



Guy Barnett MP

LIBERAL MEMBER FOR LYONS

ANZAC DAY SPEECH – CAMPBELL TOWN 11am 25 April 2017

The Centenary of ANZAC, which runs from 2014 to 2018, represents one of the most significant commemorative events in Australia's history.

During this period, Australians will commemorate 100 years of sacrifice and service by Australian servicemen and women in all wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

This year, 2017, marks the 102nd anniversary of the original Gallipoli landings and the birth of the ANZAC story in 1915—stories that helped forge the Australian identity and the character of our nation.

The attributes demonstrated then—courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice—are still relevant today.

Many important anniversaries will occur during 2017 including:

- The 100th anniversary of the Battles of Bullecourt, Polygon Wood and Beersheba; and
- The 75th anniversaries of the Fall of Singapore, Bombing of Darwin, Battle of the Coral Sea and Battle of El Alamein;

During these and other conflicts, hundreds of thousands of Australian servicemen and women would serve their country.

While the stories of courage and service they created are inspiring, the cost to Australia has been, at times, devastating.

During the Great War, the flower of a generation was lost with over 60 000 killed and 156 000 wounded, gassed or captured.

Two-thirds of those who served overseas were killed or wounded—a casualty rate of 65%, one of the highest of any nation in the war.

Tasmania also suffered with 2 432 servicemen losing their lives out of the 15,485 who enlisted during the war.

In subsequent conflicts in the Second World War, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam and the Middle East, over 40 000 Australians died on active service.

Tasmanians have been active in Australia's operations over the years including today where our men and women are serving in the middle-east in combat roles to thwart the ISIS terrorist threat in Iraq and Syria as well as in peacekeeping and humanitarian roles in the Pacific and Africa.

Tasmanians were among the first to land on the shores of Gallipoli on that first ANZAC Day and have since served in all branches of the Australian Defence Force with courage and distinction.

Of the 100 Victoria Crosses granted to Australians—the highest award for bravery in war time, fourteen have been won by Tasmanians, an amazing statistic—including most recently by Burnie born Corporal Cameron Baird VC MG in Afghanistan, one of only two Australian soldiers to receive both a Medal for Gallantry and a Victoria Cross, other being Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG.

But today I also want to share the story of Sergeant Lewis McGee who was born on 13 May 1888 in Campbell Town. Lewis was one of Tasmania's 14 Victoria Cross recipients.

Born the youngest of 11 children, McGee was working as an engine driver for the Tasmanian Department of Railways and married with an infant daughter when the War was declared in 1914.

He enlisted on 1 March 1916 at age 27 and was appointed to the 40th Battalion, who he joined for training in Claremont in May 1916, followed by additional training in Britain.

McGee was appointed a lance corporal on 23rd May 1916 while still training in Tasmania, and on 4th December that same year—having arrived in France the month before—was promoted to corporal in Armentieres, France.

On 12th January 1917, McGee became sergeant—a rapid rise through the ranks that clearly indicated his capability and leadership ability.

On 4th October 1917, while McGee's battalion were involved in fighting in Belgium, McGee undertook the following feat, earning him the Victoria Cross:

“During an action McGee's platoon was suffering severely and his company's advance was halted by machine-gun fire from a pillbox. McGee rushed the post armed only with a revolver, shooting some of the crew and capturing the rest, and enabling the advance to proceed. He reorganised the remnants of his platoon and led them through the rest of the advance.”

McGee was acting Company Sergeant Major, when he was killed in action during the second battle of Passchendaele, at Augustus Wood, on the morning of the 12th October 1917.

He was just 29 years old.

He is buried at Tyne Cot cemetery nearby.

It is unlikely he was ever aware that he was recommended for the Victoria Cross for his bravery.

McGee's Victoria Cross is currently held by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston—one of the few Australian VCs not displayed in the Hall of Valour at the Australian War Memorial.

The McGee Soldiers Club at Anglesea Army Barracks, Hobart, is also named in his honour—a fitting reminder of a man, who like many of his comrades, put others first, even when at risk to his own life.

The courage and sacrifice of men like Lewis McGee continues to serve as an example of service to us today.

Today, over 11,000 war veterans and ex-service personnel live in Tasmania.

Today we honour and pay respect to all those who have served.

On this ANZAC day I encourage the community to reflect upon the price of freedom, and give thanks to all those prepared to pay that price, on our behalf.

Thank you.