



## Special Collections

### Research Guide – World War I Diaries

This guide is an introduction to UNSW Special Collections collection of World War I Diaries. These unique military records were digitised in collaboration with the State Library of New South Wales for the Anzac Centenary 2014-2018.

The diaries reflect the experiences of Australian soldiers who served at Gallipoli, and on the battlefields on the Western Front. Of special interest are the Gallipoli diaries of father and son, Colonel Alfred and Sir General Vernon Sturdee, who recorded their experiences from separate battle posts, and were occasionally in contact with each other.

It is a selective list of resources to get you started – you can search for other manuscripts using our [Finding Aid Index](#) and for rare books in the [SearchGateway](#) (refine your search results by Collection > Special Collections to identify rare books).

If you would like to view Special Collections material or have any questions, please submit your enquiry via the Contact Us [online enquiry form](#) and we will be happy to help you.

Please refer to the [Special Collections](#) website for further information.

### World War I Diaries in Special Collections: Quick Links

For further information please see the detailed entries following this table:

MANUSCRIPT NUMBER/TITLE	DESCRIPTION	DIGITISED VERSION
Full set of Special Collections digitised WWI Diaries	All collections listed in this table	<a href="#">UNSW Canberra-Archives</a>
<a href="#">MSS 64</a> – William Hilton Saunders	Enlisted at the Gilgandra Coo-ee march at Wongarbon 1915, served as a driver in France with the 4th Division Ammunition Column until 1918	Full set: <a href="#">Diaries 1-5</a> <a href="#">Diary 1</a> : Feb 1916–2 Jan 1917 <a href="#">Diary 2</a> : 1 Jan 1917–24 Oct 1917 <a href="#">Diary 3</a> : 1 Jan 1918–31 Dec 1918 <a href="#">Diary 4</a> : 18 Feb 1919–8 Jul 1919 <a href="#">Diary 5</a> : 1916–1919 address book with poetry
<a href="#">MSS 140</a> – Major Arthur Leeman Fulton	Died in France 7 August 1916 at Pozieres, whilst in charge of B Company, 47th Battalion	<a href="#">Diary</a> : 1 January–6 August 1916

MANUSCRIPT NUMBER/TITLE	DESCRIPTION	DIGITISED VERSION
<a href="#">MSS 183</a> – Sir General Vernon Ashton Sturdee and his father Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee	Father and son who landed at Gallipoli together 25 April 1915 and were there until the evacuation and survived the war	Full set: <a href="#">4 diaries</a> <a href="#">Alfred Hobart Sturdee</a> <a href="#">Diary</a> : 8 Aug 1914–25 Feb 1918 <a href="#">Vernon Ashton Sturdee</a> <a href="#">Diary 1</a> : 25 April 1915–2 July 1915 <a href="#">Diary 2</a> : 3 September–31 December 1915 <a href="#">Diary 3</a> : 22 September 1915–23 January 1916
<a href="#">MSS 354</a> – George Hugh Morrison	Died 1917, Western Front at Passchendaele, age 21 whilst serving with D Company, 45 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Full set: <a href="#">Diaries 1-2</a> <a href="#">Diary 1</a> : 15 Jan 1916–1 Jan 1917 <a href="#">Diary 2</a> : 1 Jan 1917–9 Oct 1917
<a href="#">MSS 364</a> – Willie Neville Majoribanks Chester	Served with the 2nd Field Ambulance, Australian Army Medical Corps in France and Belgium, 1916–1918	<a href="#">Diary</a> : 5 Nov 1915–22 Dec 1918

## Special Collections World War I Diaries: Introduction

For the 2014–2018 [Anzac Centenary](#), UNSW Canberra Special Collections partnered with the State Library of New South Wales to digitise and make our World War I diaries more accessible to researchers. The diaries reflect the experiences of Australian servicemen, nurses and civilians during the First World War.

These are accessible online through the [State Library of New South Wales](#) catalogue. The State Library's extensive [World War I Diary Digitisation Program](#) includes a collection comprising approximately 2,000 diaries. Special Collections holds 13 diaries belonging to six different individuals from five manuscript collections. They give individual insights into experiences at both Gallipoli and on the Western Front. These pocket-sized 'appointment diaries' usually came with a stub pencil. Soldiers recorded what was perhaps the most significant experiences of their lives in them, often writing words from their last days in the trenches.

Some of the most notable diaries held are those of Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, a doctor on a hospital ship and his son, Captain Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee. Their diaries record that they both arrived in Gallipoli on separate ships a few days before the landing on 25 April 1915. Remarkably they both survived and also remained until the final withdrawal, except for a brief period when they were evacuated due to serious illness. They were able to meet up and visit each other during their time in Gallipoli, which they mentioned in their respective diaries. These are the only known diaries to capture the entire Gallipoli experience.

Tragically, other soldiers who fought in the trenches on the Western Front were not so fortunate. The harrowing last entry of General Arthur Fulton reads 5 August 1916: *"Arrived in trench 7pm. Rotten night. Shelled like hell all night with H.E. Only 2 men killed fortunately. Absolute Hell."* Arthur died the next day in France.

George Hugh Morrison also died in Belgium, aged only 21, and only a year after his older brother aged 26 died in France. The relative who donated Morrison's diary to us said: *"I am donating this to you so that all cadets in training should become aware of the full horrors of war. I hope his diary is of some use in educating them firsthand"*.

Special Collections World War I diarists:

- William Hilton Saunders, who enlisted at the Coo-ee march in Wongarbron 1915
- Major Arthur Leeman Fulton, who died in France 7 August 1916
- Sir General Vernon Ashton and his father Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, who landed at Gallipoli together 25 April 1915 and were there until the evacuation and both survived the war
- George Hugh Morrison, who died on the western front in Belgium in 1917 age 21 (a year after his older brother age 26 died in France)
- Willie Neville Majoribanks Chester

## Digital links

You can find out more and view the digitised diaries and via these links:

Wikipedia List of Australian diarists of World War I

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Australian\\_diarists\\_of\\_World\\_War\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Australian_diarists_of_World_War_I)

State Library of New South Wales WWI Collection and transcription of digitised diaries: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/wwi/>

State Library of New South Wales Manuscript Catalogue – 2000 digitised WWI diaries: <http://www.acmssearch.sl.nsw.gov.au/s/search.html?collection=slnsw>

## World War I Diaries: Detailed Descriptions

### [MSS 64](#) - William Hilton Saunders

William Hilton Saunders: Regimental number 4901

William Hilton Saunders was born on 2 August 1894 at Goodooga, NSW. His father was E J Saunders living at Wongarbron, NSW. He enlisted at Wongarbron at the age of 21 on 15 October 1915 when the Coo-ee recruitment march came through the town. After four months of training at the Liverpool camp he embarked on 8 March 1916 on HMAT A15 Star of England as the 15th Reinforcements for the 13th Battalion, disembarking at Egypt.

In June 1916, Saunders moved from Egypt to France, where he served as a Driver until 1918 with the 4th Division Ammunition Column. He returned to Australia on the 12 May 1919. After the war, he bought a butcher's shop with a bakery attached and then sold out and went shearing. In 1930 during the depression, he bought a mixed business in Sydney. More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [William Hilton Saunders](#).

The William Hilton Saunders collection (MSS064) relates to his World War I service and comprises 4 diaries (1916-1919), badges, newspaper cuttings, correspondence, cards, ration books, leave pass, photographs and memorabilia relating to William Hilton Saunders' First World War service in France, together with newspaper cuttings relating to the Gilgandra Co-ees. His diaries describe training in Egypt; leave in England; and serving in different campaigns in France.

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of William Hilton Saunders](#)

Digitised Diaries:

Full set: [Diaries 1-5](#)

[Diary 1](#): February 1916–2 January 1917

[Diary 2](#): 1 January 1917–24 October 1917

[Diary 3](#): 1 January 1918–31 December 1918

[Diary 4](#): 18 February 1919–8 July 1919

[Diary 5](#): 1916–1919 address book with poetry

### **[MSS 140](#) - Major Arthur Leeman Fulton**

Arthur Leeman Fulton. Regimental number - unknown

Arthur Leeman Fulton was living at 12 Pilgrim Street, Footscray, Victoria with his mother M Fulton when he enlisted in 1914. His unit embarked from Sydney, New South Wales, on board Transport A31 Ajana on 19 December 1914. Arthur died in France in action 7 August 1916. More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [Arthur Leeman Fulton](#).

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of Arthur Leeman Fulton](#)

Digitised Diary:

[Diary](#): 1 January–6 August 1916

### **[MSS 183](#) - Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee**

Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee. Regimental number unknown (1863–1939)

Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee was born on 6 May 1863 in Southsea, England and came from a family with strong Royal Navy ties. He was disappointed at not being able to join the Navy because of a minor finger disability and instead became a doctor and then a surgeon. He was the ship doctor on a voyage to Australia in the 1880s. Sturdee settled in Victoria and established a successful private medical and surgical practice. He served in the Boer war and then enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps in January 1905. Sturdee was on the first hospital ship for the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915 and converted all decks into operating theatres. His son Sir General Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee was also serving in Gallipoli at the same time. They arrived in different ships on 24 April 1915 and both remained at Gallipoli until the final evacuation in 1916. They both survived World War I. Alfred died on 19 June 1939, age 76 in Melbourne.

More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [Alfred Hobart Sturdee](#).

The Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee collection (MSS183) is predominantly that of his son Sir General Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee. It includes both of their World War I diaries. Photographs include Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, AIF with his brother Vice-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee, RN, aboard flagship HMS Hercules at Scapa Flow, UK, on December 1916; Captain R.V. Cutler, outside dugouts at Shrapnel Gully Anzac, October 1915; and Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, AIF, 1915.

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee](#).

Digitised Diary:

[Diary](#): 8 August 1914–25 February 1918

### **[MSS 183](#) - Sir General Vernon Ashton Sturdee**

Sir General Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee. Regimental number unknown (1890–1966)

Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee, KBE, CB, CBE, DSO, was born on 16 April 1890 in Frankston, Victoria. He was the son of Alfred Hobart Sturdee, who commanded the 2nd Field Ambulance, Australian Imperial Force, at Gallipoli. He was the nephew of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Frederick Charles Doveton Sturdee, Royal Navy and Sir Charles Merrett. Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee had a distinguished career in both the first and second World Wars.

Sturdee was educated at Church of England Grammar School, Melbourne. He was commissioned in 1908, and on 1 February 1911 was appointed lieutenant on probation, Royal Australian Engineers, Permanent Military Forces. The following year he was posted to Brisbane for staff duties in the 1st Military District.

In March 1913 Sturdee was posted back to Melbourne. Transferring to the A.I.F. on 25 August 1914, he was promoted captain in October. He embarked for Egypt on board HMAT A3 Orvieto on 25 April 1915, and landing at Gallipoli as adjutant, 1st Divisional Engineers. Suffering from influenza, Sturdee was evacuated in July, but returned in September as a major, commanding the 5th Field Company, 2nd Divisional Engineers. For the next three months he controlled the engineering and mining work at Steele's, Quinn's and Courtney's posts. From January 1916 he supervised the building of huts at Tel el Kebir camp, Egypt. After the 5th Division was raised, his field company was transferred to that formation and renumbered the 8th. In March he took charge of the construction of defenses at Ferry Post.

Sturdee was sent to France in June 1916, and acted as Commander, Royal Engineers, Franks Force, in September-October, and led a party which repaired the road between Albert and Montauban in November. For his work in 1915–1916 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. On 13 February 1917 Sturdee was promoted temporary lieutenant colonel and given command of the 4th Pioneer Battalion. Over the next nine months the unit maintained roads, constructed camps, laid cables and dug communication trenches.

In November 1917 Sturdee was appointed commander, Royal Australian Engineers, 5th Division. In what was an exceptional case for an officer from the dominions, he was seconded in March 1918 to British General Headquarters, France, as a general staff officer, 2nd grade. The secondment gave him invaluable experience and an insight into the conduct of large-scale operations. Returning to the 5th Division in October, he sailed for Australia next month and disembarked in Sydney in January 1919. He was appointed OBE (1919) and twice mentioned in dispatches for his service in World War I.

After Sturdee's A.I.F. appointment terminated on 14 March, he carried out staff duties in Melbourne. In 1922–1923 he completed the course at the Staff College, Quetta, India. He spent a year as an instructor in engineering and surveying at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in the Federal Capital Territory. This was followed by a term (from 1925) on the staff of the 4th Division. Sturdee was sent to London in May 1929, where he served on exchange at the War Office with the Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence, attended the Imperial Defence College in 1931 and then held the post of military representative at the Australian High Commission.

Home once more in February 1933, Sturdee was appointed director of military operations and intelligence at Army Headquarters, Melbourne. In May 1935 he was given the added duties of assistant-secretary (military) to the Council of Defence. Two months later he was promoted brevet colonel (substantive July 1937). Sturdee was primarily concerned with the operational aspects of plans to mobilise forces to defend Australia and raise other formations to serve overseas. In March 1938 he became the inaugural director of staff duties. He was appointed CBE in 1939. At the request of the Australian government a British officer, Lieutenant-General E. K. Squires, reviewed the Australian Military Forces in 1938–1939. Sturdee supported his proposals for reform.

Following the outbreak of World War II, Squires (then chief of the General Staff) promoted Sturdee to temporary lieutenant general in September 1939 and head of the new Eastern Command, Sydney, from 13 October. In the following month, Sturdee was also given the duties of commander, 2nd Military District. He took charge of raising, accommodating, training and equipping A.I.F. units in NSW at the same time as he prepared local defenses. On 1 July 1940 he readily accepted a demotion to major general on his appointment as commander of the 8th Division. His pleasure in having been given an operational command was brief. Squires died in March and his successor as C.G.S., Sir Brudenell White, was killed in an airplane crash on 13 August. Seventeen days later Sturdee was promoted lieutenant general and appointed C.G.S., first military member of the Military Board and head of the Australian Section of the Imperial General Staff. Sturdee was appointed C.B. in 1943.

In March 1944, Sturdee took command of the First Australian Army. At a ceremony on board H.M.S. *Glory* at Rabaul, New Britain, on 6 September 1945, he accepted the surrender of Japanese forces in his area. Blamey recommended him for a knighthood, and he was mentioned in despatches for his services in the South-West Pacific.

On 1 December 1945, Sturdee was appointed Acting Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces, based in Melbourne. Four months later he resumed the duties of C.G.S., first military member of the Military Board and chief of the Australian Section of the Imperial General Staff. He had to oversee the repatriation and demobilisation of the wartime army, and organise the Australian contingent for service with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, Japan. Sturdee was also responsible for the establishment of the Australian Regular Army and of the reconstituted Citizen Military Forces. To meet future requirements of the armed services, he strongly supported efforts to retain the industrial capacity that Australia had developed during the war.

On 17 April 1950 he was placed on the Retired List. In 1951 he was appointed KBE. Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee died on 25 May 1966 at the Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, Victoria.

More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee](#).

The Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee collection (MSS183) relates to his World War I service, comprising two notebooks and a correspondence book written by Captain (later Major) Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee during his World War I service at Gallipoli in 1915. The collection includes a notebook of his father's—Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee—who also served at Gallipoli with his son. There is a précis of Vernon Sturdee's notebooks prepared by Brigadier K.R. Colwill outlining the significance of his



Gallipoli service in light of his later military achievements. Also included are two ink sketches of landing plans for Kapa Tepe and Cape Helles coast line, and photographs of Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, AIF with his brother Vice-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee, RN, aboard flagship HMS Hercules, at Scapa Flow, U.K., December 1916; Captain R.V. Cutler, outside dugouts at Shrapnel Gully Anzac, October 1915; and Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee, AIF, 1915.

The notebooks made during the Gallipoli campaign, in 1915, provide a fascinating and rare insight into the character of the writers. Personal notes about the authors are scarce in these books; their notes concern primarily the duties they were performing. Vernon Sturdee burnt most of his private papers. Colonel Alfred Hobart Sturdee and his son, Captain Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee both served on Gallipoli from the landing on 25 April 1915, until the final evacuation, except for a period when they were evacuated due to serious illness.

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee.](#)

Digitised Diaries:

[Diary 1](#): 25 April 1915–2 July 1915

[Diary 2](#): 3 September–31 December 1915

[Diary 3](#): 22 September 1915–23 January 1916

Full set of Sturdee father/son diaries: [4 diaries](#)

### **[MSS 354](#) - George Hugh Morrison**

George Hugh Morrison. Regimental number 1668

George Hugh Morrison was born in Mendooran, NSW. He worked as a farm labourer in Granchester Mendooran, NSW with his older brother Thomas William. He enlisted on 15 January 1916 a month before Thomas. His father was Andrew Roger Morrison and his mother Mrs Mary Elizabeth Morrison. His unit embarked from Sydney, New South Wales, on board HMAT A40 Ceramic on 14 April 1916. He was killed in action in Belgium on 10 October 1917, aged 21.

More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [George Hugh Morrison.](#)

The Raymond Morrison collection (MSS 354) relates to his World War I service and comprises a diary, letters and his official photograph.

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of Raymond Morrison.](#)

Digitised Diaries:

Full set: [Diaries 1-2](#)

[Diary 1](#): 15 January 1916–1 January 1917

[Diary 2](#): 1 January 1917–9 October 1917

## **MSS 364 - Willie Neville Majoribanks Chester**

Willie Neville Majoribanks Chester. Regimental number 13753

Willie Neville Majoribank Chester was born in Papua New Guinea and served as a Private in the Australian Army Medical Corps, Special Reinforcements, from 29 November 1915 to 10 June 1919. Chester enlisted at the Town Hall in Sydney NSW on the 28 August 1915 and entered Holsworthy Camp in NSW on 28 September 1915 in DCoy, 9th Battalion. He transferred to the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) on 29 November 1915. He embarked from Sydney aboard HMAT A61 Kanowna on 29 March 1916 and disembarked in Egypt on 7 May 1916. He left Egypt on 29 May 1916, for England, disembarking on 11 June 1916 at Plymouth. He departed from Folkestone on the Princess Victoria on 16 July 1916, and arrived at Boulogne, France on 16 July 1916.

Chester served with the 2nd Field Ambulance, Australian Army Medical Corps in France and Belgium from 1916–1918. He returned to Australia on the 10 June 1919. More details on his military service in the AIF Database: [Willie Neville Majoribank Chester](#).

The Willie Neville Majoribank Chester collection (MSS 364) relates to his World War I service and comprises a diary kept during the First World War by Willie Chester, together with notes and addresses, 15 November 1915–22 December 1918.

Finding Aid with more detail on collection contents: [Guide to the Papers of Willie Neville Majoribank Chester](#).

[Digitised Diary](#): Diary 1: 5 November 1915–22 December 1918

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