

## **73<sup>rd</sup> Re-union Dinner RSL Caloundra**

**5 October 2019**

Good evening Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you tonight, together with my husband Shane and my daughter Madeleine. Heather has asked that I talk about the Australian War Memorial and the RSL.

I would like to start by offering some comments about the beginnings of the Memorial and the remarkable man whose vision it was, whose appreciation and love of the Australian soldier underpinned the push for a national shrine. These sentiments are what motivates us still.

### **THE BEGINNING**

The Memorial was of course the brainchild of Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean who was the longest serving war correspondent at Gallipoli.

He soon abandoned his observer status and began carrying messages between the brigade commander and the troops; also delivering water to the men in the trenches and helping carry the wounded to safer ground.

For the help he gave to wounded men under fire he was recommended for the Military Cross: as a civilian he was not eligible to receive it.

During the 6 months he was at Gallipoli he was shot in the leg whilst carrying a wounded soldier but refused to be evacuated.

He subsequently spent 3 years covering the war on the Western Front; his extensive diaries revealing not only the horrors of war but the bravery and determination of the AIF. He wrote about what he saw and experienced and he did not whitewash it.

Bean's time in Gallipoli and the Western Front left him, as with many others, a revulsion of war but with a powerful admiration of the strength, determination and mateship displayed by the soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force. He dreamed of a way to exhibit and honour these traits. He not only wrote 6 diaries and edited 8 others, he also worked towards the establishment of a national shrine.

Much has been said about his anti-Semitism, particularly in relation to General John Monash and it was true that he held many of the conventional attitudes of the time. However, post war, Bean recanted his opposition to Monash being appointed Commander of the Australian Forces in 1918, conceding that Monash had proven to be a highly competent leader as well as popular with the men.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Bean was able to shed many of those conventional prejudices over his lifetime, reversing not only his religious intolerances but also lamenting the displacement of Aboriginals from traditional lands, becoming a member of the League of Nations Union and in the 1940's supporting the notion of a Jewish refuge in Australia in response to their persecution in Europe; also urging acceptance of migrants from Asia and lamenting the continuation of a "senseless colour line".

In 1917, largely as a result of his lobbying, the Australian War Records Section was established under the command of Captain John Treloar. This department arranged for the collection of documents, relics from the field and the appointment of official war photographers and artists.

Bean spent the next 3 decades developing his concept of what was to become the Australian War Memorial.

The main building of the Memorial was completed in 1941 at a cost of 250,000 pounds, a much lower figure than originally envisioned due to the commencement of World War 2.

Initially conceived as a memorial to the Australian Forces in WW 1, the onset of World War 2 meant an expansion of that concept.

The Hall of Memory, a significant part of the Memorial, was completed in 1959. It adhered to Bean's views that war should not be glorified, but that those who fought for, and died for, their country should be remembered. Bean's other ideal was that the enemy should not be referred to in derogatory terms. These 3 concepts remain the abiding philosophical principles of the Memorial to date.

Bean died in 1968, having declined a knighthood on 2 separate occasions.

Today, the Memorial consists of 3 main parts:

1. The Shrine;
2. The Memorials Galleries or Museum;  
and
3. The Research Centre.

There have been additions over time:

- The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, added in the Hall of Memory in 1993;
- ANZAC Hall was annexed to the back of the Memorial displaying large military hardware; and
- The Outdoor Sculpture Garden embedded with plaques commemorating specific units and historical events as well as sculptures and military hardware.

Only 5% of the Memorial's Collection is displayed at any one time, with the remainder being stored at the Treloar Resource Centre in the suburb of Mitchell. This facility includes workshops for restoration and archives.

## WHAT IS THE AWM TODAY?

It is by its very name **a shrine** to those wounded and fallen in battle, the Hall of Memory and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier perhaps the most potent reminder and recognition of this. It is regarded as one of the most significant memorials of its type in the world.

It is **a military museum**, the only major institution of its kind in Australia.

Through its exhibitions, both permanent and temporary, it displays the many campaigns Australians have been engaged in.

It is the repository of the majority of bravery awards such as the Victorian and George Crosses awarded to Australians since the Boer War. We currently have 81 of the 100 VC's awarded plus another 11 on loan.

It is an **events centre**. It hosts a prolific number of ceremonies in remembrance:

- The Dawn Service and ANZAC Day Ceremony, which is actually a function of the RSL ACT branch;
- The Remembrance Day National Ceremony in November.
- As well as numerous one off events commemorating individuals, specific military units and historical anniversaries.

One of the most popular memorial services is the Last Post ceremony held daily at 4:45pm; more than 77,000 people now attend over a 12 month period.

The Last Post was instituted in 2013. There is a brief description of the service of the individual or unit being commemorated; a piper and bugler descend from the Hall of Memory and wreathes are laid at the base of the pool of reflection. The Last Post is piped. There is nothing like this personal ceremony of remembrance anywhere else in the world

and was one of the many innovations of the current director, Dr Brendan Nelson. It is hugely popular.

Applications for inclusion in the Last Post are now scheduled 2 years in advance and are expected to continue into the next century.

In recent times the Memorial has showcased our more recent campaigns such as Afghanistan.

Through temporary exhibitions we have managed to display different parts of service and history, such as the SAS exhibition, involvement of indigenous soldiers and the holocaust.

As Australia has evolved as a Nation, so too has the Memorial evolved to display our involvement in more contemporary actions, such as Afghanistan.

The Memorial is also an **art gallery** with something in the order of 36,000 items: paintings, sculptures and other artworks.

To many the Memorial is the emotional heart of their military service. It is a historical reminder of the conflicts in which they were involved, it is a public recognition of the value of their service, it is a memorial to their fallen comrades and an emotional journey that many have difficulty confronting.

Latterly, the AWM has been opened after hours to individuals and very small groups of veterans who are unable to journey through the commemoration halls in the noise and bustle of general opening hours. This is made possible by the generosity of staff who volunteer to stay after hours to enable this to happen. The Memorial currently has around 280 permanent staff and 160 volunteer staff.

The third main arm of the Memorial is the **Military History and Research Section** which houses a huge collection of military documentation and research material. Some of this material requires a security clearance but the general public is able to access records

pertaining to relatives who served, not only their military history but often associated material such as letters and postcards. An increasing number of people are seeking such access given the current interest in family history.

As part of this commitment to maintaining the history of our involvement in conflict events, the Memorial has engaged historians to author various works, 2 such recent ones being the *Official History of Australian Peacekeeping: Humanitarian and Post Cold War Operations* and *The Vietnam Medical Legacies Project*, headed by Dr Yule (expected to be published by the end of 2020).

I have gone into brief detail of some of the major aspects of the Australian War Memorial. To go into greater detail of all the exhibits and works of the Memorial would sound like a tourist blog and no doubt send you all to sleep.

But I want to demonstrate that through necessity the Memorial has evolved over time to a multifunctional organisation but it remains at its heart a shrine and always will.

There has been some criticism that the Memorial is turning into a sort of Disneyland for tourists.

I can assure you the Memorial takes its responsibility to veterans, their families and to this nation most seriously.

But the nature of modern life and its inexhaustible thirst for information, together with its amazing technology, means that we must feed that thirst with accurate knowledge, in a sensitive and meaningful way, particularly to our youth who have been raised in a peaceful democratic country with no real understanding of the costs of war.

The Memorial has often been described as the “heart of the nation”: and yet when funding was recently obtained to upgrade, restore and develop the Memorial the announcement was met with outrage in some

quarters, partly because the notion of any major changes is upsetting to many, partly because other major public and cultural institutions are lagging for want of adequate funding but also because it was suggested that the government should spend that money on veterans services.

Certainly, veterans' services could do with additional funding. We all support more funding for veterans as well as, perhaps more importantly, a more efficient delivery of services.

But when one considers that the NSW government has promised over 1.5 billion for the upgrade and build of 3 sports stadiums in Sydney and the WA government has announced over \$300 million for its sports stadium, there was no demur from the public. What does that say about our priorities?

There is no denying we love our football. But we should also love our heritage and history, the ideals we believe were important in the past and are still important and relevant for our future.

It is no accident that the Memorial has been built at the other end of Anzac Parade, in clear view of Parliament House, a constant reminder of what our nation owes our veterans.

The Hall of Memory is the heart of the Memorial. Its Byzantine Dome houses 15 stained glass windows and a world renowned mosaic designed by Napier Waller OBE CMG, cloaking the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Let me remind you of the values inscribed at the base of each of these windows.

RESOURCE

CANDOUR

DEVOTION

CURIOSITY

INDEPENDENCE

COMRADESHIP

PATRIOTISM

CHIVALRY

LOYALTY

COOLNESS

CONTROL

AUDACITY

ENDURANCE

DECISION

These were the virtues or characteristics observed in the Australians in the First World War. Each value informs character and I suggest remains just as valid and aspirational today as they did when the Hall of Memory was completed in 1959.

In a rapidly changing world, where new ideas and attitudes are thrust upon us with incomprehensible speed, where the social and cultural norms of our childhood are revised, updated, sometimes discarded, where 16 year old girls chastise us for our lack of action, where social media tells us what to think on all sorts of issues without allowing for adequate time to consider the long term consequences or allow for general consensus:

- indeed where we are castigated if we do not immediately agree with the latest social change:
- where the very language we use is dictated by the somewhat hysterical urgings of extremists, where words such as “climate change” morph into climate *emergency*, then climate *crisis*:
- where fake news, internet hacks, identity theft, financial frauds originating overseas, the cyber-attacks on our information

systems are all weapons to undermine our stability, our way of life, our belief in ourselves as a democratic nation,

we are increasingly being made to feel ashamed of our prosperity, and the freedoms we now take for granted.

The concept of warfare has changed. It is not just about whose weapons or military hardware is the biggest or best, although this will always be a factor with the military.

The introduction of cyber systems means that the potential for conflict has been brought into our very homes by enemies who need no longer set foot on our shores to do damage.

The concepts of cyber-attacks on our information, communication and transport systems are no longer in the realm of science fiction.

On the front lawn of the Australian War Memorial there is a sign that states “**For we are young and free**”, a line from our national anthem. Our director, Dr Nelson, believes this to be a powerful message.

What does it mean?

The first part is easy enough to understand. We are a young nation, a mere 120 years since Federation united the disparate colonies to form a nation in the Western tradition.

We are culturally young in terms of our ideals and traditions, unlike the European countries from where most of us originate or indeed the original inhabitants of this land.

Despite our youth we have endured a century of enormous change: the settlement of an inhabited land, the unification of British penal and free settler colonies under a central government, 2 world wars, multiple engagements in smaller conflicts no less bloody for their lack of size, as well as peace keeping roles in places far from home where we know not the people, their language or culture.

In the civilian sense we have dealt with life changing social changes: the emancipation of women, the integration our lands' original inhabitants plus successive waves of new migrants, mostly Europeans following World Wars One and Two (such as my own parents), Koreans and Vietnamese following those conflicts and latterly from South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. Dare I mention same sex marriage, to name but a few.

We have done our best to integrate these diverse groups into our own culture; a slow process but a process nonetheless.

Our youth as a nation is easily understood.

What about the part that states “**we are free**”?

We enjoy political and financial freedoms that are the envy of many. We have never been invaded, although the Japanese did their best with bombing raids in the Northern Territory and a submarine attack in Sydney Harbour.

We have been attacked but never invaded.

We enjoy a democratic system of government with free elections. Those who complain about compulsory voting might need a reminder that freedom is not free.

With all our political and democratic freedoms and our economic prosperity comes obligation.

Freedom comes at a price and has been paid for with the blood of our wounded soldiers and our dead.

It has come at the cost of much suffering from our involvement in many foreign engagements, which have kept the enemy from our shores, not just from the direct threats of 2 world wars, but also from the infringement of more covert enemies.

We have placed such importance on this notion of freedom that we have fought and died for it, not only for ourselves but for our friends and allies.

What we do as a nation also matters. The world is shrinking; we do not live in isolation at the bottom of the planet.

Our nation is still at risk. The enemy has changed tactics, the nature of war, of conflict, is not quite so black and white as it once was, not so overt.

Whilst the defence of our borders is paramount, we have placed such importance on this notion of freedom that we have fought and died for it, not only for ourselves but for our allies, and even for peoples and cultures so very different to our own.

We have to this end, fought and died on foreign soil, in outright horror situations of war but also in numerous peacekeeping engagements.

We Australians punch greatly above our weight in helping the world maintain a certain equilibrium.

What we have done as a nation, what you have done as individuals, has great value. Never doubt it.

I want to speak now about **Places of Pride**, a recent innovation of the Australian War Memorial.

The Places of Pride website is the National Register of War Memorials and aims to record the location and photos of every war memorial across the country. The website currently has 6,294 community and RSL memorials recorded.

We have also sought the support for this project through contribution of non-public memorials in Defence facilities.

Although the Memorial has over 1 million visitors a year, 150,000 being school children, it is fundamental that our history be accessible at a local and community level. Not everyone can get to Canberra.

Local RSL museums and community memorials play a significant role in keeping the stories of our involvement in conflict actions and our everyday heroes alive. It is not just a matter of history. It is not just a reminder of *what* and *when* but also *why*.

Not every veteran who serves with commitment and bravery receives the recognition of those with medals of valour. But every service man and woman deserves recognition and appreciation.

On a local community level there is that added factor of association: the veteran grew up in the area, had family, went to school, maybe married and had kids there.

Here in Caloundra, you have the Bob McInnes Memorial Garden, registered on the Queensland War Memorial Register and I am pleased to see the AWM's Places of Pride.

I can see that the Garden contains a number of elements; a restored RAAF Iroquois "Huey" helicopter, dedication plaques, a flagpole, the RSL badge and a stone cenotaph, light anti-aircraft guns, a ships anchor, a Pillar of Peace, a stone dedication to those lost to suicide (unfortunately an ongoing problem); a Gallipoli tree if I can call it that as well as many other elements.

It is quite clear that a lot of time, effort and love have gone into the establishment of the Bob McInnes Memorial Garden. It is one of the most comprehensive and impressive local community memorials I have seen. It is very impressive and you are to be congratulated.

I note the Caloundra Council intends to demolish the Bob McInnes Memorial Garden, or part of it, in order to expand the roadway system

so as to resolve transport issues. I understand it has offered to relocate and restore the Garden in another location.

As a member of the AWM Council I am not permitted to comment on individual matters. I can only stress that local memorials are a significant reminder to the community of the sacrifice made by others, and perhaps also a reminder as to whether we have been deserving of that sacrifice.

Community support is vital.

In conclusion I would like to paraphrase something that Sir Peter Cosgrove said at the ANZAC Ceremony in Canberra last April.

What you have done as individuals, what you continue to do for your country, has enormous value.

It matters.

You matter.

And we at the Australian War Memorial are here to remind everyone of that.

Thank you for your service.