



Speech by

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REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (11.55 p.m.): Soldiers danced on the buses and on the lorries. They danced on the streets, they shouted, they sang. They cheered again and again as the church bells rang out in peals of jubilation. Why? It is no wonder Australian soldiers were dancing in the streets. Armistice Day 1918 marked the end of the bloodiest war the world had ever seen. Although Australia became a nation in 1901, strong loyalty ties with Britain meant that the Australian Government was committed to supporting the British war effort during World War I.

Australian men volunteered in their thousands to fight and die on the battlefields of Europe, Turkey and the Middle East. Of a population of five million, 324,000 young Australian men went off to the Great War. Of these, 60,000 died and 156,000 were wounded or taken prisoner. What a terrible loss of the young lives that fought for Australia's and the Empire's honour. Remembrance Day is commemorated to mark the signing of the armistice and the end of hostilities on 11 November 1918. That day has come to symbolise the end of the war and provide an opportunity to remember those who died.

Northern France saw some of the most concentrated and bloodiest fighting of the First World War. There was complete devastation. Think of the moon's surface—no life, just craters. Buildings, roads, trees and natural life simply disappeared. When it rained, where once there stood homes and farms, there was now a cratered sea of mud—a grave for the dead and where brave and gallant men still stood and fought and lived. Only one other living thing seemed to survive in this harsh and shell battered area—the poppy. Flowering each year with the coming of the warm weather, it brought hope, colour, reassurance and life to those survivors still fighting.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month an armistice was declared, ending the First World War. The war was a costly affair for humanity. Thousands died for both sides; thousands more were injured and scarred by their experiences. The survivors returned to their homes, although for them the world would never be the same. Their families and relatives at home had learned to manage without them. All over Australia, there were men and women, old beyond their years, trying to fit back into an unrecognisable normality. This was a very traumatic time for families right across the country, including my own grandparents near Bundaberg.

Many ex-servicemen found that they could not fit in when they came home, much like the way many Vietnam veterans felt when they returned. Family support mechanisms were scarce. The Government provided many ex-servicemen with blocks of land to enable them to earn a living as dairy farmers, growing small crops, raising pigs, growing bananas or some other crop. These soldier settlement blocks were a great idea at the time for those lucky enough to be able to make a go of it. But sometimes something else was needed, and not everyone could work a farm.

In 1918, Moira Michael wrote a poem *We Shall Keep the Faith* in which she promised to wear a poppy "in honour of our dead". This began the tradition of wearing a poppy in remembrance. Miss Michael bought red poppies with money donated by work colleagues and, wearing one of the poppies she had bought, she sold the remainder to her friends to raise a small amount of money for ex-servicemen in need. This led to the making of artificial poppies, and their sale, to help ex-servicemen and their dependents. So the support movement started in a very humble way.

Poppies were first sold on Armistice Day in 1921 in Australia the same year and were promoted by the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia. The league is now known as the

Returned & Services League of Australia, or RSL. Since then wearing a poppy has allowed us to show that we have not forgotten over 100,000 Australian servicemen and women who have given their lives in wars and conflicts this century. Today poppy selling raises funds for returned servicemen and women. In the lead-up to 11 November each year, the RSL sells red poppies for Australians to pin on their lapels, with proceeds helping them undertake welfare work.

I was recently privileged to officially recognise the work and dedication of local poppy sellers Mr and Mrs Edwards. These caring local residents from Jamboree Heights have long supported this worthy cause and given much valuable service to the RSL. After World War II, Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day to commemorate the loss of Australians in all world wars and conflicts.

The central element of Remembrance Day ceremonies is the minute's silence. A Melbourne journalist first proposed a period of silence for national remembrance on 8 May 1919. King George V requested that "all locomotion should cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead". At 11 a.m. on 11 November 1919, Australians for the first time paused and stood in silent tribute to the men and women of the 1st Australian Imperial Force who had died on battlefields in the Middle East, Gallipoli and Europe. These silences always bring back memories.

I am proud that I have spent a small proportion of my life as an Army reservist, and I am privileged that I have become the patron of the recently formed Centenary Suburbs RSL. Although I know much about the history of war, I know little about how it feels to be part of a real war, and I admire those who fought and lived in those times of great hardship. Such courage and such sacrifice has been demonstrated for our welfare and security. Let us not forget those who fought gallantly in all of the wars and let us celebrate our peacetime as never before.

Time expired.
