

## **Annual Page Research Centre Lecture 2018**

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### **WHO WON WORLD WAR ONE AND WHY IT MATTERS TODAY:**

Napoleon Bonaparte struck an interesting note about warfare when he said: Give me a General who was lucky, rather than one who was good.

I regard myself as lucky with this invitation to deliver the Page lecture and I recognise friend John Anderson, Bill Baxter, Graeme Lavis and Kristian Jenkins from Page, also former colleagues and all – many to whom I owe a great deal over the years.

**Who won World War One, firstly let me deal with those who helped win World War One then secondly address the broader nation state dimensions flowing from the Allies defeating German Prussian militarism – in fact wiping out four empires and affirming the role of the nation state.**

At the outset never forget the autocratic military machine that was Germany. To quote US Ambassador to Germany James W Gerard writing in 1917: The officers of the German Army are all of one class, and of a class devoted to the ideals of autocracy...we are engaged in a war against the greatest military power the world has ever seen....( where the German people) are ready to submit their lives and fortunes to an autocracy which for centuries has ground their faces.

This was what the Allied Generals were up against. The Generals made their contributions, lucky and unlucky ones, but others also played key roles.

Allenby (made a Field Marshal in 1919), outstanding Australian Light Horse leader Sir Harry Chauvel and Lawrence of Arabia were the big three who dominated in the defeat of the Turkish Army, capturing everything from the Suez through Jerusalem to Damascus and Aleppo. They effectively destroyed most of the Ottoman Empire but this was a side show to the crucible of the Western Front which was set to decide victory in World War One.

There is one criteria of interest above all others in making an assessment of who most contributed to victory in 1918 on the Western Front of World War One: who had the x factor, who delivered and made a contribution that produced the extra efforts helping to secure breakthroughs and ultimate victory. In short who were those producing the 'elixir of victory' on a scale that was significant and made a difference in 1918.

Just nine giant minded men come to mind, all things considered. At various times all of these nine were within inches of losing their lives, all showed incredible initiative and boldness within the military rank structures and Governmental structures, all were motivated by the objective of victory over the Germans and all survived the war.

There had been four long years of stalemate along the Western Front since 1914 and now some Generals were talking of a 1919 offensive after the winter on 1918 / 1919! Due to the contribution of these nine, much happened in 1918 culminating in the Armistice 11 / 11 / 1918 and victory over the German Army.

**Now let me turn to the actual list, a subjective choice but based on research and weightings of contributions to victory. I accept it will annoy pure military historians, to some extent.**

**First up King Albert 1 of the Belgians**, he resisted the huge German push through Belgium in August 1914 as actual Commander in Chief and held on to the Ypres Salient for the entire war, about 8 % of Belgium. He was in some ways the anchor of the Western Front at its northern extremity. Yes he was slow to attack in 1918 and he had help holding onto that key 8% but he has been too long under recognised for his vital anchor role.

**Second comes Winston Spencer Churchill**, in his role in 1918 as Minister for Munitions. He was redeeming himself after the disaster of the Dardanelles and a stint in the trenches. He spearheaded the Mark 4 and Mark 5 tanks that made a huge difference in 1918. He met with Monash at AIF HQ on the 11<sup>th</sup> August to discuss in detail tank performance and strategies.

**Third is French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau**, who brought much needed focus and unity of effort at the top in two roles, as PM but also as Minister for War. After four years of war, in 1918 he provided new impetus from Government circles. He also produced a good quote re the USA.

**Fourth there is the Canadian Sir Arthur Currie**, he masterminded the victory at Vimy Ridge in 1917 and out performed in 1918, notably in the Battle of Amiens 8 August 1918 on the right flank. Had the right flank stalled then Monash and the AIF would have been hugely exposed and the successful punch through of over 10 kms on the 'Black Day' might not have been sustained.

**Fifth the French Allied Supreme Commander Ferdinand Foch**, he knocked heads together between the British and French Generals plus the difficult USA Contingent leader JJ Pershing. He finessed the Armistice and locked in the victory. He had lost both a son and son-in-law in the first months of the war on the Western Front and he cut the German enemy no slack right through to the end of the Peace Conference in 1919, predicting the Germans would do it all again.

**Sixth comes Sir John Monash**, born Melbourne and grew up in both Melbourne and Jerilderie, reservist who entered the Army as a private soldier, eventually becoming AIF commander of five AIF Divisions in the field in May 1918. He delivered victory using a holistic approach at Hamel in 93 minutes and then the big one, the Battle of Amiens. He did not win the war, but he made a massive contribution to victory, especially from the 8<sup>th</sup> August to the 5<sup>th</sup> October - pushing hard and ever forward to and through the Hindenburg line.

**Seventh is J J Pershing**, the strong US forces commander in France who was determined to keep his men under USA commanders. He was a difficult person to deal with in some ways but got the job done in the southern part of the Western Front.

There is a view he delayed the US build up, only agreed to by Congress on Easter Saturday 1917, to finesse a victory in France delivered by US forces. This would give President Woodrow Wilson the whiphand but after Foch visited Pershing for three days late in August 1918, the US efforts stepped up several notches and helped turn the tide in 1918.

**An unusual choice as number eight, General then later in July 1919 Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson** who had French nursemaids growing up and so was fluent in French from childhood. He liased with the powerful in Paris and London – this was his key role even as Chief of the General Imperial Staff.

In short he greatly helped with co-ordination and also in the picking of Foch as Supreme Allied Commander, pushing British PM Lloyd George hard to agree. This appointment after 4 years of a lack of deep strategic liaison and co-ordination was a vital part of the winning equation.

Let us recap and look at Albert, Churchill, Clemenceau, Currie, Foch, Monash, Pershing, Wilson. These were the eight who greatly helped, I feel more than any other, in building the victory on the Western Front in 1918.

Pure military historians have other views about this list, in a sense I dip my lid to them by adding (on balance) **Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig**, British forces overall commander after Sir John French had been sacked in 1915. Haig arguably held things together, gave his better Generals and Lt General's room to perform brilliantly but with Rawlinson must take some share for the July 1916 disaster of the Somme. His C of S in 1918 General Herbert Lawrence deserves a mention as well as a key helper.

**Thus we have the ' Notorious Nine ' Albert, Churchill, Clemenceau, Currie, Foch, Haig, Monash, Pershing, Wilson, notorious as all had there pluses and minuses but their key roles were exceptional and helped create the winning momentum in 1918, a year before some British Generals thought victory possible.**

The focus and key list I have presented tonight is subjective, however I have used a lens built on decades of life from Platoon Commander to State and Federal Parliamentarian. Yes it is different, yes unique but above all reflecting both the military, political and human dynamics involved.

At 0530am 11 Nov 1918, pre-dawn in the railway carriage blown up by the SS in World War Two, the German representatives signed the Armistice. Sadly 2,000 allied soldiers died between 0530 and 1059am that morning but essentially all fighting stopped at 11.00 and the Armistice in reality signalled Allied victory.

We move now to the second question, the creation in some cases, affirmation in others of the Nation State based on democracy and with core values:

**Right to freedom**

**Right to live in peace**

**Right to work**

**Right to a fair go**

**Right to vote**

As Margaret MacMillan in her brilliant book "Paris 1919" reminds, Finland and Poland was created or recreated, Albania and Belgium dusted off and affirmed, Armenia on curious boundaries established and much more.

**World War One and its result saw the obliteration of four powerful Empires: Austria - Hungary, Ottoman and German - Prussian, with Germany losing colonies such as New Guinea and Namibia. Imperial Russia was wiped out and the boundaries of Soviet Russia greatly reduced.**

By 1920 the three Baltic nation states were drawn up, later occupied but regained independence in 1989, namely Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Indeed World War One and the Paris deliberations of 1919 leading to the Versailles Treaty meant seven new nation states in Europe and another seven in the Middle East and around Armenia. Finland and Poland emerged again, Poland under Article 13 of Woodrow Wilson and both very significant developments and bulwarks.

Fourteen nation states replacing four big Empires and give or take, the majority of these continue today, in the case of Czechoslovakia, later splitting into two with the Velvet Revolution. Also Yugoslavia was broken up brutally late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to see Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia emerge alongside Albania and Montenegro. Kosovo was the last to emerge out of Serbia.

Whilst spheres of influence wax and wane, e.g. Putin and Russia today post the USSR, essentially that which emerged from World War One, namely the dominant template of Nation States, small and large, mainly democratic, has continued and long may this be the case.

Totalitarian militaristic dictator led templates have not vanished but the defeat notably of Germany and its autocratic ways under the Kaiser Wilhelm II, Bismarck and Hindenburg greatly turned the tide the right way. It was a near run thing as had the Germans captured Amiens Railway junction in March / April 1918 with the big push under Operation Michael, then arguably Paris would have fallen and most of continental Europe would have become ruled on a Prussian model.

Sixty one thousand AIF volunteers all paid with their lives to help deliver this outcome 100 years ago, we owe them and we owe them a great deal. Whilst the world was upturned again by Hitler and the Nazis, the Nazis and the Imperial Japanese were beaten in part because of the advent of the democratic nation state, stirred to protect their freedoms and their core values. Likewise with the bloody events of 9 / 11, we all fought back.

Now we cannot allow our core democratic values to erode, we can almost too easily give up the progress of the double HH, the golden Hawke / Howard years laced with some aspects of Keating and many aspects of Costello or – hopefully not - we can have a Federal Parliament that allows sharp drift and decline of the nation state of Australia.

We must do a whole lot better than the acidic turmoil of Rudd v Gillard, Abbott v Turnbull and so forth. As I said we owe them of World War One, all of them including a very young Private J H Bryant from Hillston who was killed at Lone Pine, a shearing shed hand, who wrote this poem I quote in part (published in Back Block Bards this month):

“And if by chance I should fall beneath a foreign sky,  
I hope some passing wind will blow a gumleaf where I lie,  
A gumleaf fresh and fragrant, blown from a wild gumtree,  
That grows in far Australia, the land of the free”.

**In closing I salute a particular group of Gallipoli veterans who survived World War One and contributed so much, some 41 ranging from Post Master General H L Anthony to Matron Grace Margaret Wilson who served on Lemnoss next to Gallipoli. Aviation activists Hudson Fysh, George Jones, Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm were all at Gallipoli, plus Lord Richard Casey, S M Bruce and Cardinal Gilroy and many more.**

They returned to outperform for their beloved country, in salute of the AIF members who never returned, in salute of the democratic nation state they called home. One hundred years on the values that emerged from World War One, the democratic nation states rather than despotic evil empires that emerged need nurturing more than ever before.

**I am despondent in this regard, we gave Sir John Monash zero, absolutely zero Australian awards post 11 November 1918, we appear to be continuing with this veto, blocking posthumously promoting him one step in rank to Field Marshal as a salute to all the AIF and deservedly a salute to Monash. Ample precedent exists and it will not open the floodgates.**

At another level, we look to our Parliamentarians to lead in a positive way, yes always with a degree of partisanship and battles over ideas and policies but spare us the acid and ego driven personality politics and all. As the Italians say, ‘Basta’ or enough. We did not go through World War One and later wars to squander a hard earned place in the sun.

It was make or break twice for our nation state since 1900, thrice counting the war on terror, we must and can do better, a whole lot better and we owe it to those who have served, especially the all-volunteer AIF and their values to see this is so.

**To end with the words of Sir John Monash: The best hope, the only hope for Australia is the ballot box and good education. This was Monash in declining to lead a coup d’etat in the Great Depression: Amen Shalom Salem!**

ENDS

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Appendix attached re “Great Gallipoli Nation Builders”.

(On Tango with ScoMo in Tourism, as a postscript, our 30 th PM will be bold and dedicated, energetic beyond belief, you will not have to ask so where the bloody hell is our PM Scott !)

## Appendix

### GREAT GALLIPOLI NATION BUILDERS

A key list of those who served at Gallipoli, survived World War One and then went on to contribute greatly to State and Nation.

Hubert Lawrence Anthony:	Federal Minister, including Postmaster General
C. E. W. Bean:	Official WW 1 historian, AWM Founding Chairman
Henry Gordon Bennett	8th Division Commander WW2 during fall of Singapore
Arthur Blackburn VC:	Cofounder RSL SA, State MP
Sir Thomas Blamey:	Victorian Police Commissione, WW 2 Leader
William Kinsey Bolton:	RSL Leader, Victorian Senator
Albert Borella VC:	Dundas activist, Albury community anchor
Stanley Melbourne Bruce:	PM post WW , London Agent General in WW 2
Lord Richard Casey:	Last Governor Bengal, Federal Minister and GG
Sir Arthur Coles:	Melbourne Lord Mayor, Federal MP, Co-Founder of Coles
Sir Harry Chauvel:	Inspector General of the Army
Sir Albert Coates:	Leading Surgeon
William Dunstan VC:	General Manager H & WT
Pompey Elliott:	Senator who suffered early PTSD and suicided
Chaplain Father John Fahey :	Cofounder WA RSL
Harry Foll:	Long serving Senator for Queensland, Federal Minister
Sir Hudson Fysh:	Cofounder of QANTAS
Sir John Gellibrand:	Victorian Police Commissioner, Federal MP
Cardinal Norman Gilroy:	Bishop Port Pirie, later Archbishop of Sydney

Sir Thomas Glasgow:	Defence Minister, later High Commissioner to Canada
John Hamilton VC:	Captain WW 2 in PNG
Neville Howse VC:	First Australian Boer War VC winner, Federal Minister
Ion Idriess:	Leading Book Author including 'Flynn of the Inland'.
Albert Jacka VC:	Mayor of St Kilda
Sir George Jones:	Head of the RAAF in WW 2
Sir Charles Kingsford Smith:	Air Commodore RAAF post WW 1
Sir Ray Leane:	SA Chief Police Commissioner, Police Academy founder
W. K. S. Mackenzie	Lawyer and leading Sydney based legal writer
Sir Ross MacPherson Smith:	Pioneer aviator, first flight UK Darwin
Sir John Monash:	SEC Victoria founder, Shrine Melbourne creator
Leslie Morshead:	Led first Nazi defeat at Tobruk in WW 2
Sir Keith Murdoch:	Gallipoli letter carrier, HWT Media giant
Henry Murray VC:	Most decorated WW 1 soldier, CO in WW 2
Sir Charles Rosenthal:	NSW State MP and head of Architects Institute
Sir Granville Ryrie:	State & Federal MP, later High Commissioner London
Sir Stanley Savige:	Cofounder of Legacy
Geoffrey Street MC:	Federal MP, Defence Minister, Army Repatriation minister
Hugo Throssell VC:	Northam leader, Anti War trail blazer who suicided
Charles Ulm:	Pioneer Aviator with Kingsford Smith
Sir Cyril Brudenell White:	CGS, later Chair Federal Public Service Board
Matron Grace Margaret Wilson:	Served on nearby Lemnos, Matron in Chief WW 2

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