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## Friends in Crisis: Anzacs and Hellenism

### Abstract

Across numerous conflicts in the first half of the 20th century, Australians and New Zealanders were at the side of Hellenism: World War One, the Asia Minor Campaign (1919-1922), and the relief efforts after the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. Beyond their battlefield record, these Anzacs and others from the Antipodes provided substantial practical and moral support for a people going through successive major crises.

2014 marked the Centenary of the outbreak of World War One, and the commencement of four years of commemorative activity to mark a series of centenaries related to Australia and the Great War. Across numerous conflicts in the first half of the 20th century, Australians and New Zealanders were at the side of Hellenism: World War One, the Asia Minor Campaign (1919-1922), and the relief efforts after the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. Beyond their battlefield record, these Anzacs and others from the Antipodes provided substantial practical and moral support for a people going through successive major crises. The crises that conflict triggered within Hellenism present some stark parallels with the Crisis within the Hellenic Republic since 2010, and some lessons unlearned.

With a pro-British elected Prime Minister (Eleutherios Venizelos) and a pro-German monarch (King Konstantinos), the Hellenic Kingdom spent the years of World War One mired in a deep political and social crisis,

following the triumphs of the Balkans Wars of October 1912-February 1913. The ideological and strategic chasm between the two men was a major contributing factor to the loss of millions of lives in the Genocide of the Hellenes as well as the loss of territories in Thrace and Anatolia promised to the Hellenic state by the victorious Entente powers. Just as the crisis which has wracked the Hellenic state since 2010, the period 1916-1926 was as much about social and economic strategies as it was about political ideologies.

Throughout the period, Australians and New Zealanders sacrificed time, effort, money, property and, sometimes, their very lives, in order to reach out to people on the other side of the world who were in desperate need. Their experiences provide a very different perspective on the tradition of Australian humanitarianism and the historiography of Hellenism in crisis.

The response to footage of natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004 is a recent example of Antipodean generosity to human beings in need. The inhabitants of *Terra Australis* (the 'Great South Land') and *Aotearoa* (the Land of the Long, White Cloud) were disproportionately generous. The stories of individual Australians and New Zealanders provide powerful testament to the ability of individuals to change the course of history. The involvement of Anzacs, their families and associates 'un-frame' Hellenic history by re-integrating it into its international context.

From 1914 the authorities in the Ottoman Turkish Empire implemented a plan of unprecedented forced demographic change. Known today as the Genocides of the Hellenes, Armenians and Assyrians, the plan called for the physical elimination of the indigenous non-Muslim populations of the Empire as the only means of securing their state's territorial integrity.

## Context

At the 1911 Congress of the governing Committee of Union and Progress, chaired by Talaat Pasha, one of the Party's chief ideologues, Dr Behaeddin Sakir declared that:

*[t]he nations that remain from the old times in our empire are akin to foreign and harmful weeds that must be uprooted. To clear our land...*<sup>1</sup>

International reaction was immediate to what British Secretary of the Admiralty Winston Churchill labelled an 'administrative holocaust.'<sup>2</sup>

Relief committees sprang up all over the world. A Joint Allied Declaration, issued 24 May 1915, stated:

*In view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization, the Allied governments announce publicly ... that they will hold personally responsible ... all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres.*<sup>3</sup>

Anzacs and tens of thousands of other Allied servicemen, captured on the battlefields of the Near East, became eyewitnesses to the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. In his diary of 18 August 1915, Able-Seaman John Harrison Wheat, a crewman of the *HMAS AE2*, wrote:

*All the Armenians are driven from the town [of Akroinos, modern Afyonkarahissar, in western Anatolia]. The principle [sic] cause of this is the Armenians are Christians and all the business of the town is carried on by them. There is a very strong feeling against the Christians in this Country. At this time, thousands of Armenians were turned out of these big towns to starve and thousands were massacred.*<sup>4</sup>

A small number of Anzacs became rescuers, saving the lives of those who had survived the massacres and deportations. Most famous of these are the men of the Dunsterforce. Australian officers in this unit, including Captains R.H. Hooper, Andre Judge and Stanley Savige, have left a legacy of written and photographic records of their rescue of some 40,000 Assyrians and Armenians in the summer of 1918.<sup>5</sup>

The 1919 Report of the Commission on Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties concluded that the Ottoman Empire's treatment of Armenians in its territory contravened 'the established laws and customs of war and the elementary laws of humanity', and declared that Ottoman officials accused of such acts were liable for prosecution.<sup>6</sup>

The response of the Hellenic state was to protest long and loud. The pre-occupation was with events unfolding in Macedonia, not in the East. As the Franco-British *Armée d'Orient* extended its control in Macedonia, friction increased between itself and the authorities in Athens. A key player in this crisis was the Allied Commander-in-Chief Maurice Sarrail (1856-1929), succeeded in December 1917 by Marie-Louis-Adolphe Guillaumat (1863-1940) and in June 1918 by Louis Franchet d'Espèrey (1856-1942).

Sarrail secured the withdrawal of Hellenic forces from Thessalonike, restricted the powers and functions of the Hellenic authorities and proceeded to arrest and deport Central Power consuls and subjects from the city. In practice, Hellenic sovereignty in the region and the country's neutrality were abolished.

In short, while Armenians, Assyrians and Hellenes were being slaughtered by the thousand in Anatolia and neighbouring regions, the struggle between the pro-German monarch and the pro-British politician preoccupied society within the Hellenic Kingdom until the decisive intervention of the French military in June 1917. Survivors who reached Hellenic-ruled territory were effectively abandoned and forced to fend for themselves.

In response to the needs of destitute survivors scattered across the Near East, the Armenian Relief Fund and Save the Children Fund emerged in Sydney and Melbourne between 1915 and 1919. The first chairperson of this combined humanitarian agency was Professor Meredith Atkinson, previously director of tutorial classes at the University of Melbourne. His colleague, Classics Professor Alexander Leeper, served as vice-chairman.<sup>7</sup>

Similar groups emerged across the globe. In June 1916, the Lord Mayor of London wrote to his counterpart in Sydney 'with the hope that you might support us by raising funds, in whichever way you consider best'. The approach from London was inspired because 'we have had so many individual donations from your town'. The stated aim of the Fund was 'for the Restoration of the Armenians to their lands, in towns and villages where the Russians have made it feasible and safe'. The needs of the war were considered a priority and so the proposal was on hold until the successful conclusion of the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

The Armistice came into force on 11 November 1918. Only weeks later, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, J. Joynton Smith, called a public meeting for Thursday 12 December. The purpose was to form 'a Committee to raise Funds for the relief of the suffering Armenian', Hellenic and Assyrian genocide survivors.<sup>9</sup> The meeting was duly held and a resolution forming the committee under the patronage of the Lord Mayor was adopted. From the outset, the Fund's work was concentrated on the survivors scattered around Syria and Greece. Before the formation of the League of Nations, Australians were deeply involved in what may be described as the world's

first international humanitarian relief effort. This involvement deepened and broadened once the League emerged.

Along with the emergence of international humanitarianism, one of the more positive consequences of the devastation of World War One was the formation of the League of Nations in 1919. Its Covenant stated that its primary goals included preventing war through collective security, disarmament, and settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. Protection of minorities and just treatment of indigenous peoples were also important fields of interest.<sup>10</sup>

One of the League's strongest advocates in the Antipodes was Henry Darnley Naylor, a classicist and proponent of collective international security.<sup>11</sup> Founder of the League of Nations' Union in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, Naylor was also a member of the combined Armenian Relief Fund – Save the Children Fund.

In May 1923, an important address titled 'League of Nations: What it is and What it does' was presented by Prime Minister Stanley M. Bruce to a League of Nations Union of Western Australia. 'Touching upon some of the more important achievements of the League', Bruce cited 'the repatriation of 350,000 Russian prisoners, and of large numbers of Greek and Armenian women held in Turkey'.<sup>12</sup>

The effort on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian, Hellenic and Assyrian Genocides was unique and unprecedented. It involved a coordinated effort by people and organisations all over the globe; efforts in which Australia and Australians played pivotal roles. Writing in *The Story of Near East Relief*, James L. Barton<sup>13</sup> recorded that the Save the Children Fund, the League of Nations, the American Women's Hospitals, the Friends of Greece and the Fatherless Children of Greece Committee were only a few of the diverse groups involved in humanitarian efforts in support of the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides from as early as January 1914.<sup>14</sup> In September 1923 the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, Norwegian Dr Fridtjof Nansen:

*... once more paid a very warm tribute to the magnificent efforts made by the Near East Relief, the All-British Appeal and the 'Save the Children' Fund ... Slowly but surely the Near East Relief and the League of Nations' machinery under Mr Childs have surmounted this great task. His procedure has been admirable.*<sup>15</sup>

The Australian merchant vessel *Hobson's Bay* was a key part of the 'machinery' Nansen referred to. It made a number of voyages to the eastern Mediterranean, laden with relief supplies donated by Australians to the Near East Relief (NER). Rev. Dr Loyal Lincoln Wirt, an American Congregational minister and the International Commissioner of the NER, described one such shipment. With half the original cargo left with the Australasian Orphanage at Antelias, Syria (now in the northern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon), the *Hobson's Bay* proceeded to Constantinople (modern Istanbul). They were immediately met by the local NER Director, Dr Jacquith. As Wirt later recalled, Jacquith said:

*Do you remember St. Paul's vision and the cry from Macedonia, 'Come over and help us'? You are no saint and probably do not resemble St. Paul in the least – except perhaps in stature – but here is a message for you. It came in the same way St. Paul's did – by wireless. And he handed me a radiogram. It was indeed the same cry.*

The radiogram was from a NER post at Alexandroupolis in western Thrace: 'Ten thousand people driven from Eastern Thrace are here, starving to death. They have been overlooked in the food distribution. Some are dead, many are dying. Can you send flour?' Jacquith informed his colleague that the local NER had already 'stripped our warehouses and taken from our orphans to provide for the new outbreak at Smyrna. Have you brought anything that can be used in this emergency in Macedonia?'

Wirt responded positively, for the *Hobson's Bay* still had 4,000 bags of Australian flour stowed away, 'given for the express purpose of meeting some such emergency'. As Wirt later recorded: 'Time was precious; moments meant lives.' Within a few hours, the flour had been transferred to a steamer and was on its way.

*It passed tragic Gallipoli, where many brave Anzacs from Australia and New Zealand had laid down their young lives, face to the foe. And now the unhappy victims of this same foe were to be fed with bread from their homeland, as if to complete the work for which they died. Anzac bread!*<sup>16</sup>

This anecdote highlights two key factors of the story of the relief efforts on behalf of the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides. First, the direct association with Gallipoli, something so pronounced that even Americans were commenting on the relationship between the

Genocide survivors and the Anzacs. Secondly, the regular reference to the Christian faith, arguably the main element that bound the survivors and their rescuers.

These factors are also very pronounced in Australian media reports on the relief efforts, as well as on the cooperation between the various Australian agencies involved in Armenian, Hellenic and Assyrian relief efforts. During a speech delivered at a League assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 1924, Mrs. Allen referred to 'the women of Australia': having started a fund for the women and children refugees of the Near East, are the members of the Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund, 279 George Street, Sydney. Lady David, Lady Sulman, Miss Jessie Webb, M.A., of Melbourne, and Mrs. Ernest Bryce, are at the head of this movement, and are working in conjunction with members of the League of Nations Union.<sup>17</sup>

At the following year's general assembly of the League of Nations, a substitute delegate, Mrs Eleanor Vokes Irby MacKinnon, was invited to speak from the tribune. Better known as the foundation secretary of the Australian Red Cross Society, the subject of MacKinnon's address was her work in helping to found the Australasian Armenian Relief Fund in 1922.<sup>18</sup>

A national conference of representatives of the relief committees from all over Australia was convened on 14 December 1922. A national executive committee was formed, with Rev. James E. Cresswell, a Congregational minister from Adelaide, as National Secretary of the Australasian Armenian Relief fund.<sup>19</sup> During an epic voyage throughout the Near East in 1923, in which he visited Syria, Greece, Georgia and Armenia, Cresswell presented, on behalf of the Australasian Fund, a complete ambulance, which he handed over to Dr. Mabel Elliott, of the American Women's Hospital, which did the medical work of the Near East relief at Athens.<sup>20</sup>

Dr Alexander Leeper, Master of Trinity College and Professor of Classics at the University of Melbourne was deeply touched by the plight of the Hellenes and Armenians and became a driving force behind the Australian movement for their relief for almost a decade.<sup>21</sup>

Amongst the associates of Leeper who became involved in the mission to save the survivors of the Armenian, Assyrian and Hellenic Genocides were Joice NanKivell Loch and Jessie Webb.

A classical scholar at the University of Melbourne, Jessie Webb had been named 'Australia's alternative woman delegate at the League of

Nations' Assembly in September' 1923.<sup>22</sup> While in Hellas, Webb became acquainted with the work of Danish relief worker Karen Jeppe, rescuing captive Christian women from harems and forced marriages throughout Syria and Turkey.<sup>23</sup>

Upon her return home in 1924, Webb appealed to Australia's women 'who live in such free and happy conditions', to show 'practical sympathy with Karen Jeppe's undertaking'. At a welcoming reception organised by the National Council of Women in Victoria, Webb described how the abducted Armenian women were:

*...forced to live in the desert under conditions which were totally opposed to that which they thought right, and so horrible were their experiences, that few of them had any affection for the children born to them in such misery.*<sup>24</sup>

The scholar of classical Hellenism, born on a station near Tumut in the New South Wales Snowy Mountains, urged her audience at the Lyceum Club to send contributions for Jeppe's work, 'however small', via Miss Alice Michaelis, international secretary of the Victorian NCW branch. The funds were used by the Aleppo-based Jeppe in the rescue and rehabilitation 'of Armenian women of the peasant type who had been carried off from their happy homes by the Turks and Arabs'.<sup>25</sup>

Edith Glanville was another pioneer of the relief effort for the genocide survivors and of Jeppe's work in particular. The first female justice of the peace in New South Wales and founder of the Australian branches of both the Quota and Soroptimist clubs, Glanville had lost her son, Leigh, at Gallipoli. Many years later, she adopted an Armenian orphan, a boy, whom she raised in the family home in Haberfield in inner western Sydney. He remained in that home until his own tragic passing in a traffic accident in 1986.<sup>26</sup>

Honorary Secretary of the Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund between 1922 and 1926, Glanville was a regular visitor to the Near East in the inter-war period. Following one of these voyages, she founded the Australian Friends of Armenians, whose purpose it was to raise funds to support Jeppe's rescue mission.<sup>27</sup>

This is not an exhaustive list of the Australians involved in the first truly international relief effort in history. It provides a synopsis of the depth and breadth of the Australian involvement, as well as the diversity

of organisations that collaborated in pursuance of the common cause. This sets the scene for the work of the most important Australian involved in the effort to rescue and rehabilitate the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocide survivors: George Devine Treloar.

The leader of the League's Commission on Refugees, Nansen is credited with establishing the League's principle that helping refugees anywhere was a worldwide obligation. It is this principle upon which he acted immediately. On 18 or 19 September 1922, Nansen received a cable from Constantinople, from the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees in Greece, Colonel Procter, advising him that a humanitarian disaster was developing all around the Aegean Basin.<sup>28</sup> In Nansen's own words: 'There appeared to be no machinery capable of dealing with this avalanche. ... The death rate was appalling, reaching some 1,500 per week'.<sup>29</sup>

In the aftermath of the holocaust of Smyrne (modern Izmir) in September 1922,<sup>30</sup> the League of Nations had agreed to Dr Nansen's written request that the High Commissariat for Refugees already in Constantinople be funded to assist the tens of thousands of Hellene and Armenian refugees arriving there from all over Anatolia. Nansen was allocated 100,000 Swiss francs by the League, while Great Britain and other countries added big donations.<sup>31</sup>

Within weeks, Nansen was in Constantinople. On 6 October 1922, he appointed a young Australian, George Devine Treloar, recently demobilised from the British army to be the League of Nations' Refugee Organisation commissioner in north-east Hellas.<sup>32</sup>

### George Devine Treloar

Born in Ballarat, Victoria, on 23 April 1884, Treloar was educated at University College and St Patrick's College until 1900. Following an accident in the gymnasium, he worked as a bank clerk in Ballarat for five years, then as a jackeroo in western Victoria and a farmer in Western Australia. In 1909, Treloar appears to have been recruited by the Julius Knight Theatre Company, gaining a reputation for successfully playing the 'villain' roles. One review declared Treloar 'is considered one of the finest swordsmen on the Australian stage'. Sometime in 1910, the rising star seems to have been enticed by an offer from the Oscar Asche company. Treloar spent the next few years

commuting between Australia and London, as in May 1911, he is reported by the *Morning Bulletin* in Rockhampton, Queensland, to be 'a leading man' in a coming production, 'direct from the Aldwych Theatre, London'.<sup>33</sup>

The outbreak of World War One in August 1914 found Treloar performing in England. One report stated that he dropped his profession without hesitation immediately the war cloud burst to play his part in the greater "game".<sup>34</sup> He volunteered for active duty in mid-1915, at first 'in an aviation corps', finding his way into 28th Battalion, The London Regiment (Artists' Rifles). His service secured him a transfer to the elite Coldstream Guards, a rare honour for a non-British-born soldier.<sup>35</sup> Buried twice by shellbursts on the Somme and almost bullet-riddled at Ypres, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross 'for frontline service,' ultimately achieving the rank of Major.<sup>36</sup>

In the months following the Armistice, Treloar was recruited to the British Mission to the anti-Bolshevik 'White' Russian armies. This was part of a half-hearted attempt by the Allied Powers to suppress the Bolshevik takeover of the Russian Empire. Following the withdrawal of the British Mission, Treloar served with Baron Wrangel's 'White' army in southern Russia.

When they were defeated, 150,000 anti-communist Russians withdrew across the Black Sea to the relative safety of the Zone of the Straits, then under British occupation. Treloar was evacuated from Sevastopol in November 1920, finding himself amongst the last to leave.

Without formal appointment, he appears to have become de facto commander of a camp for some 3,000 Russian refugees at Tuzla on the Propontis (Sea of Marmora), where Treloar remained until April 1922.<sup>37</sup>

So it was that before he witnessed the plight of the Hellene, Armenian and Assyrian Genocide survivors, Treloar had seen great suffering by civilian populations as tides of battle and oppression overwhelmed them and drove them in every direction. It is with that background that this Australian soldier came to be responsible for thousands of genocide survivors.

### League of Nations' Post

Writing in 'History's Greatest Trek', an extensive *National Geographic* report on the so-called 'Exchange of Greco-Turkish Populations', Melville Chater described the destruction of Smyrne (Smyrna, modern Izmir) in early September 1922 in the following terms:

*... the initial episodes of the Exchange drama were enacted to the accompaniment of the boom of cannon and the rattle of machine guns and with the settings painted by the flames of the Smyrna holocaust.*<sup>38</sup>

A few weeks later, the Australian officer was issued with a British passport. The Hellenic military authorities at Prousa (modern Bursa) issued a visa on 15 October 1922 for Treloar to travel to Constantinople. He passed through the military control point at the port of Moudania (modern Mudanya) on the southern shore of the Propontis (Sea of Marmara) two days later, on 19 October. His destination was the port of Raedestos (Rodosto, modern Tekirdag), on the shore of eastern Thrace. Treloar's assignment was to report to Nansen on the condition and prospects of the genocide survivors in eastern Thrace.<sup>39</sup>

A few days later the Greco-Turkish War concluded with the Armistice of Moudania (modern Mudanya). The League foresaw the dreadful problems that were emerging, as the leader of Turkish Nationalists, Mustafa Kemal pressed for the expulsion of all non-Muslims from his Republic of Turkey.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of October 1922, Nansen drove out to the Evros River to witness the evacuation of eastern Thrace by 250,000 - mostly Hellenic - Christians. He reported that he estimated that there were at least 750,000 Hellene refugees, mostly women and children, scattered over mainland Hellas, eastern Thrace and the Aegean islands.

*When at night we came on top of a hill, I thought I saw a whole city before me with its thousands of lights - it was their camps spread out over the plain, camp-fire by camp-fire, and there they were sleeping on the ground without shelter of any kind....They do not know where they are going and will find no shelter when they come...*<sup>41</sup>

At the request of the Hellenic government and with the approval of the League of Nations, Nansen tried to solve the problem of the Hellenic and other refugees who were pouring out of their ancestral homes east of the Evros (Maritza) River. Nansen's efforts saved about 1,250,000 Hellenes and approximately 150,000 Armenians, Assyrians and anti-Kemalist Muslims in territory controlled by Mustafa Kemal's forces. Nansen was instrumental in the rescue of tens of thousands of genocide survivors who had returned home at the end of the war in the hope of rebuilding their shattered lives. These hopes were cruelly dashed by Kemal's declaration.<sup>42</sup>

As the ‘Compulsory Exchange of Greco-Turkish Populations’ drew to a close in 1925, the League invited Nansen to save the remnants of the Armenian people from extinction.

According to his Nobel Peace Prize nomination, he drew up a political, industrial, and financial plan for creating a national home for the Armenians around the city of Erivan (modern Yerevan). The League failed to implement the plan, but the Nansen International Office for Refugees later settled some 10,000 Armenian Genocide survivors in Erivan and another 40,000 in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>43</sup>

### Treloar’s Assignment

Treloar spent most of October 1922 in eastern Thrace, gathering an appreciation of the problems. Treloar’s immediate superior, Colonel Procter, had created an account holding five million drachmae to procure necessary provisions for refugees, in particular grain. This sum did not provide Treloar anywhere near enough provisions for the survivors.

Shortages brought about by the war were exacerbated by the difficulties of an overwhelmed and poor quality road network, and an early winter. The correspondent covering the Hellenic-Turkish War for the *Toronto Daily Star* of Canada, Ernest Hemingway, described the scene:

*In a never-ending, staggering march the Christian population of Eastern Thrace is jamming the roads toward Macedonia. The main column crossing the Maritza River at Adrianople is twenty miles long. Twenty miles of carts drawn by cows, bullocks and muddy-flanked water buffalo, with exhausted, staggering men, women and children, blankets over their heads, walking blindly along in the rain beside their worldly goods.*<sup>44</sup>

Treloar’s headquarters were initially established in the regional centre of Komotene, in the middle of the west Thracian plain, in December 1922. These problems meant that the Australian League of Nations’ ‘commissioner’ was unable to provide the planned feeding stations along the route into western Thrace. Treloar moved the mission directly to Alexandroupolis (the closest major centre to the new border 40 kilometres away) in order to do the best possible for the survivors there, as well as for those who arrived each day.

The League of Nations endeavoured to maintain feeding stations all over the country. Food, blankets and clothing were handed out to women and children, exactly rationed by the use of identity checks. Dr Kennedy (Chief Administrator of the Save the Children Fund in the Near East) sent a cablegram to the Victorian branch: ‘Cannot over-emphasise need of clothing. Can you make special blanket appeal?’ This call echoed one by Henry Morgenthau ‘now chief commissioner of Greek refugee settlement for the League of Nations’.

*... half a million without warm clothes, fever-sodden, inadequately fed. Bulk are in Macedonia and Thrace, where severe winter conditions now exist. Many in tents, and housing accommodation inadequate. Gifts of blankets and warm clothes would be most welcome, and would save many lives.*<sup>45</sup>

Treloar’s immediate task was to settle tens of thousands of Hellenic Genocide survivors in western Thrace. Though the actual number he was responsible for is unknown, approximately 108,000 individual survivors were resettled under Major Treloar’s jurisdiction in western Thrace and eastern Macedonia.<sup>46</sup>

Treloar’s responsibilities extended to western Thrace (the areas around the urban centres of Xanthe, Karagatch, Komotini, Alexandroupolis, Didymoteicho, and Soufli), as far west as the port of Kavala in eastern Macedonia, though Treloar had few responsibilities for refugees who were permitted to remain in the urban centres themselves.

### Refuge

Throughout his time in Hellas, George Devine Treloar documented what he saw with his camera, leaving a remarkable collection of photographs. These photographs portray undeniable hardship and misery, although these Thracian refugees actually had a few days in which to gather some possessions onto a wagon.

In that respect they were luckier than many from Anatolia who had to pick up anything they could carry and leave virtually immediately, with far lesser chances of survival.<sup>47</sup>

One striking feature of Major Treloar’s writings and photographs is the disproportionate numbers of women and children compared to adult men.

At the time, he wrote on the back of one print: ‘Smyrna refugees in Athens showing proportion of men, women and children – the men were killed or held prisoner by the Turks – hence reason why so many women with children are unable to support themselves’.<sup>48</sup>

The League of Nations’ Commissioner had a keen eye for the human dimension of what he was experiencing. Some of his most tender images show a mother and daughter having erected some troughs to shield their cooking fire from the winter wind. In another, a father consoles his baby daughter, while the women of the family heat a large cooking pan and small children chat. Some families sheltered under bed frames or mattresses lain across rough piles of sacks and boxes of possessions.

Treloar’s most dramatic photographs illustrate how survivors arrived directly onto beaches, rather than at ports or wharves. In the foreground of one photograph, a man has collapsed into sleep, an empty cigarette packet behind him. In the centre a woman holds her hand to her head in a state of despair. Some arrived without footwear, others seem to have arrived with nothing at all.

## Resettlement

Writing in *National Geographic* in November 1925, Melville Chater recorded:

*Colonization had to start from the ground up, with surveying and motor plowing, for neither land maps nor boundaries existed in Macedonia, and the soil had been so long untilled that animal power was insufficient to break it.*<sup>49</sup>

Major Treloar reported to the Governor-General of Western Thrace in November 1922 that his focus was on settling survivors on the land as productive farmers.

*Our plan foresees the settlement [of] new villages, under tents of the Hellenic Government, assisting those being settled to erect dwellings for themselves as rapidly as possible so that the tents may be evacuated for use in the settlement of other refugees in other villages.*<sup>50</sup>

Treloar noted that  
*The principle of giving without receiving is erroneous. Under this system, the refugees adapt rapidly and are becoming, very simply,*

*parasites, losing every desire to work and are rapidly reaching the conclusion that donated relief is a right from merciful God. Exchange in the form of work is of benefit whenever this is possible. No relief of any kind should be extended to those who refuse to work or to move where there is a possibility of finding work.*<sup>51</sup>

Winter had set in, with its freezing temperatures and no plant growth. Hemingway recorded, ‘Thrace a barren difficult plateau – scrub oak – Greek soldiers ‘sheik’ hats, weather beaten faces but looking like Austrians’.<sup>52</sup> Although the Muslims of western Thrace were exempt from the ‘Compulsory Exchange of Greco-Turkish Populations,’ some left voluntarily for Turkey, leaving farmsteads and town houses for some of the destitute Christians. These were inadequate for the housing of the incoming multitude.

Drawing on his own agricultural experience, Treloar’s work was concentrated in developing potential farmland in an area between Komotene, the coastal town of Porto Lagos and east to what is now the town of Aratos.

Again drawing on his own experiences in rural Australia, Treloar tried to enthuse and direct the refugees to fend for themselves as much as possible. ‘No relief of any kind should be extended to those who refuse to work or to move where there is a possibility of finding work.’<sup>53</sup> Treloar was determined that as much of the fertile land should be put to use as quickly as possible.

As Treloar recorded in his 12 April 1923 report to Nansen (written in Komotene), in the preceding six months, the League of Nations team had established a number of new villages. The Australian officer has been credited by tradition with laying out the plan of the villages’ streets and lots, a distinguishing feature that separates refugee settlements from pre-existing ones.<sup>54</sup>

*“Our first settlement was established at Mourhan Tchiflik”, modern Parademe, “and consisted of refugees from Altintash”, a small town in eastern Thrace.*<sup>55</sup> *A former Ottoman estate known as Kirlik Kiri was split into two new villages: “the first with refugees from Asia Minor, Greeks and Armenians, and the second with Caucasian and Pontos Greeks”. These are now Roditis and Thrylorio respectively, a few kilometres south-west of Komotene.*

*“Three more settlements have been established at Phanar (modern Phanare), Tepe Chiflik and Orta Kishla (modern Porpi), and contain refugees from Eastern Thrace”. Considering winter was setting in,*

*Treloar's next sentence is stunning: "All the refugees in the above places are accommodated in bell tents. The remainder of the refugees on our strength are settled in farm houses in Urumbeyli, Biatli (modern Pagouria), Anakeuy, Mezhele, Ortadji (modern Aphrosia) and Haskeuy". He also mentions "Songourlou" (modern Mikro Kranovouni) and "Kir Chiftik", populated by "most of the families from our old camp in" Alexandroupolis, "Caucasian Greeks in the former and Thracians in the latter".*

The low rise upon which one village was established, named Thrylorio, was described as 'a bare hill' by one elderly survivor. The location was probably selected due to the location of a spring still called 'Mother of the Waters'. Life was 'grim in the first season, as we came with nothing and had nothing'. The land around Thrylorio was allocated in family plots: a house and about three hectares of land. Using seed secured by Treloar, they set about growing maize, wheat and barley for food and tobacco as a cash crop. Planting, harvesting and threshing was done by hand. Hand-mills ground the grain into flour. By late-1924, they had established their own Agricultural Cooperative, which is still in operation. Sale of the tobacco and surplus grain provided cash for the purchase of modern agricultural equipment.<sup>56</sup>

Some regard the survivors who ended in western Thrace as the fortunate ones. The survivors in north-east Hellas, under Treloar's responsibility, were recipients of relief supplies (flour and blankets) from Australia; the Hellenic Government was also moving quickly to make farming land available.

The influx of Hellenic Genocide survivors from Pontos (the Black Sea coast of Anatolia) and ethnic Hellene refugees from the Russian Caucasus continued through 1924. They arrived by sea, often after a harrowing period in extremely unhealthy conditions in camps around Constantinople. Many spoke an archaic dialect unintelligible to either officials or other Anatolian survivors, adding to the challenges the League and the Hellenic state encountered.

## Housing

The influx of refugees was so enormous and so swift that the establishment of even basic shelter and public health was a tremendous challenge. The centre of some towns such as Drama in eastern Macedonia became

squalid camps in which diseases raged. The situation was exacerbated wherever housing vacated by Muslims was not immediately made available to the needy. The League of Nations' Commissioner for Refugees made strenuous efforts to secure as much as possible of the housing vacated by Muslims and Bulgarians for the needs of the survivors.<sup>57</sup>

As early as April 1923, Nansen was able to report that the League of Nations' High Commission for refugees had settled eleven new villages in western Thrace and with the spring season commencing, they were well on the way to self-sufficiency.

As the emergency began to pass in 1924-25, the crisis accommodation began to be replaced with more substantial stone and mud-brick dwellings. Bricks were laid within a timber framework and faced with stone blocks. These were then roofed with sun-dried tiles. One of these early houses was for Treloar himself. He used the Australian slang word 'shack' to describe his quarters, presumably because it was quite small. From his photographs, it appeared to be built with rendered mud bricks, and had a tiled roof. Treloar has been credited by tradition with laying out the plan of the village streets and lots. A grid of straight streets concentrated family-related groups in each street. Thrylorio today resembles an Australian suburb, with each house standing on its own separate lot, often with trees or a vegetable garden. A unique part of the region's heritage, a handful of these early houses remain today, though in a dilapidated state.<sup>58</sup>

## Health Issues

Many of the survivors were suffering from infectious diseases, such as smallpox, typhus and cholera, as well as from dysentery. At one stage, the Hellenic Government suspended the admission of refugees, and parts of the resident population became reluctant to assist in caring for such infectious people.

Ensuring sanitation, refuse disposal, and water supply for these settlements was difficult. Provision of clean water was a considerable challenge. As the refugee population grew, it was difficult to prevent natural supplies of water from becoming polluted.

The undrained mosquito-breeding Marshes [near Komotene and to the north-west towards Drama] brought malaria, and the gargantuan

family had to be dosed with 15 tons of quinine. Drought came, and 50,000 cultivators (farmers) must be rehabilitated with a \$1,000,000 worth of grain and forage.<sup>59</sup>

Malaria was not officially declared eradicated in Hellas until 1974, following an intensive national campaign that began in 1946. This program included drainage works as well as mass spraying of houses.<sup>60</sup>

### Cottage Industries

Treloar's 12 April 1923 report to the League of Nations carries striking echoes to the current socio-economic crisis in Hellas, with some equally striking proposals to resolve the issues.

*We are not coping with a famine, but with an unemployment problem, of so vast a nature that if help of the proper constructive kind is not forthcoming the country will be brought face to face with the possibility of famine and ruin. Over one fourth of the entire population is without work or any prospect of it unless organized help is given to them and to the Greek Government.*

Drawing on his experiences in Victoria during the 1890s Depression, in World War One, in post Bolshevik Revolution Russia and amongst the 'White Russian' refugees who fled the Soviet victory in the Russian Civil War, Treloar was a great believer in helping people help themselves.

*A mere feeding program can only delay the fatal day. A constructive policy, under which the Greek Government is helped to place refugees on the land or organize town and village industries etc., is the only sound one. The possibilities are all here. We have proved it in this area.*

Once emergency supplies of food and shelter were secured, small-scale 'industries' were founded, a means of earning an income and encouraging self-sufficiency amongst the survivors. These new businesses included charcoal burning, brick making, lace making and embroidery, carpet weaving, as well as the planting of 16,000 mulberry trees with a view to later production of silk.<sup>61</sup>

*It is confirmed by the efforts, unfortunately so poorly supported, of those who are now endeavouring to imitate our policy, and by the hearty praise and enthusiasm of every member of the Government and Relief Organizations who have visited our area.*

*Every farmer established means not only one whole family saved from hunger and moral degeneration but one more family made independent and the State has gained a new producer who will indirectly help to support those still unproductive.*

A sizeable proportion of the survivors and refugees were illiterate, rendering it especially difficult to introduce them quickly to modern technology, whether in farming or industry.

Treloar obtained as many tools as possible, including axes. At marine locations such as Lake Vistonida, inland from Porto Lagos, where there were suitable trees, he had those experienced in ship building commence the construction of fishing vessels. He recorded that all the plans for the boats were drawn in flat damp sand, as was the custom on the Anatolian coasts.

By far the most economically valuable of these fledgling industries was carpet weaving. Drawing on traditions dating back centuries, Treloar, and fellow Australian relief workers Sidney Loch and Joice NanKivell Loch, initiated weaving carpets on hand looms, and with hand-knotting in some cases. Australian wool was particularly favoured for its fine quality.<sup>62</sup>

The Lochs were based at Ouranoupolis ('City of Heaven') in the Halkidike Peninsula in central Macedonia, a small distance outside Treloar's sphere. Until 1922, it was a malarial swamp on the north coast of the Athos Peninsula, the easternmost of the three 'fingers' of Halkidike. Sidney Loch became a regular visitor to the monasteries of Mount Athos, a short walk from the new settlement. His drawings and photographs of illustrated manuscripts in the monastic libraries became the basis of the designs the women and girls wove into their 'Pirgos Rugs' One example of the rugs the Lochs designed – named 'Creation' – is now part of the collections of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.<sup>63</sup>

The development of carpet weaving in northern Greece was remarkable. The Refugee Settlement Commission Vice President reported in 1927:

*In the vicinity of the urban settlements a large number of factories of various kinds have sprung up. Of these, the most numerous and the most important are the carpet factories. In this industry the refugees are expert and it has been introduced since their arrival. The industry is increasing very rapidly, and in the year 1927 the exports of Greek carpets to America were valued at over half a million pounds sterling.<sup>64</sup>*

## Hellenic Australians

Fifteen months after his appointment, George Devine Treloar married Kathleen May Douch in Constantinople on 27 December 1923. Her father, William Douch, had been employed as an engineering consultant to the Ottoman Turkish government. Held as civilian internees during World War One, the Douches remained in the city until the late-1920s, when they moved to England. Living a few hundred kilometers away in Thessalonike, Mrs Treloar had lost her first-born children (twins) in 1924. A daughter, Elizabeth, was born in September 1925, followed by John a year later.

A few months after John's birth, the family moved to Constantinople. Major Treloar sailed ahead, back to Australia, arriving at Fremantle on 29 April 1927.<sup>65</sup> His wife and children stayed on in Constantinople, then lived briefly in England. Largely because of the impact of the Great Depression, the family was not reunited in Australia until February 1935.

On his return home, Treloar delivered public lectures on 'War adventures and other stories' and spoke of conditions in Kemal's 'new' Turkey and the difficulties for foreigners.<sup>66</sup>

A politically active individual, he also became a passionate advocate of the rights of returned servicemen.<sup>67</sup> Treloar became a radio commentator in Perth, broadcasting under the pseudonym 'The Archer,' a career that lasted until 1949.<sup>68</sup> A range of careers, trials and tribulations – personal and professional – lay ahead for Treloar who passed away in Perth on 29 November 1980.<sup>69</sup>

## Legacy and Commemoration

The work of Major George Devine Treloar has been marked in many ways over the last nine decades. Some of the decorations Treloar was presented with during his career include: Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross (Great Britain); the Orders of St. Vladimir with Crossed Swords and Bow; Order of St. Stanislaus, and Order of St. Anne (Czarist Russia) and the Order of the Rising Sun (Japan).<sup>70</sup> The Hellenic state conferred the Gold Cross of the Knights of the Order of the Redeemer (or Saviour) upon George Devine Treloar in January 1923. The decoration was presented by the Governor of the Diocese of Thrace, Mr Spyros Dasios.<sup>71</sup>

Both Treloar and Procter had new settlements named in their honour. The one nearer to Komotene was initially named Proktion. The unfortunate

sounding name, soon led to a change to Broktion or Vroktion.<sup>72</sup> In 1980, it adopted its current name, Roditis. A few kilometers along the road to Alexandroupolis, the next village was originally named Trelorio. Again, due to its unfortunate connotations (*trelor*, crazy), this was adjusted to Thrylorio (derived from (*thrylos*), legend).<sup>73</sup>

## Australian Jewry

Members of the small, thoroughly assimilated, Australian Jewish community played key roles in the Armenian, Hellenic and Assyrian relief effort 1915-1930s. Prime examples were Sir Samuel Sydney Cohen and Miss Dora Cohen (no relation). Sir Samuel served as Honorary Consul for the Hellenic Kingdom in Newcastle (March 1905-1915) and Sydney (1915-1923).<sup>74</sup>

Sir Samuel later played a similar role in the rescue of German and Austrian Jews from Nazi persecution in the years before the outbreak of World War Two. Miss Cohen was, for many years, Secretary of the Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund, New South Wales Committee.

To enable country visitors to see examples of Armenian needlework, the committee of the Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund arranged a special Easter display and sale at the Civil Service Stores yesterday. Specimens of the handiwork of the orphans at Beirut, and of the inmates of the hostel at Aleppo, were on show, and included articles such as tray and supper cloths, runners, table centres, and handkerchiefs, showing exquisite drawn-thread work, crochet, and embroidery. Beautiful tinsel brocades were an example of the colourful embroidery, the latest work done by the Armenian refugees in Persia. Miss Dora Cohen, secretary of the fund, reported that sales had been very satisfactory.<sup>75</sup>

She was an integral member of the group of prominent Australians involved in raising funds and supplies for the rescue of the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides.

While a small number of the orphaned children and skilled migrants who were saved later migrated to Australia, there was no policy or even substantial discussion for the settlement of survivors in the Antipodes. The official policy was one of promoting the migration from the British Isles and northern Europe, while refusing to permit the migration of those 'born in Asia', unless they were deemed to be 'Caucasian'. This 'White Australia

Policy<sup>76</sup> was the cornerstone of government policy for the next six decades, shaping Canberra's response to genocide survivors and political refugees in particular.

From the 1920s until her death, Edith Glanville was a strong advocate of bringing Armenian, Assyrian and Hellenic Genocide survivors to Australia. Throughout the inter-war period, her endeavours to develop large-scale migration were thwarted by domestic political concerns and the preoccupation with maintaining a particular 'racial' mix in this country.

## Conclusion

This paper brings together a number of threads of interwar Australian history. It develops a panorama that challenges the established narrative of Australia and Australians being insular and insulated. Instead the Commonwealth and her people were deeply interested and involved in events far from our shores.

The unprecedented common humanitarian cause that was the effort to rescue and rehabilitate the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocide survivors, as well as *Shoah*, brought together Australians from all walks of life: government, commerce, the military, philanthropy and more. This paper also brings the tradition of Australian humanitarianism into a fresh perspective.

Antipodean generosity did not suddenly emerge in the 1980s with the famine in Ethiopia and other natural disasters. Through diverse organisations such as the League of Nations, Near East Relief, Save the Children Fund, and locally established Armenian Relief Funds, Australians contributed (per capita) more generously than any other country to the effort to save those who had lost virtually everything.

Australians played key roles in rescuing survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian and Assyrian Genocides as well as those who faced Nazi terror. Still active after World War Two, in one Letter to the Editor, Edith Glanville described Hellenes as 'great-hearted people' who 'will be an asset to the agricultural life of this country'.<sup>77</sup>

The stories of individual Australians form powerful testament to the ability of individuals to change the course of history, particularly in times of crisis.

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- 77 Edith Glanville, 'Letter to the Editor: Greek Citizens', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1952, p. 6.