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Sarah Dobbie
Canberra Girls'
Grammar School

World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict?

by Sarah Dobbie, Canberra Girls' Grammar School

Between 1914 and 1918 a war like no other before devastated not only the entire western world, but our young nation too. World War I turned each Australian into a mourner, as each lost someone, or something, in a foreign land far from home. Australian society was truly devastated. Devastation for Australians however was not only seen on the bloody shores of Gallipoli, but just as devastating in the minds of many was the slaughter on the Western Front and the great massacres of land and sea that plagued the minds of countless souls for years. And, although miles away from the ravaged battlefields strewn across Europe, Australian society did suffer greatly, yet to this day the commemoration of such a disastrous occurrence is more than necessary. It is a duty that we all stand to fulfil, as if we do not remember our losses, and our mistakes, they, like many before, will cease to exist and die in the memories of a nation, or worse, will appear again in history as another act of devastation. As we have done for so many years, Australia commemorates the truly outstanding efforts of our nation in World War I and, as part of this, our nation choruses "*Lest we forget*". This phrase itself must be remembered, as it simply means "May we never forget", may we continue to commemorate Australia's involvement in this conflict for countless years to come.

The great loss of young Australian lives is the main reason for which we must as a nation continue to commemorate our participation in World War I, as to not remember is to not appreciate and, to not appreciate, is to let the sacrifice of our Anzacs fade away. This in itself would be even more devastating than the initial loss. Yes "remembering is painful, it's difficult, but it can be inspiring and it can give wisdom"¹. We must not take the selfish road of forgetting for the reason that we believe remembering is far too painful, as the pain that our Anzac's and their loved ones felt is deserved of at least commemoration. Indeed we cannot escape the truth of the grave losses that were experienced, yet we can, and must, remember them; the noise of the guns across the dormant battle fields of Europe and the memories of countless Australian should still echo in our minds as we commemorate. Yet soldiers were not the only ones who lost in the war, because each Australian made sacrifices. Many individuals put their lives on the line, and many of these made the ultimate

¹ "9/11 Hijacking Film Premieres in NYC", <<http://www.conspiracyresearch.org/forums/9-11-Hijacking-Film-Premieres-in-NYC-t388.html>>



sacrifice and gave their lives, yet not only should we commemorate each soldier, we should also commemorate each Australian who lived in these years. Indeed while over 61,500 Australian soldiers died², countless mothers sacrificed sons, sons lost fathers, brothers lost sisters, families were torn apart and each Australian lost a friend. The least that we can give them is remembrance as we venerate their memories, for “no such body of free men has given so heroically since our history began”,³ and no Australian society of today can quite feel the devastating loss that was experienced by our predecessors; we can only commemorate.

During the war years many mistakes and actions of ill-judgement were made and, as commemoration takes place, individuals are able to reflect on the events that went horribly wrong and on actions that must not for the sake of humankind even occur again. Remembering these mistakes of the past is an important step in overcoming such a devastating effect as the one that World War I cast over Australian society, and reflecting on the events between 1914 and 1918 is vital for Australia’s future as “remembering the past gives power to the present”⁴. A terrible consequence of no remembrance was seen only a few decades after World War I when World War II erupted. In the short years following the end of the Great War, no commemoration as a united society took place, for it was a wound too fresh to revisit for many people. This lack of commemoration meant that our mistakes were hidden in the back of the minds of Australians and, although it seems trite on paper, history did repeat itself, in the form of another seven years of loss and devastation.

World War I in many aspects did have a devastating effect on Australian society however, in saying that devastation was the only effect, we would be neglecting the fact that from this war the spirit of a nation was born. We should remember not only for the devastation, but for the legend and Australia’s ‘baptism of fire’. Australia lost so much yet, in fighting the war, both a legend and a legacy were born. In the same way that the poppies bloomed from the dead in Flanders Fields, an Australian spirit came to life as Australians died. As has been stated by countless people, the Anzacs left in their wake a tradition that has been woven into the Australian identity, and today “ANZAC” is an immortal term whose five-letters have the ability to encompass what it is to be Australian. Bravery, mateship, humour, passion, gallantry and patriotism appeared in all theatres of war throughout the duration of World War I and must, if not for the sake of the Anzac’s, but for the sake of future generations, be commemorated as a simple token of Australia’s appreciation for their incredible actions. Commemoration is a huge part of the lesson that future Australians must learn, as their freedom and their patriotic identity is in a large part owed to the men and women that were involved in all aspects of the Great War.

The conflict that was World War I cast a blanket of devastation over the young Australian society at the time, however even this disastrous event must be commemorated in our nation for this reason in itself. It was disastrous, and we must therefore remember this mistake of ours to prevent it from ever cursing the world again. However, not only is it the actual event

² “ANZAC Casualties”, <<http://www.australianspirit.org/AustralianAndStateFlags/Flag09.htm>>

³ John Masfield - <<http://www.military-quotes.com/forum/anzac-quote-t19378.html>>

⁴ Anonymous



that we must remember, but also those who participated in it and those who experienced the emptiness that remained after the Anzac's sacrifice had been made in the foreign fields. It is our duty now, as it has been for years in the past, to commemorate the Great War, the war in which our nation's spirit was born and the war that we as Australians will, and must, continue to commemorate for generations to come.

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