

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.03 p.m.]: It was Samuel Johnson who said, "Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier ..." It is in that vein that I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance the Centenary of Anzac. On 4 August 1914 at 23:00 Greenwich Mean Time—or 9.00 a.m. this morning 100 years ago in Australia—Britain was at war with Germany. Germany failed to respond to Britain's ultimatum to grant Belgium friendly neutrality, so what would become known as the war to end all wars, and later the First World War, began.

When the call went out, Australia answered. A total of 416,809 people enlisted and 331,781 people served. An astounding 152,284 were wounded and 60,284 people died. Sixty-six Australians were awarded the Victoria Cross for valour. From New South Wales more than 160,000 people enlisted. Also in New South Wales 39.8 per cent of males between the ages of 18 and 44 enlisted, which is a higher proportion than any other State. In the First World War those men fought for our values and defended the principles of western liberal democracy. We should acknowledge their contribution and their sacrifice.

The onset of the Great Depression meant that the Anzac Memorial at Hyde Park was never completed; however, it has stood as a memorial that commemorates those who made the ultimate sacrifice for God, King and country. The memorial also serves as a practical space and still houses the office of veterans' affairs in New South Wales. Yesterday the Premier announced a \$38 million plan to redevelop the Anzac Memorial, completing Bruce Dellit's original vision of having a water cascade towards the south of the memorial. This will provide a symbol of hope for future generations.

As Australians continue to give their lives in conflicts abroad we should continue to honour those who served in the past. We are restoring and improving not only the State's pre-eminent Anzac memorial but also war memorials throughout the State. The Community War Memorials Fund exists to help protect and restore war memorials across New South Wales. This year we have provided grants in Harwood, Taree, Manly, Earlwood, Wollongong, Karuah, Narrabri, Holsworthy, Newtown, Bundeena, Moore Park, Leichhardt, Rose Bay and Kiama. We do not just remember those who served in the First World War or those who served just at Gallipoli; we remember, honour and commemorate all soldiers, sailors and airmen who served our country. We remember all diggers who display the core values of the Australian Defence Force: courage, initiative, respect and teamwork.

I recall Alan Bennett writing, "There's no better way of forgetting something than by commemorating it." I agree that when we do not place commemoration into context or emphasise the significance of the event commemorated and why we commemorate it but instead just leave a block of sandstone we will forget. The way we place events into context and explain the significance is through education. That is why the New South Wales Government will take 100

students from 25 schools from across the State to Gallipoli for the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings at Anzac Cove. The students will join First World War widows, descendants of those who served at Gallipoli and thousands of other Australians who are successful in the national ballot.

The trip, like the essay competition that I am organising with ClubsNSW, will provide students with a greater understanding of the sacrifice of those who served and the significance of the Anzacs and other servicemen in protecting our values, freedoms and way of life. Applications for the ballot close on 27 August and it will be drawn on 1 September. The New South Wales Government has also provided funding of \$60,000 for 11 local projects that support multicultural communities and young people to commemorate the Anzac spirit this year as a part of the Anzac Community Grants Program. This is another way in which the Government is contextualising the events of the First World War and commemorating the contributions of everybody who served.

More than 1,000 Indians served at Gallipoli and a very high proportion of Jews also served. Initiatives such as the community grants scheme and the Joining Forces initiative, which was announced in December last year, are promoting that migrant communities get involved in the commemorations. I note that 43 per cent of submissions to my essay competition were received from students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Government is doing a lot to ensure that the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War is appropriate. By putting the memorials into context we are able to ensure that the contribution of the Anzacs to the development of our country will never be forgotten and that we will remember them.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [7.08 p.m.]: These are the words of Wilfred Owen in his poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

Wilfred Owen was a brave man who died on 10 November 1918, the second last day of the war. His family received the news in England as the bells that announced the armistice were ringing. It is now 100 years since the Germans marched into Belgium, effectively drawing England and its empire into the war. As the Speaker said this afternoon, the war to end all wars was primarily a failure of statesmanship. As elected members of Parliament our duty is to ensure the protection of our freedom—freedom for people to democratically elect the Parliament of their choice to enact laws as the Parliament sees fit while also showing leadership in being aware of and preventing a repeat of the headlong rush into violence that occurred in 1914.

The initial episode that caused the war, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, was not much different from similar crises that had occurred in the years prior but had been resolved by diplomacy. However, this time a perfect storm of thwarted ambition, incompetent statesmanship and rampant militarism sowed the seeds for this tragic event. I

recommend all members read the cables between the Tsar and the Kaiser, which show frighteningly incompetent statesmanship in a time of crisis. As Lord Grey said at the time, "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time." At the time Lord Grey had little choice but to either ignore the safety and neutrality of a small country or to stand up and be counted for principle.

The greatest tragedy of the war to end all wars is that it was anything but. Today in Liverpool we still see the lingering effects of this conflict on our local population through the Middle East diaspora and their descendants who were forced to flee the countries that arose from the Ottoman Empire and have now settled in Australia and, in another way, through the many commemoration services that will be held over the next four years. Anzac Day, especially the Dawn Service, is bigger every year. As the member for Baulkham Hills said, during World War I more than 416,000 Australians served in the armed forces, every one of whom was a volunteer. Some 330,000 served overseas, more than 60,000 were killed and 137,000 were injured. This equates to a casualty rate of almost 65 per cent, which was one of the highest in the world. A total of 39.8 per cent of New South Wales males enlisted.

Nearly all of the bodies are buried overseas in marked graves that are run by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Every one of them has a three-line epitaph written by their families. Each one is different, each one is individual and each one represents immeasurable tragedy for families for generations. That our younger generation make a pilgrimage to these gravestones to remember the sacrifice that those soldiers made and the courage they showed in giving their lives for their country is one of the brightest aspects of Australian society. For those who survived the war there was often permanent physical and mental damage and, far too often, early death. Every cemetery in New South Wales contains men who died far too young having been permanently damaged by their service. Those who survived often were also let down by governments, for example, through the disastrous soldier settlement schemes that led many people to unemployment and despair.

In this place we commemorate Lieutenant-Colonel George Braund, who was born in England in 1866 and came to Australia at about the age of 12. He was elected to Parliament in 1913, representing the Liberal Party, he represented New South Wales in 1888 in rugby union, and he was a teetotaler and a theosophist. He commanded the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Brigade at Gallipoli. He was a very brave man, personally leading a bayonet charge on 27 April. He was shot by a sentry from his own battalion on 4 May 1915 when he failed to answer a challenge, probably because of his deafness.

Edward Larkin, who was born in 1880, was a famous cricketer and footballer who played for Australia, and was captain of Newtown in 1903. He was elected as the member for Willoughby in 1913 and was known as a champion of the working class; it was said that he always carried a socialist novel with him. He was killed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. These are but two stories of all the tragic deaths. Our role as parliamentarians is to remember every soldier, to

recognise their courage and their sacrifice and to ensure on their behalf that these tragedies will never be repeated. Lest we forget.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.13 p.m.]: Yesterday I had the great honour to represent the Premier and the New South Wales Government at a service at Australia's World Peace Bell at Cowra to commemorate the centenary of the commencement of the First World War. I joined Lieutenant-General Ken Gillespie, Mayor Bill West, Mr Tom Keneally and other distinguished guests including the member for Hume, Angus Taylor, the ambassador for Japan and consuls general from around the world. Before we went to the service we gathered at the Cowra cemetery where we recognised Private Edward George Henderson, a blacksmith from Cowra who succumbed in 1919 to serious wounds received in Belgium. In paying honour to Private Henderson we honoured all those who left family and livelihood to serve. I understand that there are only two men from that war buried in Australia; the other is General Bridges.

One hundred years ago Australia was at war. Britain had declared war on the Central Powers on 4 August 1914. Consequently, all British Empire nations were also at war. Australia was in the throes of a national election and Conservative and Labor leaders alike quickly promised support. Famously, soon-to-be Prime Minister Andrew Fisher pledged that we would commit "to our last man and our last shilling". Two days later, on 6 August, Britain had requested Australia, newly in possession of a Royal Navy fleet, to secure territory to its north in what is now Papua New Guinea, a mission that led to the first Australian casualties of the Great War. To follow was the mass recruitment of troops destined for the battlefields across Gallipoli, the Middle East, and the Western Front.

Through more than four years of conflict Australian and New Zealand troops were to become known as Anzacs and were to leave their indelible mark in our history and in our understanding of ourselves as a nation. Each nation represented likewise found itself at war on this day a century ago, or otherwise significantly affected by Europe's dark summer days of 1914. Each nation suffered, many from the devastation of war in their own land, all of them through millions paying the ultimate sacrifice and the burden of grief that brought to their homes. Peace eventually prevailed in 1918. It was hard won and involved huge costs but, sadly, was not to last.

We consider these lessons from the vantage point of hindsight. We learn from the past and, unfortunately, often need to relearn. The World Peace Bell in Cowra symbolises our hopes as well as our fears. By ringing the bell we ushered in the First World War centenary period, remembering how on 4 August 1914 the world stood in hope and fear. As we stood together in the last light of day 100 years on, we acknowledged that we should never forget how costly war is, the impact it has on lives and the imperative for peace and freedom in our world. Cowra was an appropriate place for the commemoration not only because of Private Edward George Henderson but because of the great breakout that occurred in Cowra and the cemetery that is now managed and protected by the community of Cowra and supported by people throughout

the nations that were affected by the Great War. I acknowledge the people of Cowra for the way in which they conducted the service yesterday. It was a great honour and a privilege to take part in such a moving event.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.16 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Wagga Wagga and the member for Macquarie Hills for their contributions to this matter of public importance. Some would say that it is not appropriate for State parliaments to hold significant ceremonial commemorations of the First World War because veterans' affairs and defence policy are the responsibility of the Federal jurisdiction, but it is highly appropriate for this Chamber to make appropriate commemorations because it was this Chamber that farewelled New South Wales soldiers to the Maori wars in 1853; it was this Chamber that farewelled New South Wales contingents to the Sudan in 1885 to fight the Mahdi and his dervishes; it was in this Chamber in 1889 that members gathered in the name of the New South Wales Colonial Government to send soldiers to the Boer War; it was this Chamber that established a contingent in 1900 to go to the Boxer Rebellion; and it was in this Chamber that First World War soldiers were farewelled, being the first time soldiers had left Australia without the Chamber having made policy to do so. On the eve of war the Foreign Secretary said:

The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time.

The lights in Europe went out, but Australians, together with British, French, New Zealanders, Africans, Indians and many others from all over the then Empire, fought to relight the lamps of Europe. The death toll of the war was great—so great that it was supposed to be the war that ended all wars. Whilst the war did not end all wars it changed our attitude to war. We learned that *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*—which translates to "it is sweet and fitting to die for your country"—was an old lie.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Siegfried Sassoon.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I thank the member for Macquarie Fields, who has probably learnt a bit more Latin than I have. We learnt about the horrors of war, horrors that came about as a result of new technologies. But we also learnt of the great courage, awesome mateship and extraordinary ingenuity of the Australian digger. We managed to find ourselves as a nation and to come together as a nation and now we are all inheritors of the legacy of the digger, who continues to fight for our freedom and values. The New South Wales Government is commemorating Australia's contribution to relighting the lamps of Europe and is recognising those who served as soldiers, sailors, merchant marines and nurses. I initially spoke of the need to contextualize memorials. That is why, as part of the development of the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, the Government is installing an education centre.

Another area of particular significance is the creation of a Centenary of Anzac website, which lists many of the local events happening in communities, such as an Australian War Requiem at Sydney Town Hall on 10 August, which I will be attending, and the re-enactment of recruitment marches throughout New

South Wales—the Kangaroo March in September and October next year and the Kurrajongs Re-enactment March. The centenary of the First World War is extremely important to the people of New South Wales and it is appropriate that this Parliament supports it. New South Wales is doing a lot to commemorate the contributions of those who served and to place the commemoration of the centenary into an appropriate context: to ensure that we will never forget.