

The Boy  
in  
the Bag

or

Kid-knap-sacked

On Christmas Day 1918, as No. 4 Squadron Australian Flying Corps were mopping up in Belgium, a small French orphan attached himself to them as their mascot. They estimated his age at 7 years but he could have been younger than that.

The time came for the Squadron to be demobbed and, although they made extensive enquiries in a war-torn France, they could find no relatives to care for him. Both his parents were dead, his mother killed by bombing and his father in the early days of the war trying to protect his country. Tim Tovell and his brother, Ted, both mechanics, from Jandowae, Queensland, Australia decided that Henri would have to go with them back to Australia. Tim was older than most of the Squadron, married with a family at home in Queensland. Sadly, his letter to his wife telling her of the problem and asking her for permission to bring the boy home crossed with one from her to say that his own son of three had died of polio. She later wrote again eager to meet Henri and have him in their family so the brothers' plans took shape. It was not going to be easy as neither the military nor the French authorities would have allowed them to do such a thing. With the help of some of the men they devised a scheme which entailed Henri curling up in a sack, disguised with a wooden frame, which Tim carried on his back.



*At Hurdcott, Tim demonstrating how Henri fitted in the sack*

Tim's personal belongings were spread amongst his comrades who were pleased to help as they had all grown fond of the boy. The journey took several hours but Henri remained as quiet as a mouse until they at last could open the sack on the train from Southampton to Salisbury, then on to Hurdcott Camp at Fovant.

The Flying Corps spoilt him dreadfully buying him toys and a small replica of the uniform he had grown to love. Unfortunately, they also taught him less admirable things such as playing 'Two Up', the Australian gambling game which had gripped the Diggers. They mischievously encouraged Henri to play even when he beat them.

## Two-up

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Two-up** is a traditional Australian gambling game, involving a designated 'Spinner' throwing two coins or pennies into the air. Players gamble on whether the coins will fall with both (obverse) heads up, both (reverse) tails up, or with one coin a head, and one a tail (known as 'Odds'). It is traditionally played on Anzac Day in pubs and clubs throughout Australia, in part to mark a shared experience with Diggers through the ages.

The game is traditionally played with pennies – their weight, size, and surface design make them ideal for the game. Weight and size make them stable on the 'kip' and easy to spin in the air. Decimal coins are generally considered to be too small and light and they don't fly so well. The design of pennies that date pre 1939 had the sovereign's head on the obverse (front) and the reverse was totally covered in writing making the result very easy and quick to see. Pennies can often be observed being used at games on Anzac Day, as they are brought out specifically for this purpose each year.

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Australian soldiers playing Two-up during World War I at the front near Ieper, December 23rd, 1917, Australian War Memorial Museum

One day he was called before the CO and reprimanded as he was thought much too young for gambling. He continued to join the men at the games but in the capacity of mascot and 'good luck charm'; the men rewarding him with pennies when they won. He accumulated such an amount that Tim had to open a Post Office Savings account for him!





*Henri 'advising' the Colonel.*





*Henri in his Australian Imperial Force uniform*

Then, at long last the news came of their repatriation to Australia. By now everyone knew about the 'sack escapade' so that could not be used again. It was one of the young officers who suggested a sports equipment hamper partially filled with cricket bats and entertainment costumes. The officer boarded the ship first and threw his cabin key down to the waiting soldiers who marched aboard saying that they had to deliver the important hamper to the entertainment officer's cabin. Again it worked and, when the ship was well out to sea, they let the little boy out of his cramped concealment. Of course, it was not long before the lower decks knew what had happened and eventually the story spread to the upper decks as well.

It so happened that the Lieutenant Governor of Queensland was also returning with his family. He enjoyed the story and admired the men's ingenuity. From Perth he wired his government in Queensland to have the necessary papers ready for their arrival in Sydney where Henri finally landed to a hero's welcome.



*Henri leaving home to start his training in Melbourne*

Tim adopted him and, after his schooling was over, Henri opted to join the RAAF (as it had become). He started as a civilian employee because he could not join the armed forces as an alien, and could not be naturalised as an Australian citizen until he was 21 years old. So, he began training as an aeroplane mechanic, following Tim's wartime occupation.

Tragically, a few weeks before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Henri was killed in a motorbike accident. The No.4 Squadron made a collection and erected a fine memorial stone crowned with a bronze figure of the small, lost waif they had first known.



*The whole story of Henri can be read in 'Young Digger' by Anthony Hill.*

*Pictures by kind permission of the  
Australian War Memorial Museum  
Canberra , Australia*

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