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..... 31; Gone for soldiers	32
Wild colonial boys.	
36Sailors and non-combatants; End of innocence.	
..... 42; Embattled manhood	45;
Digger culture and identity.	50; 2
Charles Bean and the Anzacs	53; An English
Australian	54; Baptisms of fire.
..... 58	
Writing at the cutting edge.	
63Bean's Anzac Book.	72; 3 Memories
of war	81; Percy Bird.
..... 81; Bill Langham. .	
..... 90; Fred Farrall.	
..... 107; Part II The politics of Anzac.	
.....121	
4 The return of the soldiers.	
123Coming home.	
124; Rehabilitation and the Repat	
125; The home front.	127; A land fit for
heroes?	130; Hoodlums, revolutionaries
and genuine diggers	134; 5 The battle for the Anzac legend .
..... 137	
Loyalists and disloyalists.	137

Sommario/riassunto

What is taboo in any family or in any society is never fixed. And neither is that body of family information which everybody knows but no one talks about. Mental illness is one such subject, and it created a kind of fence around one central element of Thomson's work in the 1980s - his grandfather Hector's story. He has had the courage to take that fence down and use a range of sources to enter the no man's land of suffering and isolation which was a part of his grandfather's life, and perforce, that of his grandmother and the young child who became his father. When the first edition was in pre

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