
Why Do We Have A Continued Interest And Desire To Memorialise Ww1

Australians have fought in both world wars, and many other wars since becoming a unified nation, and although many people died in and as a result of these wars, our losses are minute compared to the losses of other countries like France, England and Germany. Although we have comparatively small losses we have an especially strong desire to memorialise war, especially the western front in the first world war. Because of this desire, we put huge amounts of time, resources and money in to memorials and other memorialisation's, but why do we have a continued interest and desire to memorialise war, and in particular the western front?

Memorialisation in Australia

To begin to answer this question of why, we first must understand how we memorialise war. As Australians, we have been memorialising war since the ending of our involvement in the 1st world war. We memorialise war in many ways; whether it be dawn services, cemeteries and marches to commemorative events and overseas memorials or the aptly named ANZAC day on the 25th of April, memorialising war is a big part in Australian history. Even though we have been memorialising war for so long it has only been in recent years that it has gained popular attention, dawn services used to be attended mainly by other veterans due to the negative opinions of war held by the general public after the Vietnam war. However due to these changes of opinion, participation of such events, especially dawn services are actively encouraged, for example an email to all public-sector employees was sent from the premier of South Australia, Steven Marshall, on the 24th of April 2018, the day before Anzac Day encouraging employees to participate in a dawn service or other commemorative activities. But it's not just on this one day that we have memorials and pay our respects to those who fought in the wars we have many permanent memorials like statues, obelisks and monuments.

The vast majority of country towns and cities in Australia have an obelisk or statue commemorating the wars that Australians have fought in, and the city of Adelaide is no exception, "The National War Memorial" located on the northern side of the Adelaide CBD, is the largest monument in Adelaide sitting on approximately half an acre of land. It was opened by Governor Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven VC, DSO on Anzac Day in 1931 to a crowd of approximately 75,000 people . Roughly 35,000 South Australians enlisted in WW1 (37.7% of the male population between 18 and 44 years of age) with 5511 killed and 15 000 wounded. Although called the "National War Memorial" it was dedicated purely to the South Australians who fought in the 1st World War. Memorialisation Overseas However, there are also Australian war memorials, cemeteries and dawn services overseas on, or nearby the sites that Australian soldiers fought on especially in France. Many of these battlefields now over 100 years old have been left unchanged, with trenches, and craters where mortar rounds impacted still clearly visible and stakes that once held barbed wire still standing all being slowly eroded away with time. One of these sites is Villers Bretonneux where there is a permanent grave and memorial for Australian, Canadian and British soldiers, Villers Bretonneux is the site of a famous battle in which the German army launched a successful attack to capture the town of Villers Bretonneux, in the following days Australian and British forces surrounded and retook the town.

During this battle 2400 Australian's and 9500 British soldiers lost their lives. As a result of this successful battle, every year on the 25th of April a dawn service is held at the Villers Bretonneux war memorial, thousands of Australians attend with many high-profile politicians and personalities among them. At the 2018 dawn service held at Villers Bretonneux Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull spoke about the battle of Villers Bretonneux, and the impact the Australian soldiers had on the battle. However, it's not only the dawn service but the preparation leading up to the day, since the recent surge in numbers attending overseas dawn services, massive grandstands and shelters were erected for the service at Villers Bretonneux and hundreds of chairs laid out for the attendees. It was estimated that approximately 8200 Australians travelled from Australia to attend the 2018 dawn service at Villers Bretonneux and the opening of the Sir John Monash Centre.

Why do we as Australians have a desire to memorialise war? At the outbreak of the 1st World War Australia was a very new country keen to prove itself to the world, especially England. Since the ending of WW1, we have spent millions of dollars on memorials. But why did we suddenly start caring so much about Anzac Day and these memorial services, was it politically motivated, was it to unify the population of Australia in a common belief or was it to cover up something more sinister? Remembering Do we memorialise war purely so that we don't forget the horrors and tragedies of war without events like ANZAC Day and War memorials would it all be forgotten, his Excellency, the Governor Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, at the unveiling of the SA National War Memorial, 25 April 1931, said; "It is not only for ourselves that we have erected this visible remembrance of great deeds, but rather that those who come after us and have not experienced the horrors of war or realised the wanton destruction and utter futility of it all, may be inspired to devise some better means to settle international disputes other than by international slaughter." Meaning that we must remember, what has happened so as not to repeat it, or at least find another way to settle these disputes. This is similar to George Santayana's aphorism in his book *The Life of Reason* in which he states; "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" Forming an Identity Australia is a very new country in comparison to the rest of the world and because of this we have a very short history, this means that our contribution in these wars has made up a large part of our history and national identity.

Kevin Rudd said in 2010; "All nations are shaped by their histories, their memories and their stories" With our short and often uninspiring history have we glorified the points in our short history in which we believe are inspiring. With many historians describing the Australian soldiers in WW1 as having qualities such as heroism, courage and mateship. Clemence Due from the University of Melbourne's department of History quoted in her essay "'Lest we forget': creating an Australian national identity from memories of war" that... "Anzacs are portrayed as symbolising values and attitudes which are distinctly Australian, and are generally considered to have had a large impact on the formation of Australian national identity" This mentality that we have about the Anzacs and the values that they are said to have held provides an increasing number of young Australians with a feel-good, feel-proud attitude. It also provides people with role model type figures, with young people especially looking up to these Anzac Legends.