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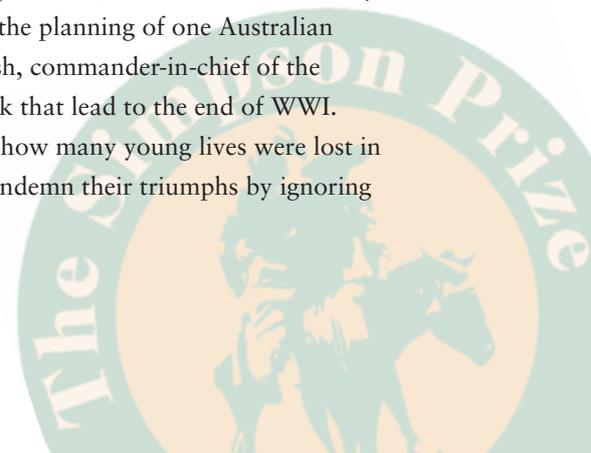
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World War I had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict?

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World War I (WWI) had a devastating impact on Australian society, and while we should not commemorate it for our participation in it, we should commemorate it for what our participation represented to Australia. When Australia became involved in WWI, the nation saw Australia shape an identity related to the character traits associated with a typical 'digger', unite as a nation at home in support of the cause and develop ideals that are reflected throughout and influence Australian society then and today. The whole world was devastated by the effects of WWI, but not expanding on this is merely scratching the surface of a very complex topic. It's easy enough to view the bigger picture, and say no good came from the war, enough said. We can hardly promote what happened in WWI, but nor should we condemn and ignore our participation in it. To do that would be to allow ourselves to be blinded by its repercussions and no longer see what we should commemorate, that is to say, Australians' character and sacrifice, the unity created and the ideals that we have today as a result of that.

Before the beginning of WWI, there was tension between the Allies; Britain, France, Russia and their supporting countries, and the Central Powers; Germany, Hungary, Turkey and their supporting countries. A great amount of rivalry, jealousy and distrust surrounded their existences through their desire to build up their empires. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 7) The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo sparked war between Austria and Serbia, and the involvement of the other countries was almost immediate. Australia, thirteen years young and with a thirst to prove itself followed its Mother country to war after the political party leaders vowed to assist Britain, seeing it as their patriotic duty. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 8) Australian men, in sync with our political leaders, saw it as their duty to help fuel the efforts of Britain and the Allies. 216 720 men sacrificed their lives, physical health and sanity so that our country would be protected, and our mother country would have the support it needed. It was also thanks to the planning of one Australian commander-in-chief that the war ended. Sir John Monash, commander-in-chief of the Australian Army in France planned the final British attack that lead to the end of WWI. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 8) It is truly devastating to find out how many young lives were lost in the war, but can we really condemn their bravery, and condemn their triumphs by ignoring their participation entirely?



One aspect of life in the war that the Australian Army was particularly known for was digging trenches, thus the term 'digger' was coined. Its association with the Australian Army was at first only through their trenches, but as the war continued, it became an affectionate term meaning mate, or pal. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 6) Every individual of every army was subject to the same horror, yet it was the Australian's who became known for enduring such horrors with larrikinism, a good nature, optimism and general willingness to stick by their mates in times like those. (Blair, 2001, pp. 3) Faced by such challenges, the ability to have an attitude like that shows how unique the Australian soldiers were in putting the lives of others before their own. As Jesus lay down his life to save us from our sins, Australian soldiers laid down their lives to save us from the invasion of foreign armies and from a corrupt world. If we fail to acknowledge this, to remember it, and to channel their courage in times of hardship, then we fail them, and their lives were lost in vain.

The Australian soldiers overseas were not alone. A whole nation rallied behind its boys. The support networks were phenomenal. The ratio of support personnel was an incredible 42:1, meaning for every soldier 42 or more people contributed to making sure they were fed, clothed, attended to medically, and had something to look forward to. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 11) Whole communities worked hard to ensure enough money was raised to purchase goods for the troops. The women knitted warm socks, which were constantly needed, and scarves. The shortage of men meant that some factories and other workplaces opened their doors to female workers, in order to keep their productivity rates up. This was still unusual, but gave women a cause. They were paid less than men, but were allowed to work in professions previously barred to them. Because of the war and what it led to at home, women began to challenge accepted expectations of them. (Beaumont, 1995, pp. 78) Despite the shortage of medicine, money and jobs, people remained patriotic. (Hillman, 2001, pp. 23) As a comparatively new nation, the way that Australia united to support its troops was admirable, and certainly deserves commemorating.

The perception of Australia from the perspective of other countries is largely that we are a friendly, laid back society. The perception of Australia from the perspective of ourselves, is that we have a common set of values. But what are these values, how far do they date back, and how did they come about? The personality traits that we value now and utilize throughout society were born and greatly influenced during and by the first war. Prime Minister Paul Keating said;

'It [the ANZACS] is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumphs against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is legend of free and independent spirit whose discipline derived from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and demands of necessity. It is a democratic tradition in which Australians have gone to war since.'

Australians now go to war with the intention of upholding our reputation as being committed to our nation, and to our mates. Similarly, Australian communities cast light to mateship as an important value, as well as a balance in work and play, larrikinism and honesty. These traits all originate from WWI. If these common values are to be observed as they are, then we reserve the right to recognize where they came from. It is part of our



heritage, and part of every Australian today. This is what we commemorate. That part of ourselves. We do not have the right to ignore that.

Part of every Australian is the spirit demonstrated by the soldiers in the First World War, those who came back alive, and those who sacrificed their lives. Our countries participation in WWI signified the beginning of the 'digger' legend, a united nation at home, and ideals that resonate through society today. We acknowledge the devastating impact WWI had on Australian Society, but this is what we should commemorate.

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