



The

a competition for

Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

2009 runner-up
Northern Territory

Samuel van den Nieuwenhof
Darwin High School

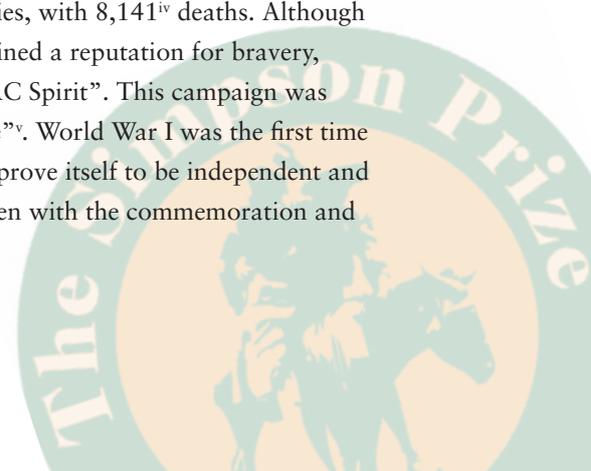
World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict?

by Samuel van den Nieuwenhof, Darwin High School

World War I was a brutal and bloody war, with many young men laying down their lives for their nations. We commemorate the loss of Australian men in World War I and other campaigns each year on ANZAC Day and Armistice Day and recognise those who fought and lost friends and comrades through involvements with the Returned Soldiers League and other charities. However the loss of these men had a profound effect on Australia during and after The Great War. Their ultimate sacrifice on foreign soil stirred debate at home in the new, independent Australia.

World War I began in August, 1914, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Soon all of Europe became involved in the First World War. So horrific were the casualties in this theater that “calculations for victory were based on national birthrates to replace the losses”ⁱ.

Having only been a Federal Commonwealth for thirteen years, and still a loyal member of the British Empire, the Australian Government under the then Prime Minister Andrew Fisher pledged full support to England shortly after the outbreak of the war. Eager to establish a reputation amongst other nations, many young men happily signed up for the war effort. In total 416,809ⁱⁱ Australian troops enlisted to fight in the Western Front, Gallipoli and other campaigns. The battles that most Australians associate with World War I are the battles that occurred at Gallipoli in what is now Turkey. The plan to capture Constantinople, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire and an ally of Germany, backfired when the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, or ANZACs, landed on the wrong beach for the offensive, meeting only cliffs and Turkish machine gun fire. However the ANZACs continued to fight chivalrously until they were evacuated eight months later. During this campaign Australia suffered 26,111ⁱⁱⁱ casualties, with 8,141^{iv} deaths. Although the campaign was unsuccessful, Australian forces had gained a reputation for bravery, loyalty and mateship, traits that we now call “the ANZAC Spirit”. This campaign was considered “Australia’s coming of age on the world stage”^v. World War I was the first time Australia got to “show off” at an international level and prove itself to be independent and strong, a reputation that we earned and have not forgotten with the commemoration and continuation of the ANZAC Legend.

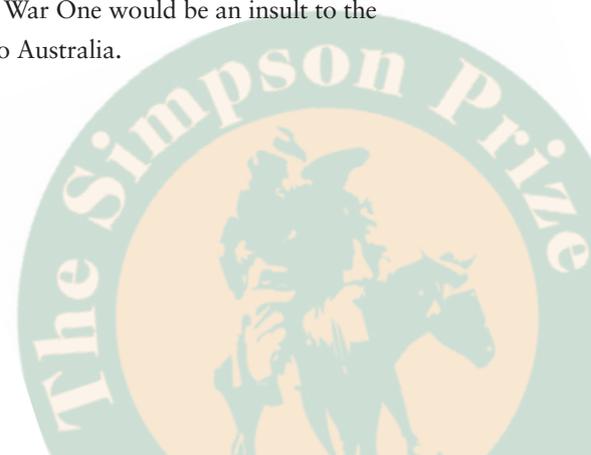


By the end of the First World War over 61,000^{vi} Australian soldiers were killed and over 156,000^{vii} had been gassed, wounded, or taken prisoner. The huge loss of Australian life crippled the new nation of only about five million people. The men lost were brothers, husbands and fathers to an entire generation of Australians, a loss that took Australia years to recover from. Each year the nation commemorates the loss of those men who lay down their lives in the name of Australia, leaving behind friends, family and loved ones. These commemorations give the friends and relatives of the war deceased a chance to mourn and share their grief with others in a similar position and for returned soldiers to remember their fallen comrades and to reflect on the atrocities of battle.

The philosopher and poet George Santayana once said “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”^{viii}. Statistically, World War I was the most horrific war to date. With today’s technology, a repeat of World War I would create far more destruction than it would have ninety years ago. The commemoration reminds everyone of the mistakes of the past and to use these events as an example of what should not be done.

Each year a contingent from my school attends the ANZAC Day Dawn Service here in Darwin. I feel proud to be involved with a school that plays a major role in this service each year, with around eighty students and staff attending the memorial service to represent our school community and commemorate the loss of Australian men and women in conflicts. War commemoration has an extra meaning here in Darwin, too. During World War Two Darwin was attacked 64 times by Japanese bombing missions. In the first attack alone “242 enemy aircraft dropped 683 bombs, devastating the town and leaving over 243 dead”.^{ix} In total, more bombs were dropped on Darwin than on Pearl Harbor, destroying infrastructure and claiming the lives of around 1000 civilians and service men and women. This brought the war to Australia on a level not yet experienced by people from other parts of the country. The involvement of my birthplace in this conflict means that the commemoration of war and fallen soldiers is of personal significance to me.

For the residents of Darwin, the signs of war are all around. On The Esplanade, meters from the CBD, there is a gun from the USS Peary pointing to the sunken remains of the ship and the grave of the 91 crew who died on board. Many of the street names in the suburbs of Darwin are named after the civilians killed in the bombing raids during the Second World War. The major military installations in the Northern Territory also serve to remind us of the continuation of Australian war and peacekeeping efforts. The War Cemetery at Adelaide River, just south of Darwin, is unique in that it is the resting place of service men, women and civilians lost during battles in this part of the world. The commemoration and remembrance of the tragedies of war have become an integral part of our local culture because of the strong military presence and history here in Darwin and the Northern Territory. I am firmly of the belief that not commemorating our participation in World War One would be an insult to the deceased, to the currently serving, to my home town and to Australia.



Bibliography

- Anonymous. *Gallipoli Campaign* [Online] <http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk!studentforumllofiversionlindex.php/t3147.html> [Date Accessed 4/12/08]
- Anonymous. *World War I: Causes* [Online] <http://www.infoplease.comlce6/history/A0862003.html> [Date Accessed 1/12/08]
- Anonymous. *World War I: Wars Outbreak* [Online] <http://www.infoplease.comlce6/history/A0862004.html> [Date Accessed 1/12/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *Australia at War* [Online] <http://www.upfromaustralia.com/australiaatwar.html> [Date Accessed 4/12/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *Australian War Casualties* [Online] http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/war_casualties.asp [Date Accessed 6/12/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *Darwin Air Raids* [Online] <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/airRaids/darwin.asp> [Date Accessed 8/12/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *First World War, 1914-18* [Online] <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/index/ww1.asp> [Date Accessed 28/11/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *First World War 1914-18* [Online] <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1.asp> [Date Accessed 6/12/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *Gallipoli* [Online] <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/gallipoli/> [Date Accessed 30/11/08]
- Australian War Memorial. *The ANZAC Day Tradition* [Online] http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac/anzac_tradition.asp [Date Accessed 28/11/08]
- Badsey, S. *The Western Front and the Birth of Total War* [Online] http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/total_war_01.shtml [Date Accessed 1/12/08]
- Lewis, I. *History Quotes* [Online] http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_history.html [Date Accessed 30/11/2008]
- Liukkonen, P. *George Santayana* [Online] <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/santayan.htm> [Date Accessed 30/11/2008]
- Martin, G. *Gallipoli ANZAC Day Dawn Service* [Online] http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA200603_0702_1 [Date Accessed 3/12/08]
- Mountford, E. 2001, *Bombing of Darwin*, Hollands Print Solutions, Darwin
- Mountford, E. [Interviewed 28/11/08]
- Tyquin, M. *Shell Shock and the Australians* [Online] <http://www.springerlink.com/content/04nr31366n7m5513/fulltext.pdf> [Date Accessed 8/12/08]
- Web, K. 2008, *Analysing Australian History*, Cambridge, Melbourne
- Zarimis, M. [Interviewed 5/11/08]



Endnotes

- i http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/tota1_war_01.shtm1
[Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- ii <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1.asp> [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- iii <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/gallipo1i/> [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- iv Ibid
- v [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key
LA20060307021](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3KeyLA20060307021) [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- vi http://www.awm.gov.au/research/infosheets/war_casualties.asp [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- vii http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/statistics/world_wars.asp [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- viii <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/santayan> [Date Accessed 9/12/08]
- ix Mountford, E. 2001, *Bombing of Darwin* Hollands Print Solutions, Darwin, Pg .15

