**Remembrance Day 2018: Centenary of the end of World War 1**

**Michael Rathborne**

*Editor’s note: Michael wrote this speech for the local Mayor to assist with preparations for Remembrance Day 2018.*

Salutations to dignitaries and guests present.

Today is a significant day. For at this hour, on this day, in this month one hundred years ago the Armistice that ended the Great War came into effect. Four years previously a continental conflict that many expected to be over by Christmas had begun with the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne and his wife. In those four short years that followed there were nearly 40 million civilian and military casualties, including 10 million soldiers and 6 million civilians dead.

Just under 60,000 Australians made the ultimate sacrifice in giving their lives.

It is very important to recognise that we gather here today not to *celebrate* but rather to *commemorate* the sacrifices of generations who have gone before us, for they have laid the foundations of the lives we lead today. There is no doubt that many of the young Australians that left our shores more than one hundred years ago did so for high ideals – for King, Country and God – for the defence of freedom. But it is equally true that just as many went for the spirit of adventure, or for even more mundane reasons – the promise of a better life when they returned home.

Australia was just a young nation when the war began in 1914 – only thirteen years old with a population of around 4½ million. The fact that we stand here today to commemorate the end of the Great War, one hundred years to the day, is testament to the impact of that conflict on all involved but also on our nation particularly. It is not an understatement to say that Australia lost the flower of a generation – future doctors, lawyers, engineers, builders, prime ministers – but most importantly our nation lost sons, brothers, and fathers.

How does one count such a loss? In the cities and towns around our nation we came together to share our communal grief at such a staggering loss. Just as we gather here today at this memorial in Uralla, all across the country in similar small towns at similarly small and poignant memorials people will stand in remembrance of long lost relatives and of those who served and returned different men and women from those who marched and sailed away to the war.

We must never forget any of our young men and women who served – in any conflict. We should never glorify any aspects of war – this is the significance of the Ode – we will remember them.

We will remember all of the sons of Uralla who served but specifically those that did not return, for so many of them were so young that they left none but us behind to remember them.

We remember Trooper Claude Lonsdale (Army Number 137) who lies in the cemetery at Shrapnel Valley at Gallipoli – killed in May 1915.

We remember Cecil Stoker, only 18 when killed at the end of June 1916, and his comrades Norman Lonsdale and Cyril Walker killed towards the end of July.

We remember Norman Cowie and Robert Walden, who both died on the 3 of August 1916 and are buried at the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial. Not enough Australians know that if you go to the school in Villers-Bretonneux above every blackboard in every classroom the children are urged to ‘Never Forget Australia’ for it was Australians who died in great numbers to save their town both in 1916 and in 1917 like George Robson who was 22 when he died.

Sons of Uralla gave their lives in most of the theatres of the war.

Trooper Athol Faint lies in the Beersheba War Cemetery, killed in 1917 in the supporting actions around Beersheba where the last cavalry charge in modern warfare took place. There are many others that we could mention from our town, our state and our nation – all too many of them. Not only the nearly 60,000 directly lost to the war, but also those in the years afterward, who were never quite the same from their experiences and for whom their lives too were ever too short – like Private Francis Nixon who made it back to Australia but died nearly two months after this day and is buried in the cemetery in Uralla.

We could stand gathered here today and lament the loss of these young men and their futures, and the impact that this had on their families and our community, but whilst there will ever be a sadness inherent in sharing such collective grief, we should also give thanks to the foundation that they laid for the creation of our nation. For the championing of the ideals of freedom from oppression and tyranny and in the end for just putting forward to us all the option of hope. For even in the darkest hour there can be such stories – like that of Trooper Len Hall who, whilst not from Uralla, I like to think was not unlike the young boys that were.

Len was 16 when he marched towards the ship in Fremantle in 1915, but as he did so his eye caught a beautiful young woman. On a whim he plucked the emu plume from his hat and briefly left the ranks to give it to her. Len saw action on Gallipoli and later in Palestine as part of the Light Horse. As he marched from the ship with his comrades in Fremantle in 1918, that same young woman to whom he had given the emu plume from his hat four years earlier stepped from the crowd and asked, “Excuse me, sir, would you like your plume back?” Len and Eunice would marry in 1920 and were together for 74 years until Eunice passed away in 1995. Len was reunited with her in 1999 when he passed away at the age of 102.

The Great War does not define us as a nation or a people, nor do any of the conflicts that we have been involved in over the century since then, but it does help shape who we are and how we look with hope towards the light of who we could be.

Lest we forget.

**Contributor details**

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