

Anzac uniforms functional but heavy

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Australia's World War I soldiers went to war weighed down by almost 30 kilograms of clothes, weapons, tools and kit.

The initial contingent of 20,000 Australian soldiers who sailed out on November 1, 1914 and who landed in Egypt (and later went to Gallipoli), were dressed in uniforms that were, in general, designed to be comfortable and serviceable, from their famous slouch hats right down to their lace-up boots.

The uniform varied between mounted troops and other soldiers, and between officers and other ranks. (The Light Horse, for instance, wore leather leggings rather than puttees - long strips of fabric wrapped around each leg).

Here's how a typical soldier in the infantry was kitted out - although, as time passed on Gallipoli, the men played a bit fast and loose with the uniform:

Slouch hat: The iconic fur-felt hat, with chinstrap and brim turned up on the left side, had a khaki hatband and a large Rising Sun badge (the latter's proper name was the Australian Army General Service Badge).

Cap: Soldiers were also issued with the felt British Service cap, onto which would be pinned a small Rising Sun badge. Many of the Australians who landed on Anzac were wearing this rather than a slouch hat.

Tunic: This loose-fitting khaki woollen jacket, with buttons, four baggy pockets on the front (plus an inside pocket to carry a field dressing), had a double-pleat on the back for warmth.

Badges: A King's Crown rising-sun badge went on the end of each collar on the tunic. Two "Australia" shoulder titles were pinned at the end of the epaulettes. At the start of the war, a metal badge spelling out the soldier's unit would go just above the "Australia" badge, but shortly before Anzac these were replaced by a cloth patch denoting the soldier's unit that was sewn onto the upper sleeve. (Each battalion had a different colour patch.)

Badges indicating rank were worn on the tunic: officers would wear them on their shoulders, while warrant officers and NCOs wore theirs on their right sleeve.

Breeches: made from khaki woollen cord fabric, with side pockets and button flies. Soldiers were issued with two pairs of breeches, plus a pair of dungarees. The breeches ended above the ankles and the gap was filled with puttees.

Braces: worn with breeches.

Puttees: The men wound these strips of woollen cloth, almost three metres long, upwards from the ankle to just below the knee. Soldiers disliked the puttees, probably with good reason: the tight binding restricted circulation and might even have contributed to the high incidence of trench foot. Mounted troops wore leather leggings.

Shirt: Soldiers were given two grey, collarless, flannel shirt, plus a military shirt.

Ankle boots: brown and lace-up.

Socks: Made from wool or cotton. Soldiers were issued with three pairs.

Greatcoat: the khaki woollen coat (which weighed about 3kg) often doubled as a soldier's bedding and was his chief protection against the cold and wet. The coat came into its own when snow hit Gallipoli in November 1915 and also on the Western Front.

- Jersey

- Singlets: Soldiers were issued with 2 woollen singlets.

- Cotton "drawers" (underpants): Soldiers were issued with two pairs.

- Abdominal belts: a sort of cummerbund that was issued to keep soldiers warm and supposedly ward off disease.

- Backpacks and webbing: The main backpack was a rectangular sack measuring about 15 inches x 13 inches, closed at the top by a folding cover secured by two straps. The webbing included a web belt, cartridge pouches, small haversack, bayonet frog, an entrenching tool holder (plus another holder for its handle), and a water-bottle holder.

- Identity disc: Soldiers were initially issued with one medal "dog tag" on a cord, but later in the war they were given two tags, made of compressed fibre.

Soldiers were also issued with a "housewife" - a sewing kit containing such items as needles, thimble, thread, wool and button so they could carry out running repairs.

Also in their kit were a short-magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifle, a rifle sling, a bayonet and scabbard, and an "entrenching tool" (they were "diggers" after all). This came in two parts, with the helve (handle) separate from the spade part.

Soldiers were issued with eating equipment (knife, fork, spoon, an enamel mug, water bottle (with two-point capacity), and a mess tin with carrier.

They also had a clasp knife (with marlin spike, tin-opener and lanyard), razor, shaving kit, soap, comb, two towels, field dressing (carried in the tunic's inside pocket), and a hold-all, in which they could pack their private possessions.

No item was probably looked after more carefully than their service pay book: privates were paid six shillings a week.

Later in the war soldiers were issued with other items, especially as fighting on the Western Front dragged on and gas became a serious threat.

The men on Gallipoli had little head protection, but from 1916 to 1918 Australian troops got the standard British-issue steel helmet.

Gas masks of various types were also issued on the Western Front as were gas/rain capes from late 1917, to keep off the damp and to protect from the corrosive effects of gas attacks.