

## ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC TO MARK THE 93<sup>rd</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF ARMISTICE DAY

At 11 am on 11 November 1918 the guns of the Western Front fell silent when the Germans called for an armistice. The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month has attained special significance in the post-war years. It's the moment in time which has become universally associated with the remembrance of those who died in that war. After four years of bloodshed the battlefields were becalmed; Great empires had been broken; and millions lay dead—among them, sixty thousand Australian heroes whose final resting place will forever be foreign soil. And there were a further one hundred and fifty thousand whose bodies and minds were forever scarred by the horrors of that war. And all this from a country of some four million people. It was called the *War to End All Wars*. But we now know that it was not. It was the *First World War*.

Today we remember the end of that Great War where we as a nation paid a heavy price:

- 26,111 Australian casualties at Gallipoli including 8,141 deaths.
- 5,533 Australian casualties at Fromelles—in one night.
- In the fighting at Pozières the Australian Imperial Force suffered more than 23,000 casualties in little more than six weeks, with nearly 7,000 killed.
- At Bullecourt, 10,000 Australians were killed or wounded.
- During the three battles at Ypres there were 38,000 Australian casualties.

Today these numbers are mind-numbing—they are horrific in magnitude.

So it is right that we honour the service and sacrifice of the fallen today. It is right that we honour all those who have served. And it is right that we remember today those who are still serving.

From a naval perspective it is also right to consider that at the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the Australian Fleet operated as an integral part of the Royal Navy and served in all operational areas. The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force carried in HMAS *Berrima* and supported by units of the Australian Fleet, including HMAS *Australia* which had the first band of the Royal Australian Navy embarked and whose musicians performed wartime duties as medical orderlies) captured German New Guinea colonies. This was the first amphibious assault of the war. After this operation the ships of the Royal Australian Navy began the vital role of convoy escort. It was whilst escorting a convoy that the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* was detached to investigate the sighting of a strange warship. This ship turned out to be the German light cruiser *Emden*. In the ensuing battle *Sydney* destroyed the *Emden* and thus won the Royal Australian Navy's first battle.

The Royal Australian Navy also played a supporting role in the Gallipoli campaign. HMAS AE2 became the first allied warship to penetrate the Dardanelles, but was eventually sunk by the Turkish Navy in the Sea of Marmora. On the peninsula the Royal Australian Navy also played a supporting role in the Gallipoli campaign. HMAS AE2 became the Bridging Train provided vital service to the troops as well as being the last Australians to leave Gallipoli.

The submarines AE1 and AE2 were the only losses suffered by the Royal Australian Navy during this conflict. The first named was lost with all hands off New Britain on the 14 September 1914, and AE2 was scuttled by her crew in the Sea of Marmora on the 30 April 1915, after she had forced a passage through the dangerous waters of the Dardanelles in support of the Gallipoli campaign.

In years past, Remembrance Day ceremonies overwhelmingly reflected personal loss. It is different now. Thankfully, a great many Australians have no personal experience of war, no way of knowing the anguish of enforced separation, or the greater grief of separations made permanent.

Today we remember that each of the fallen had a family and friends whose lives were enriched by their love and diminished by their loss. Each added to the life of a city suburb or country town. Each worked before enlistment in one of countless occupations, which added to the prosperity and the richness of our nation. These strangers from another time have given us a legacy from the past on which to build the future.

A spirit born on the cliffs of Gallipoli, then matured in the mud of the Western Front, in jungles and in deserts, and in desperate struggles on the seas and in the sky. A spirit which draws Australians together in time of need. A spirit which may seem to slumber; but arises to draw new breath when needed.

Their story, the legacy of all Australians who have died or suffered in war and armed conflict, has been passed to each one of us. By today's act of remembrance, we cherish and nurture this possession, their gift. We prove an understanding both of its value and its cost.

One of the most enduring symbols of Remembrance Day is the Red Poppy, which was among the first plants that sprouted from the devastation of the battlefields of northern France and Belgium. This same poppy also flowers in Turkey in early spring—as it did in April 1915 when the ANZACs landed at Gallipoli. Folklore tells us that the poppies were vivid red from having been nurtured in ground drenched with the blood of soldiers.

The Red Poppy was first described as a flower of remembrance by Colonel John McCrae who served in France in World War One as a medical Officer with the first Canadian Contingent. After watching the death of a close friend he wrote in pencil on a page torn from his despatch book the following poem which has become synonymous with Remembrance Day:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

We should all be familiar with that poem, but you may not know that it inspired many replies from across the world including the following poem from an American, Miss Moira Michael, entitled *We Shall Keep the Faith*:

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders' fields,  
Sleep sweet - to rise anew,  
We caught the torch you threw,  
And holding high we kept  
The faith with those who died.  
We cherish too, the poppy red  
That grows on fields where valour led.

It seems to signal to the skies  
That blood of heroes never dies,  
But lends a lustre to the red  
Of the flower that blooms above the dead  
In Flanders' fields.

And now the torch and poppy red  
Wear in honour of our dead.  
Fear not that ye have died for naught  
We've learned the lesson that ye taught  
In Flanders' fields.

It is right that we remember those who fell, that we remember the lessons they have passed to us, and that we honour the contribution they have made to our nation. We honour the contribution they have made to the world. And we commit ourselves afresh to the worthy cause of peace.

Lest We Forget