Sometimes a very small photograph can have an extraordinary power, as is the case with J.P. Campbell’s *Sheltering from Bursting Shells*. The image appears in the final pages of Campbell’s self-titled album *The Great War 1914–15: A Collection of Photographs Taken by Signaller J.P. Campbell whilst on Active Service with the Glorious 3rd Brigade of Light Horse*. His personal narrative of the Great War, or the First World War, is laid out neatly and logically; the photographs, most with handwritten captions underneath, are arranged in two rows per page. The album’s excellent condition indicates that first Campbell and then its later guardians acknowledged its great personal value and looked after it well.

Soldiers’ photograph albums from the First World War generally follow a conventional narrative structure, starting with the departure from Australia, proceeding to the battlefields in the Middle East or Europe and, for the lucky ones, ending with the return home to Australia. J.P. Campbell’s album is typical in many respects. His visual journey began aboard the troopship *Star of Victoria* in Melbourne in February 1915 and took in Albany, Western Australia, Colombo and the Suez Canal, concluding in Egypt where his regiment encamped at Mena, 15 kilometres from Cairo and close to the pyramids. For Australian soldiers in Egypt, exploring the pyramids in the area around Giza and being photographed there was almost a rite of passage. But while most soldiers posed at the base of a pyramid—with a view behind them that was exotic and instantly recognisable—Campbell chose otherwise. Reflecting the desire for authenticity that underpins the photographs he would take in Gallipoli in the ensuing months, he was photographed standing at the top of the Great Pyramid taking in the view, his face in profile. At aged 49, he is older than expected. In a reversal to the more familiar practice of soldiers overstating their age, he understated his, declaring in 1914 in his official papers that he was four years younger.

Campbell’s interest in snapshot photography was not unusual. The marketing of small, lightweight roll film cameras in the immediate prewar years saw a phenomenal increase in the use of the photographic medium. For soldiers, therefore, a Box Brownie camera was an obvious addition to their kit, the perfect means of visualising the great adventure that the Great War was believed to represent. As a consequence, amateur photographs of war proliferated to an extent never seen before, providing alternative viewpoints to the heroic images such as those by photographer Frank Hurley and painters George Lambert and William Longstaff, with which we have become much more familiar.
Although eminently suited to war conditions, the snapshot camera did have one main drawback: the resultant prints are relatively poor in quality and limited in the detail they can offer to contemporary viewers, who are eager for as much information as possible about what are now recognised as major historical events. J.P. Campbell's snapshots are typically flat in tone, and detail is often indistinct. Paradoxically, this also explains the power of the images. Their technical modesty and informality can be taken as a guarantor of authenticity: one accepts the photographs as being un-manipulated, un-posed and therefore as emphatically real.

Campbell, who had had some experience as a photographer before enlistment, was keyed in to the picturesque—photographing a sunset on board ship, taking views from the top of the pyramids, and photographing the inhospitable landscape on the Gallipoli Peninsula. However, the importance of his album lies in his images of the Australians' activities at Gallipoli where he arrived on 21 May 1915 with the 8th Light Horse Regiment. The tiny photographs of the camp at Anzac Beach, for example, include invaluable information about the organisation of men, animals, supplies and equipment. Other photographs—such as those showing a water tank being dragged slowly up a steep hill—highlight the difficulties posed by the site for the establishment of the camp.

In the photographic sequences in Campbell's album, the momentous and mundane coexist. Images of daily life and routine activities (shaving, bathing, cooking, eating and writing letters) appear alongside images showing the awful aftermath of battle. These include Armistice to Bury in which Australian soldiers have climbed out of their trenches to view the battlefield during a negotiated pause in fighting; the image may have been taken in June when the heat was extremely intense and the stench of unburied bodies was unbearable. In Dead Turks in Front of Our Trenches, the bodies of the deceased soldiers, barely recognisable as human forms, lie just a few metres away from the ANZAC trenches. Such images demonstrate in a compellingly matter-of-fact way that the situation was dire. On 7 August, in the disastrous Battle of the Nek, the 8th Light Horse Regiment sustained a huge number of casualties. Four out of five men in the regiment were killed or wounded.

Sheltering from Bursting Shells is a simple image showing three Australian soldiers huddled together in a shallow trench or hole. The men are not particularly conspicuous, their dirty uniforms render them the same tone as their earthen shelter, and their individuality does not seem to be relevant. What is stressed instead is that they are all alike, sharing exactly the same predicament. Though open-eyed, the soldiers do not look at anything in particular, suggesting that in their situation hearing rather than seeing is the most useful sense. It is this—their extreme physical vulnerability and their 'nakedness'—that makes Sheltering from Bursting Shells so affecting. Bare-headed and, in one instance, bare-armed, there is nothing in the image to protect them, no solid structures, no
military equipment or weaponry, not even any protective clothing. Huddled together, the soldiers are like animals, functioning at an instinctive level where the most urgent desperate requirement is shelter.

J.P. Campbell, who served as a private (signaller), was wounded in August, possibly at the Battle of the Nek and appears to have assembled his album while recovering in hospital at Heliopolis in Egypt. As the care he lavished on his album demonstrates, photography was enormously important to him, as it was to others whose albums are in the National Library's Photography Collection. Taking the photographs and later arranging them into coherent narratives appears to have provided these soldiers with a means of structuring their experiences and, one suspects, of making sense of them.

The desire to visually make sense of their war experiences was not confined to those who took photographs. Major W.A.S. Dunlop, for example, was more like a bowerbird, gathering material for his album from a wide range of sources, including newspaper articles, aerial photographs, postcards and personal memorabilia such as leave forms. He brought these varied items together into a hectic, seemingly disorganised narrative. Though it paid little attention to a correct chronological sequence of events, it nevertheless has its own story to tell about the war.

Aside from its messy energy, this album is distinguished by the inclusion of some totally unexpected images: photographs of German soldiers. Three of them are scattered through the album, along with an advertisement for German war bonds and a German postcard of the Western Front. Each is a group portrait of young German soldiers, probably a company, in which the men are conventionally arranged by height, with the tallest standing in the back row and the shortest men lying on the ground in the front. These are relatively relaxed photographs that speak of the men's camaraderie and of their group belonging. However, underneath each image is a brief caption written in Dunlop's hand—Taken from a Hun, Taken from a Boche, Captured from a Hun—and a recurring date 'the night of 4/5 May 1918'. Only a few words, but sufficient to rupture the intimacy of the images and render them unstable.

Dunlop's captions, grim confirmation of an Allied victory, dramatically change the status of these modest little things, no bigger than postcards. Whether 'captured' from a German prisoner or 'taken' from a corpse, the photographs assume another reality as trophies of war and souvenirs, part of the booty that was commonly brought back to Australia. They are, however, more complex than this suggests, for these photographs hover right at the very limits of representation, of what could and could not be given visual form.

At the heart of First World War albums there is always a blank—the battle itself. After all, the albums' authors were soldiers, able to pick up their cameras only when the fighting was over and, presumably, their safety had been assured. Live action was the domain of official, not amateur, war photographers.

Even when it came to official photographs soldiers developed their own ways of claiming or owning the images. A case in point is aerial photography. Australians were
not involved in the production of aerial photographs in France, though they were in Palestine, but they actively acquired copies, such as those printed by the Army Printing and Stationery Services, and personalised them in different ways. Soldiers like Major W.A.S. Dunlop pasted aerial views into their albums, incorporating them into their own narratives of war. Others kept the photographs loose, 'entering' into what was depicted through the personal inscriptions written to accompany them. For example, on the back of a photograph related to the battle for Zonnebeke, there is a handwritten inscription which reads:

D.27.A89 is a railway line. In the centre can be seen an old gasometer with some concrete block houses on left of it. We had a bit of trouble there but soon cleared it up.

Personalising aerial photographs in different ways may seem ironic given that they are the most detached of all war images, rendering war at its most abstract and, in relation to its use for aerial bombing campaigns, at its deadliest. However, such activities were obviously important for the individuals involved. They presupposed an audience, offering a means by which participants in the war could begin a conversation with those who had remained at home. The naming of places—Passchendaele, Zonnebeke, Pozieres, Ypres, the Somme and so on—enabled non-participants to come to 'know' the battlefields. This was an essential stage in the visualising and imagining of places where their loved ones had fought and in many cases had died. In such instances the photographs came to function not only as a record of a soldier's activities but also as a memorial to his life.

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