

# Cheops Pyramid: Amateur detectives identify Gallipoli-bound diggers in WW1 photo mystery

WHEN this photo was first published, armchair detectives across the globe went nuts and combined to solve 60 mysteries.

-Justin Lees

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Who are their families? ... From left to right; 2nd Lt William George Hastings, Private Rupert James Sparrow, Lance Corporal Walter William Paterson and Bugler, Private Albert Durham Thrush. Picture: Supplied

THREE months ago we published this iconic photo — and armchair detectives across the globe went nuts, breaking the internet (well, a server at least) in the process.

They also helped researchers undertaking one of Australia's most painstaking historical detective investigations to solve 60 mysteries and debunk a couple of persistent myths.

As we mark Remembrance Day, your help is wanted again to identify the men in the famous Cheops Pyramid photo. We'll tell you how below.

The picture shows 703 Australian soldiers posing on the steps of the huge Egyptian pyramid, shortly before they were shipped off to the battlegrounds of Gallipoli in 1915. Many did not come back, so it was to be their last photo together.

For a century most of the faces have been unidentified, and the picture has been best known for the myths attached to it — such as the “Disguised Dead Digger” theory and the story that a father and his sons near the front all died together on April 25.

We published the truth behind those myths in August and urged today’s Australians to help identify their ancestors, while colourising the men in the photo who had already been named.

Since then, a flood of new leads has poured in to the team leading research at the [Western Australian Genealogical Society](#) (WAGS), resulting in around 60 new identifications — also coloured in our updated picture above.

Incredibly, it appears the weight of traffic to WAGS on the day we published was so heavy their server broke ... however that didn’t stop them for long.



Found him ... Dr Charles Steadman located his grandfather and namesake in the photo. Picture: Steve Pohlner

WAGS webmaster Chris Loudon said identifications had come from across Australia and beyond.

“We have had contacts from Canada, Scotland, Switzerland, Tahiti,” he said — appropriate given the men pictured, Australian Infantry Division’s 11th Battalion, came from all over the nation and the wider British Empire.



Big job ... the blocks at Cheops dwarf modern-day tourists.

While the battalion was raised in WA, Chris adds: “Most of the them were from other places, not native WA men; they were working here in the gold rush, or as miners, farmers ... some were lawyers and the like.”

Among the new identifications was Private Charles Ernest Steadman, of Queensland. His grandson and namesake Dr Charles John Steadman, 57, would often search for him in an old copy of the photo, but picking him out was almost impossible.

After our August call-out he emailed high-resolution pictures to WAGS, who finally found Private Steadman in the very middle of the shot.

“It’s meant a great deal to me,” Dr Steadman said. “Just the fact alone that this photo is coming back to life with this commemoration is something that has quite touched me.”



Middle man ... Private Charles Steadman (centre) in the Cheops photo.

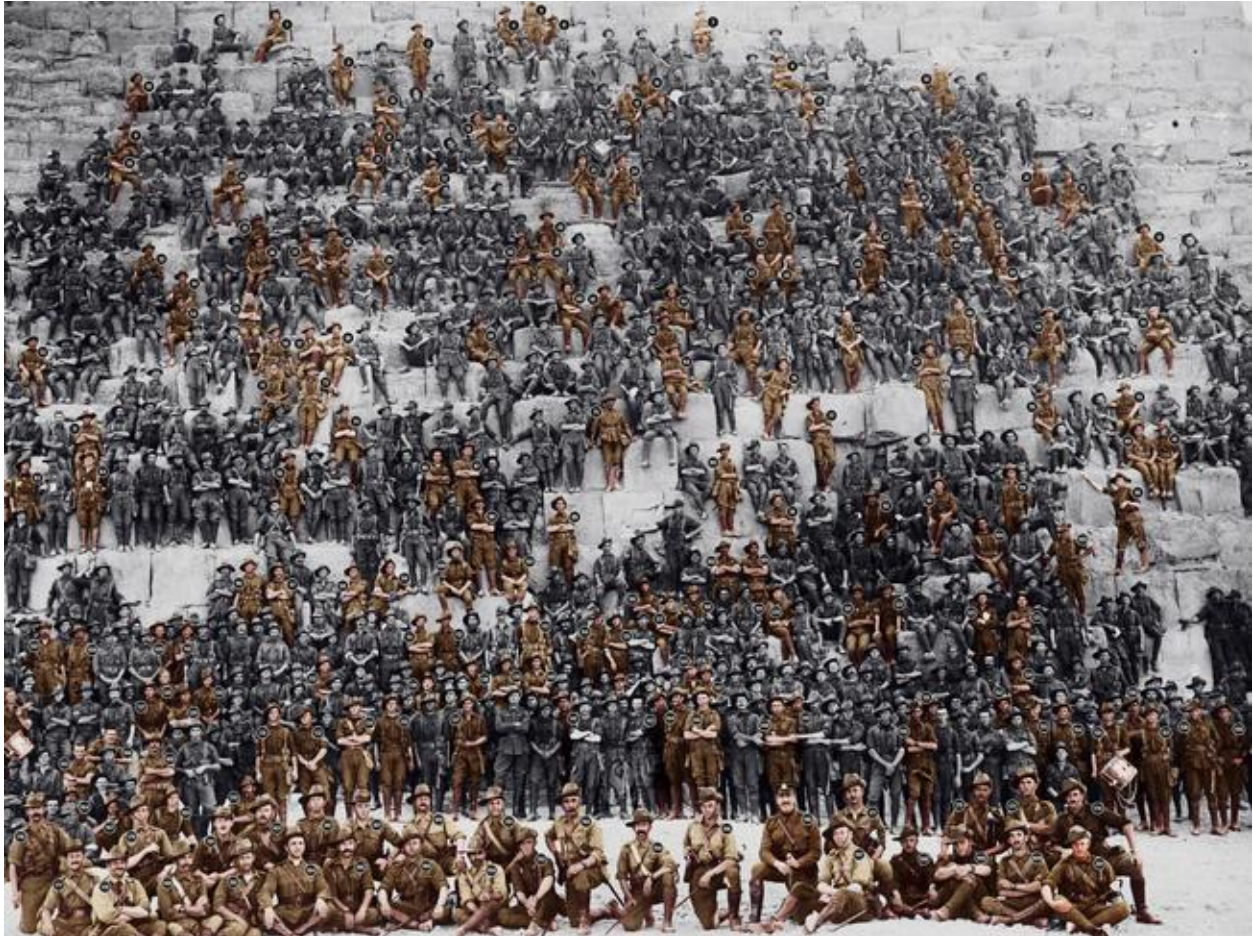
### **NO CATHOLICS, NO MACHINE-GUNNERS: MYTHS SHOT DOWN**

The men were thrust into action in the first wave at Anzac Cove, on April 25, 1915 (losing 50 on that day alone). They posed for the photo after church parade at their camp in Egypt on Sunday, January 10, 1915.

Having debunked the myths of the dead body hidden among the men, the doomed family group, a secret signal among the married men and a band of brothers crossing bayonets ([more about those myths here](#)) Chris and team have now established two other beliefs about the photo are foey.

“There was a claim there were no Catholics,” said Chris, “because their church service was later; but that’s a myth as well because (Catholic padre) Father John Fahey is sitting down the front and if church had been on, he’d have been there!”

And a tale that no machine gunners were included in the photo has also been shown up thanks to new identifications.



No need for a magnifying glass ... look at the interactive at the top of the story.

### **HOW DO I KNOW IF MY ANCESTOR IS THERE?**

The WAGS team now have more than 200 men identified, scores more in the process of being checked and are hoping for still more by the time of the photo’s anniversary — which will be marked by a gathering of descendants in WA.

If you think an ancestor may have been present, we can help.

As a starting point, we are running a full list of the battalion’s roll online — log on to our website, find the picture and see if your family name is there.

If you think you can help identify a relative, contact the team at WAGS ([wags.org.au](http://wags.org.au)). They may ask if you have old photos for cross-checking or other information.

Good luck! @Untold100



‘Square jawline, slouched hat’ ... Paul Fathers picked out his grandfather. Here he displays Walter’s medals. Picture: Calum Robertson

### **SILENT REMINDER OF A BLOODY TIME: WHY HE KEPT PHOTO**

Paul Fathers remembers the photo having pride of place on the walls of his grandfather’s lounge room.

Mr Fathers, from Brighton in SA, saw the story in August, and contacted WAGS to let them know his granddad, Private Walter Fathers, was in their photo.

“They had him already identified but not verified and with all the family information we had we could do that,” Mr Fathers said.

“There he is on the steps with a square jawline and a slouch hat,” Mr Fathers, operations manager at Ross Trevor college at Woodforde, said.

“When you look at that photo there is hardly another soldier with his arms crossed exactly the way he did. Once you know about his trick you can’t fail to find him.”

For Walter the photo — the only piece of war memorabilia the family remembers him displaying — represented a silent reminder of a time of comradeship and bloody conflict that changed the way of the world.



“A larrikin of a sort” ... Bernard Alston identified because of his “jaunty look” and family resemblance. Picture: Supplied

### **LARRIKIN FROM AFFLUENT FAMILY: HOW HE ENDED UP IN WA**

One of the mysteries surrounding Bernard Alston was how he finished up in Western Australia when he came from a well-to-do family in Alexandra, in the foothills of the Victorian high country.

The reason, according to his granddaughter Sharon Cooper, was the family had been involved with mining and Bernard went west to join his brother who was working in a mine. Ms Cooper refers to him as “a larrikin of a sort” and the family was able to identify him in Cheops’ image by his demeanour - his ‘jaunty look’ - and the family resemblance.

Bernard became a POW after he stumbled in to a German trench at Mouquet Farm while trying to help a wounded mate back to safety. But Bernard had tuberculosis and he was part of a prisoner swap that meant he spent some of the war in Switzerland. Back in England, he married an English girl and returned to Australia but was plagued by what we would now call PTSD. He kept a gun under his pillow, struggled with drink and battled to keep a job. In the end though, he and the family found peace on a hobby farm at Red Hill in Victoria. The years of TB wore him down and Bernard died, aged just 64.



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#### **NEXT OF KIN IN NSW: ARE YOU RELATED TO THEM?**

While no new identifications have been made from NSW since August, at least five men are thought to have links to the state - can you help find them?

It is believed 2nd Lt Arthur Bird Brook (not pictured), 2nd Lt William George Hastings, Private Rupert James Sparrow, Lance Corporal Walter William Paterson and Bugler, Private Albert Durham Thrush took part in the photo. Each enlisted with next of kin located in NSW.

Brook, from Murrurundi, was wounded at Cordonniere in France in May 1916, believed to be buried up to his neck. He was freed when supporting troops arrived on the scene some time later. He was returned to Australia in July 1917 and died in 1934.

Hastings, from Gosford, was killed in action by a bullet or shrapnel through the heart at Poziers in July 1916 and is buried at Villers-Brettonneux Memorial in France.



Paterson suffered rheumatic fever and was returned to Australia in September 1915 and discharged in November that year.

Not much is known of Sparrow, from Broken Hill, or Thrush, from Redfern.

Sparrow is buried at the Lone Pine Memorial at Gallipoli and Thrush, who was B Company's bugler, was injured in 1915 and returned to Australia.



A changed man ... Randal Hodgson with a wedding day picture of grandparents Frank and Caroline Hodgson. Picture: Ross Marsden.

### **GALLIPOLI LANDING THE WORST DAY IN WAR: FRANK'S STORY**

Randal Hodgson's grandfather [Private Frank Hodgson](#) used to tell his family the Gallipoli landing was his worst day in five years of war.

Frank, who was in the 11th Battalion, was part of the first group on the beach and his job was to unload supplies. He said the landing was relatively easy because the Turks were slow to react. But their machine guns soon started and soldiers were being cut down all around him.

Despite the hail of gunfire, Frank said everyone continued in their roles.

Frank was the victim of a mustard gas attack towards the end of the war and by the time he got back to his wife, he was a changed man.

Mr Hodgson, of Launceston, said his uncle and father described Frank as a very hard man who hardly ever talked about the war.

“He made Dad and Uncle sleep on the porch every night to toughen them up in case anything like it happened again,” Mr Hodgson said.