To the letter

On Monday, April 25, commemorative services will be held all over Australia to remember and acknowledge the service and sacrifice of the young men who joined the armed forces in all wars and conflicts. Anzac Day was officially named on April 25, 1916. Ceremonies were held in Australia and over 2000 Australian and New Zealand servicemen marched through the streets of London; a London newspaper called them "the knights of Gallipoli". 

Hundreds of young men from the Riverina joined the Australian Expeditionary Forces and sailed for Europe with pride and hope. Families feared for their husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, uncles and friends and were grateful for any letters they received from them, as a symbol of their loved ones safety. 

Many of these letters were published in Wagga's The Daily Advertiser; excerpts of just a few follow here:

Published November 28, 1914 - George Cowell, W Jones, T Douglas (June) and Reginald Tournel, formerly of Wagga were training together in Sydney. George Cowell stated: "I am aboard the SS Suffolk, at Albany, lying anchor waiting arrival of the remaining troop ships to form our fleet, looking around the harbour you can count 24 boats, all conveying boys of the Bulldog breed and there are about 15 or 16 boats still to come... So far it is all like a holiday, quite different to what we had for a few weeks in Sydney. It was hard, very hard, training from morning till night. I tell you it was no joke marching nine to ten miles without a stop with our full kit up (about 70lbs) before lunch... Kind regards to Wagga friends from all the boys. I hope we get a chance of popping a few Germans off."

Published June 25, 1915 - Mr and Mrs WJ Hamilton of Forry Street received a letter from their son from the firing line. 

Private Leslie Hamilton: "We have been here a fortnight next Sunday and the battle is still going strong. I think the best way to describe the first week would be to say we paid hell a visit for that period. I have a fairly imaginative mind, but I do not think I could concoct stories of hair-breath escapes to come up to those which we passed through in reality. I think our boys have proved themselves heroes, and I think their doings will hold a prominent place in modern history. The boys are all in great spirit, and there is not any doubt as to our ultimate success."

Published August 9, 1916 - "Writing from Egypt, Mr Donald Smith, until recently a member of the commercial staff of The Daily Advertiser mentions that he is doing well, and looking forward to a shortly expected go at the Turks. Mr Smith joined the Mounted Rifles in New South Wales, and his company has only recently arrived in Egypt."