

# DIGGERS



Songs of the Australians at War  
compiled by Warren Fahey



1. **BUGLE CALL** (Trad. Australian) (0.09)  
It was the sound of the bugle that haunted the life of a soldier - morning, noon and night and all those times in between.
2. **HOW'D YER BE?** (Trad. Australian) (5:45)  
The laconic tale of the digger and his new found mate. A tale in the tradition of the Australian bush yarn.
3. **DINKI DI** (Trad. Australian) (2.21)  
This song was known to most soldiers who sympathised with the poor old private and the idea of 'kicking the corporal in the arse' must have found plenty of flavour.
4. **WE'RE IN THE ARMY NOW** (Trad. Australian) (0.28)  
The 'do it all' marching chant that often accompanied the marching boots!
5. **ITS A LONG WAY TO GO TO MELBOURNE** (Trad. Australian) (0.37)  
No prizes for guessing where this parody came from. 'Tipperary' was a popular music hall song and the parodies came fast and free.
6. **PUCKAPUNYAL** (Trad. Australian) (0.49)  
A parody from Victoria's most famous army training camp.
7. **THE SAR' MAJOR** (Trad. Australian) (0.14)  
The sergeant major was the soldier who instilled the most fear into the ranks.
8. **KISS ME GOODNIGHT, SAR'MAJOR** (0.48)  
An extremely popular song - every soldier knew this one.
9. **THE COOK** (Trad. Australian) (0.31)  
The saying goes - an army marches on its stomach - a few of the soldiers reckoned they would rather march all over the cook.
- STEW FOR DINNER TODAY** (Trad. Australian)  
Like the shearer's cooks the army cooks were accused of producing nothing better than an average stew. They used to say: "What sort of cook is he?" To which the automatic reply was "Just".
10. **PLUM AND APPLE JAM** (Trad. Australian) (0.18)  
The 'regulation' jam also came into the firing range and just the sight of that tin could produce the trembles in the average soldier.
11. **YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW** (Trad. Australian) (0.15)  
Another marching ditty which was used to relieve the boredom of route marching.
12. **OUR SERGEANT MAJOR** (2.42)  
George Formby (The man with the ukulele)
13. **GOD BLESS OUR SPLENDID MEN** (Trad. Australian) (0.54)  
A parody on 'God Save The King' and typical of the patriotic verse of the turn of the century.
- OOM PAUL KRUGER** (Trad. Australian)  
A little sarcasm to scare the Boers and boost our morale.
14. **WHY CAN'T WE HAVE A NAVY OF OUR OWN** (1.17)  
From the Sydney Music Hall and the singing of Fred Bluett. We got a navy soon after.
15. **BINKY DOODLE I DO** (3.01)  
Albert Whelan and his patriotic Music Hall song taken from an early phonographic disc.
16. **THE GUMTREE WITH SIX BRANCHES** (Trad. Australian) (2.15)  
This song actually comes from the heady days of Federation as the Commonwealth started to realise it would need to work as one identity rather than independently.
17. **FIGHTING THE KAISER** (Trad. Australian) (0.44)  
A marching song, to the tune of Waltzing Matilda, telling the Kaiser that we were coming to 'drink all his beer and eat up all his sausages!'
18. **WE ARE A RAGTIME ARMY** (Trad. Australian) (0.21)  
A marching song. The last line was changed by the various military brigades so ANZAC would also be Alf etc.
19. **MY LITTLE WET HOME IN A TRENCH** (Trad. Australian) (1.42)  
Many the rain-sodden soldier could identify with this song and its sentiments. A parody on 'Little Grey Home In The West'.
20. **I'LL TAKE THE TRIPOD** (Trad. Australian) (0.15)  
To the tune of Loch Lomond a comment on 'iron nations' - anyone who has eaten an army biscuit will remember this.
21. **SOD 'EM ALL** (Trad. Australian) (0.35)  
'Bless 'em All' takes on a new meaning. Songs like this were the only 'safe' way to get back at the military brass.
22. **WHEN GOD KNOCKED OFF** (Trad. Australian) (0.21)  
A toast that would have boosted the spirit of mateship.
23. **MY YARRAWONGA** (2.06)  
Mastertouch Piano Roll 'Let The Pianola Play'  
This tune was extremely popular at home and abroad and many times it would have been played on the mouth organ as troops whiled away their time.
24. **DOWN IN THE OLD FRONT LINE** (Trad. Australian) (0.39)  
A parody on 'My Home In Tennessee'. The soldier was always thinking of the return to Australia.
25. **OH, WHEN I DIE** (Trad. Australian) (0.19)  
A boozers ditty.

- 26. IT'S A LONG WAY TO THE RIVERINA** (Trad. Australian) (1.00)  
Another parody on 'Tipperary' and another 'we will return' ditty.
- 27. VAN DAM FAMILY** (2.47)  
**Florrie Forde and Orchestra**  
Many of the Music Hall songs included slight political comment and this one from the great Florrie Forde was a popular singalong as it told of the 'lost Gretchen girl'.
- 28. AN AUSSIE SOLDIER** (Trad. Australian) (0.15)  
Humour was always a useful tool to relieve the tension of war.
- 29. BILLY HUGHES' ARMY** (Trad. Australian) (0.22)  
The conscription issue was a major problem for the Australian political system and especially the 'Little Digger' Billy Hughes who campaigned long and hard for its introduction.
- 30. YOU'RE A MISCHIEF MAKER**  
**BILLY HUGHES** (Trad. Australian) (0.21)  
Another popular anti Hughes ditty.
- 31. THE BATTLE OF WARWICK** (Trad. Australian) (0.15)  
No prizes for guessing where this parody came from. Apparently someone did throw an egg at Hughes when he was campaigning in Warwick, Queensland.
- 32. THE WIN THE WAR PARTY** (Trad. Australian) (0.31)  
Hughes called his political party the 'Win The War Party'. It won him few friends.
- 33. KNOCK KNOCK** (Trad. Australian) (0.10)  
A popular wartime ditty that comments on Hughes and his 'door knock' campaign.
- 34. MADEMOISELLE FROM ARMENTIERS** (2.19)  
Most people know the bawdy version of this song however the original is a lovely song in its own right.
- 35. I PAID A FRANC TO SEE** (Trad. Australian) (0.41)  
A bit like the Groucho Marx 'Lydia, Lydia, that encyclopedia - Lydia the tattooed lady' however this one is definitely Australian.
- 36. THE GERMAN LIKES HIS BEER** (Trad. Australian) (0.13)  
An Australian drinking toast.
- 37. HALT! WHO GOES THERE?** (Trad. Australian) (0.22)  
A soldier returns to the barracks to be confronted by the duty sentry.
- 38. WHEN THIS BLASTED WAR IS OVER** (Trad. Australian) (2.45)  
The familiar theme of the soldier's dream of returning home.
- 39. LATRINE DUTY** (Trad. Australian) (0.45)  
Well, some one had to do it.
- 40. KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, ALLEMANDE!** (Trad. Australian) (0.26)  
Allemande was a nickname for the German soldier and derived from the French pronunciation.
- 41. THE COLONEL KICKS THE MAJOR** (Trad. Australian) (0.16)  
The poor old 'pongo' always thought that he received the last kick.
- 42. BREAD AND TINKER'S JAM** (Trad. Australian) (0.14)  
They also thought they got the very worst of tucker.
- 43. IT WAS A CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE BARRACKS** (Trad. Australian) (0.19)  
A parody on 'It Was Christmas Day In The Workhouse'.
- 44. POOR KAISER BILL IS FEELING ILL** (Trad. Australian) (0.18)  
A bawdy ditty which would have been sung with a certain gusto!
- 45. OH, LORD WE ARE LOUSY** (Trad. Australian) (0.14)  
Chats (body lice) and fleas were a major problem for the fighting men of the desert campaigns.
- 46. LAND OF THE PHAROAHS - FARE THEE WELL** (Trad. Australian) (0.33)  
Apparently this ditty (sometimes sung to the tune of 'There Is A Tavern In The Town') summed up the feeling of most of our Desert Infantry.
- 47. GOODBYE GENERAL ORDERS** (Trad. Australian) (0.24)  
Another parody on 'Tipperary'.
- 48. GOODBYE-EE** (2.59)  
**Florrie Forde and Orchestra**  
This song was unbelievably popular with the troops and those left behind.
- 49. WE'VE JUST BLOWN IN FROM THE WEST** (Trad. Australian) (0.23)  
The Western Australian brigade sang this out loud.
- 50. GOODBYE UNCLE ADOLPH** (3.01)  
Jack Cooper with Ambrose and his Orchestra.  
From disc this song was typical of the popular songs written in the Second World War.
- 51. THE ROSE OF NO MAN'S LAND / THE NOSE ON MY OLD MAN** (Trad. Australian) (1.24)  
The Red Cross Nurse was often referred to as the 'Rose Of No Man's Land' because of her red and white uniform. The parody was collected from Swagman Jack Pobar.
- 52. HANGING ON THE OLD BARBED WIRE** (Trad. Australian) (1.57)  
A drinking song with a bitter twist at the end.
- 53. HITLER'S BALLS** (Trad. Australian) (0.28)  
An extremely popular song about Mr Hitler's testicles.
- 54. POOR MARLENE'S BOYFRIEND** (Trad. Australian) (1.20)  
A parody on Lili Marlene and the fact that her boyfriend will not be seeing Marlene.

**55. AIRMEN'S MEDLEY:** (Trad. Australian) (1.12)

And We'll Cart Him Away On A Spoon  
And He Ain't Gonna Fly No More

The second World War was very much an 'air war'  
and there were many songs and ditties about the  
perils of flying.

**56. HUSH A BYE RADAR** (Trad. Australian) (0.25)

Radar was a new development and very important to  
the air fighting men.

**57. DEAR LIZ** (Trad. Australian) (1.12)

Bluey writes a heartfelt letter home.

**Musicians**

**Warren Fahey** - vocals

**Mic Conway** - vocals, ukulele, train whistle, kazoo

**Andrew De Teliga** - dobro, mandolin, fiddle, guitar, bongo drums

**Justin McCoy** - guitar

This collection was devised and produced by **Warren Fahey**. If you have additional military folklore and would like to add to this collection please address all correspondence to **Warren Fahey** at The Australian Folklore Unit - P.O BOX 561, ALEXANDRIA 2015

This recording was issued in conjunction with '**Diggers**'.

The Australian Army, Navy And Air Force In Eleven Wars - compiled and written by **George Odgers** and published in two volumes by Lansdowne Publishing, Sydney.

A book containing the songs from the Australian soldier in eleven wars - titled: "The Songs Of The Australian Digger" was published by Larrikin Entertainment in 1995.

For more information on Rouseabout's *Yesterday's Australia's Series*

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**58. TOM BLAMEY'S BOYS** (Trad. Australian)(2.09)

A parody on the Australian national anthem.

**59. THE LITTLE BROWN MAN FROM JAPAN -  
Hamilton Hill** (2.40)

From the Music Hall tradition. Mr Hill's comments  
refers to the Russian 'Bear' moving in on Japan  
and then the protectors of the British 'Lion' and  
American 'Eagle'.

**60. WORKING FOR THE YANKEE DOLLAR**

(Trad. Australian) (2.15)

Who won the war! A parody on 'Rum and Coca Cola'.



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Recorded and mixed by **Justin McCoy**  
A special thanks to **Florence Miles-Waldman**


**ROUSEABOUT**

**RRH42**

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**D**own through the years the Australian soldier became respected as a reliable fighter, a mate when a mate was the difference between life and death and, above all, the Australian soldier was considered to be a 'larrikin' who saluted but would not doff his hat to no man. He was an Aussie, he was Cobber, he was Pongo, he was Curly and Bluey and he was Digger.

**A**ustralians have fought in 11 wars. It seems incredible but 11 times we have marched away to the sound of the bugle and every time it was a call to join our allies and 'mates' at arms. We fought in the famed Maori Wars Of Taranaki and the Waikato, a contingent of gallant lads travelled to the Sudan wars and then our Lighthorsemen galloped into the Orange Free State and the Boer War. Next came the so called 'Boxer Rebellion' and then the first and second World Wars. We glibly believed that the second World War was the 'war to end all wars' but we were wrong and our troops were once again called to battle in lands too close to the home front - Malaya, Malta, Korea and Indonesia and these were all followed by the horrors of Vietnam. As if to remind us that war is always 'just around the corner' our troops rallied in 1990 to confront the threat of yet another uprising in that war-torn zone known as the Middle East.

This recording is a unique oral history of the songs that the Australian soldiers sang. War is always a frustration and the songs, ditties, parodies, poetry and stories serve many well-earned roles as a morale booster to facilitate camaraderie, to educate and to assimilate 'new recruits' and to allow that necessary ongoing de-fusing of tension. As with other periods of history when all is not well, like times of economic recession and depression, the songs tend to be short and not so sweet, and, army songs being what they tend to be very much to the point - boots and all!

This collection mainly comes from the first and second World Wars however, there is no doubt that many of these same songs were sung by the 'Diggers' who marched away to Korea, Malaya and Indonesia. As our entertainment patterns changed so too have our soldier songs and the collected material from the Vietnam War tends to be songs about air fighter planes, raids and gas bombs. The later songs still use parodies however, they are chiefly American popular songs. Warfare has also changed dramatically and this might explain why there are so few songs from the Gulf War. I guess it's hard to sing when you're sitting alone in a computerised fighter plane with one finger cocked on a button.

**Warren Fahey**

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