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Coo-ee March

By the end of 1915, setbacks at Gallipoli and the realities of the First World War saw enlistments decline. It was during this dark hour in Australia's war history that a plumber and rifle club captain from Gilgandra in Western NSW came up with an idea that would trigger a dramatic upturn in recruitment figures.

Despite the initial reluctance of the military authorities, William 'Bill' Hitchen's now-famous Coo-ee March snowballed, motivating hundreds of men to join the fight. Leaving from Gilgandra with just 26 members, through Dubbo, where 12 new recruits joined, the march continued through the towns and villages of the Central West before reaching Lithgow and gaining momentum as it headed over the mountains, arriving in Sydney with 263 recruits.

The idea caught the imagination of the Australian public and the Coo-ees became national heroes, triggering further recruitment marches across Australia. The resulting boost in morale and dramatic upturn in enlistments provided much-needed reinforcements to the ANZACS.

Sadly, many Coo-ees, including their leader William Hitchen, would never return home.

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