

Address given by LCDR Jason Taylor at Exeter
Remembrance Service 11th November 2018

One hundred years ago today, at 11 o'clock, fighting in the First World War ceased.

The war of 1914-1918 was to become the largest and most costly conflict the world had known - "The Great War" involved the mobilisation of 70 million people in uniform worldwide.

They fought in a global conflict that drew in over 100 countries, caused the disintegration of old empires, and reshaped the world.

Over 13 million people died. Many millions more were maimed physically or damaged mentally.

Over 400,000 Australian men enlisted during the war – amounting to almost half the eligible male population of the country, with over 300,000 of them serving overseas.

Almost two-thirds of those who served overseas became casualties. Australia had the highest proportion of battle casualties of all the forces of the British Empire.

The Royal Australian Navy was only three years old when the war began; but like our Army, the Navy punched well above its weight in battle. The decision in 1909 to invest heavily and buy the best ships available

at the time, gave Australia an extremely powerful navy almost overnight.

Our Fleet, led by HMAS *Australia*, was employed at the start of the war as a very effective defence against the German East Asian Cruiser Squadron, whose five cruisers were equal to our own cruisers, but the more powerful battlecruiser HMAS *Australia* tipped the balance in our favour. A battlecruiser is a hybrid. It has a battleship's larger guns, but is based on a cruiser for speed. They were a very powerful platform. The *Australia*'s presence deterred the German Fleet from operating in Australian waters entirely, eventually vacating the Pacific, rather than encounter HMAS *Australia*, which their Admiral described as being superior to his entire force by itself.

While four of the five cruisers headed east across the Pacific towards the Atlantic, one cruiser, the *Emden* remained behind to raid commerce in the Indian Ocean and, while attacking the Australian wireless station on Cocos Island, was engaged by our cruiser, HMAS *Sydney*, who was escorting a troop convoy to the Middle East.

Sydney was more heavily armed than *Emden* - but had lighter armour, so it was faster. At the end of the 2 ½ hour battle, *Emden* was hit more than 100 times and its captain decided to beach it. 1/3 of her crew were dead before surrendering. *Sydney* was hit only 16 times, suffering 4 dead and 13 wounded.

The other four German cruisers now at South America, sank three British cruisers off the coast of Chile, inflicting the first sea battle lost for the British Royal Navy since the Napoleonic wars 100 years before. Enraged by the loss, the Royal Navy sent two battlecruisers to hunt down the German Cruisers.

They were found at the Falkland Islands, and all four of German cruisers were sunk in battle.

The complete destruction of the German Pacific Fleet made the our region safe enough that our fleet could be redeployed to the war in Europe by early 1915.

So the idea that this was only a European war, and we were just supporting British Imperial interests is not correct. Had our young fleet not been so formidable, it is quite likely that Australia would have come under direct attack, as did many other countries in our region. As Prime Minister Billy Hughes declared, 'but for HMAS *Australia*...the great cities of Australia would have been reduced to ruins, overseas trade paralysed, coastal shipping sunk, and communications with the outside world cut off'.

Over the course of the war, the Royal Australian Navy lost only two ships – both of our submarines; and a total of 300 lives.

The first submarine was lost in September 1914 in New Guinea while patrolling islands recently seized from the German Empire. She vanished without a trace, with all

35 of her crew. The sub was found only last year and the cause of her sinking is currently being investigated.

The second sub deployed to the Dardanelles campaign. She was the first Allied vessel to penetrate the Dardanelles Strait into Turkey's internal sea, the Sea of Marmara, on 25 April 1915 – the day of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli. Dodging extensive minefields, shore bombardment and patrol boats which had already claimed four Allied battleships, she entered the Sea of Marmara, attacking Turkish shipping which was resupplying their forces at Gallipoli. Our sub was spotted five days later by a Turkish torpedo boat and hit, forcing the crew to abandon ship and scuttle the submarine. The crew was captured by the torpedo boat with no loss of life, although four died later from illness while in captivity.

By war's end, over 60,000, or one in five Australians who served abroad, died on active service.

Of the 264,000 who returned, more than half were wounded, both physical and emotionally.

For Australia, the effects of the war were profound and enduring.

It devastated rural and regional Australia for a generation. Entire families lost their next generation of sons, either in the war itself, or in the years that followed, with many dying from their wounds, disease

and infection, or what we recognise today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Moving forward 100 years from the “War to End All Wars” and we’re still fighting for peace; with more than 2,400 Defence personnel currently serving overseas in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sinai, South Sudan and the Philippines.

We’re still losing our young people in battle, and they’re still returning home injured physically and psychologically. The suicide rate for ex-serving men under 30 years of age is over twice the average of the Australian male population.

Department of Veterans’ Affairs statistics for the veterans of deployments to recent conflicts show that 70% of the 12,500 veterans in their care, suffer some form of Mental Health problem.

The recent Invictus Games has highlighted the ongoing pain and challenges that veterans must endure well after they leave the battlefield, and how important support, understanding, compassion and care are to their recovery.

So as we remember the sacrifice and loss of our fallen in all our wars, many of whom have their names cast in bronze before us here; I ask you to remember those who made it home only to fall victim to it later, and those who still live with the scars. The war only ends for those who die in battle. The survivors’ fight continues.

Lest We Forget.