Winter, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2015), 2: 1073656
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2015.1073656

cogent arts & humanities

HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

"The theatre with the most meagre audience": War trophies from ex-German New Guinea

Christine Winter[1]*

Received: 15 March 2015
Accepted: 19 June 2015
Published: 17 August 2015

*Corresponding author: Christine Winter, Race and Ethnicity in the Global South (REGS), University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
E-mail: Christine.Winter@sydney.edu.au

Reviewing editor:
Julius Ruiz, University of Edinburgh, UK

Additional information is available at the end of the article

Abstract: How the First World War is envisaged and commemorated in Australia has been the subject of many studies, which focus on the European war. Seemingly forgotten is the occupation of New Guinea, which has received recent interest as Australia's first war action. This article analyses the first transient war memorials, namely the exhibiting of war trophies in local shop windows. The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Forces brought home and sent home a mixture of German war trophies and New Guinean artifacts, blending war trophies and curios into shows of victory.

Subjects: British History; European History; First World War; Imperial & Colonial History; Military & Naval History; Museum and Heritage Studies; Social & Cultural History

Keywords: WWI; Australia and New Guinea; legacies of German colonialism; ethnographic collecting

1. Introduction

A small booklet entitled *Passed by the Censor* compiled by members of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Forces (AN&MEF) for Christmas 1918 in "the very late German New Guinea" expressed in the foreword, a bitterness and sadness over a perceived lack of recognition:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Winter, ARC future fellow at the University of Sydney, is a transnational historian of legacies of colonialism and Pacific-European relations during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Her current research analyses scientific theories, identity transformation and politics of mixed-race German Diasporas in the Global South. The article is an outcome of a research collaboration between the South Australia Museum, the Melbourne Museum and the University of Sydney, on the War Museum collection housed at the Melbourne Museum. In a monograph *War Trophies or Curious?*, Barry Craig, Ron Vanderwal and Christine Winter document this unique collection, examine the collection's historical genesis and investigate the objects' origins and cultural significance. In this article, Christine Winter details some of the individual collectors, members of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, and how they exhibited war trophies and curios during the Great War.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article is about Australia's first military action in WWI, the takeover of German New Guinea, trophy taking and ethnographic collecting. First, objects were acquired by individual soldiers and displayed at home in local shop windows; towards the end of the war, they were collected by the military administration as trophies for a future War Museum. The public displays in 1915 and 1916 of Mauser pistols, bayonets, spears, carvings and pottery in Australian towns and cities were the first memorials of the Great War. Albeit transient, they pre-date efforts by local and national government agencies to create memorials and with them wider meanings of what the war and participation in it signified. The focus on war trophies from New Guinea highlights a tension between grass-roots community engagement and Commonwealth commemorations, and raises questions about the entanglement of Australia's participation in the Great War with regional desires of colonial expansion.

© 2015 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

> Our job is done, and all that we can ask is the acknowledgement that we did our job decently. … Of all the many "theatres of war," ours has probably been the theatre which staged the dullest play – certainly it has been the theatre with the most meagre audience. But that has been neither our choosing nor our fault. (AN&MEF, 1918)

How the First World War is envisaged and commemorated in Australia has been the subject of many studies, with most focusing on the European war. Actions, such as the planting of trees in Australia forming Avenues of Honour, and bringing native Australian species abroad, as a piece of home guarding the far-away graves, were gestures that bridged the distance between the war in Europe and home.

The stone- and iron-made statues and grander buildings, such as the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, solidify the making of an Australian "ANZAC" nationalism that reinforces and gives war a central role in the development of an Australian identity (see e.g. Beaumont, 2014; Inglis, 2008; Moses & Davis, 2013). Seemingly forgotten is the occupation of New Guinea, which has received recent interest for a short moment in 2014 as Australia's first war action (see http://www.smh.com.au/national/ww1/100-years-since-first-australian-losses-of-the-world-war-i-commemorated-at-rabaul-20140911-10fiui.html); for an example of radio broadcasts see Christine Winter, "WWI and New Guinea", Segment "side shows", by Antony Funnell, part of "The Great War: Memory, Perceptions and 10 Contested Questions", a special programme to mark the centenary of World War One, ABC Regional Radio, broadcast 28 June, 2.05 pm–3 pm AEST.

On 4 August, Britain declared war on Germany. On 6 August, the British Secretary of State sent a telegram to the Governor-General of Australia, outlining the first war action for Australia: to seize German wireless stations at New Guinea, the Marshall Islands and Nauru, and thus prevent a coordination of German naval forces in the Pacific. A nearly identically worded message was sent to New Zealand. In addition, Australia and New Zealand were advised that "any territory now occupied must at conclusion of war be at the disposal of the Imperial Government for purposes of an ultimate settlement" (Rowley, 1958, p. 2).

In August and September 1914, Australian volunteers assisted the New Zealanders in securing Samoa, and set out for German New Guinea. Japan occupied the Marshall Islands (see e.g. Hiery, 1995; Mackenzie, 1941). Though initially uncertain how long Australian occupation would last, Australian administration continued in various forms until the independence of Papua and New Guinea in 1975.[1] Australia had begun its war with a fast victory—an assertion of regional dominance. As the war unfolded, the quickness of the victory faded to be replaced by battles far away, high numbers of casualties and no victory in sight. This article highlights the earliest moments of Australian military triumph and victory in the Great War through the display of war trophies in shop windows of towns and cities throughout Australia. The displays in shop windows, I argue, were outward and visible signs (what might be thought of as civic performances of victory) that linked the recruits and their home communities, created public optimism, reinforced belonging and generated a shared sense of participation in war and victory.

In this article, I analyse how Australia's first war action was a colonial endeavour on behalf of the British empire, and how it was brought back home, namely through public exhibitions of war trophies from the occupation of what was immediately termed "ex-German New Guinea" (Craig, Vanderwal, & Winter, 2015; Newton, 2014). By the end of the war and as a result of the Versailles Peace Conference, New Guinea became Australia's colony, what historian Douglas Newton has noted as Australia's "only war trophy" (Personal Comment 23 November 2014). Historian Susan Pederson remarks in regard to the creation of C-Mandates by the newly established League of Nations that "no one thought the territories that changed hands in the early years of the First World War would become the harbingers of a new order. They were just booty" (Pederson, 2015, p. 19). On 17 December 1920, New Guinea became a C Mandate of the League of Nations under Australian

administration; military occupation ended on 9 May 1921, when the New Guinea Act came into force (see Winter, 2012, p. 31).

Trying to summarize these endeavours of collecting and exhibiting with one singular motivation or meaning would be counterproductive. The meaning of these cultural objects changed as the war changed, and with it attitudes about New Guinea and Australia's presence there. They were and are "entangled objects" signifying a shared history between (Papua) New Guinea and Australia. The meanings, connections, responsibilities and obligations which are entailed in this shared history remain to be re-narrated and re-negotiated anew, now and in the future (see Craig et al., 2015).

2. Australian occupation—mementos and curios

The speed with which Australia and New Zealand put together expeditionary forces reflected general excitement at the outbreak of war that would bring swift victory to Britain, as well as honour, adventure and, last not least, travel abroad. On 10 August, four days after the request to seize all German wireless stations, the Australian government informed Britain that it was in the process of forming an expeditionary force. Colonel William Holmes, a distinguished officer with experience in the Boer War, was appointed commanding officer of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF). The 1,500 men selected were 1,000 infantry men and 500 naval personnel consisting of active navy men, reservists and new recruits. The South Australian contingent left Adelaide on 15 August for Melbourne, where they were joined by the Victorian quota, and continued to Sydney, arriving on 18 August. Together with the volunteers from New South Wales, the newly formed Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) boarded the auxiliary cruiser HMAS *Berrima*, weighed anchor and got away on "midday, 18 August (a memorable day to all)" (AN&MEF, 1918, p. 3). The AN&MEF's commemoration booklet got the date wrong. HMS transporter Berrima left Sydney Harbour on 19 September (Kerr, 2002, p. 3; for further background, see Connor, 2013, pp. 283–303; Mackenzie, 1941; Marre, 2009; Winter, 2015, pp. 14–41). Speed and decisiveness characterized Australia's entry into the war.

HMAS *Berrima* reached Port Moresby, the capital of the Australian Territory of Papua, on 5 September. A swift occupation of German New Guinea proceeded. The Germans had retreated from Rabaul, the capital. The only resistance by German and Melanesian soldiers occurred at Bita Paka, 8 km inland, where a radio station was in the process of being built. In the fighting one German, 7 Australians and about 30 New Guineans died. Ten New Guineans were wounded and another sixty were taken prisoner (Marre, 2009; Morlang, 2008). With the German colonial government in retreat, the AN&MEF held a victory celebration on 13 September. On 21 September, (nearly) all German forces in the colony surrendered.

3. "A right to mementoes"

From then on, there were few opportunities for the Australian volunteers to prove their mettle in battle. Not all Germans obeyed the official surrender. The German naval vessel SMS *Komet* escaped and had to be chased along the North coast of New Britain. She was finally captured in October 1914. *Komet* was a visible symbol of the first Australian successful operation in this new war, and she was brought to Sydney and incorporated into the Australian navy under the new name HMAS *Una*. About half a year later, however, in May 1915, the hero of AN&MEF, Colonel J Paton, who had managed to seize *Komet,* was court-martialled in Sydney on looting charges. In his defence, he declared that he had indeed taken cutlery from the ship in the belief that he had a right to trophies of war; he was honourably acquitted, and later promoted to Major General.[2]

In December 1914, following rumours of a German raider, three Australian ships, HMAS *Yarra*, HMAS *Parramatta* and HMAS *Warrego* steamed 193 miles up the Sepik, but found no sign of a German raider. In the process, however, they discovered and raided the base camp of the German ethnographer Richard Thurnwald, who was exploring the upper reaches of the Sepik River unaware that war had broken out, leading to a long and protracted campaign by Thurnwald to regain his possessions and collections (Craig, 1997; Craig et al., 2015).

After some of these initial exciting events of the takeover, the members of the AN&MEF began an occupation uncertain of its duration and tasks. During a concert on 30 January 1915, some five months after the takeover of New Guinea, one member of the AN&MEF expressed a collective experience of boredom and an attitude of pointless service lacking glory (Worthington, 1919, pp. 83–84). Profiteering and souveniring was rife. A few minor scandals which found their way into official files were the tip of an iceberg (see Winter, 2015). For many men then the mundaneness of day-to-day duties led them to enlist in battalions which were assured of action.[3] It was anticipated that the war would be over within the year.

4. Sending mementoes home

One of the first to send mementos home was actually Colonel Holmes himself, who donated a German flag to Sydney for exhibition in the Town Hall: "The Imperial flag, that for the last time fluttered from the stand at the German administrative block at Rabaul, New Britain, a few weeks ago, now belongs to the citizens of Sydney" (*Bathurst Times*, 1914). Holmes hoped the flag would "stimulate the interest in recruiting in Sydney for the additional forces that are sure to be required to help the dear old Motherland, to which we owe so much". His interpretation of this act of trophy taking as a patriotic endeavour assisting the armed forces and the "dear old motherland" was met with exasperation by the Australian Minister of Defence. Britain insisted on controlling war trophies centrally through London, and Australia was not to encourage individual trophy taking or souveniring (*The West Australian*, 1914). Despite the minister's instruction that war trophies, such as German flags and guns, be forwarded to military authorities, private collecting was nonetheless tolerated, and items reached homes, communal spaces and an expanding and bouyant market in war souvenirs.

In February 1915, Captain Edward Twynam of the AN&MEF spoke about his war service in New Britain as an honoured guest of the Goulburn Motor Club. He had only a small number of war trophies to show. He brought along one "ghastly looking German bayonet with saw edges" and one "wicked Mauser pistol". The Mauser pistol was a "memento" of his capture of a German police officer, while a "king spear" was presented to him by the "Astik tribe" of which he claimed he had been made a member. The rest of his trophy exhibits were "spears and clubs, curios of all kinds, native money and tribal dresses … Some fine cloth and garments made from banana fibre were much admired". Then the members rose to sing a song composed by their secretary, sung to the melody "It's a long way to Tipperary": "It's a long way to Rabaul … but Goulburn's boys got there", and the meeting concluded with the National Anthem.[4]

Gunner Harry Kenny Thorpe's war trophies were collected more systematically than those of other returned soldiers, whose collections were mainly souvenirs for family viewing. After all, 39-year-old Thorpe, a widower from Fairfield, New South Wales, and a volunteer for the AN&MEF in 1914, stated his profession on the enlistment form as "collector".[5] He first exhibited his "fine collection of samples of native weapons, etc", German coins, a sharp pointed bullet and "other trophies too numerous to mention" on return from New Guinea in early 1915. The war trophies were accompanied by tales of Thorpe's experiences "in the thick of the fighting" taking over the German wireless station in Rabaul (*The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 1915). Volunteering a second time for the battlefields on the Western Front, he added considerably to his "war trophies and curios" collection. After Thorpe returned to Fairfield in late 1919, a selection was exhibited in Mr Wheatley's shop window, used before the war to exhibit curiosities such as the "whopper pumpkin"; one could see amongst many things "a double eagle German flag, captured at Rabaul, and an iron cross and ribbon, which was captured in France", as well as a "collection of native spears and drums taken from German New Guinea" (Ibid., 1919, December 13, p. 5). The warm welcome Harry Thorpe received on return translated into winning a seat in the local council elections of January 1920, although he resigned as alderman the following year for family reasons (Ibid., 1920, January 24, p. 14; 1921, October 8, p. 9).

5. A patriotic endeavour: the Ogilvy brothers' ethnographic donations

With just under 700 Germans in New Guinea, including men, women and children, German flags, Mauser pistols, bayonets or amunition were soon all scooped up, and the main items available as

trophies were "native curios".[6] Collecting "native curios" was a feature of German rule, and some items, especially from the Sepik, were sought after by museums around the world. The desire for native curios as a commodity was exploited by one member of the AN&MEF, Private William James Potter. Potter, a clerk by profession, was born in Bombay, India, and a keen amateur collector. On furlough in February 1916, he used his time on the mainland to contact a number of state museums and offered his collecting services. Back in New Guinea, he began delivering on demand throughout 1917: he sent ethnological material and unspecified "specimens" to the Queensland Museum in Brisbane, natural history specimens to the professor of biology, Baldwin Spencer, in Melbourne, and one bundle of curios and a further crate to the Sydney Museum (Australian Museum).[7] There were others like him who also used their war service in New Guinea to bring back and sell items or small collections to curio dealers, such as Sydney-based *Tost and Rohu*, Taxidermists, Tanners, Furriers and Island Curio Dealers. In contrast to museums who purchased through middle men, such as Private Potter, the director of the South Australian Museum, Edgar Ravenswood Waite, visited New Guinea himself in 1918, in order to collect ethnological and natural history objects.[8] The South Australian Museum was the recipient also of a number of private donations by local settlers who were proud of their museum, and eager to confirm their own social and civic status as benefactors.

Amongst the early volunteers from South Australia to join the AN&MEF were Walter Mansel Balfour Ogilvy and his younger brother Harry Lort Spencer Balfour Ogilvy, from a founding settler family in Renmark, South Australia. The Balfour Ogilvy family was aware of its status and responsibility, descending from an aristocratic family of military and church leaders, tracing their line on the maternal side back to the Plantagenets. Both men had previously served in the Boer War—as had all their brothers. The local newspaper proudly announced the brothers' enlistment under the headline "To serve the Empire. Renmark men commissioned". The article referred to them by their local nicknames "Penny" and "Tuppy" which made it clear that the brothers were close.[9] On arrival in German New Guinea in December 1914, Harry was appointed District Officer in Kieta, Bougainville, and half a year later moved to Kavieng, on the northwestern tip of New Ireland. In July 1915, he was appointed Officer in Charge of Native Affairs in Rabaul.

Moving from anticipated battles to administrative tasks, the AN&MEF's needs for cooperation with New Guineans increased—a change that also influenced collecting. This required men that met the main prerequisite of the right character and ability in dealing with New Guineans. In a memorandum explaining why one officer, originally from South Africa, was sent back as unsuitable, Colonel Samuel Augustus Pethebridge, who had replaced Holmes, set out the standards he expected, which made Ogilvy so invaluable to him. Pethebridge wrote: "South African methods would, under the present conditions of temporary Military occupation be disastrous here. … Officers in this Force have to do with so many details affecting natives that, unless they show some aptitude and realize how necessary it is to establish firm, but just and friendly relations, their presence here in a position of authority will do incalculable harm and destroy any prestige we so far have been able to achieve".[10] Harry Ogilvy met these criteria. Even the Resident High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Merton King, when visiting Rabaul, commented on how impressed he was with Major Ogilvy: "His assistance was invaluable. His unflagging energy, his coolness, his tactful handling of natives were all beyond praise."[11]

In the meantime, Walter was promoted to Captain and appointed District Officer at Madang. There he encountered the distressed German ethnographer Richard Thurnwald, whose base camp and collections had been raided by members of the AN&MEF. Pethebridge, coincidentally in Madang at the time when Thurnwald arrived there (after navigating down the Sepik in local canoes, as even his river boats had been taken away), instructed Ogilvy to assist and "to procure for him a passage to Sydney by the next steamer" (Craig, 1997, p. 392). Thurnwald and Ogilvy established a close rapport, and the German collector managed to explain to Ogilvy the nature and importance of his undertaking. Formally approached by Thurnwald in March 1915 with a request for the continuation of his explorations, Ogilvy informed his superiors in Rabaul that he had given Thurswald permission to reside with the Catholic Missionaries at Marienberg (on the Sepik River). Ogilvy added: "I am of the opinion that he is a perfectly genuine gentleman, wrapt (*sic*) up in scientific research work".[12] During their

negotiations and discussions, it seems Walter Ogilvy discovered a new appreciation for artifacts, and their value for a wider European and Australian public. He had earlier sent war trophies to his wife back in Renmark, in particular visiting cards of Captain Müller "of the notorious Emden, ...[and] other German commanders and also several Japanese commanders of warboats" as well as local ethnographic artifacts, namely "a parcel of spears and a fascinatingly hideous idol". After his encounter with Thurnwald, he wrote to the local paper, announcing the dispatch of a "comprehensive collection of savage trophies" and suggested that they should be exhibited "for the raising of a patriotic fund in Renmark, preferably for the Belgium relief, and be afterwards retained as the nucleus of a museum in connection with the Renmark Institute".[13]

Some time in August or September 1916, Walter Olgivy embarked on a major trip up the Sepik River.[14] Leaving Madang in the motor schooner *Genoa*, he travelled up the Sepik "probably one of the finest inland waterways in the world". He inspected villages, mapping and counting inhabitants, and appointing New Guineans to government positions, village constables, *luluais* and *tultuls* (for background see Kituai, 1998). His government duties merged with opportunities for exploration, and collecting souvenirs to bring home for a wider admiring audience.[15]

Like many of the members of the expeditionary force, he longed for real active service before the war was over. Ogilvy contemplated applying for a transfer to the AIF, and made a formal request at the beginning of December the same year. (In June 1917, he was finally granted a discharge from the AN&MEF).[16] Walter thus used what seemed like a unique and final opportunity to assemble a collection for private purposes, gifts and mementos for the family, and to inspire local patriotism, entangled with a desire for recognition at home. He selected items that would get the public talking. The Renmark newspaper *Murray Pioneer* described "some interesting and valuable trophies" that he brought with him on his annual leave from New Guinea in early 1917:

> These are "painted heads"—skulls very skillfully prepared by the Kanakas after they have eaten the original owners of them, faced with very fine clay masks and shaped and coloured to represent the head of the original in life. Despite their cannibal practices, the warlike natives of the little known Sepic districts are declared by Capt. Ogilvy to be quite a decent sort of people.[17]

The paper invited all locals to have a look for themselves:

> The fine collection brought to Renmark by Capt. Ogilvy is now on view at Mr. Holder's shop, where it may be viewed at the cost of a few pence. The proceeds of the spectacle will be devoted to the Renmark Soldiers' Memorial (Ibid., 27 April 1917, p. 4.).

While Walter Ogilvy brought spectacle and tales of adventure back to his home town, he also had an eye on a wider significance of his service: he knew from his encounter with Thurnwald that ethnographic objects would be welcomed by Australian museums, and inspire a more scientific appreciation of the AN&MEF collecting in ex-German New Guinea (Craig et al., 2015). Following Walter's lead, his younger brother Harry, too, sent objects to his family that he obtained from New Ireland, Bougainville and New Britain, and put together a small collection of 135 objects that he donated to the South Australian Museum in 1917 (Craig, 2007).

In December 1916, Administrator Pethebridge announced to Senator George Pearce, Minister of Defence, the dispatch of three cases of "native curios" obtained by District Officers while on inspection or patrol duty and that "some of them are said to be very old and valuable as they are 'stone axe' work". They were "sent for disposal to a Museum or otherwise as you may decide". From the short note and the list attached, it is not clear who initiated the sending of the cases, nor whether all objects were collected by Ogilvy, though the majority of the objects coming from the Sepic indicates that Ogilvie was a key collector.

It also appears to be a strategic interest by the potentially outgoing commander of the AN&MEF himself, should Germany get its colonies back in the near future. During 1916 negotiations that took place between Germany and the Allies, and from the news that reached New Guinea, it seemed likely to the military Administration that a peace treaty could be signed as early as December 1916. Telegrams from the Secretary of Defence updated Pethebridge on the progress of these negotiations, including the likelihood of a return of "ex-German" New Guinea to its former colonial owner.[18] The sending of the cases thus fulfilled two purposes. Firstly, they were showcasing to the minister in a tangible way the quality of services rendered by the AN&MEF, and secondly, as a farewell tribute of an administration that anticipated imminent departure from New Guinea.[19]

6. Displays turning from spectacles to memorials

Initially, the shop window displays of war in Australia were mainly spectacles showing the strange and exotic world in which the young men had been sent. Exotic items, like grotesque New Guinean artefacts or Egyptian cushions were intermingled with weapons and other items taken from the enemy on the fields of battle. Photographs further contextualized the items, and authenticated the war experiences of "our boys" abroad. Moreover, the displays were personalized and localized by giving a soldier's name, a face—and a rank—to the collection and exhibition. They thus established a personal connection between "war" and a local place of origin, which was further enhanced by newspaper reports. It is through the reports in newspapers that these transient displays of war trophies can be reconstructed. They are lost to formal military and government archives.

Newspapers further emphasized and asked for a contribution to the war effort by those viewing the displays. The use of such matériel for recruiting young men, underlines a sense of community involvement that the exhibitions generated, beyond their function as a facilitator of community news. Like sermons, singing and donating in church, the shop window exhibits were part of a larger public portrayal of war and community participation. A mercantile interest, however, should not be overlooked. After all, the shop window displays brought people to the shop and encouraged an interest in its merchandise.

During 1917 and 1918, however, there was an emotional shift as the displays took on a more solemn note, and the general trend of shop window displays shifted from exotic spectacle to community memorials. Photos of local men, who had died on the battleground, were included amongst the shrapnel, bullets and war trophies of the Western Front. Death became increasingly integral to the displays and the reporting. Still, a strange sense of entertainment though mixed with grief pervaded these early grass-roots memorials. Ex-German New Guinea, in the process, moved into the background, a side show to the main battlefields.

7. Fighting over trophies

Throughgout the war, there had been a struggle over ownership of war trophies and war relics. The collection and distribution was under the control of the British War Office. In late 1916, it established a committee to deal with the distribution of war trophies after the war was over and favoured a British-based Imperial war museum. The dominions, including Australia, were unhappy with such an arrangement and argued that the country that captured or collected a trophy should be entitled to keep it. Trophies and relics from the Western Front, the Gallipoli Peninsula, Palestine and Egypt were most sought after. The Pacific campaigns were deemed of little value in comparison. Despite these Britain-centred strictures, inspired by the Australian Official War Correspondent Charles Bean Australia had been proactive in collecting war unit diaries, documents, photographs and objects. Bean anticipated such material would form the foundation of a future national war museum. In May 1917, Australia set up a competing stucture to the British one, the Australian War Records Section, under the young soldier John Treloar, who in 1920 became the first director of the Australian War Memorial, to collect, store and archive war memorabilia.[20]

In April 1918, the Australian Department of Defence, under whose jurisdiction the Records Office was, moved from its focus on the Western Front to marginal theatres of war, and asked the Australian

military administration in New Guinea to participate in the national effort to put together documents, mementos and war trophies for a future war museum.[21] The war on the western front was turning in favour of the allies, and with the end of the war in sight collecting tangible mementos of all of Australia's war involvement was timely. On 11 November 1918, Germany formally surrendered.

The armistice in November 1918 did not mean collecting war trophies or curios ceased. To the contrary, it accelerated the collecting of war trophies, memorabilia, photographs and documents. Peace meant that Britain was no longer able to control and centralize the collecting and distribution of war trophies, and the Australian War Museum, which was just being founded, stepped up calls to send photos, documents and objects to Melbourne. It led to an increased effort on the part of the Australians in New Guinea to collect more "native trophies".

In ex-German New Guinea where very little fighting had occurred "war trophies" were scarce, and long before the end of the war most Mauser pistols, cartridges, bayonets and German flags had already been souvenired as mementos by members of the AN&MEF. The Australian military administrator thus suggested local "native" objects, such as baskets, pottery or weapons, as suitable trophies. Substituting enemy army equipment with local cultural objects was not uncommon, as the history of the Shellal Mosaic shows, taken from the Palestinian theatre, and incorporated into the Australian War Memorial.[22] Nevertheless, the Department of Defence, responding to the Administrator's offer, expressed a preference for war-like objects, namely weapons. The Administrator, Brigadier General George Jameson Johnston, had replaced Seaforth Mackenzie, Judge of the Central Court and later official war historian, who was acting Administrator. Petherbridge had retired in 1917 due to ill health. Johnston replied that such an undertaking was difficult, though not impossible, and the best way was to "invite the co-operation of district officers". He estimated costs for purchase and transport for a suitable collection would be between 100 and 200 lb, and asked for authorization for this expenditure. As "native" weapons were not permitted in many districts "a collection [therefore] would have to be made by patrol into the hinterland".[23] Johnston's proposal for collecting local ethnographic objects for a national war museum found an enthusiastic response on the ground. The AN&MEF complied eagerly, sending boxes and boxes of ethnographic objects, spears and carvings, masks, pottery and woven baskets.

Paradoxically collected artefacts became "war trophies" in a double sense: they were intended to be exhibited in Australia's War Museum, and some were collected in a war-like manner. One expedition that went up the Sepik in 1919 not only collected a great number of rare and beautiful items, but also sparked the imagination of Australian officials in New Guinea and the mainland of Australia about the future of New Guinea, and the aptitude of Australian colonial rule. Peace brought about propects of ruling New Guinea and new assertions of power.

Complaints by a German labour recruiter, and news from the Catholic mission about inter-village fighting up the river, convinced Johnston that a major "demonstration in strength" was needed. The members of the expedition, headed by the local District Officer, included three regimental officers, a medical officer (Raphael Cilento), ten other ranks and seventy-five New Guinean police, assembled in Angoram, some forty miles up the Sepik River, armed with a three-pounder and two machine guns, food for 30 days rations for all soldiers and native troops, as well as "trade tobacco and trade goods to the value of 20 [pounds]".[24] The government steamer SS *Sumatra* and the mission steamer *Gabriel* were made available for the expedition, which lasted from 3 February to 7 March 1919.

Reporting on this expedition to the Department of Defence in Melbourne Johnston painted an overall picture of success:

> [T]he great aim of the expedition was to carry law and order into those regions most remote from the influence of this Administration. I am happy to say that owing to the zeal and tact of the O.C., the loyal cooperation of his subordinate Officers and the excellent discipline of all ranks, this intention was carried out in full.[25]

He noted that *Sumatra* had gone further than the Australian Destroyers *Warrego* and *Yarra* in December 1914, and further than any German expedition before. "*Sumatra*... went further than the limits of the Chart itself" and thus added to knowledge gained by prior German explorations, and the information obtained aided "the general development of the country" and would be "of material benefit to any system of post-war settlement".[26] Johnston called the expedition "a remarkable feat of inland navigation through unknown waters" that lifted this expedition beyond other patrols and transformed it into a symbol of successful Australian colonial governance.

In addition to establishing *Pax Australiana*, Johnston pointed out the value of the expedition. "Order", Johnston boldly claimed before he had even received the final report, "has been restored without blood-shed or a display of force".[27] He commended the party's "zeal and enthusiasm".[28] In mid-April, he forwarded a detailed 14-page report by Captain James Harvey Olifent, who had arrived in New Guinea in late 1918 and succeeded Walter Ogilvy as District Officer. Johnston also sent an additional report on the future of New Guinea, extolling the prospects for settlement and economic possibilities in raptured tones: "there are potentialities so wonderful that it is difficult to speak of them without employing apparently extraordinary terms."[29] The memoranda and reports by Johnston can be found in many government department files, and like earlier transient exhibitions of curious and trophies, create a reality of success.

The historian Charles Rowley states that "the instruction to identify the good, and tactfully frighten the bad with quick firing ammunition was... fatuous in the extreme" (Rowley, 1958, p. 203). Raphael Cilento was the medical orderly on board *Sumatra*. He provides vivid descriptions of the actions by this punitive force.[30] He describes, for example, how *Sumatra* approached a village situated on the Sepik River; the AN&MEF opened fire with the machine guns and started shelling the village. All inhabitants had fled by the time the Australians landed and entered the village, and examined the deserted huts and the sacred men's house. The members of the expedition proceeded to take all weapons they found, the carved king post (holding up the Haus Tambaram), ritual objects from the men's house and loaded them onto *Sumatra*, before sinking the canoes on shore, burning the village down and moving on to the next place to "tactfully frighten the bad". One hundred and fifty New Guineans were captured, 40 released for lack of evidence and the rest put to forced labour (Rowley, 1958, pp. 202–205).

The Secretary of the Department of Defence acknowledged the receipt of Johnston's interim report and Olifent's final report, and copies were provided to the Prime Minister's department, the Department for Home and Territories, the Naval Secretary, and a copy of the reports was presented to the Governor General.[31] In the chain of reporting, the significance and success of the expedition grew with each endorsement. It is thus understandable that with considerable pride, items from the Sepik dominated Johnston's first major sending of war trophies and curios for the new war museum. Peace had been declared yet the AN&MEF "pacified" the people and the land as if there still was a war to be fought and won, taking trophies from the "battlefield" they had initiated. These boxes sent by Johnston were the trophies of war, tangible evidence of Australia's political control over New Guinea, *Pax Australiana*. It is therefore ironic that the War Memorial ultimately rejected these objects as unsuitable. For, truly, New Guinea was Australia's greatest war trophy.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank colleagues who have commented on earlier versions of this chapter, in particular Barry Craig, Peter Hempenstall, Ken Inglis, Douglas Newton, John Moses and Peter Stanley. As always, Geoffrey Gray has been part of this conversation from the first tentative plans to the last written word. I thank Emma Shrapnel, Social History and Exhibitions Curator at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery and Marilyn Gallo, Librarian at Fairfield City Council for their assistance.

Dedication
This article is dedicated to late historian Sam Kaima.

Funding
This article is an outcome of a Darling Foundation Grant in collaboration with the South Australia Museum, and the Melbourne Museum, and was supported by Australian Research Council Future Research Fellowship [grant number FT130101715].

Author details
Christine Winter[1]
E-mail: Christine.Winter@sydney.edu.au
[1] Race and Ethnicity in the Global South (REGS), University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

Citation information
Cite this article as: "The theatre with the most meagre audience": War trophies from ex-German New Guinea, Christine Winter, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2015), 2: 1073656.

Notes

1. In 1945, New Guinea was joined with the Australian territory Papua as an administrative unit (see Gray, 1970).
2. NAA, A1, 1914/23291; AWM33, 64/1; http://www.pngaa.net/Library/Komet.html. Radio presenter Ellen Fanning succinctly summarized Paton's trophy taking: "He nicked the silver!"; see "War trophies and curios from New Guinea in WW1", Christine Winter interviewed by Ellen Fanning, ABC Radio National, broadcast 25 April 2014, 8:24 AEST.
3. At the beginning of 1915, the arrival of the "tropical force" under Pethebridge made such transfers to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) possible; by then pilfering by the initial occupation force under Holmes had become endemic, threatening to turn into a public embarrassment (see Craig et al., 2015; Marre, 2009).
4. *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* (1915). See also NAA, B2455, Twynam Edward.
5. NAA, B2455, Thorpe Harry Kenny.
6. Newspapers carried warning against bogus war trophies (see e.g. *Sunday Times* (Perth), 1915).
7. 5 November 1918 Memo No. 401/8/354 Administrator to Secretary, Department of Defence, AWM 33, 55/6. See also NAA, B2455, Potter William James.
8. 18 May 1918 telegram No. 4274 to Secretary, Defence to Administrator, New Guinea, AWM 33, 46/3.
9. *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* (Renmark, SA), 12 November 1914, 4. See also National Archives, B2445, BALFOUR/OGILVY H L S and B2445, BALFOUR/OGILVY W M.
10. 10 February 1916 Administrator to the Minister of Defence, AWM 33, 12/12.
11. 21 November 1916, report by High Commissioner M King. NAA B2445, BALFOUR/OGILVY H L S.
12. NAA, B543, W112/7/58.
13. *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* (Renmark, SA), 1 July 1915, p. 5.
14. The Germans had named it the Kaiserin Augusta River.
15. Walter Ogilvy, "a trip up the Sepic River", Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record (Renmark, SA), 21 December 1917, p. 7. See also JHS Olifent, Report of Patrol Sepik River. 3 February to 7 March 1919, NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245 Expedition up Sepik River NG by Capt JHS Olifent.
16. NAA, B 2455, BALFOUR/OGILVY WM; 2 December 1916 Administrator to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, AWM33, 54/4 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports Oct-Dec 1916.
17. *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* (Renmark, SA), 20 April 1917, p. 4.
18. See AWM 33, 43/6 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Telegrams.
19. 14 December 1916 Administrator to Senator Pearce, Department of Defence; list compiled by Captain W Balfour Ogilvy. AWM33, 54/4 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports October–December 1916.
20. For an analysis of Treloar's collecting of war art (see Conde & Treloar, 2007, pp. 451–464).
21. For an overview see "War trophies: First World War", *Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia*. https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/war_trophies/; "Origins of the Australian War Memorial". http://www.awm.gov.au/about/origins/NewZealand in contrast, albeit collecting war trophies, never established a national war museum (Fox, 1987).
22. http://awm.gov.au/collection/ART40979/; *The Argus*, 1921; Daley, 2012, http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/war-and-pieces/468/.
23. 27 November 1918 Administrator to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, replying to memo 1007/69 of October 30th. AWM33, 55/6 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports November–December 1918.
24. 19 February 1919, Operation Order No. 100, Brigadier General G.J. Johnston, Commanding Officer A.N&M.E. Force, NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245. For details on SS Sumatra see NAA, MP367/1, 603/1/1425. See also 21 February 1919 Administrator, Brigadier-General to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, AWM 33, 56/1.
25. 15 March 1919, Johnston to Secretary, Department of Defence, NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245.
26. Ibid. See also AWM 33, 56/1.
27. 4 March 1919, Johnston to Secretary, Department of Defence, NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245.
28. 19 April 1919, Johnston to Secretary, Department of Defence, NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245. See also NAA, A1, 1920/7183; Expeditions - German New Guinea - Patrol Reports.
29. 4 March 1919 Administrator, Brigadier-General to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, AWM 33, 56/1.
30. Ralph Cilento, diary, Fryer Library, University of Queensland UQFL44, Box 11, Item 18.
31. NAA, MP367/1, 404/11/245.

References

AN&MEF. (1918). *Passed by the censor*. Rabaul: Author.
Beaumont, J. (2014). *Broken nation*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
Conde, A.-M., & Treloar, J. (2007). Official war art and the Australian war memorial. *Australian Journal of Politics and History, 53*, 451–464.
Connor, J. (2013). The capture of German New Guinea. In C. Stockings (Ed.), *Before the Anzac Dawn (a military history of Australia to 1915)* (pp. 283–303). Kensington: University of New South Wales Press.
Craig, B. (1997). The fate of Thurnwald's Sepik ethnographic collections. *Baessler-Archiv, Neue Folge, XLV*, 387–409.
Craig, B. (2007). Edgar Waite's North-West Pacific expedition. In S. Cochrane & M. Quanchi (Eds.), *Hunting the collectors' Pacific collections in Australian museums, art galleries and archives* (pp. 173–195). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
Craig, B., Vanderwal, R., & Winter, C. (2015). *War trophies of curios? The war museum collection in Museum Victoria 1915–1920*. Melbourne: Melbourne Museum.
Daley, P. (2012, November 9). War and pieces. *The Global Mail*. Retrieved from http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/war-and-pieces/468/
Fox, A. (1987). *Silent sentinels: The war trophies of the first New Zealand expeditionary force in war and peace* (Honours thesis). University of Otago, Dunedin.
Gray, G. (1970). The passing of the Papua–New Guinea provisional administration bill 1945. In H. Nelson, N. Lutton, & S. Robertson (Eds.), *Select topics in the history of Papua and New Guinea* (pp. 37–42). Port Moresby: UPNG.
Hiery, H. J. (1995). *The neglected war*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Inglis, K. (2008). *Sacred places: War memorials in the Australian landscape*. Melbourne: Miegunyah Press.
Kerr, G. (2002). Naval reservists in WWI—First to fight, first to fall. *Navy News*. Vol. 45, p. 3.
Kituai, A. I. K. (1998). *My gun, my brother: The world of the Papua New Guinea colonial police, 1920–1960*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Mackenzie, S. (1941). *The Australians at Rabaul. Official history of Australia in the war of 1914–1918* (Vol. X). Canberra: Australian War Memorial.

Marre, A. (2009). Searching for Bitapaka: Creating voices for history's silenced. *Limina, 15*, 1–13.
Morlang, T. (2008). *Askari und Fitafita: 'farbige' Soeldner in den deutschen Kolonien* [Askari and Fitafita: "Coloured" soldiers in the German colonies]. Berlin, CH: Links Verlag.
Moses, J. A., & Davis, G. E. (2013). *Anzac day origins*. Canberra: Barton Books.
Newton, D. (2014). *Hell Bent: Australia's leap into the Great War*. Melbourne: Scribe.
Pederson, S. (2015). *The guardians: The league of nations and the crisis of empire*. Oxford: OUP.
Rowley, C. D. (1958). *The Australians in German New Guinea*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Winter, C. (2012). *Looking after one's own: The rise of Nationalism and the Politics of the Neuendettelsauer Mission in Australia, New Guinea and Germany (1921–1933)*. Germanica Pacifica: Peter Lang Verlag.
Winter, C. (2015). Chapter two: The occupation of German New Guinea. In B. Craig, R. Vanderwal, & C. Winter (Eds.), *War trophies of curios? The war museum collection in Museum Victoria 1915–1920* (pp. 14–41). Melbourne: Melbourne Museum.
Worthington, A. H. (1919). *Our island captures: being an account of the operations of the Australian Expeditionary Force in the South Pacific Ocean, 1914*. Adelaide: G. Hassel and Son.

Australian War Memorial (AWM)
AWM 33, 12/12; Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports February–October 1916.
AWM 33, 46/3; Ex-German New Guinea: Telegrams May–June 1918.
AWM 33, 43/6; Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Telegrams.
AWM 33, 54/4 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports October–December 1916.
AWM 33, 55/6 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports November–December 1918.
AWM 33, 56/1 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous Reports January–March 1919.
AWM 33, 64/1 Ex-German New Guinea: Miscellaneous material used for writing Volume 10, Australian Official History, arranged by chapter. Chapter 8: The Capture of the KOMET].

Fryer Library, University of Queensland
UQFL44, Box 11, Item 18 Ralph Cilento, diary.

National Archives of Australia (NAA)
A1, 1914/23291; S.S. Komet or other captured vessels required by Papuan Govt.
A1, 1920/7183; Expeditions - German New Guinea - Patrol Reports.
B543, W112/7/58; [Report No A50 by Colonel Pethebridge].
B2445, Balfour/Ogilvy H L S.
B2445, Balfour/Ogilvy W M.
B2455, Potter William James.
B2455, Thorpe Harry Kenny.
B2455, Twynam Edward.
MP367/1, 404/11/245; Expedition up Sepik River NG by Capt JHS Olifent.
MP367/1, 603/1/1425; SS "Sumatra".

Newspapers
Bathurst Times. (1914, October 8). p. 2
Life in New Britain. Captain Twynam at the Motor Club. (1915, February 4). *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, p. 2.
Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record (Renmark, SA).
Sunday Times (Perth). (1915, July 25). p. 4.
The Shellal Mosaic. (1921, September 9). *The Argus*, p. 6.
The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate. (1915, March 6).
War trophies: To be forwarded to military authorities. (1914, October). *The West Australian*, p. 17.

Australian War Memorial Web Resources
Origins of the Australian war memorial. http://www.awm.gov.au/about/origins/.
Shellal mosaic. http://awm.gov.au/collection/ART40979/.
War trophies: First World War. Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia: https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/war_trophies/.

cogent oa

© 2015 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:
Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.
The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:
Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.
You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.