Introduction to Australia at war (1914–1918)

World War I was a global conflict that played a key role in defining world history in the 20th century. World War I became known as a 'total war' because it was the first war in which people from all sectors of society became involved in the war effort, not just soldiers. Nations around the world – including Australia committed not only their armed forces to the war effort but also their industries and resources. Many of the conflicts, attitudes, prejudices and grievances that make the international news today can still be traced to the effects of World War I.

A study of Australia's involvement in World War I is important because it helps us to better understand Australian society and the wider world in which we live today.

chapter 14

Source 1 An Australia poster from 1917 encouraging Australians to enlist and fight in World War I

14A
What were the key events of World War I?

14B
What was the significance of World War I?

UNIT 1 AUSTRALIA AT WAR
This unit is MANDATORY:
• World War I (1914–1918).
It must be completed by all students.

14.1 What were the key events of World War I?

World War I fundamentally changed many aspects of Australian government and society. Our country's involvement in World War I also played an important part in the development of our idea of Australia as a **nation**, and our place in the world. Knowing about the history of Australia at war helps us to gain a clearer understanding about the world beyond our shores, and about how our own history, national character and identity developed. It can also be argued that a historical study of the causes of World War I is important in a world where there are weapons capable of mass death and destruction. Understanding how wars begin may be one of the keys to preventing them.

In *Unit 3 – World War I* you have the opportunity to learn in detail about:

- the main causes of the war and the reasons why men enlisted to fight
- the places where Australians fought and the nature of warfare (including the Gallipoli campaign)
- the impact that the war had on Australia and the world (including the changing role of women and the public debate around compulsory military service, know as **conscription**)
- the ways in which the war is commemorated (including debates about the nature and significance of the Anzac legend).

World War I was a horrific experience for those involved. The statistics are damning. It is estimated that 10 million people were killed and 20 million wounded as a result of actual combat. Although official statistics vary, most countries involved suffered horrendous losses. There are also civilian casualties to be taken into consideration. Australia lost over 50 000 men, a huge toll in a population of 4.5 million, it meant over 1 per cent of the population were victims of the war.

A study of World War I can sometimes be overwhelming given the complexity of the events and number of countries involved. The following tables provide a quick reference to some of the main issues and events of World War I and Australia's involvement in them. They provide an overview and summary of all content within the depth study and can be used to help you navigate the topic and guide your understanding of key points.

Source 2 On 25 April 1915 members of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) landed on the beach at Gallipoli Cove in Turkey with troops from New Zealand, Britain, and France. This was the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War. Each year it is commemorated on Anzac Day.

Source 3 New weaponry such as machine guns and poisonous gas changed the nature of warfare from previous wars.

An overview of the causes of World War I, why men enlisted and where Australians fought		
Causes of World War I	See Unit XX	• Long-term factors contributing to the outbreak of conflict in 1914, including nationalism, rivalry over colonies, the arms race in Europe, Europe's alliance system and military plans • Events leading to war after the 'July crisis', which followed the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand
Where was World War I fought?	See Unit XX	• Major campaigns involving Australian forces: Gallipoli Campaign (Turkey) 1915; campaigns on the Western Front (France and Belgium) 1916–1918; campaigns in the Middle East 1916–1918
Australia's entry into World War I	See Unit XX	• Varied reasons motivated men to enlist, including loyalty to Britain, spirit of adventure, experience of war unknown to most Australians

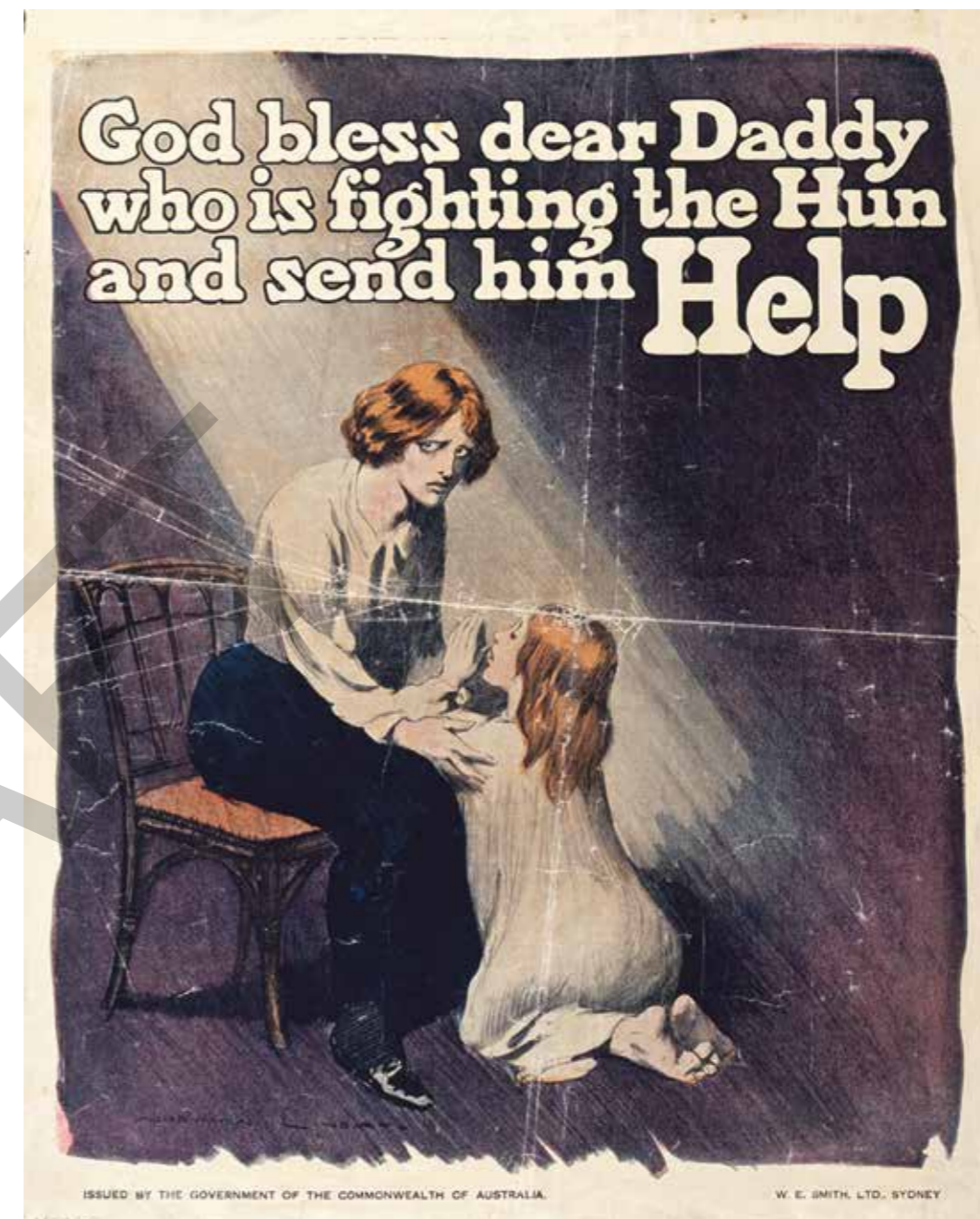| An overview of significant campaigns and the scope and nature of warfare		
The Gallipoli Campaign	See Unit XX	• Landing of troops at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915 • Attacks and counter attacks by ANZAC and Turkish soldiers over 8 months, including fighting at Lone Pine and the Nek • Withdrawal of ANZAC troops in December 1915
The Western Front	See Unit XX	• Defensive warfare using machine-guns, trenches and barbed wire. • Series of attacks and counter-attacks using artillery fire, then infantry charges involving close fighting with rifles, bayonets and grenades • Appalling conditions for soldiers living in the trenches
The nature of warfare in World War I	See Unit XX	• Theatres of war in WWI: the Middle East, the Western Front and the Eastern Front in Europe, the North Sea, Turkey, northern Africa • New weapons technology – machine guns, heavy artillery, poison gas, tanks, planes and Zeppelin airships • New communications technology – telephone, wireless radio • Both sides evenly matched, resulting in stalemate on the Western front

An overview of the impact of World War I on Australia at home		
The conscription debate	See Unit xx	• During WWI, a decline in enlistments and heavy casualties on the Western Front caused Prime Minister Billy Hughes to call for two plebicites (public votes) on compulsotry military service (conscription) in 1916 and 1917, with both resulting in a majority of 'no' votes (see Sources 8.65 and 8.66) • The conscription debate was a hugely divisive issue in Australian society
Use of government propaganda	See Unit xx	• During WWI, the government issued pro-conscription and anti-German **propaganda**, including flyers and posters. Propaganda was designed to glorify the efforts of Australian soldiers overseas, maintain public anger towards the enemy, motivate people to join the war effort and regulate their behaviour
Changing roles of women	See Unit xx	• During WWI, women moved into previously male occupations to support the war effort, with an expectation they would return to domestic roles and traditional occupations after the war
Internment of 'enemy aliens'	See Unit xx	• During WWI, people with German backgrounds or born in countries at war with Australia were interned (imprisoned) in remote camps to isolate them from the general public
War-time controls and censorship	See Unit xx	• During WWI, extension of Commonwealth powers allowed the government to collect income tax, censor media and communications, control the movement of 'enemy aliens', among other war-time controls
Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	See Unit xx	• During WWI, Indigenous Australians attempting to enlist were initially turned away, but by 1916 changes were made so that 'half-castes' could enlist. Over 400 Indigenous Australians fought in the army, although at this time they could not vote and were not counted as Australian citizens

Source 4 Tins of Fray Bento and Heinz eaten by soldiers during World War I

Source 5 An Australian propaganda poster produced in Australia around 1918. The poster was designed to encourage Australians to vote in favour of compulsory military service (conscription) in a public vote that was held in Australia during the war. The word 'Hun' is a derogatory term used to refer to Germans.

Check your learning 14.1

Remember and understand

1 How many Australian men died during World War I?

2 In your words, define the term 'conscription'. Why was the conscription debate in Australia so divisive?

Apply and analyse

3 What is propaganda and why was it used by the Australian government during World War I?

Evaluate and create

4 Search the Internet to find examples of Australian propaganda from World War I designed to achieve the following goals:

• regulate the day-to-day behaviour of civilians

• maintain public anger towards the enemy

• motivate people to join the war effort.

14.2 The significance of World War I

World War I left Europe devastated. In January 1919, the victorious nations met at the Paris Peace Conference in France to come up with a plan for rebuilding Europe and ensuring peace in the future. After months of negotiations, the **Treaty of Versailles** was signed on 28 June 1919. This document officially ended World War I and forced Germany to accept responsibility for starting the conflict. It also ordered Germany to pay **reparations** to the Allied Powers.

As a result of the war, the map of Europe was redrawn. Four major European empires – the Austria–Hungary, the Russian Empire, the German Empire and the Ottoman Empire – were broken up and a number of new countries were created in their place. The ruling monarchies of these empires all lost power. The Russian Tsar was overthrown by a communist revolution in 1917; Austria–Hungary was broken up into a number of newly-formed states including Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia; and Turkey emerged as a modern, secular republic after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.

However, World War I was not only a historically significant event in Europe. Far way in Australia, the events and experiences of the war had major effects on our nation's society and relationships with other countries. Australia had become a nation after Federation in 1901. Unlike many other countries, such as the United States and France, the founding of the Australian nation was achieved without the need for revolution. Instead, the Australian people created a nation founded on the principles of modern democracy through peaceful means. The events of World War I such as the ill-fated invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915, are often described our 'coming of age' as a nation and our 'baptism of blood'. In many ways, World War I provided an opportunity to create a national story that expressed our national character and identity.

Source 1 Parade of Australian soldiers at the trenches on the Western Front, following capture of Pozières on 23 July 1916.

An overview of the significance of the wars to Australia		
Impact of the wars on returned soldiers and civilians	See Unit xx	• Over 300 000 Australians served overseas during WWI, with around a quarter of a million servicemen returning to Australia at the end of the war. Many returned with physical or psychological injuries. Their care and families' financial responsibilities fell on women in the community. The government established a Repatriation Department in 1917 to provide health, compensation, housing and job training for veterans
Commemorating the war	See Unit xx	• Commemoration services on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day both linked to WWI • Aspects of commemoration services still linked to WWI
Different perspectives on the ANZAC legend	See Unit xx	• The birth of the ANZAC legend and its significance today • Differing perspectives on the place of Gallipoli in defining Australia's national identity • Differing views on what Australia should most celebrate

Source 1 An Anzac Day parade, commemorating Australian soldiers who fought in World War I and all wars since

Check your learning 14.2

Remember and understand

1 What European empires disappeared after World War I?

2 Why do so many Australians regard the Gallipoli campaign as a significant event?

3 What is the Treaty of Versailles?

Apply and analyse

4 Why do you think the Gallipoli campaign has been described as Australia's 'coming of age' and 'baptism of blood'? Do you think these descriptions are accurate? Justify your response.