

## **Returned and Services Leagues WA**

### **Remembrance Day Commemorative Service**

#### **Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC Governor of Western Australia**

**Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

On 11 November 1918, the guns of the Western Front fell silent after four years of continuous warfare. With their armies retreating and close to collapse, German leaders signed an Armistice, bringing to an end the First World War.

Those Australians who served on the Western Front achieved a fighting reputation out of proportion to their numbers, but victory had come at a heavy cost. They suffered almost 48,000 casualties during 1918, including more than 12,000 dead. In the four years of the war, more than 330,000 Australians had served overseas, and more than 60,000 of them died. The social effects of these losses cast a long shadow over the post war decades.

Over the next 10 years another 60,000 died of war related causes. Our vibrant, hopeful pre-war selves were traumatised. Unheralded, Australian women sustained our society as they struggled to cope with loss and damaged menfolk. The greatest loss of course were those who died.

Each year on this day, Australians gather in memory of those who died or suffered in all wars and armed conflicts. On the walls of the State War Memorial behind me are listed the names of more than 7,000 West Australians killed in action or who died of wounds or illness in the 1st World War, as well as nearly 4,000 who lost their lives in World War 2. The names of the fallen from subsequent conflicts are also included here at Kings Park, and throughout this great state of Western Australia.

We see here before us, thousands of red poppies that have long been a part of Remembrance Day. During the First World War, red poppies were among the first plants to spring up in the devastated battlefields of northern France and Belgium. In soldiers' folklore, the vivid red of the poppy came from the blood of their comrades soaking the ground. The sight of poppies on the battlefield at Ypres in 1915 moved Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae to write the poem In Flanders Fields – a recital of which you heard a short time ago.

This humble poppy is indeed a vivid reminder of sacrifice and of service and it is very fitting that here today we witness not only the new poppies springing up in front of us but the more than 20,000 woven poppies adorning the Kings Park lawns, lovingly knitted by the RSLWA Poppy Ladies.

For more than 100 years now, we have gathered to remember the past but to also look to tomorrow and the continued importance to supporting our men and women in the Australian Defence Force who all have pledged to put their own lives on the line if called upon.

Right now more than 2,000 Australian Defence Force men and women are deployed around the world including Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, South Sudan, Philippines, the South China Sea, the Southern Indian Ocean, and the South West Pacific. Many thousands more here in Australia are also doing their duty, including border protection and supporting disaster relief missions. They all deserve our support and it is days like today that we pay our respects to those who are currently serving in the defence of our nation and of the values we all hold dear.

Between now and Remembrance Day next year, a new era of veteran support will be marked by the completion of the third ANZAC House built on the same spiritual site opposite Government House in the Perth CBD. It will stand as a physical reminder of the past but also the future – housing what is to be called Veteran Central – a unique and collaborative one-stop-shop for all veterans, young or old, those in need or who just want to gather with family and mates in the true spirit of ANZAC.

The Veteran Central model is to be expanded through the greater Perth metro area and in regional centres with a vision of putting the veteran and his or her family at the centre of service delivery.

It is estimated that more than 25,000 ex-service veterans live in WA with the expectation this number will grow exponentially as more of our service men and women leave their military life for civilian life.

The challenges of such a transition are being met by our hard-working Ex-Service Organisations; not least the ground-breaking initiatives being driven by RSLWA in doing things better together with other Veteran organisations, as well as government and community-based service providers.

As a community, we have inherited the freedoms forged by our forebears. And as a community we need to continually strive to support those who have supported us for so long.

As Laurence Houseman said in his poem 'Heroes';

*"They are the race,—they are the race immortal,  
Whose beams make broad the common light of day!  
Though Time may dim, though Death hath barred their portal,  
These we salute, which nameless passed away."*

To those who went to their graves. To those who returned and were never again the same – including 46 per cent of veterans who left the ADF experiencing a mental disorder within five years<sup>1</sup>. To those who served and those who continue to serve. Thank you.

Lest we forget.

---