, to maintain clarity; Melanie Oppenheimer, “Opportunities to Engage: The Red Cross and Australian Women’s Global War Work,” in *Australians and the First World War: Local-Global Connections and Contexts*, ed. Kate Ariotti and James E. Bennet (Springer International Publishing AG, 2017); Martin Crotty, “The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 53, no. 2 (2007): 183–93; Martin Crotty, “The RSL and Post-First World War Returned Soldier Violence in Australia,” in *Legacies of Violence*, ed. Robert Mason, Rendering the Unspeakable Past in Modern Australia (Berghahn Books, 2017); Joan Beaumont, “Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914–1918?,” *Australian Historical Studies* 31, no. 115 (2000): 273–86.

²⁴ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 23.

and the Red Cross, informed my own analysis of repatriation as a deeply interconnected process with multiple stakeholders.

Gendered studies of repatriation are fewer, but Garton's assertion that repatriation was imbued with a "central appeal to manhood" is foundational to this thesis.²⁵ However, whilst he acknowledges that "the recovery of manhood was not just a task for men", he does not move beyond a theoretical consideration of this fact.²⁶ Jill Roe also located this gap, one that this thesis aims to bridge.²⁷ Marilyn Lake similarly noted the appeals to masculinity within the repatriation project of soldier settlement, strengthening rural masculine ideals of the yeoman living off the land and providing for his family.²⁸

Studies of Australian masculinity more broadly have been largely preoccupied with the ANZACs, but studies of inter-war masculinity, particularly as they relate to domesticity are sparser.²⁹ However, following Lake's identification of the importance of family to the soldier settler ideal, Alistair Thomson similarly uncovered the importance of familial connections and domestic life to Australian inter-war manhood.³⁰ Here, the work of Martin Francis and John Tosh is fundamental in establishing the home as a site of masculinity

²⁵ Garton, "Return Home," 198.

²⁶ Garton, "Return Home," 200.

²⁷ Jill Roe, "Chivalry and Social Policy in the Antipodes," *Historical Studies* 22, no. 88 (1987): 409.

²⁸ Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria, 1915-38* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁹ Note that I follow Australian historiographical conventions here, using "ANZAC" to refer to the actual Australia New Zealand Army Corps, but "Anzac" to refer to the ideals and subsequent mythologisation of the ANZACs in Australian society; See for example: Stephen Garton, "War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1998; Alistair Thomson, "A Crisis of Masculinity? Australian Military Manhood in the Great War," in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jack Bowers, "Lest We Forget: Mateship, Masculinity, and Australian Identity," in *Mediating Memory* (Routledge, 2017); Joan Beaumont, "The Anzac Legend," in *Australia's War 1914-18* (Routledge, 1995); Carolyn Holbrook, "Gendered Perspectives on War and Nationhood: The Prism of Anzac," in *How Gender Can Transform the Social Sciences: Innovation and Impact*, ed. Marian Sawer et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2020).

³⁰ Alistair Thomson, "'When's Dad Home?': An Oral History of Inter-War Australian Fatherhood," *Oral History* 47, no. 1 (2019): 35-48.

building in the inter-war period, challenging reductive boundaries between the feminine/private and the masculine/public.³¹

Shell shock has captured the interests of historians across various international contexts, and has been studied through numerous lenses, but few works regarding Australia discuss it in substantial depth.³² Michael Tyquin's *Madness and the Military* is perhaps the most comprehensive, tracing the military, governmental and social responses to shell shock during the war and through its immediate aftermath.³³ Of particular interest is his location of taboo, effeminacy and cowardice as connotations of shell shock in the Australian context. In *Freud and the Antipodes*, Joy Damousi traces the application of psychoanalysis to shell shock patients in Australia and role of military medical professionals in articulating various explanations for the condition.³⁴ Larsson, in her journal article on shell-shocked men, their families and institutionalisation, moves beyond understanding the taboo of shell shock on a theoretical level and shows how men and their families worked to lessen it.³⁵ It is therefore a crucial work in understanding the high social stakes of shell shock.

³¹ Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002): 637–52; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale University Press, 2008).

³² For an overview of changing understandings of war neurosis, see: Hans Binneveld, *From Shell Shock to Combat Stress*, trans. John O'Kane (Amsterdam University Press, 1997); Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Psychology Press, 2005); For histories of shell shock in Britain (where severe Australian cases were treated during the war), see: Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (Continuum, 2010); Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); For the symbolic and social implications of shell shock, see: George L. Mosse, "Shell-Shock as a Social Disease," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (2000): 101–8; Jay Winter, "Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (2000): 7–11.

³³ Tyquin, *Madness and the Military*.

³⁴ Joy Damousi, "I Can Speak If the Listener Will Be Patient": Listening to the Shell-Shocked," in *Freud in the Antipodes: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in Australia* (University of New South Wales Press, 2005).

³⁵ Marina Larsson, "Families and Institutions for Shell-Shocked Soldiers in Australia after the First World War," *Social History of Medicine* 22, no. 1 (2009): 97–114.

Thesis overview

This thesis establishes a point of departure from existing accounts by exploring the concept of social repatriation through the lens of gender, testing Garton's assertion that repatriation was embedded with a "central appeal to manhood" and exploring the role of non-governmental groups in rehabilitating the masculinities of shell-shocked men within Mont Park's MMB.³⁶ Towards this end, in Chapter 1 I interrogate the definition of repatriation, arguing that its meaning evolved over the period in question. Even when the DoR settled on considering repatriation as a primarily medical and monetary affair, government officials constructed shell shock as a social issue. I explore the ways this discursively cast the shell-shocked man as a failed masculine citizen in inter-war Australia, particularly shell shock's threat to manly independence. Chapters 2 and 3 show the ways non-governmental groups stepped in to rehabilitate the masculine and civic identities that were discursively threatened by the rhetoric of the DoR, each group taking different approaches in their appeals.

Chapter 2 centres on the charitable women's groups of Melbourne who visited the soldiers at the MMB on numerous occasions. I argue that they recreated scenes of domestic life within the institution, emphasising traditional feminine characteristics which resulted in a parallel restoration of masculinity for the men within. Here, civic roles of the maternal citizen and masculine breadwinner were enacted. I argue that traditionalism was an anchor for gender relations in social repatriation. This expression of traditional femininity, while patriarchal in nature, was in some ways also liberating for women, providing agency in the public world through acts of charity and philanthropy.

Where Chapter 2 highlights a hyper-feminine approach to rehabilitating masculinities, Chapter 3 engages with masculine attempts at social repatriation by the RSL and other ESOs.

³⁶ Garton, "Return Home", 198.

These were hyper-masculine groups that employed governmental lobbying and thinly veiled threats of violence to secure the reputations and welfare of the men they represented. I explore the “segregation debate” - the debate around segregating military mental patients from civilian mental patients in Victorian hospitals - and the ways that this reflected attempts to maintain soldierly identity for military patients. This chapter, in exploring the tensions between non-government and government forces, illustrates how the goals of social repatriation were contested by different interest groups.

The repatriation period was one of great adjustment for Australia. Women, men, governments, local groups, those who stayed at home and those who had returned after years away, all had to grapple with questions of responsibility, citizenship, and of community. Repatriation was more than just a numbers game of pension allocation, but rather a deeply social and connected process in which the interests of multiple actors affected the resulting inter-war society. Shell-shocked men, as a group of individuals subjected to an enormous amount of taboo, provide an illustrative case study of the ways social repatriation functioned and called on numerous groups, privileging an understanding of returned men as connected beings rather than lone individuals isolated from broader social phenomena.

Chapter 1 - Redefining Repatriation: The “Will to Work” and Governmental Attitudes Toward Shell-Shocked Men.

Australian repatriation was always a social affair. While studying the legal and administrative actions of the DoR implies a practical and economic view of repatriation, repatriation was imbued with social meaning, concerned with issues of social integration, and was undertaken by non-governmental groups from its beginning. The definition of repatriation was unstable and open to interpretation, and when it changed from a private philanthropic virtue to a governmental obligation in September 1917, so did understandings of what it entailed. Whilst early parliamentary debates highlighted the social implications of the transition from soldier to citizen with governmental promises to aid it, by 1918, under the DoR, the definition narrowed, and therefore so did the DoR's self-imposed responsibilities toward returned soldiers. For shell-shocked men, whose condition was associated with a failing of willpower, social issues of reputation and notions of failed masculinity were issues the DoR frequently commented on but managing them was not included under their own dynamic definition of repatriation. Consequently, the onus of social repatriation was placed on the soldier himself and the communities around him. By analysing this discourse in Departmental publications, I argue that the DoR contributed to the challenges of social repatriation by constructing and perpetuating those same discourses that rendered the shell-shocked man an unstable and subversive social figure, particularly in the realm of gender.

This chapter begins by reframing contemporary definitions of repatriation as dynamic and subject to evolution, and in doing so, opens and extends the possibilities for understanding repatriation as a historical event and process. By uncovering the meaning

politicians assigned to repatriation and thus their beliefs on what made a successful citizen, I then set forth the elements of social reintegration the DoR positioned as problematic for shell-shocked men, namely the attainment of independence and self-control, each essential components of inter-war Australian masculinities. By supplementing my analysis with contemporary medical understandings of shell shock, I argue that the DoR constructed shell shock as a primarily social, as opposed to medical, issue. This excluded shell-shocked men and remedying the social issues they faced from the DoR's definition of repatriation and thus placed them outside its self-constructed responsibility. Repatriation therefore became the task of the individual and his community.

Evolving Definitions

Whilst the *War Pensions Act 1914* and the *Soldiers' Repatriation Fund Act 1916* were both steps toward increasing governmental responsibility for repatriation, it was the *Australian Soldier's Repatriation Act 1917* and the subsequent establishment of the DoR in 1918 that signalled the Australian Government's assumption of full leadership over the concerns of returned men.¹ Whilst non-governmental organisations, charitable groups, and philanthropic individuals had been the primary supplier of benefits to returned men during the war, the establishment of the DoR positioned repatriation as a public and legal initiative.² This necessitated a definition that would punctuate the ways people managed and understood repatriation during the inter-war period. Crucially however, it would also establish the legal responsibilities of the state to its citizens who were impacted by the war.

¹ War Pensions Act 1914 (Cth.), AustLII, https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/wpa1914341914190/wpa1914341914190.pdf; Soldiers' Repatriation Fund Act 1916 (Cth.), AustLII, https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/asrfa191671916422/asrfa191671916422.pdf; Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act 1917 (Cth.), AustLII, https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/asra1917371917381/asra1917371917381.pdf.

² Garton, *The Cost of War*, 81.

Unfortunately, the definition left much to be desired in terms of specificity. The term “repatriation” was renowned for its vagueness in the Australian context, and while it was agreed to entail “rehabilitation back into civilian life”, what exactly this meant, and therefore the exact responsibilities of the state toward returned men, was far from clear.³ While early parliamentary discussions (before the Act was passed) noted that returning to “civilian life” required social rehabilitation, later actions of the DoR indicate a decision to understand this rehabilitation as a monetary and medical endeavour. Importantly, this definition hinges on what one considers the most important aspects of “civilian life” to be, with the successful repatriation of the soldier only occurring once he achieves these subjective aspects. Thus, any evaluation of the success of the DoR in achieving its goal can only be gauged so far as its own interpretation of what “reinstatement in civil life” entailed.

Prior to the Act being passed in September of 1917, Senator Edward Millen, who would become the first Minister for Repatriation, defined repatriation as more than the physical return of soldiers to Australia, but rather a “sympathetic effort to reinstate [them in] civil life”.⁴ This was significant in its expansion of the traditional definition of the term which only encompassed soldiers’ physical return, but it also emphasised care and humanity toward these men. Senator Hugh Sinclair similarly stressed the “sympathetic” element, stating that returned men should be treated as more than “mere cogs in the wheel, and, when they are broken, as fit only to be scrapped”.⁵ When men’s war service left them no longer able to serve the national economic machine through employment due to their war service, they were still to be assisted. For Sinclair, repatriation was about “humane treatment” and maintaining the

³ Payton, “*Repat*”, 5, 21; For contextualisation of the plural meanings and usage of the term “repatriation” in Australia, see: Lloyd and Rees, *The Last Shilling*.

⁴ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 1917, 183. (Edward Millen, Senator).

⁵ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. September 25, 1917, 2700 (Hugh Sinclair, Senator).

<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1917-09-25%2F0049%22>

government's promises to men "who risked their lives to save the empire."⁶ As Millen emphasised, repatriation meant honouring the metaphorical contract between citizen and state, and therefore it was "an effort to secure their return in civil life which at the call of duty they abandoned".⁷

The return of these men, however, was embedded with social concerns, and it would not be a one-sided adjustment. War had profoundly transformed many men returning, both physically and mentally, leaving them somewhat alienated from a home front that had remained relatively by untouched direct experiences of war. For Senator William Kinsey Bolton (who was the first national president of the RSL), the shell-shocked man epitomised the collision of these two worlds and the social issues that repatriation aroused. They had "come back to us with chattered constitutions" and had "lost their self-control and self-respect".⁸ Bolton proceeded to argue that their visible presence on the street in poor condition, due to their inability to work and substance abuse issues, was a stark reminder of the cost of war, one that was the duty of the state to repay. Restoring them as "respected and useful members of the community" was part of this obligation.⁹ Here, Bolton references one of the main concerns of social repatriation. He understood that full integration into civil society necessitated the respect of the community, something he was aware they were lacking due to social taboos about mental illness and perceived idleness. Repatriation then, was not just about individual soldiers, but their relationship to their community and its attitudes and responses toward them. It was a process of negotiation between two groups. In these early debates, repatriation *was* social repatriation. However, this positive, restorative rhetoric

⁶ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 1917, 2700 (Hugh Sinclair, Senator).

⁷ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 1917, 183 (Edward Millen, Senator).

⁸ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. July 19, 1917, 276 (William Kinsey Bolton, Senator).
<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1917-07-19%2F0012%22>.

⁹ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 1917, 276 (William Kinsey Bolton, Senator).

around the civil rehabilitation of shell-shocked men was not to last as the DoR narrowed its definition of repatriation.

In March 1919, eleven months after the DoR's operations began, it published the first issue of its magazine, *Repatriation*, which outlined its intentions. It begins with a definition of repatriation that echoes that same ambiguity of the first parliamentary definitions: "if the ex-soldier needs assistance to re-establish himself in civil life, it is the duty of the Department to provide it."¹⁰ However, by this time the DoR, even under the leadership of Millen, was far less concerned with the attitudes of the community than the material reestablishment of returned men from a purely economic standpoint. Articles explain pension allocation, housing schemes, employment and soldier settlement, topics which are clearly economic in focus.¹¹ Even discussions of medical treatment position it as a means to an end of economic success: "the ultimate idea of this restoration of function is to be able to return the injured man to civil life in such a condition that he will once again be able to earn a living."¹² With the heavy focus on economic reinstatement, social concerns seem largely sidelined, but they are not absent. Certainly, earning a living wage was a priority for these men, but the Department still acknowledged that the repatriation process had harmful social ramifications, especially for disabled men:

he will be able to become a useful member of society, a wage earner who will be able to maintain himself and not be a drag on the State, and more than all, will not degenerate into that horrible sight common after all past wars, the soldier condemned to beg at the street corners for a subsistence.¹³

¹⁰ The Department of Repatriation, "Australian Repatriation Scheme," *Repatriation*, March 1919, 3.

¹¹ The Department of Repatriation, "Pensions," *Repatriation*, March 1919; The Department of Repatriation, "The Housing Scheme," *Repatriation*, March 1919; The Department of Repatriation, "Employment Section," *Repatriation*, March 1919; The Department of Repatriation, "Land Settlement," *Repatriation*, March 1919.

¹² R.B. Wade, "Orthopædic Surgery in War Injuries," *Repatriation*, March 1919, 6.

¹³ Wade, "Orthopædic Surgery in War Injuries," 6.

Rather than emphasise the independence that occurs with recovery as a goal to achieve, the DoR uses the adverb “not” to construct disablement as a threat to personal and social fulfillment. For the returned soldier, it is not a case of what he can achieve, but rather what he must avoid. Disablement here poses numerous risks to his social repatriation, namely shame, destitution, social exile and the guilt of becoming a “drag on the state”. This last risk, accompanied by the use of the pronouns “he” and “himself” as the active agent, places the onus of social repatriation on the returned soldier himself, dismissing it as a concern of the government. Additionally, it betrays a transactional view of citizenship, where being a “wage earner” makes an individual a useful citizen - a far cry from Bolton’s speech in parliament two years prior.

While the DoR maintained that employment and economic contribution to the nation were the most important aspects of a citizen’s duty, it was also clearly aware of the social repercussions of repatriation for disabled, or more specifically, shell-shocked men. While it chose not to consider these social aspects through positive, restorative language, its messaging also speaks to a larger importance of reputation in Australian civil life. The Department understood that disablement, even from something as honourable as war service, was a social issue, but it was not one it was prepared to fix.

Instilling the “will to work”

The DoR’s publications also construct a particular masculine identity that was largely unattainable for physically disabled men, much less shell-shocked men. The excerpt from the first issue of *Repatriation* provided earlier enshrines self-reliance and independence, from both the state and the community, and ties a man’s usefulness to his ability to earn a wage and be a breadwinner. An inability to work was a subversive position to be in, and the attitudes of the DoR confirm this. As Garton and Lake have pointed out, independence has long been one

of the defining features of Australian masculinity.¹⁴ Whilst Connell reminds us that “gender is by no means fixed”, and the object from which independence was sought has changed significantly (from domestic responsibility in the late-nineteenth century, to the welfare state in the inter-war period), independence remained central nevertheless.¹⁵ If we accept a semiotic definition of gender where masculinity is always “masculinity-in-relation” and defined by what femininity is not, then dependency arising from a disability was an inherently feminised condition.¹⁶

Indeed, the DoR frequently leveraged the notion that a man’s worth was strongly bound to his ability to work, often categorising men who could not as “sub-efficients”.¹⁷ One of the largest repatriation projects, soldier settlement (which saw 11,000 returned men and their families settle farms on Victorian land), also hinged fundamentally on men’s ability to work.¹⁸ Soldier settlement was an attempt to realise an Australian fantasy of the yeoman cultivating the soil and rebuilding the “health and wealth” of the nation after the war.¹⁹ Key to the yeoman identity was the “willingness to work hard” and physically labour on the land, and the large family that he could provide for through his self-sufficiency - both of which fulfilled larger nationalistic goals of repopulation and capital growth.²⁰ Regardless of the success (or lack thereof) of soldier settlement, independence and sustaining a family were aspirations for the inter-war Australian man, and this could only be achieved through work.²¹

¹⁴ Garton, “Return Home,” 93; Marilyn Lake, “Historical Reconsiderations IV: The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context,” *Historical Studies* 22, no. 86 (1986): 118.

¹⁵ R.W Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2005), 6; Lake, “Historical Reconsiderations IV,” 125; Garton, “Return Home,” 193.

¹⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, 70, 43-44; Garton, *The Cost of War*, 23.

¹⁷ Albert J. Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, Annual Report (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921), 10.

¹⁸ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, xviii.

¹⁹ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, 12, 22.

²⁰ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, 14, 21.

²¹ For an overview of why soldier settlement failed, see: Ken Fry, “Soldier Settlement and the Australian Agrarian Myth after the First World War,” *Labour History*, no. 48 (1985): 29-43.

Groups like the RSL were keenly aware of the connotations that welfare attached to non-working men and the repercussions this had for their masculine identities. It relentlessly insisted that repatriation policies, namely pensions, be construed as a “right based on sacrifice, rather than a gift”.²² Associations between the soldier’s pension and the citizen’s pension needed to be dispelled in the rising welfare state of early twentieth-century Australia, a distinction that will be further explored in Chapter 3. Receiving a pension may have been the material difference between destitution and supporting a family, but socially, being a pensioner was a reputational nightmare.²³ Repatriation was a socially loaded process, and it came with a cost.

Certainly, gaining employment was an important step in repatriating ex-soldiers and returning them to civil life, and the DoR aimed to assist men achieve this goal in any way it could. And indeed, it leveraged the achievement of “manly independence” at every turn, but the Department had ulterior motives.²⁴ Swathes of men returning from war and entering the depleted workforce would be hugely beneficial to the Australian economy, and it also meant the DoR had to spend less money on pensions. Millen himself stressed the dual benefits of employment back in 1917:

... in view of the heavy financial responsibility which will be involved in consequence of this measure, that when we help our soldiers we shall to a large extent be helping ourselves, and by doing so fit this country the better to carry that great burden of debt that will undoubtedly fall upon it as a legacy from the war.²⁵

²² Garton, *The Cost of War*, 82, 83, 103, 109.

²³ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 104.

²⁴ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, 17.

²⁵ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. Senate. 18 July 1917. (Edward Millen, Senator).

<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1917-07-18%2F0014%22>

Here, the DoR's motivations are clearer. However, shell shock posed a risk to this plan. Where limb differences could be accommodated for with prostheses, shell shock was "systemic and unstable" and was a barrier to economic contribution through stable employment.²⁶ The DoR nevertheless stressed the medical benefits of work, boldly stating that "work has proved the most potent and successful factor in the treatment of damaged soldiers."²⁷ Convalescent homes for shell-shocked patients were structured around prescribing work for "mental-therapeutic" and "body-toning" purposes, with the intent to encourage and develop the "will to work".²⁸ Simultaneously however, the Department was aware that long-term employment was likely not achievable for chronic cases: "The majority of them will have to be more or less carried by the community, and they will always be unreliable, unstable, or inefficient in some way."²⁹ This "manly independence" was not achievable for shell-shocked men according to the DoR, and its frustration with their continued burden on the state was palpable. Language such as "drag on the state", and "conscious exaggeration...to obtain some or all of the possible monetary...benefits that may accrue", highlight irritation and reluctance to continue supporting men who may struggle to maintain stable employment and require a pension.³⁰

Beyond frustration, these quotes allude to a broader theme in the DoR's discourse around shell-shocked men: a nagging feeling that these men were, in essence, faking it. Whilst the Department never outright rejected shell shock as a legitimate condition, discussions of it in annual reports always erred on the side of scepticism. There was a sense

²⁶ Marina Larsson, "Restoring the Spirit: The Rehabilitation of Disabled Soldiers in Australia after the Great War," *Health and History* 6, no. 2 (2004): 54.

²⁷ Albert J. Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, Annual Report (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921), 19.

²⁸ Albert J. Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, Annual Report (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921), 20, 19.

²⁹ Albert J. Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, Annual Report (Repatriation Commission, 1922), 35.

³⁰ Wade, "Orthopædic Surgery in War Injuries", 6; Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 19.

that most cases, particularly those who were chronic or “problem cases”, were consciously exaggerating their symptoms to obtain financial assistance.³¹ The DoR made distinctions between two main types of patients: those who were “robust prior to enlistment and endured hard fighting”, and those who had always been physically and mentally weak and would continue to leech off of the state as they had during their time in the army.³² Most of the cases still requiring treatment, the DoR remarked, were from the latter category.³³ Now that those who were “never robust prior to enlistment” were back on Australian soil, they were “faced with the problem of doing anything at all to earn a living”.³⁴ They were “civil misfits” who the community should treat with the utmost suspicion to avoid giving them “misplaced sympathy”.³⁵

Still, the DoR maintained that most of these men were “undoubtedly very sick”, and that “pure malingerers” constituted only a small percentage of cases, but its continued emphasis on these rare malingerers constructed it as a much larger issue.³⁶ Certainly, the largely invisible nature of shell shock made distinguishing the true cases from the illegitimate difficult, but the DoR’s response was to drape a blanket of scepticism over the collective. According to the DoR, most of the men still receiving care in the MMB of Mont Park and similar hospitals around Australia in 1921, were “civil misfits” intentionally avoiding the drudgery of full-time employment. The DoR’s message to the community? These men were not to be trusted.

³¹ H.J Green, *Report of the Repatriation Commission for the Year Ending 30th June, 1924*, Annual Report (Repatriation Commission, 1924), 5.

³² Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 15.

³³ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 15.

³⁴ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 15.

³⁵ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 15.

³⁶ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 19.

“When there is a will, there is a way”

To fully grasp the rhetoric of mistrust directed at shell-shocked men and therefore the ways they were constructed as a subversive and feminised subject, a summary of contemporary understandings of shell shock is necessary to contextualise the DoR's attitudes. Shell shock, as ambiguous as its definition and diagnosis could be, was often further classified with the descriptor of “hysterical”. Sufferers could have “hysterical symptoms”, be diagnosed with “conversion hysteria”, or be afflicted with “hysterical fits”.³⁷ Hysteria, however, was ridden with feminine associations from its etymological inception, the prefix “hyster-” denoting its connection to the uterus.³⁸ Definitionally and connotatively, hysteria was largely considered a female affliction by the late-nineteenth century.³⁹ How then to reconcile the influx of men exhibiting hysteria-like symptoms in the midst of war? If war was the ultimate masculine environment, where men performed and proved their manliness through military rituals of courage and violence, then a failure to engage in such rituals, rendered the hysterical shell-shocked man a failed masculine subject.⁴⁰ A discursive renegotiation of hysteria was thereby necessary.

As Anna Loutfi argued, the “masculinisation of hysteria” necessitated a transfer of its imagined somatic location from the female reproductive system to the “manly will”.⁴¹ In the process, “the will” transformed from an abstract enlightenment ideal into a “mysterious aspect of male biology in need of disciplinary training and medical intervention”.⁴² George L.

³⁷ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*, 19; AG Butler, “Chapter II - Moral and Mental Disorders,” in *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914-1918*, vol. 3 (Halstead Press, 1943), 117; Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, 36.

³⁸ Russell Meares et al., “Whose Hysteria: Briquet's, Janet's or Freud's?,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (1985): 256.

³⁹ Meares et al., “Whose Hysteria,” 256.

⁴⁰ Joseph Pugliese, “The Gendered Figuring of the Dysfunctional Serviceman in the Discourses of Military Psychiatry,” in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 162.

⁴¹ Anna Loutfi, “Eugenic Nationalism, Biopolitics, and the Masculinization of Hysteria: Historical and Theoretical Reflections,” in *Masculinities and the Nation in the Modern World*, ed. Pablo Dominguez Andersen and Simon Wendt (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 56.

⁴² Loutfi, “Eugenic Nationalism,” 56.

Mosse similarly located the significance of the “will” in understandings of shell shock, and the consequent ramifications that a lack of self-control had on masculinity.⁴³ A true man “controlled his passions, and... expressed his commitment to moderation and self-control”, leaving the shell-shocked man in a state of perceived effeminacy when he could not maintain control over his mind or body.⁴⁴

While psychiatrists in Europe were coming to understand shell shock as a failing of the “manly will”, Australian medical authorities were following suit. W.R. Regnell, in a 1919 *Medical Journal of Australia* article, located the cause in the “subliminal subconscious” which led to “an anxiety state, a condition of indecision, a lack of will power, a feeling of mental tension”.⁴⁵ A.G. Butler, Australia’s official medical historian of the war characterised shell shock as a “moral and mental disorder” caused by a “morbid degradation of the will”.⁴⁶ It was the soldier’s temperament that made him prone, and resistance to neurosis was achieved through his “captaincy of his soul”.⁴⁷ While the soldier may not be aware of it himself, somewhere deep inside of him, embedded into his character, was a desire to flee from the strain of war. When the men returned home and were receiving treatment, restoring the will was crucial to recovery. As the DoR stated in 1924, “‘When there is a will, there is a way.’ The man who does not possess the will to rise superior to his incapacity is invariably a hopeless problem.”⁴⁸ Another report argued that “the whole question of treatment resolves itself into the capacity of the patient to re-act to it, his determination, his courage, and the depths of his desire to get better”.⁴⁹ A patient’s failure to recover was not a reflection of the

⁴³ Mosse, “Shell-Shock as a Social Disease.”

⁴⁴ Mosse, “Shell-Shock as a Social Disease,” 101-103.

⁴⁵ W. R. Regnell, “The Psycho-Neuroses of War,” *Medical Journal of Australia* 1, no. 23 (1919): 459.

⁴⁶ Butler’s history was published in 1943 which would typically make it outside the scope of the study, however, his attitudes were shaped by his own experience as a medical officer in the war. Additionally, most of the sources he drew from to explain the causes of shell shock were published between 1915 and 1935; Butler, “Chapter II - Moral and Mental Disorders,” 60

⁴⁷ Butler, “Chapter II - Moral and Mental Disorders,” 60.

⁴⁸ Green, *Report of the Repatriation Commission for the Year Ending 30th June, 1924*, 8.

⁴⁹ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, 36.

medical severity his case, but was rather a personal or moral failing in which his lack of determination was the primary cause of his continued suffering. His “flesh was willing, but [his] spirit was weak”.⁵⁰

If we return to the DoR’s convalescent farms, developing “the will to work” through “mental-therapeutic” measures makes more sense. Indeed, the 1921-22 report emphasised that convalescent homes were designed to “stimulate *the habit* of work... in those who have lost the *will to work*” (emphasis added).⁵¹ This was not about developing the *capacity* to work, but the *desire* to work, suggesting that the capacity to overcome disability was a choice. The “manly will” had to be developed and exercised if shell-shocked men were to return to work and obtain the “manly independence” that Australian masculinity demanded. That domestic ideal of supporting a family, and working and living off the land, was thus coded by the Department as unachievable for these men. Not only had they “lacked the grit” to fulfil the masculine ideal of the soldier, their lack of will power also reduced them to an effeminate figure in peacetime.⁵² They were a “drag on the state” and unable to contribute to relieving the “burden of debt”, and this feminised dependency on the state made them socially subversive, “endangering the clear distinction between the genders”.⁵³

Despite the medical interest in shell shock and the medical facilities established to treat it, in inter-war Australia, shell shock was tied to deeper social concerns. The DoR understood that reputation was an important element of civilian life, and one that was threatened by shell shock. It also knew that work, despite its economic benefits, was the path to achieving the all-important “manly independence” that underpinned Australian masculinity. However, by continually reinforcing that recovery was contingent on willpower,

⁵⁰ A.F Hurst, “Nerves and the Men,” *Repatriation* 1, no. 3 (1919).

⁵¹ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, 30.

⁵² Beaumont, “The Anzac Legend,” 155.

⁵³ Mosse, “Shell-Shock as a Social Disease,” 103.

the Department discursively distanced itself from its responsibility to socially repatriate these men fully. Through its evolving definitions for repatriation, the DoR placed the onus for recovery and reintegration in the hands of the shell shock patient himself. It was now about *his* determination to avoid social stigma, *his* courage in engaging with treatments of “sympathetic persuasion”, and *his* “will to work”.⁵⁴ Shell shock was indeed a legitimate social issue facing the returned man, but the Department was steadfast in its stance that it was not its responsibility to solve. This did not mean, however, that this deficit went unaddressed.

⁵⁴ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, 19.

Chapter 2 - “The Value of Womanly Influence”: Recreating Domesticity in Institutional Care

Over the course of the war only one repatriation ship entered Port Melbourne unwelcomed by the home front– the first. It is unclear whether a lack of organisation or physical barriers prevented access to the port, but the shame of not having met the *Kyarra* compelled a group of women from Port Melbourne to never let it happen again.¹ They were motivated by a sense of social obligation and patriotism, feeling “so keenly the neglect” of the first ship and the “returned heroes” within.² From August 1915 to September 1919, the Women’s Welcoming Committee (WCC) of Port Melbourne met every ship that returned to Melbourne with Australian soldiers, many of whom had become physically or mentally injured over the course of the war (fig. 2.1).



Fig 2.1 Members of the Women's Welcoming Committee posed with soldiers from the Ballarat, August 6, 1915.

¹ Terry Keenan, *Welcoming the Wounded Anzacs* (Terry Keenan, 2014), 6.

² “WOUNDED SOLDIERS - Letter to the Editor,” *Argus* (Melbourne, Victoria), August 19, 1915.

When the second repatriation ship, the *Ballarat*, arrived on August 6, 1915, the women were ready. They stood on the pier, posed with banners that read “Welcome Home our Brave Soldiers” on one side, and “Australia is Proud of You” on the other (fig. 2.2).³ They handed out home-made cakes, flower arrangements and cigarettes, and some of the younger girls slipped love notes into cars bound for the hospital.⁴ It was an intensely feminine display for men whose masculinity had been challenged by the social connotations of their condition.⁵

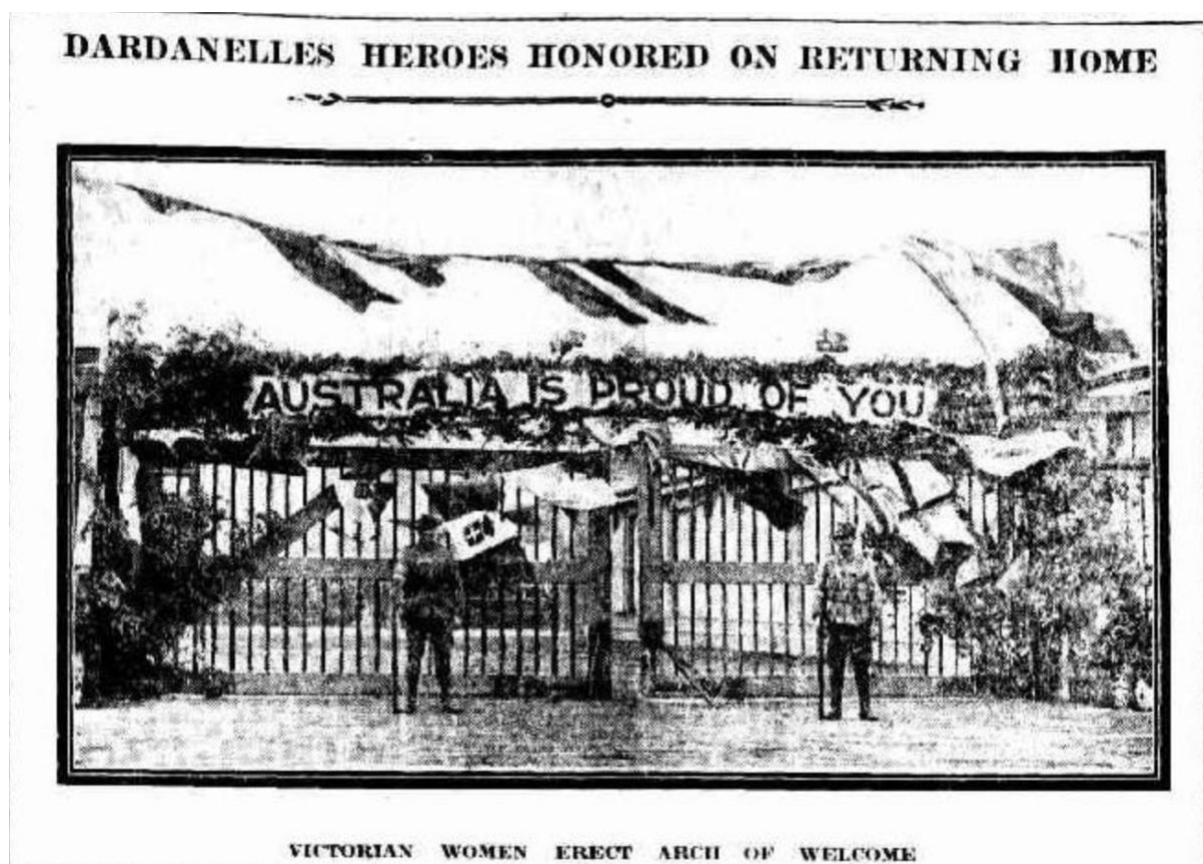


Fig.2.2. Welcoming home the Ballarat, August 6, 1915.

The sight of women on the pier of Port Melbourne was their first experience of home after having endured the war, and it began the process of social repatriation. These men had

³ “DARDANELLES HEROES HONORED ON RETURNING HOME,” *Herald* (Melbourne, Victoria), August 10, 1915.

⁴ “WELCOMING WOUNDED. Port’s Warm Reception,” *Port Melbourne Standard* (Victoria), August 14, 1915.

⁵ Pugliese, “The Gendered Figuring of the Dysfunctional Serviceman in the Discourses of Military Psychiatry.”

gone through a life-altering event and were now expected to assimilate back into domestic society and navigate life, not as soldiers, but as citizens. It was a process organised and led by local voluntary community groups as opposed to governmental bodies and their policies (the DoR would only be established three years later), and through the demonstration of gratitude it was a social act. Local women's groups such as the WWC would come to play a pivotal role in social repatriation, particularly for shell-shocked men, helping to ease the crucial transition from soldier to citizen.

After disembarking the ship, men were either sent home or sent to hospitals for further medical care. Those with severe cases of shell shock were later admitted to repatriation hospitals such as Mont Park, where they would undergo psychiatric care, supervision, and treatment. Shortly after the facility's first military mental patient was admitted, women's organisations began visiting the returned men, bringing with them a recreation of domestic life. The ladies of the WWC visited the men at Mont Park on at least two occasions in the immediate aftermath of the war, the first in July 1919, and the second a month later.⁶ Local branches of the Red Cross, known as Red Cross Committees (RCC), which were primarily composed of women, engaged in similar visits, as did local independent women's organisations such as the Fairfield Ladies. Reports of these visits were often published in local newspapers and appear to have been a source of pride for communities, perhaps an affirmation of their patriotism and dedication to philanthropy. Each report outlines the vast array of flowers and cakes donated by the women and details the entertainment they provided the patients.⁷ This was more than a delivery of goods, but an

⁶ Keenan, *Welcoming the Wounded Anzacs*, 76.

⁷ "TOPICS OF THE WEEK: SOLDIERS' CHRISTMAS TREAT," *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle* (Victoria), December 7, 1918; "PORT RED CROSS. Soldiers at Mont Park Entertained," *Port Melbourne Standard* (Victoria), September 2, 1916; "LADIES' NIGHT AT MONT PARK," *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle* (Victoria), August 18, 1917; "ELECTRIC SPARKS," *Port Melbourne Standard* (Victoria), July 12, 1919; "GALA DAY AT MONT PARK SANATORIUM," *Advertiser* (Hurstbridge, Victoria), January 18, 1929; "BRIGHT MOMENTS AT MONT PARK," *Herald* (Melbourne, Victoria), December 11, 1922.

extended visit where a performance of gender roles ensued. Descriptions of these events centre on their “homely” nature and suggest that the soldiers benefited from the recreation of domestic life within the institution.⁸ These women’s organisations recognised that a female presence, accompanied by symbols of femininity and domestic life, would have a positive effect on the men and which subsequently contributed to the parallel reconstruction of domestic masculinity.

By emphasising their domestic skills, these women embraced highly traditional modes of femininity. These visits became acts of social repatriation that came to rehabilitate the civilian status of these men along gendered lines. In reconstructing the masculinities of the shell-shocked, it attempted to restore the condition of men who existed outside the norms of contemporary masculinity that, as explored in the previous chapter, emphasised independence and the adoption of the role of the breadwinner who contributed to family building and national economic stability.

However, whilst these women were making forays into the public world of charity and philanthropy, they “operated within traditional understandings of gender roles”.⁹ Inter-war femininity demanded that women assume the role of the “maternal citizen”, in which women’s greatest civic duty “lay precisely in their capacity to give birth and nurture”.¹⁰ This maternalism, in which women’s biological and social role of “mother” was reified as their most important contribution to the state, was also attached to broader notions of care, duty and morality.¹¹ The maternal citizen reflected state values that encouraged repopulation

⁸ *Port Melbourne Standard*, “ELECTRIC SPARKS.”

⁹ Beaumont, “Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914–1918?,” 276.

¹⁰ Marilyn Lake, “A Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia,” in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (Taylor & Francis Group, 1993), 399.

¹¹ Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens, “Contextualising Australian Mothering and Motherhood,” in *Australian Mothering: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 12.

amidst increased white anxieties of geographical isolation, depopulation, and the “degeneration” of the white Australian “race”.¹² The actions of these women’s groups can therefore be contextualised amidst the rise of the maternal citizen, informing their obligations to care for institutionalised men in a manner akin to that of a mother, wife, or sister, and in doing so, assigning the men the role of father, husband, and brother.¹³

Masculinities and femininities are highly relational concepts, each defined by what the other is not such that, in the words of Connell, “no masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations”.¹⁴ Thus, I argue that the strong expression of femininity by the women was a form of social repatriation that caused a parallel strengthening and affirmation of masculinity for the men within the institution.

Further, I argue that whilst these women operated within a patriarchal society, their embrace of tradition was a means of achieving agency and autonomy. The once private practice of domestic skill became a patriotic act of the public sphere through its deployment within charity and voluntary work. Through this public “performativity” of the maternal citizen role, the parallel identity of the domesticised citizen-soldier could emerge according to the relational nature of gender.¹⁵ The recreation of domesticity within the confines of the institution is therefore a significant insight into the ways that these women enacted and reinforced their own civic values, performing acts of social repatriation in the process.

¹² Lake, “A Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia,” 399.

¹³ For a further discussion of maternal citizenship, see also Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 71; Marilyn Lake, “A Revolution in the Family,” 399–416.

¹⁴ R.W Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2005), 71.

¹⁵ For the theory of gender performativity, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Routledge, 2002).

Tracing changing models of masculinity

Despite the domestic space being typically perceived as an exclusively feminine domain, it was centrally important to masculine identities, particularly in the aftermath of the war. The end of the First World War ushered in a “re-domestication of the male” in which dominant masculinities were strongly associated with a relationship to the home and family, and the men took on the role of provider and breadwinner.¹⁶ In contrast, war-time masculinity had been defined by the defence of country. It was demonstrated through violence and strengthened through male-male bonds in the almost exclusively masculine environment of war.¹⁷

Upon their return to Australia, men had to adjust to the requirements of civilian life and thus, relationships with, and connections to the feminine environment of the home would have to develop in a masculine fashion.¹⁸ It was a masculine take on the typically feminine domesticity. Institutionalised shell-shocked men, both in their physical removal from the space of the home, and in their inability to provide for a family in a breadwinner capacity due to their condition, therefore faced “an uphill task in maintaining their masculine dignity”.¹⁹

These changing ideals of masculinity and the existence of men who sat outside of these ideals is best elucidated by acknowledging that masculinity is unstable, plural, and certainly not universal across spatial and temporal contexts.²⁰ What it ‘means’ to be a man, and how that identity is expressed, is generated externally, is subject to cultural changes, and

¹⁶ Francis, “The Domestication of the Male?,” 643; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 1–8.

¹⁷ Stephen Garton, “War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, January 1, 1998: 86.

¹⁸ Garton, “Return Home,” 192.

¹⁹ Garton, “Return Home,” 198.

²⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*.

is reinforced by its enactment, or to quote Judith Butler, “performativity”.²¹ Similarly, multiple masculine ideals can coexist at any one time. Almost 40 per cent of Australia’s male population aged eighteen to forty-four went to war, making Anzac masculinity a particularly hegemonic ideal, but it stood in tensions with the values of peace-time Australia.²²

Domestic masculinities could co-exist with Anzac ones created in war, but they had to be negotiated. Returned servicemen, numbering 264,000, represented a staggeringly large demographic.²³ Excessive drinking and a disdain for authority may have been acceptable behaviours at war, but it had to be controlled if Australian society was to remain stable.²⁴ Violent riots led by ex-soldiers took place across Australia and were described as “serious” and “lawless”.²⁵ As the next chapter explores, soldierly masculinity had imbued returned men with a sense of elevated citizenship, making them and their representatives in the RSL a particularly powerful and disruptive lobbying group.²⁶ From the government’s perspective, it was essential for peace-time Australia that repatriation facilitated an easy transition from soldier to citizen. True social repatriation was more than a task for the men themselves; as Garton points out, there “was an imperative for sympathetic responses and sexual readjustments from women” as well.²⁷ The soldier had to become the citizen-soldier, with the maternal citizen by his side as his wife, “fulfilling his obligation to provide a home...to bring up the citizens of the future”.²⁸

²¹ Alan McKinlay, “Performativity and the Politics of Identity: Putting Butler to Work,” *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, The Contours of Critical Accounting, 21, no. 3 (March 1, 2010): 234; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Routledge, 2002).

²² “Australian Recruitment Statistics for the First World War,” National Archives of Australia, accessed May 14, 2025, <https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/student-research-portal/learning-resource-themes/war/world-war-i/australian-recruitment-statistics-first-world-war>; Connell, *Masculinities*.

²³ National Archives of Australia, “Returned First World War Soldiers Disembarking in Melbourne.”

²⁴ Crotty, “The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL,” 189.

²⁵ Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance* (University of Queensland Press, 1988); “LAWLESS RETURNED MEN,” *Daily Standard* (Brisbane, Queensland), March 25, 1919.

²⁶ Crotty, “The Anzac Citizen.”

²⁷ Garton, “Return Home,” 200.

²⁸ Jenny Gregory, “Protecting Middle Class Suburbia: An Ideal Space for the Citizens of Interwar Perth,” *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 17 (December 2020): 79.

As the war was a major life event, soldierly masculinity remained integral to many returned men's identities, but a parallel, domestic masculinity emerged upon their return to Australia. This domestic masculinity was dually constructive for peace-time Australia. Primarily, it necessitated that returned men re-enter the workforce to fulfil their role as breadwinner, but it also encouraged the repopulation of Australia after the loss of 54,000 men during the war.²⁹ Contemporary popular literature highlighted an Australian brand of heterosexual romance that embraced men being "caring spouses" but did not compromise the "straightforwardness" and "hard exterior" that was still expected of Australian men.³⁰

Relatedly, there was an almost "universal acceptance" of men being breadwinners and women "being typically responsible for the home and childcare".³¹ The soldier settlement project epitomised this, with its idealisation of the yeoman who, through his cultivation of the land, could support a large family.³² The DoR's magazine, *Repatriation*, published success stories often, stating that "every man here has a chance to more than maintain himself and family by following the most independent calling in the world".³³ Productivity and work was a means to an end of supporting a family, but inter-war masculinity also meant "to establish a home, to provide for it, to control it".³⁴

Here, gender becomes relational. To be a husband is to have a wife, and to provide for a family, a man must have one. Domestic masculinity required more than the mere presence of women - it also required their involvement in fostering it, often through expressions of traditional femininity.³⁵ For those in the MMB at Mont Park, domestic masculinity was hard

²⁹ Tibbetts, "Casualties of War."; For a detailed account of the gendered dimensions of re-population in the inter-war period, see: Marilyn Lake, "Giving Birth to the New Nation," in *Creating a Nation*, ed. Marilyn Lake et al. (Ringwood, Vic: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 205–29.

³⁰ Melissa Bellanta, "A Masculine Romance: The Sentimental Bloke and Australian Culture in the War - and Early Interwar Years," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 2, 10.

³¹ Thomson, "'When's Dad Home?'," 38.

³² Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, 14.

³³ "Beerburrum: A Successful Settlement," *Repatriation*, July 25, 1919.

³⁴ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 4.

³⁵ Garton, "Return Home," 198.

to achieve. In the absence of the home environment where “daily practices and routines” construct the masculine self in a “web of obligations” to the central femininity of the mother and wife, the soldiers at Mont Park were excluded from the emerging domestic masculinity.³⁶ The presence of women at the institution, therefore was a crucial component in the social repatriation of these men.

Behavioural Expectations of Women in the Institution

Whilst a feminine presence in the MMB was very much appreciated by the men within, it was also prescribed by the DoR itself. Female visitors are not explicitly mentioned, but the outlined expectations of women who are employed at the facility are reflective of the traditional femininity adopted by the women’s groups.

The DoR’s first annual report details the repatriation efforts being undertaken to rehabilitate shell-shocked men.³⁷ It provides an instructive account of social interaction with shell-shocked patients at convalescent farms, which, through its administration of treatment and emphasis on outdoor work, shared many similarities with Mont Park. The explanation of the management of such farms is explicit in its dictation of gender roles and the importance of their maintenance at the facility:

The Matron is in charge in the absence of the doctor, and she cares for all the patients when they are not employed outdoors. The value of womanly influence cannot be overstated. The Diggers have a very warm affection for the nurses who have been overseas, and when this is kept in mind it will be appreciated that the Matron is seldom called upon to take disciplinary action.³⁸

³⁶ Andrew Gorman-Murray, “Masculinity and the Home: A Critical Review and Conceptual Framework,” *Australian Geographer* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 369; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 4.

³⁷ Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921*.

³⁸ Mullet, “Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921”, 20.

The term ‘matron’ conjures connotations of a maternal figure, but she is coded as mother in other ways. The matron managed the inner workings of the facility and was responsible for creating a homely environment away from the realm of men, which existed outdoors and was managed by the overseer who is referred to later with male pronouns.³⁹ While she is first mentioned as a leader, her power was curtailed by her resistance to discipline misbehaving patients. She was first and foremost a carer and was supposed to inspire the same “warm affection” the men felt for nurses at war. The success of the matron was judged by her ability to care and create a home. She was an object for the affections of the male patients to be projected onto, and acts that subverted this were discouraged. Her role as an employee was to fulfil a gender role. Latter DoR descriptions of the matron figure stresses that these “splendid women” persuaded men to get better by “appealing to their manliness”, an admission of the value assigned to her role at the facility.⁴⁰

At Mont Park, Matron Ida O’Dwyer (fig. 2.3) very much fulfilled these expectations. O’Dwyer lived on site in the same quarters as the nurses, making her a constant presence at the facility.⁴¹ She oversaw the visits carried out by the women’s groups and seems to have been responsible for distributing the donations provided, reassuring them that she “felt sure all the soldiers enjoyed themselves”.⁴² If the matron was a model for feminine behaviour at the facility, her engagement with, and leadership during, the visits by the women’s groups set the standard for female interaction with the male patients. Such standards focussed on the

³⁹ Mullet, "Report of the Repatriation Commission 1920-1921", 20.

⁴⁰ Albert J. Mullet, *Report of the Repatriation Commission, Year Ending 30th of June 1922*, Annual Report (Repatriation Commission, 1922), 31.

⁴¹ Yarra Plenty Regional Library Local History, [Matron O’Dwyer, 16th Australian General Hospital, Mont Park, circa 1918], January 1, 1918, photo, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yprrlocalhistory/26374511293/>; “What Women Are Doing,” *Australian Women’s Weekly* (Australia, Australia), December 17, 1938; PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7472 Outward Letter Books, volume 1, Letter from the House Keeper to the Medical Superintendent, October 9, 1923.

⁴² “RETURNED SOLDIERS. A CONVALESCENT HOME. THE HOSPITAL AT MONT PARK,” *Age* (Melbourne, Victoria), September 20, 1915.

fulfillment of traditional gender roles that saw women take on roles akin to that of a mother or wife in the maintenance of a homely environment in the facility.



Fig. 2.3. Matron Ida O'Dwyer at Mont Park, c. 1918.

Traditionalism and voluntary work

Whilst the early twentieth century saw white Australian women gain increased opportunities in the public sphere, challenging the public/masculine and private/feminine binaries of space, these opportunities often emphasised their traditional gender roles.⁴³ As Jay Winter has explained, traditionalism was comforting and stabilising after the upheaval of war, and the return to traditional symbols and gender roles was a means of reaffirming and strengthening community.⁴⁴ Indeed, despite women's ventures into the public sphere, an "ethos of domesticity" became typical in popular culture and social life.⁴⁵

⁴³ Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces," in *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Nancy Duncan (Routledge, 1996), 128.

⁴⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80.

⁴⁵ Adrian Bingham, "'An Era of Domesticity'? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 1, no.2 (2004): 225.

White women were well-established members of the public sphere by the start of the inter-war period through both their political rights and charitable organisation. However, an “ethos of domesticity” saw this membership and petitions for economic freedom be largely punctuated by their traditional roles as mothers and wives.⁴⁶ Both sides of the conscription campaigns in 1916 and 1917 appealed to women’s social and biological roles as mothers, which in the context of increasing conversations around the relationship between the state and the citizen, framed women’s citizenly duty as motherhood.⁴⁷ Further, women’s liberation was closely tied to the economic concerns of the domestic space, where they called for the “formal recognition of household labour” and economic independence *through*, rather than *from*, their role as maternal citizens.⁴⁸ This emphasis on traditional femininity in women’s advance into the public sphere of politics was reflected in their acts of social repatriation through voluntary charitable work.

In the late nineteenth century Australian women’s philanthropy had been a popular activity for bourgeois “ladies”, whose class and respectability made them powerful agents of social and moral improvement.⁴⁹ However, by the start of the war, voluntary work and engagement with philanthropy increased, with over 82,000 Australian women engaged in the Red Cross alone.⁵⁰ Middle-class women increasingly became distributors of charity, and such involvement was symbolic of their “moral and social obligations” as citizens.⁵¹ Internally,

⁴⁶ Marilyn Lake, “Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation—Nationalism, Gender and Other Seminal Acts,” *Gender & History* 4, no. 3 (1992): 305–22; James Keating, “‘Woman as Wife, Mother, and Home-Maker’: Equal Rights International and Australian Feminists’ Interwar Advocacy for Mothers’ Economic Rights,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 47, no.4 (2022): 957–985.

⁴⁷ Beaumont, “Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914–1918?,” 277; Beaumont, “Australian Citizenship and the Two World Wars,” 171–174.

⁴⁸ Lake, “Mission Impossible”; Keating, “‘Woman as Wife, Mother, and Home-Maker’,” 960.

⁴⁹ The term “ladies” held dual connotations of high class and morality, for an overview, see: Judith Godden, “‘The Work for Them, and the Glory for Us!’: Sydney Women’s Philanthropy, 1870–1900,” in *Australian Welfare History: Critical Essays* (The MacMillan Company, 1982), 84; F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 7.

⁵⁰ Beaumont, “Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914–1918?,” 273.

⁵¹ F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 5–7.

these activities provided a source of self-expression in a society that restricted women's employment prospects; however, this expression was tied to their success in the domestic sphere.⁵² Women could enter the public sphere, but only in ways that contributed to "upholding the values, and promoting the ideological hegemony" of the traditional family.⁵³ The creation and donation of domestic products like baked goods, floral arrangements, and sewn and knitted textiles were examples of acceptable manifestations of female charity. As F.K. Prochaska aptly put it: "From their domestic citadel, women could make forays to spread that tenderness and purity, thought to be the essence of female character, through society".⁵⁴

Whilst some have argued that this framework was inherently restrictive, it could also be contended that domestic skill was a path to achieving increased personal freedom for middle-class women.⁵⁵ In her study of women's church fetes in the late nineteenth century, Anne O'Brien argues that domestic skills paved the way for women to enter the public space and gain autonomy despite increasing male anxieties over women in the male dominated space of the market.⁵⁶ Domestic skills provided "important social and communitarian value", not just for the benefactors of these goods and services, but for the women who were involved in their creation.⁵⁷ The act of donation or sale was a point of social connection as much as an expression of expertise and morality. Charity through the demonstration of domestic skill was therefore a path to autonomy and agency.

⁵² Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 5-7.

⁵³ Godden, "'The Work for Them, and the Glory for Us!'," 91.

⁵⁴ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 7.

⁵⁵ Godden, "'The Work for Them, and the Glory for Us!'," 97.

⁵⁶ Anne O'Brien, "Faith, Fetes and Domesticity in Australia," *Women's History Review* 15, no. 5 (2006): 719-35.

⁵⁷ O'Brien, "Faith, Fetes and Domesticity", 727.

Social repatriation in action: Women at Mont Park

Each of the women's groups engaged in similar domestic practices in their visits to Mont Park which likely produced such feelings of agency, but their visits were not only reflective of a desire to express patriotism and achieve autonomy. The recreation of domesticity in the institution was an act of maternal citizenship, helping to restore the masculinities of the men within. Indeed, these women's groups visited and donated goods of their own accord. The 1923 annual report on the hospital's affairs noted that "professional entertainment cannot be engaged" due to a lack of funds, but that the "few entertainments provided by outside organisations have been much appreciated".⁵⁸ The soldiers relied upon volunteers, and the initiative of these women in visiting locates their motivations more firmly in service of social repatriation and a genuine desire to help.

In a letter to the editor of *The Argus*, an unnamed member of the WWC spoke about the social obligation of women aiding the repatriation effort. The WWC "felt so keenly the neglect of our returned heroes by the first steamer that we determined that such would never occur again".⁵⁹ They felt it was their responsibility as women of the Port Melbourne area to welcome these men in this first act of social repatriation, and their subsequent visits to Mont Park can be explained by this same motivation. Additionally, it seems that the war broadened the demographics of women engaged in voluntary work and, therefore, those engaging with this type of citizenly duty. The WWC was not composed of "aristocrats", but rather "the wives and mothers and sisters of working men".⁶⁰ Their self-identification as the "wives, mothers and sisters" of men also demonstrates that their construction of gender was

⁵⁸ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7472 Outward Letter Books, volume 1, Annual Report of the Military Mental Hospital, February 1923.

⁵⁹ *Argus*, "WOUNDED SOLDIERS - Letter to the Editor."

⁶⁰ *Argus*, "WOUNDED SOLDIERS - Letter to the Editor."

contingent on their relationship with men and signposts their later recreation of domesticity in their visits to Mont Park.

In August 1916, members of the Port Melbourne RCC visited Mont Park. While they donated various goods such as cheese, tobacco and fruit, each woman also brought “her own parcel of dainties for the soldiers”.⁶¹ These likely included home-made food products such as jams and baked goods, demonstrating the individual’s domestic skill. However, as a gesture, it showed a level of personal commitment to providing and caring for the men in a manner which could be compared to that of a wife or a mother. As Marjorie L. DeVault points out, “the work of feeding is always done in particular, material places, by and for specific people”.⁶² When the WCC visited in July 1919, the gifts they provided were described as “comforts” of a “homely order”.⁶³ The food and gifts were not just a donation, but a symbol of community, gratitude to the individual soldier, and the femininity of its creator.⁶⁴ To be cared for by women in the overly masculine space of the MMB was to recreate experiences of the home.

The food itself was secondary to the visit. It is the construction of community and family that occurs when a meal is shared that informs the significance of these events.⁶⁵ If providing baked goods was just about making sure the patients were well fed, a donation would have sufficed. However, the visits were extended ones – in the case of the Port Melbourne RCC, not concluding until 10:00pm - demonstrating that the intended outcome was more than this.⁶⁶ When the Fairfield Ladies visited Mont Park in August 1917, refreshments of “a most tempting nature” were provided, but the real entertainment was the

⁶¹ *Port Melbourne Standard*, “PORT RED CROSS. Soldiers at Mont Park Entertained.”

⁶² Marjorie L. DeVault, *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 17.

⁶³ “ELECTRIC SPARKS,” *Port Melbourne Standard*, July 12, 3, 1919.

⁶⁴ O’Brien, “Faith, Fetes and Domesticity in Australia,” 727.

⁶⁵ DeVault, *Feeding the Family*, 78.

⁶⁶ *Port Melbourne Standard*, “PORT RED CROSS. Soldiers at Mont Park Entertained.”

presence of the ladies themselves.⁶⁷ The patients cheered as the ladies arrived at the facility, and gifted them bouquets of wattle as they left.⁶⁸ As the author of the article wrote, “To say that the dancing was enjoyed would only convey a slight idea of the real pleasure of the graceful movements of the waltz”.⁶⁹ Those whose conditions prevented them from dancing were “ministered to by the ladies so deftly as to win the admiration from every soldier’s heart”.⁷⁰ From the waltz to the gifting of flowers and references to the men’s hearts, the scene feels almost romantic.

Social connection was the purpose of the visit, and in this show of traditional gender roles, the women attempted to construct and affirm domestic masculinity. In this enactment, gender identities are located and constructed through the “performativity” of “mundane daily experience”.⁷¹ In these cases, the private space of the institution is reconfigured into that of the home in an act of social repatriation. Though the patients’ absence from the home threatened the construction of a civilian masculinity centred on connections to the domestic space, the voluntary work of women’s groups helped to bridge this. By engaging in hyper-feminine, domestic acts, these women fostered the rehabilitation of masculinity according to the relational structure of gender, which was particularly crucial for emerging civilian masculinities that emphasised connection to the domestic world. The patients were rewarded for their labour as soldiers as the women showed their “debt of gratitude”.⁷² In their homecoming through repatriation, they were cared and provided for through methods typical

⁶⁷ *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle*, “LADIES’ NIGHT AT MONT PARK.”

⁶⁸ *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle*, “LADIES’ NIGHT AT MONT PARK.”

⁶⁹ *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle*, “LADIES’ NIGHT AT MONT PARK.”

⁷⁰ *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle*, “LADIES’ NIGHT AT MONT PARK.”

⁷¹ McKinlay, “Performativity and the Politics of Identity,” 235.

⁷² *Heidelberg News and Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek Chronicle*, “TOPICS OF THE WEEK: SOLDIERS’ CHRISTMAS TREAT.”

of traditional domesticity, symbolically akin to a male breadwinner returning from work to a home led by a figure similar to that of a “subservient wife” devoted to “caring for her husband”.⁷³

Garton is correct in stating that “sympathetic responses” from women were central to the “remasculinisation” of disabled soldiers, but it is important here to locate the subjectivities of the women in these groups.⁷⁴ Despite emphasising their domestic skills and operating in a patriarchal system, these women gained autonomy and a sense of purpose within this system through their social repatriation activities. They journeyed from all over Melbourne to the north-eastern suburb of Macleod of their own accord to show their appreciation for the war service of the patients at Mont Park by harnessing a traditional, domestic femininity. The real value in their work was not in the goods they provided, but in their very presence at the facility and the subsequent re-masculinisation of the patients there through their embrace of traditional modes of feminine domesticity. Social repatriation was achieved through the reinforcement of traditional social gender roles, with the woman as mother, wife and nurturer, and the male patients as recipients of nurturing and care. However, this was just one interpretation of what inter-war masculinities should look like, and a further exploration of other groups’ social repatriation activities reveal a very different construction of identity that reflected distinctive civic ideals.

⁷³ DeVault, *Feeding the Family*, 15.

⁷⁴ Garton, “Return Home”, 200.

Chapter 3- “Special Treatment”: The RSL, the Segregation Debate and the Maintenance of Soldierly Identity.

In early 1928, Lambert Andrew Whitty of the 8th Battalion suffered a relapse of a war-related mental illness and became suicidal.¹ The process of his admission to hospital, however, was complex. As he moved back and forth from civilian to military mental hospitals, the Victorian Department of Lunacy (DoL), under Inspector-General of the Insane Dr. Ernest Jones, corresponded with the DoR. The issue was that Whitty had been certified as insane, but he was an ex-soldier, and the DoR had not yet attributed his condition to his war service. The question of where he should reside was argued between the two departments, but they were both aware that a third party may become involved if he was not placed in a military mental hospital. Jones, in a letter to the Deputy Commissioner for State Repatriation noted: “I should say that it is more than likely that a fuss will be made as to his being sent to a civilian hospital, when there was a military hospital so close, and particularly seeing that he was already in the care of the Department of Repatriation.”² Each department shared a concern that a certain organisation would protest Whitty’s admission into a civilian facility, and they certainly had good reason to worry. The RSL and other ESOs had spent the better part of the 1920s causing quite the “fuss” over the treatment of shell-shocked men, specifically over the location they were receiving said treatment.

¹ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Request form to receive patient Lambert Andrew Whitty under the Mental Treatment Act, February 7, 1928.

² PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from Ernest Jones to the Deputy Commissioner for State Repatriation Re. Lambert Andrew Whitty, February 16, 1928.

Here, we are alerted to a significant battle fought by non-governmental organisations for the social repatriation of returned men. This chapter charts what I term the “segregation debate”, in which ESOs clashed with governmental bodies over the treatment of shell-shocked men alongside mentally ill civilians. Whilst the debate reached a peak in 1924, it symbolised greater questions that pervaded the war and subsequent repatriation period. What are the state’s obligations toward its citizens, particularly those who volunteered to fight for it?³ Do those who fought deserve special rights or treatment distinct from those who stayed at home? Can the returned soldier population truly reintegrate into civilian society and whose interests does this serve?

This last question is particularly relative to social repatriation, highlighting contested understandings of what reintegration should look like. Whilst the Australian Government was keen to reinforce notions of domestic, civilian masculinity that emphasised the role of the breadwinner and the attainment of “manly independence” from the welfare state, other actors had differing interpretations. For the RSL, the maintenance of soldierly identity was paramount. “Re-establishment in civil life”, then, was not about erasing the last four years of war and assimilating into the civilian population. Rather, it was the re-establishment of ex-soldiers as elevated citizens deserving of special rights in return for the “blood sacrifice” they made for empire and nation.⁴ Returned men were not soldiers anymore, but they certainly were not normal citizens – they were soldier-citizens, and this dual identity necessitated particular rights, treatment, and respect that was distinct from those who did not serve. This distinction was important and deserving of protecting. Consequently, new hierarchies of citizenship emerged, with “(male) military service” granted a position at the peak, merging the concepts of masculinity and good citizenship in the “masculinist context” of inter-war

³ Joan Beaumont, “Australian Citizenship and the Two World Wars,” 171.

⁴ Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War*, 194.

Australia.⁵ This chapter charts this interpretation of social repatriation, and the ideals of citizenship that accompanied it, as articulated by the RSL and reflected through the segregation of shell-shocked men and mentally ill civilians.

The RSL

When the RSL was formed in 1916, it was one of many ESOs, but by the end of the war, it had a monopoly with membership soaring to over 150,000 by the end of 1919.⁶ It soon became the voice of returned soldiers, or at least loudest and most socially palatable voice.⁷ Formed from several state-based returned soldier associations which joined together under a federal league, the RSL committed itself to abstaining from party politics and instead focussed on supporting ex-servicepeople and their families. For the RSL, the protection of returned servicepeople transcended any partisan allegiance, but with its rhetoric of “patriotism, sacrifice, and national wellbeing”, governments found it difficult to ignore in the aftermath of the war.⁸ Toward the end of the war, the RSL lobbied the Australian Government to gain official status as the representative of all returned men and, with its rising influence, its wish was granted. So began a long history of intertwined connections between the government and the League, one that was in turn mutually beneficial and extremely tense.

The return of 260,000 men with newly acquired military training and, if we are to believe C.E.W Bean, a disdain for authority, was an unnerving prospect for peacetime Australia.⁹ Fears of disruption and social subversion were realised in 1919 during the

⁵ Bart Ziino, “Eligible Men: Men, Families and Masculine Duty in Great War Australia,” *History Australia* 14, no. 2 (2017): 203; Marilyn Lake, “Historical Reconsiderations IV,” 116–31.

⁶ G.L. Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism: The Pressure Group Activities of the Returned Servicemen's League* (Australian National University Press, 1966), 14.

⁷ Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism*, 14; For an exploration of 'radical digger' experiences and disillusionment from the RSL, see: Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, 2nd ed. (Monash University Publishing, 2013), 139–48.

⁸ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 55.

⁹ C. E. W. Bean, *Anzac to Amiens: A Shorter History of the Australian Fighting Services in the First World War*, 5th ed. (Australian War Memorial, 1968), 9.

Brisbane Red Flag Riots, when returned men lashed out against Russian immigrants and trade unionists.¹⁰ Police struggled to cope with the violence as “militaristic idealism” clashed with poor economic conditions, complicating the readjustments returned soldiers needed to make upon return to civilian life.¹¹ All major cities, with the exception of Perth, experienced similar outbursts of returned soldier violence, with each riot confronting minority groups considered “antithetical to the spirit of Anzac”, and demanding solutions to problems faced by returned men.¹² Where civil authorities failed, the RSL promised discipline and control. By somewhat taming the riots and advocating for non-violence, the League proved to the Australian Government that it was a powerful ally in maintaining inter-war peace.¹³ However, as Crotty has identified, despite a claim to non-violent methods of achieving its goals, there was always an undercurrent of intimidation toward the government, with the ever-present potential for “digger violence” if the RSL’s demands were not met.¹⁴

Despite the RSL and the Australian Government being two very distinct entities, they operated with some considerable overlap in both their views and administration. William Kinsey Bolton for example, whose ideas on repatriation were featured in the first chapter, was both a senator and the League’s first national president. Significantly, an RSL-appointed member sat on all government committees relating to repatriation, and crucially, many of the Repatriation Commissioners were selected from a list of candidates specially nominated by the League.¹⁵ Whilst Garton attributes the RSL’s overwhelming success to its “effective organisation and leadership” alongside its clear principles and commitment to non-

¹⁰ For a full history of these riots, see: Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance*.

¹¹ Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance*, 189-192.

¹² Stephen Garton, “Demobilization and Empire: Empire Nationalism and Soldier Citizenship in Australia After the First World War – in Dominion Context,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 1 (2015): 138.

¹³ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 142.

¹⁴ Martin Crotty, “The RSL and Post-First World War Returned Soldier Violence in Australia,” 194.

¹⁵ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 142; Martin Crotty, “The Veteran Challenge: Repatriation Benefits for Returned Soldiers,” in *The Great War: Aftermath and Commemoration*, eds. Carolyn Holbrook and Keir Reeves (NewSouth Publishing, 2020), 58.

partisanship, its connections to government, as Thomson and Crotty argue, cannot be overlooked as a primary factor in the achievement of its goals.¹⁶ The League's ability to be "well connected to the government, but never captured by it" secured its position as a political pressure group which was largely successful in advancing the concerns of returned men in the inter-war period.¹⁷ However, regardless of their intertwined relationship, the Australian Government and the RSL were in fact separate, and they very often did not agree. Prime Minister Billy Hughes often expressed exasperation at the number and enormity of the League's demands, and discussions between the RSL and the DoR were characterised by their "frankness at all times" in both the 1927-28 and the 1928-29 DoR's annual reports.¹⁸

In its lobbying of the government, the RSL was largely concerned with issues relating to soldier pensions, a system it asserted should be considered as separate and distinct from that of the civilian pension system under the welfare state. It was important to returned men and their families, the RSL argued, that war pensions were not thought of as charity stemming from the civilian welfare state, lest the implications of that feminised dependency discussed in Chapter 1 taint their heroic soldierly reputations.¹⁹ The link between war pensions and the dependence on charity was so concerning that even the terminology for war pensions came under question when the president of the Victorian branch of the League demanded it be called "war disability compensation" instead of a pension.²⁰ Regardless of whether this nomenclature was widely accepted by the public, in practice, the gulf between

¹⁶ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 56; Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 143; Crotty, "The Veteran Challenge: Repatriation Benefits for Returned Soldiers," 56.

¹⁷ Crotty, "The Veteran Challenge: Repatriation Benefits for Returned Soldiers", 58; For a history of the RSL as a political pressure group, see: Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism*.

¹⁸ Crotty, "The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL," 186; H.J. Green, *Annual Report by the Repatriation Commission for the Year Ended 30th June 1928*, Annual Report (Department of Repatriation, 1928), 4, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-524322899/view?partId=nla.obj-524328207#page/n2/mode/1up>; H.J Green, *Annual Report by the Repatriation Commission for the Year Ending 30th June 1929*, Annual Report (Department of Repatriation, 1930), 10, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-524328101/view?partId=nla.obj-524333022#page/n0/mode/1up>.

¹⁹ Garton, "Return Home," 193.

²⁰ "COMPENSATION, NOT PENSIONS: Soldiers Want Change In Name," *The Sun-News Pictorial* (Melbourne, Australia), December 14, 1932; Garton, *The Cost of War*, 104.

war and civilian pensions was so wide that returned men and their dependents were effectively the “elite of the welfare state”. The RSL’s success in preserving this distinction has even infiltrated the historiography, with Garton going as far as to call the repatriation system a “second welfare state”.²¹ If access to social welfare was a “social right” of Australian citizens, then the “segregated welfare system” of inter-war Australia denoted a two-tiered system of citizenship.²² Returned soldiers were therefore imbued with an elevated citizen status and constituted what Crotty has termed a “positive integrated bracket”, where war service granted one a higher position in new inter-war hierarchies of citizenship.²³ Notably, this was a hyper-masculine hierarchy that left women and so called “stay-homes” at the bottom.²⁴

This separation between ex-servicemen and the general population in the pension debate was one that underpinned the League’s own broader concept of repatriation. Separation was to function at both a material and conceptual level, ensuring tangible benefits and that returned men enjoyed a higher level of social prestige than civilians. It required that returned men maintain their soldierly identity and resisted the linear “soldier-to-citizen” assimilatory transition that is commonly understood of repatriation. Evidently, this ideology reverberated through smaller battles fought by the RSL and other ESOs, namely in their steadfast opposition to mixing military mental patients and the civilian mentally ill, both in terms of physical proximity and discursive association. This was a distinction granted by Victorian state legislation in 1915, but it was one that still required defending as the segregation debate of the 1920s demonstrated.

²¹ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 86.

²² “First Claim,” *Smith’s Weekly* (Sydney, Australia), January 14, 1933; Roe, “Chivalry and Social Policy in the Antipodes,” 509.

²³ Lorraine Wheeler, “War, Women and Welfare,” in *Australian Welfare: Historical Sociology*, ed. Richard Kennedy (Macmillan Education UK, 1989), 192; Crotty, “The Anzac Citizen,” 183.

²⁴ Roe, “Chivalry and Social Policy in the Antipodes,” 409.

The Mental Treatment Act

In 1915, the Victorian Legislative Assembly passed the *Mental Treatment Act 1915* (MTA). This Act and its implications were social repatriation manifest. It allowed Australian soldiers who were “suffering from mental disorder of recent origin arising from wounds, shock, disease, stress, exhaustion, or any other cause” to be treated in civilian mental hospitals without being certified as insane.²⁵ Certification was a legal prerequisite for admission to a psychiatric facility under the *Lunacy Act 1890* (Vic), and there was no provision for voluntary admission.²⁶ However, certification, which required doctors to certify that an individual was in a “state of chronic insanity”, carried connotations beyond its legal bounds.²⁷ At its core, the requirement for certification was rooted in a deep anxiety that “sane” people would be detained amongst and tainted by the “insane”.²⁸ Mental illness was already deeply stigmatised as shameful and dangerous, but certification was “the final shame”.²⁹ The label of “insane” applied through certification was therefore defined along both legal and social lines, with significant consequences for the individual in both respects. The MTA, then, was an attempt to allow the soldier to transcend these dual implications.

John Murray, the Member for Warrnambool, explicitly articulated the intertwined social and legal elements of certification when advocating for the MTA: “People generally look upon it as a stigma if a person has been certified to as a lunatic. Before an individual can be sent to an asylum, or to a licensed house, he has to be certified to”.³⁰ Here, a dilemma is

²⁵ Mental Treatment Act 1915 (Vic), AustLII, https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/hist_act/mta1915187/

²⁶ Lunacy Act 1890 (Vic), AustLII, https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/hist_act/la189091.pdf

²⁷ Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: A Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880-1940* (UNSW Press, 1988), 61.

²⁸ Milton Lewis, *Managing Madness: Psychiatry and Society in Australia 1788-1980* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), 124.

²⁹ Michael Tyquin, *Madness and the Military: Australia's Experience of Shell Shock and in the Great War* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019), 113.

³⁰ Victoria, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, August 12, 1915, 1809 (John Murray, Member for Warrnambool and Chief Secretary of Victorian Parliament). <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/4afc6b/globalassets/hansard-historical-documents/weekly/1915/19150810-19150812-hansard-combined.pdf>

presented for returning shell-shocked men. Do they seek help and risk social exile? Or do they abstain from treatment and avoid the stigma of certification despite the real risks to their health? The Victorian Government's answer was that returned men would be "dissociated totally from those who have been certified as insane".³¹ This dissociation was both legal and social in nature. Legally, the distinction between military and civilian patients was that the former was "detained" under the MTA while the latter was "certified" under the Lunacy Act.³² Socially however, much like the RSL's "war disability compensation", this distinction was primarily grounded in semantics. As a letter to the DoL conveyed, "under each act, the same conditions exist regarding restraint, etc."³³ The MTA did not grant better medical care, but rather special treatment at an immaterial level, allowing shell-shocked men, in theory, to transcend the stigma of mental illness. Therefore, in its attempt to protect the reputation of shell-shocked men, the MTA was an instance of social repatriation. However, mere discursive separation was not sufficient to fully mitigate the stigma of civilian mental illness. A concrete, material separation would have to be erected.

Segregation at Mont Park

Segregated psychiatric facilities emerged in Victoria the same year that the MTA was passed. This is evidenced by the military's acquisition of the Old Laundry Workers' Block at Mont Park, transforming it into the MMB for the treatment of men returning from the front with shell shock.³⁴ The MTA had already made provisions for treatment amongst civilians, but the provision of physical segregation suggests a divergence between the approaches of the Victorian Government and the military. The military's decision to segregate military and

³¹ Victoria, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 1915, 1810 (John Murray, Member for Warrnambool and Chief Secretary of Victorian Parliament).

³² Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 156.

³³ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from H. McPhee to the Lunacy Department Re: Willian F. Lock, November 8, 1928.

³⁴ Bircanin and Alex Short, *Glimpses of the Past*, 6.

civilian cases suggests that the discursive distinction between “detention” and “certification” was not sufficient to fully mitigate the stigma of being treated with the civilian patients.³⁵ Whilst the Victorian Government used the MTA to physically assimilate soldiers into the civilian population (albeit without certification), the military, and then later the RSL through its lobbying, sought a more rigid maintenance of soldierly identity through physical separation in psychiatric facilities. Here it is clear that there were different ideas as to the final goal of repatriation.

By January of 1922, there were 448 patients at the entire Mont Park facility, including 102 ex-soldiers in the MMB.³⁶ Beds were keenly sought after by returned men and their families, but a soldier needed more than proof of his service to be admitted to a segregated ward – the DoR would have to confirm that his mental illness was a result of war service.³⁷ When returned soldier Llewellyn Dadswell presented to the receiving house in late 1927, Jones first needed to confirm with the DoR that it determined Dadswell a “war case”.³⁸ Only when the DoR confirmed this was he able to be transferred to a “departmental institution”.³⁹ Other soldiers, like Donald Fraser, were not so lucky, and despite their service only had access to treatment as civilians under the Lunacy Act.⁴⁰

To better understand the segregation debate, it is important to further explain the structure of psychiatric care in inter-war Victoria. While both civilian and military patients

³⁵ Ruth Rae, “An Historical Account of Shell Shock during the First World War and Reforms in Mental Health in Australia 1914–1939,” *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 16, no. 4 (2007): 71.

³⁶ Bircanin and Short, *Glimpses of the Past*, 10.

³⁷ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 156.

³⁸ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from Ernest Jones to the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of State Repatriation Re. Llewellyn Dadswell and Harry McKay, December 1, 1927.

³⁹ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from the Assistant Deputy Commissioner to the Inspector General of the Insane Re: Ex-No. 507 -DADSWELL, Llewellyn L. - Sgt. - 37/Btn., December 23, 1927.

⁴⁰ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Repatriation to Ernest Jones Re. Fraser, Donald - Ex. 1915 - Pte. 8th Btn., August 24, 1925.

were treated at Mont Park, civilian cases in the civilian blocks were under the management of the Victorian DoL, but the MMB was managed at a federal level under the military, and subsequently the DoR. By 1918, the DoR was wholly responsible for the “safe custody, care, medical treatment and maintenance” of military mental patients, the “good order and condition of the wards”, and the salaries of all nurses and attendants employed at the MMB.⁴¹ However, Jones, as head of the DoL, had extensive contact with the DoR. He often lobbied the DoR on behalf of returned soldiers, to request that they be treated under the MTA and receive pensions, and he was aware of the conditions and goings-on at all psychiatric facilities within the state of Victoria, regardless of whether it was a military ward.⁴²

The split jurisdiction of the wards at Mont Park contributed to differing standards of care between the civilian wards and the MMB. Patients in the MMB got better food and the staff responsible for their care received higher pay.⁴³ Soldier patients appear in photographs wearing their military uniforms in the immediate post-war period (fig. 3.1) but later also wore different uniforms from civilian patients, a very visual method to distinguish between the two groups.⁴⁴ Additionally, patients in the MMB had access to special activities (fig. 3.2), visits, and gifts from the general public, notably from the women’s groups discussed in the previous chapter.⁴⁵ However, the MMB was not a faultless facility. There were complaints of a broken sewerage system and a lack of supplies such as boots and towels, a shortage that *Smith’s*

⁴¹ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7532 Correspondence Files, box 1, Memoranda from Dr. Hollow concerning Military Mental Patients, August 3, 1921.

⁴² PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from Ernest Jones to the Deputy Commissioner for State Repatriation regarding a pension for W.V.G Smith, October 11, 1927; PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from Ernest Jones to the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of State Repatriation Regarding Llewellyn Dadswell and Harry McKay, December 1, 1927.

⁴³ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 156.

⁴⁴ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7532 Correspondence Files, box 3, Letter from the Chief Clerk and Accountant of the Lunacy Department Re. Tweed selected by I.G. for clothing for Military Mental Patients with attached sample fabrics, November 11, 1926.

⁴⁵ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 156.

Weekly reported was a result of staff theft.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, conditions for soldier patients were generally much better than those for their civilian counterparts, and the outrage from the press when complaints surfaced reflected the public's belief that returned soldiers, by virtue of their service, were entitled to higher standards of care.⁴⁷



Fig. 3.1. Patients in uniform at Mont Park, c.1918.



Fig. 3.2. Patients and nurses participating in a nail driving competition during a sports carnival day at Mont Park, 19 November, 1918.

⁴⁶ Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, 170; "From Federal to State Control: Plight of Soldier Mental Cases," *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney, Australia), August 2, 1924.

⁴⁷ "MONT PARK HOSPITAL: Living Conditions Criticised," *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), February 26, 1923.

The Segregation Debate

When news broke that the DoR would transfer control of the MMB to the Victorian DoL in April of 1924, the public's outrage was palpable, and in some cases, verged on militant. The press called it a "dumping project"; opponents in the House of Representatives accused the DoR of "selling out"; and the RSL even threatened to overtake the Exhibition Building.⁴⁸ While the RSL was the most active group in the debate, a range of other ESOs were also engaged, notably the RSFFA, a group of fathers advocating for their ex-soldier sons. Other groups included the Limbless Soldiers' Association, the Widow and Widow Mothers' Association, the One-Eyed Soldiers' Association and the Tubercular Soldiers' Association.⁴⁹ The involvement of these numerous parties indicates that Mont Park and the segregation debate had become symbolic battlegrounds for social repatriation. It was a contest between the government's own approach which sought to assimilate soldiers into the civilian population, and that of the ESOs that demanded the preservation of military distinction.

As outlined earlier, the MMB was under the management of the military from 1915 until the DoR took over in 1918, assuming responsibility for the medical care of returned men upon demobilisation. However, the civilian blocks of Mont Park and the patients within had always been under the control of the Victorian DoR. Mont Park then, was a facility run by two separate departments, one operating at a federal level and one at a state level. The 1924 transfer of the MMB to the DoL meant the facility came under one jurisdiction; however, the MMB was still physically segregated from the civilian blocks, and the DoR retained a

⁴⁸ "MONT PARK MEN," *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne, Victoria), April 1, 1924; ⁴⁸ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Representatives. April 2, 1924, 213, (James Scullin, Member for Yarra). https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/hansard80/hansardr80/1924-04-02/toc_pdf/19240402_reps_9_106.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22mental%20soldier%20Repatriation%20Department%20%201920s%22; "MENTAL SOLDIERS: Comrades Wage War," *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne, Victoria), June 25, 1925.

⁴⁹ "MENTAL SOLDIER CASES: Transfer to State Control," *Age* (Melbourne, Victoria), July 29, 1924.

“certain degree of inspection and control of the Military mental patients”.⁵⁰ What exactly this entailed, however, is not clear. As reported by contemporary newspapers, the exact conditions of the agreement were shrouded in ambiguity and vagueness which likely contributed to the intensity of the clash between the ESOs and the Victorian and federal governments.⁵¹

The RSL, and indeed many ex-soldiers, already had a deep-seated mistrust of the DoR by 1924. Despite Australia having the most generous repatriation system of the Allied nations, domestically, the DoR had a reputation for excessive money-saving at the expense of the welfare of the returned men it was tasked to aid.⁵² For example, *Smith's Weekly*, the notoriously chauvinistic paper that commanded a large ex-soldier readership, dubbed the DoR the “Cyanide Gang” (fig. 3.3) for its reputation for refusing pension requests.⁵³ Disapproval escalated in 1921 when the DoR attempted to certify twenty soldier patients under the Lunacy Act and subsequently transfer them to the Kew and Sunbury state civilian asylums, a decision the RSL called “unlawful”.⁵⁴ An attitude of mistrust and suspicion was certainly typical of the RSL’s interactions with the DoR, particularly those concerning the patients at Mont Park, the treatment of which J.W McKenzie of the Melbourne RSL branch called a “disgrace”.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Confidential letter from Ernest Jones to Eric Sinclair Re. Bundoora Park, July 2, 1924.

⁵¹ “MONT PARK INMATES: State Control Opposed,” *Argus* (Melbourne, Victoria), April 2, 1924; “MONT PARK TRANSFER: War’s Mental Victims, Big United Protest,” *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne, Victoria), July 29, 1924.

⁵² Crotty, “The Veteran Challenge: Repatriation Benefits for Returned Soldiers,” 58.

⁵³ Sally Young, *Paper Emperors: The Rise of Australia’s Newspaper Empires* (NEWSOUTH BOOKS, 2019), 551; W.B.D, “BRUTALITY OF THE CYANIDERS,” *Smith’s Weekly* (Sydney, New South Wales), March 12, 1921.

⁵⁴ “CARE OF MENTAL SOLDIERS.,” *Sunbury News* (Victoria), August 30, 1924.

⁵⁵ “SOLDIER MENTAL PATIENTS: Segregation at Mont Park Urged,” *Argus* (Melbourne, Victoria), February 26, 1923.



Fig.3.3. Cartoon from Smith's Weekly, April 2, 1921.

country - their reason".⁵⁷ There were thinly veiled threats of violence: "We will call a mass meeting of every digger in Melbourne - and then we'll nail our colours to the mast, and do what the Government have refused to do- look after our unfortunate comrades."⁵⁸ The League sent a deputation to the Minister for Repatriation at the end of March and then sent representatives to the Australian Parliament on 1 April to argue their case.⁵⁹ Their lobbying was successful, and the House of Representatives adjourned to protest the transfer the next day.

The RSL was vehemently opposed to the transfer of the MMB to Victorian control, and in March 1924, the acting-president of the RSL called the proposed action "the gravest matter we've ever dealt with", going so far as to call it a "slur on Australia".⁵⁶ He deployed notions of elevated citizenship, demanding that the soldier patients remain in federal facilities, a right they earned because they "gave the next best thing to their lives for their

⁵⁶ *Sun News-Pictorial*, "MONT PARK MEN: RSL Angry."

⁵⁷ *Sun News-Pictorial*, "MONT PARK MEN: RSL Angry."

⁵⁸ *Sun News-Pictorial*, "MONT PARK MEN: RSL Angry."

⁵⁹ "SOLDIER MENTAL CASES: State Control Resented," *Argus* (Melbourne, Victoria), March 31, 1924; *Argus*, "MONT PARK INMATES: State Control Opposed."

On 2 April, the House of Representatives heard John Lister, Member for Corio, protest the transfer. A returned soldier himself, he echoed the sentiment of the RSL, calling on the sacrifices they “rendered to this country in its time of need”.⁶⁰ When Treasurer Earle Page, who was in favour of the transfer, reassured that military patients would remain physically segregated under the new arrangement, Percy Coleman, Member for Reid and also an ex-soldier, argued that this was not enough. Coleman argued that even indirect contact with civilian cases would make soldier patients “much worse by the knowledge that [they had] been placed in what we colloquially term a lunatic asylum.”⁶¹ “It is a national obligation to undertake separate treatment of returned soldiers in Commonwealth hospitals,” he continued. “Those men are entitled to special treatment”.⁶² Indeed, Page acknowledged that “the soldiers [were] being treated in a far better way” than civilian patients.⁶³

Here the hierarchical structure of the welfare state is clear. The poor standard of care for civilian patients was not discussed as a shameful issue to be remedied, but rather was evidence that the government was doing its part in ensuring soldier patients were being treated substantially better than them. The gendered aspects of this cannot be ignored. Special treatment was exclusive to some men – it was their right for having served their nation. If access to welfare was owed by the state to its citizens, then the differing levels of care across military and civilian facilities constituted “sexually differentiated citizenship”.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Representatives. April 2, 1924, 212, (John Henry Lister, Member for Corio). https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/hansard80/hansardr80/1924-04-02/toc_pdf/19240402_reps_9_106.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22mental%20soldier%20Repatriation%20Department%20%201920s%22

⁶¹ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Representatives. 1924, 218. (Percy Edmund Coleman, Member for Reid).

⁶² Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Representatives. 1924, 212. (Percy Edmund Coleman, Member for Reid).

⁶³ Cth. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Representatives. 1924, 217. (Earle Page, Treasurer and Member for Cowper).

⁶⁴ Lake, “Mission Impossible,” 314.

When the various ESOs met at Anzac House on 28 July 1924 to further contest the transfer of the MMB, their protest remained centred on notions of separation and distinction from civilians. However, the distinction between soldiers and civilians had to function at both physical and symbolic levels, and physical segregation alone was not satisfactory: any ill association with the “lunatic” civilians was unacceptable, even if it was just being under the same jurisdiction. “These men had received their afflictions while fighting for Australia, and it was the duty of the Federal Government to care for them”, not the state of Victoria, which was concerned with its civilians.⁶⁵ One attendee recalled that the then Minister of Defence had stated that these men “would remain soldiers as long as they needed care and attention”, implying that the transfer to Victorian state authority would strip them of their soldierly identity.⁶⁶ Even though physical segregation was never jeopardised, being treated by the same authority that treated civilians was enough to contaminate their soldierly identity with the social stigma of civilian mental illness. This identity was powerful in its provision of special treatment, but it was simultaneously fragile and in need of protection because even a loose association with civilians could be enough to shatter it. The goals of the ESOs’ social repatriation are clear here: they were not concerned so much with the physical location of these men, but with the social connotations attached to this location. It was a matter of stigma, reputation and social hierarchy.

Much to the RSL’s dismay, the transfer of the MMB did take place, but the transfer of fifty of its patients to the new Bundoora Repatriation Hospital was a small consolation. Bundoora had never had the stigma of being a civilian facility like Mont Park had, and so its residents would not be tainted by the associations of civilian lunacy. It was the ultimate segregation, both physical and discursive, and now it was the duty of the RSL to see the

⁶⁵ *Age*, “MENTAL SOLDIER CASES: Transfer to State Control.”

⁶⁶ *Age*, “MENTAL SOLDIER CASES: Transfer to State Control.”

remaining Mont Park patients transferred there.⁶⁷ This was realised in 1933 when all remaining soldier patients moved across the road to Bundoora, and Mont Park, for the first time since 1915, became a completely civilian institution once more.⁶⁸

As I have argued, this debate was always about more than just the patients at Mont Park. Even though most of the RSL's fury had been directed at the DoR, Ernest Jones had felt its wrath, having to defend multiple "imputations on his reputation" in the press.⁶⁹ Victoria had been the only state not to send soldier patients to civilian institutions, and Jones had the mind to warn his colleague, Eric Sinclair, the New South Wales Inspector General of the Insane, about the segregation debate and the potential for the RSL to "turn its attention to other states".⁷⁰ He clearly understood that the League was a powerful force to be reckoned with. It had successfully had its case heard in Federal parliament and the press was actively supporting its case, with major papers like *The Age*, *The Argus*, *The Sun News-Pictorial* and *Smith's Weekly* commenting on the debate.⁷¹

For the ESOs and the returned soldier population at large, the assimilation of soldiers into civilian orbits of association set a worrying precedent. G.E. Gillet, the federal president of the Tubercular Soldiers' Association worried that the transfer would pave the way for similar action being taken over the treatment of other disabled soldier groups.⁷² Was the primacy of the returned soldier in Australian society slipping? Assimilation meant being

⁶⁷ *Sunbury News*, "CARE OF MENTAL SOLDIERS."

⁶⁸ Bircanin and Short, *Glimpses of the Past*, 16.

⁶⁹ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7532 Correspondence Files, box 1, Letter from Ernest Jones to the Chief Secretary's Department requesting the defence of Ernest Jones' reputation, February 23, 1923.

⁷⁰ PROV, VA 2864 Mont Park Hospital for the Insane, VPRS 7527 Military Mental Hospital Correspondence Files, box 1, Confidential letter from Ernest Jones to Eric Sinclair Re. Bundoora Park, July 2, 1924.

⁷¹ "DIGGERS DIG IN," *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne, Victoria), March 31, 1924; *Sun News-Pictorial*, "MONT PARK MEN"; "MONT PARK HOSPITAL: Living Conditions Criticised," *Age* (Melbourne, Victoria), February 26, 1923; *Argus*, "SOLDIER MENTAL PATIENTS: Segregation at Mont Park Urged"; "Sailors and Soldiers' Parliament," *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney, New South Wales), August 2, 1924.

⁷² *Age*, "MENTAL SOLDIER CASES: Transfer to State Control."

subjected to the poor conditions of the civilian population, and ESOs were not prepared to take that risk.

The debate speaks particularly to the broader anxieties of the RSL, which was determined to maintain segregation between those who served the nation, and those who did not; not just at a physical level, but at a figurative and symbolic one. The extensive lobbying for “war disability compensation”, and the outrage over being “dump(ed)” into Victorian jurisdiction, even when physical segregation was maintained, were, as the MTA highlighted, driven by concerns of social perception, not material conditions.⁷³ Social repatriation for the RSL was not the assimilation of soldiers into the civilian population, it was about establishing a masculine soldierly elite that was distinguished from those lower in the hierarchy of citizenship along lines of reputation and fundamental difference. For the RSL, social repatriation was not about turning a soldier into an ordinary citizen once more. War was irreversible, and it had left its mark on returned soldiers, a mark that demanded recognition and attention, and granted elevated status.

⁷³ *Sun News-Pictorial*, “MONT PARK MEN.”

Conclusion

Turning the soldier back into a citizen was a not a simple task, nor was there consensus on what this should look like in the inter-war Australian project of national reconstruction. Everyone understood that repatriation was an effort to reestablish soldiers in civil life, but conflicting views of what this entailed punctuated the actions of the groups that supported and affirmed the threatened identities of shell-shocked men. Hopeful governmental aspirations of a smooth transition from battle-worn fighter to civic-minded economic contributor were revealed as just that – aspirations. The continued care and treatment of shell-shocked men at Mont Park was a reminder that the effects of war could not be undone. For many such men, adhering to emerging ideals of masculine civic duty were not achievable, leaving them in a liminal space between the seemingly binary categories of soldier and citizen.

Mont Park was a symbolic borderland between civilian and soldierly identities, where the actions of voluntary women's groups and ESOs came to rectify the dissonance between them. Each approach to engaging with and attempting to rehabilitate shell-shocked men betrayed a distinct position on what inter-war masculine citizenship should look like. For women's groups, embracing the domestic reaffirmed civilian masculine identities of the male breadwinner, moving beyond their military past into a new world of familial responsibility. The RSL resisted this, refusing to let soldierly identity fade into a mere memory of shared experience. The segregation debate epitomised both the physical and symbolic separation of returned men and 'stay-homes' in a hierarchy of citizenship that saw the former achieve special treatment in return for their service. In exploring Mont Park as a contested site of identity formation through the concept of social repatriation, this thesis elucidates the

interwoven, socially contingent and debated nature of welfare, citizenship and identity in inter-war Australia.

This thesis has also argued for the importance of including the contributions of non-governmental groups in studies of repatriation. By peripheralising state-based efforts and foregrounding the role of non-governmental groups, social repatriation offers an insight into the ways Australians, as individuals and communities, grappled with the social upheaval and aftermath of war. It underscores repatriation as a process contested between and amongst the state and the people. The DoR, despite its control of the MMB, was resolute in its conclusion that shell-shocked men's need for continued treatment, and therefore their failure to assimilate into prescribed civic norms, was a result of a lack of willpower. In this discursive rejection of its responsibility to socially repatriate these men, it became the obligation of non-governmental groups to support them. The visits by the women's groups were an immense source of joy and social connection for these otherwise isolated patients, welcoming them into a domestic world of care and nurturing. The RSL, alongside smaller ESOs, continued to lobby the government and shape the repatriation system in substantial ways throughout the inter-war period. By demanding special treatment for their fellow returned men in both a material and symbolic sense, they contributed to lasting distinctions between the civilian welfare state and the repatriation benefits awarded to returned men.

Ultimately, the concept of social repatriation offers a multitude of possibilities beyond the story of the shell-shocked men at Mont Park and the groups who advocated for them. Repatriation did not end in 1933 where this thesis concludes, and many of the men who once lived at Mont Park continued to require assistance for the rest of their lives, not just from repatriation hospitals, but from communities they were a part of. Beyond the inter-war period, Australians would have to contend with numerous phases of repatriation and its associated questions of citizenship, obligation, masculinity and welfare. At its core, repatriation is a

story of both assimilation and difference, and through examining the responses of community and non-governmental groups, this thesis articulates a picture of diverse notions of identity and civic duty

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Fig.3.3 Hartt, Cecil. *The Cyanide Gang*. Illustration. In *Smith's Weekly*, April 2, 1921, 10. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/234272372>

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