**The Geoffrey Bolton Lecture**

***Here is their Spirit* – the Anzac Centenary and the Generation that gave a nation its story.**

I was honoured to receive and accept the invitation to deliver the 2014 Geoffrey Bolton Lecture.

If meaning is built into a life by the people and causes to which it is committed, Geoffrey Bolton’s life has been an extraordinarily meaningful one.

Over more than six decades, he has published works on Australian history in form and language accessible to everyday Australians. He has authored fourteen books, co-authored many more and played a central role in bringing both knowledge and understanding to Western Australia’s social and political history. His life and its work – in history, humanities and social sciences, remind us that if all economic and scientific problems were ever solved, all important questions would remain unanswered.

Geoffrey Bolton is simply - a giant in a state that has produced so many.

Charles Bean was Australia’s official First World War Historian.

He landed with the troops at Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915 and stayed with them at the front through the entire war. It was said of Bean that no-one risked death more often. He carried a Turkish bullet in his leg from the August offensive in 1915, having refused evacuation.

He wrote six of the twelve volumes of the official history and edited the other six. The task would take almost a quarter of a century to complete.

At its very end, in seeking to summarise it all, he wrote this:

*What these men did, nothing can alter now.
The good and the bad, the greatness and the smallness of their story
It rises….it always rises, above the mists of time.
A monument to great hearted men, and for their nation – a possession forever.*

Of all that Bean witnessed and recorded, what perhaps says it best is an incident before the assault on Lone Pine, Gallipoli.

Lone Pine was a frontal assault, but the fighting and dying was by bayonet and bombs in the Turkish trenches, tunnels and galleries over a four day period front the 6th of August 1915. At its end would be 2,300 Australian and 7,000 Turkish casualties. Seven Australians would be awarded the Victoria Cross.

In the pre-dawn darkness, Bean observed an Australian soldier leaning over the forward trench.

*‘Jim here?’ he asked.
A voice in the fire step answered, ‘Right here Bill’.
‘Do you chaps mind movin’ up a piece?’ asked the first voice.
‘Him and me are mates - and we’re goin’ over together’*

At its end, Sergeant Laurence, a tunnelling engineer, stood atop the Turkish trenches looking back to the Australian lines and observed the carnage:

*All the way across is just one mass of dead bodies.
Beside me I count fourteen of our boys – stone dead. It is a piteous sight.
Men and boys who yesterday were full of joy and life,
now lying there cold, lifeless……glassy eyes, sallow, dusty faces.
Soulless….somebody’s son, somebody’s boy.
The Major standing next to me says, “Well, we have won”.
Won – that means a victory, and all these bodies within arm’s reach.
Then may I never see a defeat.*

Every nation has its story. This is ours.

John Stuart Mill, the great nineteenth century English philosopher and pioneer of liberal thinking, concluded that there were two essential elements for a nation to exist.

The first was that a people would want to be governed as one single nation state.

Our forebears over a generation and a half in the late 19th century, intensely debated with much anguish whether we should become a nation. Finally in 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was born and its legal architecture was in place.

Mill’s second essential element for a nation was that its people were bound by a ‘common fellow feeling’, one deeply rooted in language, literature and history.

Beyond its indigenous history, the pioneering efforts of those who came on the first fleet and others who joined them throughout the nineteenth century, it was not until the cataclysm that unfolded in late 1914, that our nation had its story.

Formation of the Australian Imperial Forces, Australians recruited into an Australian uniform and sent overseas with an Australian flag. The series of military battles that ensued, the deep divisions within Australia, especially around two conscription referenda, the pride of victory infused with a generation of deep mourning and grief – all combined to give the young nation a greater sense of belief in itself and place in the world.

We went away firmly British, but returned with a greater sense of being Australian. Prime Minister Billy Hughes’ asserting our young nation’s interests to US President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles conference in 1919 – “I speak for 60,000 (Australian) dead, how many do you speak for?” was but one manifestation of this new confidence.

Australia’s population in 1914 was just over 4.5 million. We had a million men who were of an age that could volunteer. Of those, 417,000 did, 32,231 volunteering in Western Australia. Four years later would be almost 62,000 dead, more than 7,000 of whom were Western Australians.

Another 60,000 would be dead within ten years of returning of the 155,000 who had been wounded.

Such were the deep wounds inflicted on the young nation, which to its immense credit and our pride, twice rejected conscription.

One hundred years ago, amidst the excitement and apprehension, a young “Banjo”, AB Patterson described the departure of the first convoy from Albany, the sense of historic moment in his prophetic words:

*Noiselessly the great ship gathers speed and moves ahead through the waiting fleet; and, as she goes out, the vessels that are to follow her in line get silently under weigh and fall in line behind her … Thirty thousand fighting men, representing Australasia, are under way for the great war.*

No one really knew what would lie ahead.

At Pozieres, France in late July 1916, Australia had sustained 23,000 casualties in just six weeks. Charles Bean wrote in his diary:

*Many a man lying out there at Pozieres and in the low scrub of Gallipoli
with his poor, tired senses barely working through the fever of his brain,
has thought in his last moments, well….well, it’s over.
But in Australia, they will be proud of this.*

Around that time, a mortally wounded Australian asked Bean, “Will they remember me in Australia?”

And so he conceived and resolved that at the war’s end he would build the finest museum and memorial to the men of the AIF and nurses.

The power is in the story.

Here is just some of it.

Driver Douglas Barrett-Lennard was a vigneron from Guildford, Western Australia. He was a member of the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade when he was killed at Gallipoli on the 17th of July 1915. His mate, Corporal H.R. McLarty wrote home detailing the circumstances:

“This is how the men in this battery die. When the smoke from the bursting shell had cleared away, Wallis ran up to see the damage. He found Mick Taylor crawling about the ground, covered in blood and dazed.

Bill said, ‘Are you badly hit, Mick?’

‘No, Bill’, he said. ‘I am only scratched; look after Doug and Stan’. (We subsequently found he was wounded in 14 places)

Bill Wallis then picked up Doug Lennard. The poor lad had one arm blown off, one leg shattered at the thigh and internal wounds. He said, ‘I’m done; look after Mick and Stan – don’t mind me’.

Carter was leaning on the gun. He had a fearful wound in the side. He said, ‘I’m sorry I’m moaning. I know it will upset the others, but I can’t help it. I can’t help it.’

He died, poor lad, almost immediately. His last words were, ‘Did they get the gun?’

Doug (Barret-Lennard) was in fearful agony but kept saying, ‘I’m dying, but by God, I’ll die game.’ He lingered for two hours and it was a pitiful thing to watch. His last words were, ‘I died at the gun, didn’t I?’

And so he went, dear lad, the most gallant, the most unselfish little soldier God ever made. He has taught us all how to die.

Mick may pull through – fourteen wounds. God grant it may be so.

I do not think in the whole history of this war there is anything to eclipse this incident for gallantry or unselfish devotion to comrades.

The General spoke to us all. He said, ‘Dear lads, I have heard of nothing grander than the way your comrades died. I am proud of your battery. I would be proud to be a gunner in your battery. I only hope that when you return you will be appreciated as you should be.’

“We buried the dear lads side by side at midnight. It was a real soldier’s burial. The minister’s voice was drowned in the crack of the bullets whistling overhead.

And thus we left them.”

Also at Gallipoli, Private Victor Nicholson saw his mate ‘Lofty’ killed at Quinn’s Post, shot through the eye peeping through a peep hole:

‘I didn’t cry, unless Gallipoli was one long cry.

If you cried once, you never stopped.

There were friends going every day and sometimes every hour of the day, wonderful friends. You cried inwardly, that’s all you could do.’

But it was at The Nek on 7 August that extraordinary courage was shown by these men, including the Western Australians of the 10th Light Horse.

The Nek was a vitally important position on the northern end of the positions at Anzac. The attack was part of a diversionary effort for the August Offensive, and intended to draw Turkish troops south from the main assault thrusting towards the Sari Bair Range.

The attack was to begin at 4.30 am on 7 August in four waves of 150 men each. The distance to advance was only 20 to 60 metres. It would be preceded by a bombardment of the Turkish trenches. However, the bulk of the shells fell beyond their intended targets and ended seven minutes early.

Instead of charging at this point, the light horse officers held their men back until the appointed time for the attack arrived. In that eerie silence, they could here the Turks cocking their rifles and testing their machine guns, only metres away.

In the first wave, Lieut Colonel A. White elected to lead the men of the 8th Light Horse whom he loved. Historian Phillip Schuler documented him making a brief farewell to his brother officers shaking each by the hand. He then stood in the firing-line of the trench waiting, watch in hand.

“Men”, he said, “you have ten minutes to live, and I will lead you”.

The whole line went when the time came. White had not gone ten paces when he fell dead.

The first assaulting wave from the 8th Light Horse Regiment was shot to pieces as was the second, also from the 8th. Light horse officers suggested cancelling the attack, but this was overruled by Major John Antill, commander of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade.

The Western Australians of the 10th Light Horse Regiment formed the third and fourth assaulting waves. The men filing into the trench for the third wave took a last look at photos of wives and loved ones, removing wedding rings and keepsakes,  and attached them to the inside of the trench.

When the whistle blew, all jumped over the parapet with a cry.

At its end at, of the 600 who went ‘over the top’, the 3rd Light Horse Brigade suffered 372 casualties. The bodies were piled two and three deep on an area the size of two tennis courts.

Sergeant Cliff Pinnock miraculously survived the first wave. In pained anguish he later said:

“Roll call was the saddest - 47 of 550 men answered the call.
When I heard the result, I cried like a baby.”

Charles Bean summarised the epic, senseless savagery of it and the bravery of these men:

"The 10th [Light Horse Regiment] went forward to meet death instantly, as the 8th had done, the men running as swiftly and as straight as they could at the Turkish rifles.  With that regiment went the flower of the youth of Western Australia, sons of the old pioneering families, youngsters--in some cases two or three from the same home--who had flocked to Perth at the outbreak of war with their own horses and saddlery in order to secure enlistment in a mounted regiment of the A.I.F….. Men known and popular, the best loved leaders in sport and work in the West, then rushed straight to their death.”

And then, there was France and Belgium. Forty six thousand Australians would remain buried there, silent witnesses to the future for which their lives were given. The bloody road to victory after General Monash’s command of the Australian Corps in 1918 and the key role played by Australians in breaking the Hindenburg line would infuse the tragedy with a pride that would sustain us in the aftermath of the war.

Again, the power is in the story.

Neville Macken wrote to his brother, Victor in Wagga Wagga from the Somme. He described the death of their younger brother, Bob, aged 22 who was in the same gun crew, the 5th Field Artillery.

Dear Victor,

By this time you will have heard the terrible news of Bob’s death. It came as a terrible shock to me and all the boys of the battery, even though we are expecting to be killed at any minute.

Bob was killed on August 23 at half past five. A shell burst between him and the other chap H.J. Curtis, the tie manufacturer from Sydney. Both were blown open and absolutely pulped.

Nothing has unnerved me more here than the sight of my own brother, Bob lying stiff in the trench.

The OC (Officer Commanding) gave sub permission to bury Bob and Curtis in a little British cemetery, one mile from the gun pits on the old Pozieres road. We buried Bob and Curtis side by side in one grave and we erected a wooden cross painted white and edged with black, made by one of his mates.

Military won’t stand grave stones until after the war, but I think this cross should always be left there as Bob died in action by the gun and the cross was made by mates in appreciation of Bob’s and Curtis’ personalities and service.

The Cross has a rising sun nailed to it. I am trying to get a photo of the grave.

Cheer mum up.

Herb

A former senior cabinet colleague recently remarked to me that other former colleagues had been ‘surprised’ that, with my background I had chosen to take a relatively ‘low status’ job as director of the Australian War Memorial given the CV that I had brought to it.

Each of us occasionally has an epiphany. Mine came in 2011.

I arrived in Brussels as Australia’s ambassador to Belgium, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) early in 2010. Several months later, I discovered a Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery near Ploegsteert in the French speaking part of Flanders.

I walked past the truly Anzac ‘Mud Corner’ cemetery in which are buried only Australians and New Zealanders. Then I walked along a country lane almost a kilometre through the paddocks and grazing cows. Then, in the midst of the beautiful, lightly wooded forest, a small cemetery appeared, shards of spring light breaking through the tree cover above.

It is the Toronto Avenue Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. It is one of only two cemeteries on the entire Western Front containing only Australian graves. Seventy eight Australians are buried there, all having died over three days in June 1917 in the battle of Messines.

I immediately thought that this is where there should be an Anzac Day ceremony conducted in the late afternoon. I resolved that I would do so in 2011 and that it would become a permanent feature of ANZAC Day commemorations in Belgium.

As ambassador I knew that I would deliver the Anzac Day address at the service. In preparation I wrote to a little organisation I had joined when minister for Defence – the Families and Friends of the First AIF. I asked if one of its amateur historians might send me six profiles of the Australians buried there.

From these I chose one. I chose it because it was it was the story of a typical Australian.

John Stannon Luff was born in 1887 in Freemantle, Western Australia. He attended Beaconsfield Primary School, leaving to become a gardener for the Freemantle municipality.

In 1908 he was appointed caretaker of the Freemantle Oval. He married the love of his life, Ruby McLaughlin in 1911. They then lived under the grandstand at the Freemantle Oval (Victoria Pavillion), producing three children – Eric, Ron and May.

To the distressed opposition of Ruby, John Luff enlisted in the AIF in March 1916. From training, embarkation and time in England, he would fight in France and Belgium, writing eleven letters home to Ruby.

His last letter written on 25 May, three weeks before his death, said in part:

‘Don’t worry Dear,

I will come back some day to you……I do get down hearted when I think of you and my dear little children. It nearly breaks my heart, especially when I am in danger, and that is pretty often lately……..I do feel sorry for some of the poor boys when there is strafe on.

They do get frightened; especially the new men….they hang on to us old boys. It is a jolly hard life, and no one knows – only us poor chaps here….

I like my chances. I think I’ll come through all right and I don’t want you to worry…’

Luff was killed on 7 June 1917 tending to a wounded man on open ground. He was thirty years old.

Ruby Luff’s case was taken up by the Ugly Men’s Association, volunteers who built her a house. She moved into it with the children in July 1918 and lived there until her death on 26 May 1968.

So on Anzac Day 2011 we conducted the first service at Toronto Avenue. I told John Luff’s story. But I also had a photograph sent me by the FFFAIF – John Luff in his uniform and Ruby in her ‘Sunday best’ with Eric, Ron and May in front of them.

I enlarged and laminated the photo, inscribing it on the rear:

*To Jack and Ruby.
In immense admiration and appreciation.
Brendan Nelson
Australian Ambassador Anzac Day 2011*

I placed the photograph on the grave and we all left.

Weeks later I received a letter from Mr Roland Rayfield, of Bicton, Western Australia.

He wrote in part:

Dear Dr Nelson,
My wife and I were in Belgium recently. We went to the Toronto Avenue Cemetery on Sunday the 8th of May. For the first time I visited the gravesite of my grandfather, John Stannon Luff.
It was an extremely emotional moment. What we saw on the grave completely blew us away. It was a laminated photograph of my grandfather, grandmother and their three children, one of whom is my mother.
On the reverse is a hand written note from yourself. To find something like that placed on the gravesite was totally unexpected and enormously enhanced the emotion of our experience.
Of course we left the grave as we found it.

Of all that I have seen and experienced which says most to me of life, love and loss – are the epitaphs. Families were forced to make some sense of it. They had only 66 letters to summarise what it all meant and to pay for each letter.

Private I.D. Hart was thirty years old when he was killed on the 26th of November 1916. He is buried at the Guards cemetery at Arass, just off the Somme. His mother penned the words at her kitchen table for a grave she would never see:

I GAVE MY SON
HE GAVE HIS ALL, HIS LIFE
FOR AUSTRALIA
AND EMPIRE

Private T.R Webb was twenty six when he died on the19th of July 1917. His father chose the words for his grave from choices available:

TO LIVE IN THE HEARTS
OF THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND
IS NOT TO DIE

Matilda Jackson wrote to the Imperial War Graves Commission in relation to her husband’s epitaph:

Dear Sir,
In reference to your kind letter which I received last week about the inscription on the tombstone of my husband late W.J. Jackson no (1952)……I do not understand about the 66 letters, but I am sending the inscription I would like to have – ‘In loving memory of dear husband and father William John Jackson killed in action at Flares between 16 and 18November 1916. Loved in life, honoured in death, cherished in memory’.
I would like you to put it the best way you think possible that it will fit on the tombstone as you will have a much better idea than what I will have.
So, hoping to hear from you if this will suit you.
I remain yours faithfully

Matilda Jackson

Her letter is now inscribed on the memorial at the commencement of the Anzac Way at Albany.

When I was informed that I was to be appointed director of the Australian War Memorial, one of my friends in whom I confided the news said, “I can’t believe you’re doing that. You’re wasting your life. You have far more important things to do for Australia than rearrange its history”.

Yes, this is our history, but it has much more to do with our future.

As TS Eliot wrote in 1942:

A people without history is not redeemed from time
for history is a pattern of endless moments

Charles Bean articulated the vision for the Australian War Memorial in 1948, vision of course differentiating leadership from management:

Here is their spirit in the heart of the land they loved.
And here we guard the record they themselves made.

A century on from the unfolding of these events, we remain true to Bean’s vision in a world he could not possibly have imagined. But our challenge and responsibility is to make this history live for a new generation of Australians, whether Australian by birth or by choice.

It is tempting, human beings that we are, to settle for the broad brushstrokes of our history.

It is easy in neglectful ignorance to forget individual sacrifices made in our name and the heroism of those who lives were taken, the families who mourned them and the communities that honoured them.

Soon the redeveloped First World War Galleries will open at the Australian War Memorial.

They are stunning. I am confident that Bean’s dying soldier at Pozieres and Gallipoli was right – we are proud of them and what they did.

The origins of the war, Australia’s initial enthusiasm for it, Rabaul, enlistment, embarkation and Egypt. The Gallipoli campaign, France, Belgium, the Sinai Palestine, the war at sea and in the air and Monash leading the Australian corps to victory in 1918. It is all there, including ten dioramas all beautifully restored and in chronological order presented with some new backdrops, soft LED lighting and a letterbox effect. From artworks and armaments to the personal items treasured as repositories of memory – it is all there.

Perhaps more so than in the past, the galleries will tell of the cost of the war at the personal level and also draw out the service and sacrifices of indigenous Australians. In leaving, visitors will do so with a sense of great pride in what was achieved but one informed by a sober understanding of the price that was paid.

In the very final reflections space as you see the images of First World War Australian soldiers and nurses appear and morph into the earliest Anzac Day marches through generations of marches to today, you will hear Beatrice Tucker, age 16 simply sing the song she has written of her grandfather, a World War Two spitfire pilot:

There was a man among the soldiers, but not upon the fields
He flew up high, in the sky, as a moving defence shield
When he went to war he risked his life, without a family or a wife
He was brave, honest and always true
There was a man among the soldiers
Arthur Tucker was his name
My gaffer he has gone now
But I love him just the same

Every night at the Australian War Memorial we now conduct the Last Post Ceremony. The national anthem is sung after a reminder of the origins of the Memorial. A piper plays the lament as wreaths and floral tributes are laid at the base of the pool of reflection. A uniformed serving member of the defence force then reads the story of just one of them from the Roll of Honour – who was this person, where was he/she born, where did they grow up, who loved them and then how did they die, for us?

A photograph of the person profiled is displayed all day at the Memorial and then next to the pool of reflection for the service.

The Ode is then recited and a bugler plays the Last Post.

All of it is streamed live on our website via webcam.

The emotion in these services is palpable.

Year six students have been recording the name and age of death of each one of the 62,000 from the First World War Roll of Honour.

As you walk along the First World War cloister, you now here these you voices simply reciting the name and age of death of each one of them. Soon we will add to the 6,000 names recorded using the ABC regional radio network with the launch of an app produced by Google.

Any school anywhere in the nation will be able to log in and the students then download names and ages, record them and upload them back to the Memorial for playing in the cloister.

Already schools have used the links to research who these young men were.

The recordings will be kept in the Collection forever.

One ten year old summed it up when asked what it meant to him, “I now realise they were real people like us and not just made-up names”.

On the 4th of August this year we commenced projecting the name of each one of the 62,000 from the First World War Honour Roll onto the front of the Memorial just below the dome. The letters are a metre high and visible down Anzac parade. Each name is projected for thirty seconds on thirty occasions over four years. The Memorial’s website allows you to log the name of the person in whom you have an interest into the estimator and the dates and times of projection are provided.

Here is part is one family’s experience after their visit to the projection:

‘My son James will be visiting the battle fields of France with his school next month. His teachers have rearranged their schedule to accommodate the group’s visit to James’ relative, John Francis Hogan who died in WW1 and is buried at the Queant Road Cemetery, Buissy, Nord Pas De Calais.

Last night James, aged 17 and complete with L plates on the family car, drove myself, his grandmother and his brother to the AWM to see our relative’s name beamed up in lights for all to see.

It was bitterly cold, wet and windy, and I had forgotten my jumper; a small sacrifice for only 15 minutes.

When the name of our very own relative John Francis Hogan came up on the wall at 10.44 pm, we ourselves fell silent.

My son quietly said, “I’ll be seeing him soon dad.”

Through a tear I took a photo and for the next quiet seconds, I had so many feelings.

I felt sadness in considering how many family, over how many years, some that I have known – and some that I hadn’t, some who are long gone, and some who are withering, that would have longed for such recognition of their son, brother, uncle and friend. And whom would surely have been proud of us standing there doing such a thing, so many years later.’

Father of James

Not long after my arrival in Brussels as ambassador in early 2010, I received a letter from a man called Peter Pickering. Naming themselves Sons of the British Empire, He and his volunteers had been making wooden commemorative crosses in their sheds and garages. They would then dress in First World War uniforms and visit senior primary schools telling students the stories of Australians on the western front.

At the end of the presentation, students would write their name and school on one side of the cross and what it means to them on the other.

Mr Pickering’s letter asked me in the absence of any government support if I would be prepared to be patron of their group. I did so and further to that, used my position to have the crosses sent to Belgium by our diplomatic service to be placed on Australian graves at the conclusion of Anzac Day services.

It is hard to describe the scene at the Polygon Wood cemetery in Flanders at the end of the Dawn service in 2011. The early dawn sun had risen up behind the memorial to the 5th Division sitting atop the ‘Buttes’ overlooking the 2100 graves below, of which 570 are Australian.

I invited the Australians present to come forward and take a cross from the Stone of Remembrance. They had been carefully laid out by Pickering’s volunteers who had come down from England.

As the defence singers sang The Green fields of France and The band played Waltzing Matilda, people came and took a cross. More than a few were emotional at reading the inscription and then they slowly made their way through the cemetery to choose a grave upon which to place it. Many took photos and sent them back to the student whose message it was.

We repeated this at Toronto Avenue cemetery. Very moving.

Peter Pickering died on the 18th of January this year, leaving a wife and children.

I called him three days beforehand and said, “Peter, your legacy will live. I have ordered 100,000 crosses for the Australian War Memorial. They will be placed on Australian graves in 39 countries from all conflicts. You have achieved more in your four decades of life than most people will do in ten”.

I would like to see each one of the Australians visiting Gallipoli next year for the centenary take a cross and place if on an Australian grave or the Lone Pine Memorial. Is it beyond the wit of our nation to achieve this?

Beyond this, the Memorial is undertaking many commemorative activities.

Large First World War weapons are coming onto the Memorial’s grounds.

We are digitising records in a major project to facilitate access to and retrieval from our rich archive.

We are well advanced in developing a major, national travelling exhibition for the Centenary.

There will be a commemorative performance conducted from Anzac Hall in the lead-up to Anzac Day next year. Led by John Schuman, well know musicians will preform renditions of music from the First World War era to Afghanistan. The songs will be interspersed with readings from diaries and letters penned by soldiers, sailors, airmen and nurses. It is likely to be broadcast to the nation.

In the week leading up to Anzac Day 2015, we will project images onto the Memorial each night depicting the service and sacrifices of Australians over more than a century.

A large screen will project on the grounds of the Memorial the Anzac Day service at Gallipoli in the early afternoon.

The Last Post ceremony at the Memorial on Anzac Day will tell not only the story of an Australian killed during the Gallipoli campaign, but also that of a Turkish soldier.

The Menin Gate Lions will return to Ieper and the Menin Gate to commemorate the Third Battle of Ypres – Passchendaele, in 2017.

There will also be travelling exhibitions of art works and images throughout the centenary and of course the loan of many objects from the Memorial’s collection to galleries and museums around the country.

The Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial beneath the beautiful byzantine inspired dome, houses fifteen stained glass windows.

Each one depicts an Australian serviceman in different roles from the First World War, and a nurse.

At the war’s end in the design of the Hall of Memory, Charles Bean and the first director, John Treloar – himself a veteran of the Gallipoli campaign and western front, sat with the army historian to meet a self imposed challenge.

They sought to determine what qualities, values and virtues they had seen in these men and nurses. They settled on fifteen which they regarded as being essential not only for victory in battle, but for breadth and depth of character. Each one has also stood as a silent sentinel above the Unknown Australian Soldier since his interment in 1993.

Those values are:

*Resource Candour Devotion Curiosity Independence
Comradeship Ancestry Patriotism Chivalry Loyalty
Coolness Control Audacity Endurance Decision*

Born in 1958, I regard myself as being a member of the last generation of Australians born into a society in which my life would be lived within the broad framework of ‘God, King and Country’. For many reasons – not all good, much of that has changed.

Young Australians could be tempted to embrace values for the world they think they are going to get – mistrust, cynicism, detachment, impatience and materialism.

I say to young Australians, these values, these ideals enshrined in these men and women more than a century ago through to those serving now, are values to embrace for the world you want. They are also in many ways those that underwrite the major faiths.

As we face new, emerging, unseen and at times, threatening horizons, we must be clear about who we are in what we believe. We should not lecture other nations about their values, but we must be clear about our own and who we are.

There are some truths by which we live that are worth fighting to defend.

The Chief of the Turkish Air force stood in the Commemorative area of the Australian War Memorial last year and pointed to one of the names in bronze where Australians have fought and died over more than a century.

He asked me, “Why were Australians there?”

I replied, “General, that is a very important question. In answering it and on your journey of discovery, you will know who we are and what makes us tick as Australians”.

Each of the almost 62,000 Australians who gave their lives in our name and in our uniform during the First World War, like us, only had but one life.

Only one chance to use life in a way that might serve others and our nation.

They chose us.

The great paradox is that the most fragile, yet powerful of human emotions is – hope.

It is the hope of a better future, of helping and of being helped to shape that future which most inspires and strengthens hope.

The legacy we have been given is that of ‘mateship’. It is one of being prepared to serve the interests of other human beings ahead of our own, even at risk of our own lives.

Let us over the period of this centenary of the First World War, inspire the next generation to embrace the world as confident, compassionate people, imbued with the Anzac spiritual legacy of endurance, courage and a selfless determination to help one another. In doing so, we should know that what we need most is just that – one another.

After the bloodbath that was Fromelles, Sergeant Fraser spent three days bringing in the wounded from No Man’s land.

Rising from the mist to penetrate his exhaustion, a lone voice pleaded, “Don’t forget me cobber”.

He didn’t.

We won’t.

We never will.

For, as we often sing - we are young, and we are free.

Lest we forget.

Brendan Nelson

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