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

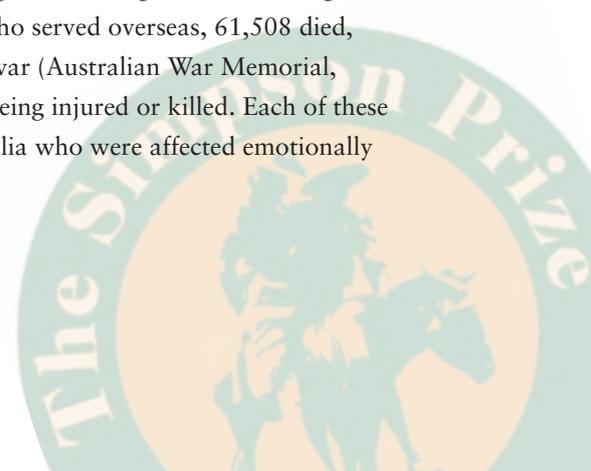
by Erin Moriarty, Darwin High School

World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society and impacted greatly on both individuals and the development of our nation. Despite this, Australians should commemorate our involvement in this conflict. To commemorate is to 'preserve in memory by some celebration' (Sykes, 1976 p. 202). However we must do more than this. We must also learn from our involvement to ensure a safe future, and prevent such a tragedy from recurring because, while a nation was born in the trenches of Gallipoli and the Western Front, it came at a cost no nation should have to pay.

World War I erupted after Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated by a Serbian terrorist on an official visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, on 28 June 1914. Although there was no evidence suggesting the terrorist had been acting under orders from the Serbian government, Austria immediately accused its neighbour of involvement and invaded Serbia. This action divided Europe. 'On one side [was] Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on the other, France and Russia' (Carlyon, 2003 p. 8). When Germany invaded Belgium, Britain, treaty bound to defend Belgium, entered the war. In the years before 1914, Australia was unquestionably devoted to Britain 'and there was no doubt that Australia would immediately support 'the mother country'' (Webb, 2008 p. 91).

Australians fought in the division known as the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.) or, when they were combined with New Zealand troops, as the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs). The Australians 'remained the only solely volunteer force in World War I, despite suffering terrible casualties' (Gifford, 2002 pp.19-20). By the end of the war, they were known for their determination and loyalty to never leave a mate behind. Australians fought in two major theatres of the war: Gallipoli and the Western Front.

World War I needs to be commemorated because the diggers who fought made such a great sacrifice to help Australia. Of the 330,000 Australians who served overseas, 61,508 died, 155,000 were wounded and 4,044 became prisoners of war (Australian War Memorial, 2008). This equates to 67 per cent of those who served being injured or killed. Each of these men had a family, friends and community back in Australia who were affected emotionally and financially by their loss.



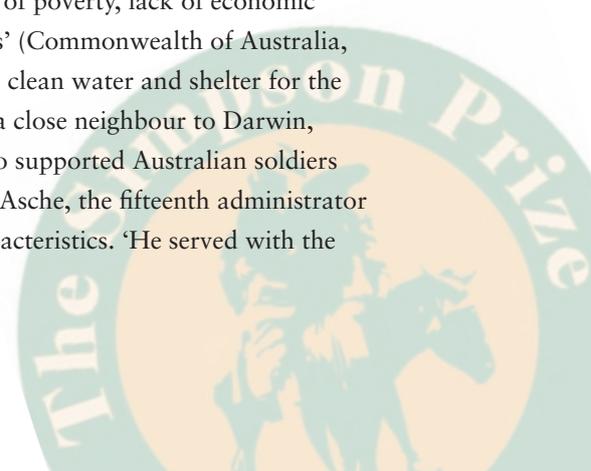
After the war ended, sacrifice continued. Many Australian soldiers came home as strangers to their friends and families and found they were haunted by the memory of their mates dying beside them. Because the survivors had been away from home for so long, many of their physical features had been changed by the effects of combat and harsh conditions. Some who were injured never fully recovered and suffered for many years to come. Some survivors fell into depression because they were haunted by the memory of their mates' deaths and the knowledge that they had killed so many people. To honour and respect the Great War is to honour and respect the proud and traumatised Australian Diggers, who risked and sacrificed their well being by their service.

World War I should also be commemorated because the Australians fought with extreme loyalty and determination. At the beginning of the war, the Australians developed 'a reputation for unruliness' (Carlyon, 2003 p. 19). This stemmed from a belief that the Australian Diggers did not value the uniform, but the man within (Carlyon, 2003). As a result, the Australian Diggers fought harder because they believed they were fighting, not only for themselves, but for their mates around them. They served with extreme honour and loyalty and many died because they refused to give up the search for a lost mate. This was epitomized by John Simpson Kirkpatrick who, although born in England, spent most of his life in Australia and served amongst the Anzacs at Gallipoli. He carried men to safety using a donkey because there was a shortage of stretchers. During his twenty four days at Gallipoli he was 'credited with saving the lives of probably hundreds of men' (Anzac House, 2005). Simpson was killed after a piece of shrapnel or bullet lodged itself in his heart. Simpson's efforts exemplify the way Australian soldiers served bravely and for their mates.

Those who were considered unfit to fight offered their service in different ways. Men became stretcher-bearers and would search No Man's Land looking for survivors who had been unable to make it back to the trenches. Few women were directly involved in combat, but many served in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). Back home in Australia, citizens volunteered for organisations such as 'Red Cross or Australian Comforts Fund' (Webb, 2008 p.112). These people also served, and by their service, demonstrated their loyalty and commitment to Australia.

We can also 'serve' by living the commemoration and celebrating the spirit of the Anzacs as part of our everyday lives and as a guiding force for our nation. By commemorating our involvement in World War I in our personal lives, Australians can bring the same bravery, loyalty and mateship to the current difficulties we face.

In Darwin the tradition of the Anzacs is still powerful; the Darwin community admires and often displays many of their characteristics. When the East Timor crisis arose the Darwin community donated funds that helped reduce 'symptoms of poverty, lack of economic opportunities and unresolved social and political tensions' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). They donated to support agencies providing food, clean water and shelter for the Timorese people. Support still continues today. Timor is a close neighbour to Darwin, and the community felt they should help their mates, who supported Australian soldiers trapped behind enemy lines during World War II. Austin Asche, the fifteenth administrator for the Northern Territory, also showed great Anzac characteristics. 'He served with the



RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] for two years... mostly in the Northern Territory and Northwest Australia' (Northern Territory Government, 2008). During his time in the RAAF, Asche displayed great Anzac spirit and served courageously and loyally. He was appointed Queen's representative as a man the Northern Territory people admired.

The Gallipoli legend has helped define what it means to be Australian. 'Since 1915, one day in the year has involved the whole of Australia in solemn ceremonies of remembrance, gratitude and national pride. That day is Anzac Day' (Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, 2008). Today, many true Australians show their respect to the Australian Diggers. In the Northern Territory 'one of the most moving ceremonies is the Dawn Service, when family, friends and veterans gather as the sun rises. A bugler plays and everyone is silent for a minute' (Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, 2008).

Australians must commemorate our participation in this conflict because it is a sign that we, as Australians, honour the courage and sacrifice the Anzac Diggers made in standing for their beliefs and their country. To honour their sacrifice is to honour all Australians who risked and sacrificed their lives in war. We need to ensure that we learn from such historic events or risk fulfilling the prophecy of George Santayana (1980, p. 284) 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

Lest we forget.

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