

‘Fortune, ... is powerful in all things, especially in war...’¹



Extract of Service Record, Patrick Francis Plunkett, 18 September 1915.²

Patrick Plunkett was a fortunate man. His timely enlistment during World War I triggered a series of significant events that changed his life for the better. Regardless of the dangers he would later face on the battlefield, enlistment offered Patrick an escape from a troubled personal life, and early treatment for a serious illness. Convalescence delayed overseas deployment, so Patrick missed key battles with high casualty rates. Patrick's unit, formed during his convalescence, proved a good match for his civilian skills. Avoiding serious injury, Patrick returned home a local hero, unaffected by his chequered service record. But with his time in the AIF over, Patrick's luck faltered. With his personal life again in disarray, Patrick enlisted at the outbreak of World War II, hoping that luck would smile upon him once more. Here follows the story of Patrick Plunkett and his timely good fortune.

Born on 7 January 1884, Patrick Francis Plunkett grew up in Queenstown Victoria.³ Initially eschewing his Irish father's gold-mining occupation, Patrick moved away from his family to work as a 'railway employé' in Molesworth.⁴ With bouts of alcohol-fuelled belligerence labelling Patrick 'a nuisance to the town', he moved to Walhalla to find gold.⁵

¹ Cayo Julius Caesar and Aulus Hirtius, *C. Julius Caesar's Commentaries of His Wars in Gaul, and Civil War with Pompey: To which is Added, a Supplement to His Commentary of His Wars in Gaul; as Also, Commentaries of the Alexandrian, African, and Spanish Wars, by Aulus Hirtius, Or Oppius, Etc. With the Author's Life. Adorn'd with Sculptures from the Designs of the Famous Palladio*, J. and P. Knapton, London, 1750, p. 304. Google eBook.

² Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 1, B2455, National Archives of Australia.

³ Findmypast, Baptism Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 'Australia, Births and Baptisms, 1792-1981', Accessed 4 March 2017.

⁴ Ancestry, Passenger List for Patrick Plunkett, 'Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839-1923', Public Record Office Victoria, North Melbourne, Victoria, Accessed 8 April 2017.; 'Schedule A.-(Clause 4(b).) Notice of Application for a Mining Lease', *Evelyn Observer and Bourke East Record*, 20 May 1910, p. 2.; Ancestry, Electoral Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1913, 'Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980', Australian Electoral Commission, Accessed 28 April 2017.;

⁵ 'Yea Police Court.', *Yea Chronicle*, 8 January 1914, p. 3.; Ancestry, Electoral Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1914, 'Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980', Australian Electoral Commission, Accessed 28 April 2017.

At the Court of Petty Sessions on Monday, before Messrs Purcell (Chairman) and Taite J's.P. a man named Patrick Plunkett was charged with being drunk and disorderly on Sunday, 9th November.

Extract, *Yea Chronicle*, 13 November 1913.⁶

Like many men, although the right age, Patrick was in no hurry to join up when war was first declared.⁷ Indeed, approximately two thirds of Australian men aged 18 to 44 never enlisted.⁸ Yet on 18 September 1915, Patrick joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).⁹ At 31 years 9 months, Patrick was much older than the national average of 24.25 years.¹⁰ Despite enlistment numbers being at their peak, advanced age and run-ins with the law suggest that avoiding gaol rather than patriotic fervour was Patrick's motivation.¹¹

ENLISTMENTS BY STATES WITH PERCENTAGE TO TOTAL POPULATION AND TO MALES AGED 18 TO 44					
State	Enlistments.	Approximate percentages			
		to total population	to males aged 18 to 44		
Queensland	57,705	8.5	37.7		
New South Wales	104,030	8.8	39.8		
Victoria	112,399	7.9	38.6		
South Australia	34,959	8.0	37.6		
Western Australia	32,231	9.9	37.5		
Tasmania	15,485	7.9	37.8		
Total	416,809	8.5	38.7		

Age at Enlistment, 1914-1918.¹²

Private Plunkett Service Number 2422 had two medical examinations.¹³ The first found no 'defect calculated to unfit him for the duties of a soldier', but the second diagnosed venereal disease.¹⁴ Timely detection saved Patrick's life.

⁶ 'News and Notes', *Yea Chronicle*, 13 November 1913, p. 3.

⁷ Australian War Memorial, 'Enlistment standards', <https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/enlistment/>, Accessed 29 April 2017.; Anthony Fletcher, 'A New Moral Order', *History Today*, Vol. 64, Issue 8, 2014, p. 26.

⁸ Joan Beaumont, 'Australians and the Great War: Battles, the Home Front, and Memory', *Teaching History*, Vol. 49, Issue 1, 2015, p. 20.; Ernest Scott, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume XI: Australia During the War*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney Australia, 1941, p. 874.

⁹ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 1.

¹⁰ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 1.; Macquarie University, 'WWI Age at Enlistment', <http://mq.edu.au/on-campus/museums-and-collections/australian-history-museum/online-exhibitions/oua-anzac-unit/wwi-age-at-enlistment/>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

¹¹ K.H. Jobson, 'First AIF Enlistment Patterns and Reasons for Their Variation', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 132, 1998, p. 62.; Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: A study of the diaries and letters of Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974, p. 8.

¹² Ernest Scott, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume XI: Australia During the War*.

¹³ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 3.

¹⁴ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 3.

Immediately, Patrick began treatment at Langwarrin VD Hospital.¹⁵ The hospital's location somewhat mollified the moral sensibilities of an Australian public fearful of contagion, but patients frequently escaped from the abysmal conditions, causing further public outcry.¹⁶ However, substantial changes including modern facilities and payment in return for cooperation had improved conditions for many patients, boosting patient morale and reducing breakouts.¹⁷ Patrick's timely arrival saw him benefit from the changes.

Patrick's situation was typical of many Australian soldiers. 'The social and "moral" aspects of the problem of "wastage" from venereal disease ... are an essential part ... of the war.'¹⁸ Popular opinion suggested that the AIF had higher rates of venereal disease than other armed forces, and measures were introduced to reduce infection rates.¹⁹ Success at Langwarrin, too, did much to ameliorate the situation; almost 85% of the 7,242 soldiers treated at Langwarrin later served overseas, Patrick among them.²⁰

ADMISSIONS AND DISCHARGES TO LANGWARRIN V.D. HOSPITAL INCLUDING MEN RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA FOR TREATMENT																						
	Gonorrhoea.		Chancroid.		Primary Syphilis.		Secondary Syphilis.		Tertiary Syphilis.		Gonorrhoea and Chancroid.		Gonorrhoea and Syphilis.		Syphilis and Chancroid.		Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, and Chancroid.		Not diagnosed or non-V.D.		Total.	
	Adm.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Ad.	Disc.	Adm.	Disc.
1915 March-June	366	364	107	107	97	89	5	5	—	—	8	6	48	32	8	5	2	1	92	59	733	668
1915-16 ..	2559	2130	223	223	213	127	37	18	—	—	39	35	81	38	2	3	—	—	7	21	3161	2595
1916-17 ..	1195	1429	76	72	112	185	43	61	2	1	16	19	39	78	4	5	—	1	9	28	1496	1879
1917-18 ..	575	591	12	11	61	69	72	47	23	14	6	7	38	80	3	2	3	1	—	1	793	823
1918-19 ..	272	390	21	11	72	57	60	53	10	13	3	5	21	62	4	4	—	2	3	2	466	599
Total ..	4967	4904	439	424	555	527	217	184	35	28	72	72	227	290	21	19	5	5	111	111	6649	6564

Treatment Outcomes, Langwarrin VD Hospital, 1915-1919.²¹

¹⁵ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 4.

¹⁶ Raden Dunbar, *The Secrets of the Anzacs: the untold story of venereal disease in the Australian Army, 1914-1919*, Scribe Publications, Brunswick, 2014, pp. 78, 83-85.; 'Langwarrin Camp. Unsatisfactory Medical Inspection. "Victoria A Dumping Ground"', *Ballarat Courier*, 27 October 1915, p. 3.; 'Venereal Disease. Public Protection Sought.', *The Argus*, 11 November 1915, p. 5.

¹⁷ Arthur Graham Butler, *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III – Special Problems and Services*, Halstead Press, Sydney, 1943, pp. 153, 175-177.

¹⁸ Arthur Graham Butler, *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III – Special Problems and Services*, Halstead Press, Sydney, 1943, p. 151.

¹⁹ Arthur Graham Butler, *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III – Special Problems and Services*, p. 152.; Michael Caulfield, *The Unknown Anzacs: the real stories of our national legend – told through the rediscovered diaries and letters of the Anzacs who were there*, Hachette Australia, Sydney, 2013, p. 267.

²⁰ Arthur Graham Butler, *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III – Special Problems and Services*, p. 177.; 'Langwarrin Depot. Treating Venereal Disease. Beneficent Work Done.', *The Argus*, 4 April 1918, p. 8.

²¹ Arthur Graham Butler, *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III – Special Problems and Services*, p. 148.

After nearly eight months at Langwarrin, Patrick commenced training at Seymour.²² The 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion was formed in March 1916.²³ Although trained as infantrymen to support other troops, the Pioneers provided the labour force necessary to create and maintain the physical infrastructure including trenches, huts, roads, rail and walkways, so other units could function effectively.²⁴ As such, the work of the Pioneers eminently suited Patrick's railway and mining background.²⁵ The timely formation of Patrick's battalion during his medical treatment worked in his favour.

In July and August 1916 as part of the 2nd Australian Division, the Pioneers engaged in intense fighting at Pozières and Mouquet Farm in the Somme Valley.²⁶ Casualties were severe. Pozières Ridge, noted historian CEW Bean, was 'more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth'.²⁷ Now cleared for duty, Patrick was destined to arrive too late to join his unit in these fierce battles.

Private Patrick Francis Plunkett sailed off to war on board HMAT A32 *Themistocles* on 28 July 1916 alongside 151 other members of his battalion.²⁸ With a maximum speed of 15 knots, the 11, 231-ton vessel docked in Plymouth England six weeks later.²⁹ While Patrick waited at Perham to join his unit at the front, his rebellious nature resurfaced and he was punished for returning late to barracks.³⁰

²² Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 4.

²³ Australian War Memorial, 'Highlight on official records of the First World War: AWM352 Miscellaneous records of the 2nd Pioneer Battalion, AIF, 1914-18 War', <https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2016/03/31/highlight-official-records-first-world-war-awm352-miscellaneous-records-2nd-pioneer/>, Accessed 28 April 2017.

²⁴ RSL Virtual War Memorial, '2nd Pioneer Battalion 2nd Division, AIF: About This Unit', <https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/units/62>, Accessed 29 April 2017.; K.W. Mitchinson, *Pioneer Battalions in the Great War: Organized and Intelligent Labour*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, England, 2013, unpaginated, Google eBook.; Noel E. Adsett, *Stories from the Honour Boards: Booklet Number 68: William Temple 1894-1917*, Saint Andrew's Uniting Church, Brisbane, 2015, p. 4.

²⁵ Ancestry, Electoral Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1913.; Ancestry, Electoral Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1914.

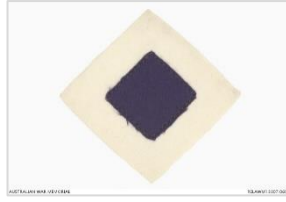
²⁶ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/5, July 1916, pp. 2-3.; 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/6, August 1916, pp. 2-5; The Long, Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918, '2nd Australian Division', <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/2nd-australian-division/>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

²⁷ Carolyn Holbrook, *ANZAC: The Unauthorised Biography*, NewSouth Publishing Sydney, 2014, unpaginated. ePub eBook.; Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, *ANZAC to Amiens*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1983, p. 264.

²⁸ Australian War Memorial, 'First World War Embarkation Rolls: Patrick Francis Plunkett', https://www.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM_LARGE/RCDIG1066894/RCDIG1066894--14-.JPG, Accessed 29 April 2017.

²⁹ Don't forget the Diggers, 'HMAT A32 Themistocles', http://www.dontforgetthediggers.com.au/galleryimg_large.asp?galID=31&gallimgID=180, Accessed 29 April 2017.; Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 9.

³⁰ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 9.



Colour Patch, 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion, World War I.³¹

Proudly wearing his battalion's colour patch, Patrick left England on 2 November for the 2nd Divisional Base Camp at Étaples, France.³² The 'largest of its kind ever established overseas', the camp was a temporary home for up to 100,000 soldiers.³³

In late November 1916, Patrick marched out to join his battalion along the Longueval-Bernafay Road.³⁴ Here, the Pioneers were performing the 'back-breaking' work that varied by location and focus according to need. By February 1917, the Pioneers were constructing a 'Deconville Tramway ... past Dead Mule Corner', and a 'Duck-board track to Little Wood'.³⁵ Two months later, they were practising for an "attack on (the) Hindenberg Line".³⁶

In May, as his battalion moved to 'Gordon Camp near Contalmaison', Patrick suffered a perforated eardrum from a shell explosion.³⁷ Upon his return from Camiers hospital, Patrick was charged with drunkenness and forfeited a day's pay.³⁸ Like many frontline soldiers, Patrick sought solace in alcohol, despite attempts back home to have rations of this 'molten fire' stopped.³⁹ Other soldiers found comfort through drawing, sometimes on official records, while people back home wrote poetry.⁴⁰

³¹ Australian War Memorial, 'Colour patch: 2 Australian Pioneer Battalion, AIF', <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RELAWM13307.060>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

³² Australian War Memorial, 'Colour patch: 2 Australian Pioneer Battalion, AIF'.; Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 9.

³³ Following the Twenty-Second: 'Training Camps: France', <https://anzac-22nd-battalion.com/training-camps-france/>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

³⁴ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 9.; 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/7, p. 3.

³⁵ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/9, February 1917, p. 4.

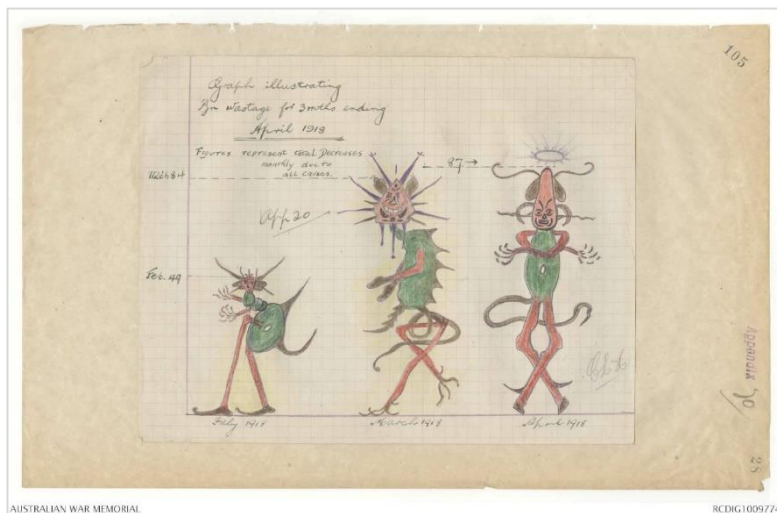
³⁶ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/11, April 1917, p. 2.

³⁷ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/12, May 1917, p. 4.; Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 9.

³⁸ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 10.

³⁹ Harold Roy Williams, *An Anzac on the Western Front: The Personal Reflections of an Australian Infantryman from 1916 to 1918*, Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley England, 2012, unpaginated. ePub eBook.

⁴⁰ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/23, April 1918, p. 30.; Rosalie Triolo, 'Shell-shocked: Australian teachers, their schools and families after Armistice', <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/publications/papers-and-podcasts/war/after-armistice.aspx>, Accessed 3 May 2017.



Artwork, War Diary, 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion, April 1918.⁴¹

Patrick's Division moved on, engaging in action at Bullecourt and Third Ypres⁴². At Nieppe, Patrick spent a week in hospital with impetigo.⁴³ On return to his unit, Patrick was found guilty of drunkenness and forfeited 28 days pay.⁴⁴ Following the Pioneers engagement in the lead-up to the Hundred Days campaign, Patrick's war was over.⁴⁵

In July 1919, Victorian newspapers announced Patrick's return to Australia on board HMAT *Mahia*, and he settled back home with his family.⁴⁶ Although ineligible for the 1914-15 Star, Patrick was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, a combination affectionately monickered 'Mutt and Jeff'.⁴⁷ Patrick's name appeared on local honour boards, 'significant embodiments of national culture' indicating a shift in commemorating conflicts.⁴⁸

⁴¹ 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/23, April 1918, p. 30.

⁴² RSL Virtual War Memorial, '2nd Pioneer Battalion, 2nd Division, AIF: About This Unit', <https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/units/62>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

⁴³ ; 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion Unit Diary, AWM4 14/14/22, March 1918, pp. 3-4.; Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 11.

⁴⁵ RSL Virtual War Memorial, '2nd Pioneer Battalion, 2nd Division, AIF: About This Unit'.

⁴⁶ 'Social Notes', *Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser and Diamond Creek Valley Advocate*, 11 July 1919.; Ancestry, Electoral Roll for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1919, 'Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980', Australian Electoral Commission, Accessed 28 April 2017.

⁴⁷ Service Record of Patrick Francis Plunkett, p. 33.; The Long, Long Trail, 'Researching a soldier: The British campaign medals of WW1', <http://www.1914-1918.net/soldiers/themedals.html>, Accessed 3 May 2017.

⁴⁸ Sandra Kerkvliet, *Honour Board*, 2017, digital image, personal collection.; Rosalie Triolo, 'Shell-shocked: Australian teachers, their schools and families after Armistice'.; K.S. Inglis and Jock Phillips, 'War Memorials in Australia and New Zealand: A Comparative Survey', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, Issue 96, 1991, p. 180.; Joy Damousi, *Mourning Practices*, in Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Vol. III: Civil Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, p. 360.; Bruce Scates, 'Bereavement and Mourning (Australia)', http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/bereavement_and_mourning_australia, Accessed 4 May 2017.



Honour Board, Panton Hill State School.⁴⁹

War did not change Patrick’s character. After his discharge from the AIF, he lived much as before, mining for gold and continuing his run-ins with the law.⁵⁰ Despite moving back home, Patrick’s relationship with his family remained fraught; Patrick was overlooked as executor of his father’s will, the honour falling on the shoulders of Patrick’s younger brother.⁵¹

Patrick married in 1926 at age 46 but with no offspring born of the union, he and his wife later lived apart.⁵² With gold harder to find and his nest egg stolen, the announcement of war proved fortunate for Patrick yet again.⁵³ He enlisted in the 2nd AIF, this time to earn a living. Too old for overseas deployment, Private Plunkett Service Number V6871 served as a member of the Citizen Military Force at the Melbourne Recruitment Reception Depot.⁵⁴ Two months after the Allied victory, Patrick died from an undisclosed illness and was interred in Queenstown cemetery.⁵⁵ No headstone marks his grave.

⁴⁹ Sandra Kerkvliet, *Honour Board*.

⁵⁰ ‘Dogs Worry Sheep’, *Advertiser*, 1 November 1929, p. 2.

⁵¹ Will of Patrick Plunkett, died 27 September 1923, Public Record Office Victoria, Series VPRS 7591/P0003, Unit 694, Item 105/903.

⁵² Marriage Certificate of Patrick Francis Plunkett and Annie Walker, 1930, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, 890/1930.; Ancestry, Electoral Record for Patrick Francis Plunkett, 1939, ‘Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980’, Australian Electoral Commission, Accessed 28 April 2017.

⁵³ St Andrews Primary School Council, *St Andrews: A Village Built on Gold*, St Andrews Primary School Council, St Andrews, 1998, p. 12.; ‘Gold Missing’, *Advertiser*, 19 February 1937, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Australian War Memorial, ‘Roll of Honour: Patrick Francis Plunkett’, <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R1682345/>, Accessed 29 April 2017.

⁵⁵ Death Certificate of Patrick Francis Plunkett, died 1945, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, 11564/1945.; ‘Deaths’, *The Argus*, 7 November 1945, p. 18.; ‘Funeral Notices’, *The Age*, 7 November 1945, p. 8.

In summation, enlistment in World War I was lucky for Patrick Plunkett. He avoided gaol, and he was given timely treatment by the AIF for venereal disease. His convalescence delayed overseas deployment, so he missed key battles with high casualty rates. Patrick's unit, formed during his convalescence, better suited his civilian skills. Despite minor injuries and bouts of drunkenness during active service, Patrick was feted on returning home, but upon discharge from the AIF his luck faltered. An unfulfilling civilian life led Patrick to enlist at the outbreak of World War II to earn an income. Hopefully, Patrick Plunkett's second service record shows that he found timely good fortune once more.

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