

***Virtually There* – a visit to the Australian War Memorial for Primary students**

Narrated by Al Bridges and Joanna Taplin

Introduction

Al: Welcome to a very special place ... here, in the heart of our nation's capital.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Ngunnawal people, and pay our respects to their elders past and present.

This is a place to remember all Australians who have served this country in time of war. This is the Australian War Memorial.

The story of the Memorial began with this man: Charles Bean. He was there when Australia went to war in 1914. He was there with the Anzacs when they landed on Gallipoli. He was there in the mud and devastation of the Western Front. Charles Bean was not a soldier – his job was to write. But he realised there are some things you can't put into words.

When Charles returned home, he left behind more than 60,000 Australians who had died in the fighting. He wanted to build a 'memorial museum' so that Australians could remember, and see for themselves what had happened.

Al: My name's Al

Joanna: And my name is Joanna. Al and I are both members of the Education team here at the Memorial. Al is also a veteran, which means that he has served in the armed forces. He served in Vietnam and we are grateful to have your expertise today.

The Australian War Memorial has three main roles. It is an archive, holding many records relating to wartime service. It is also a place of remembrance, and it is a museum.

The Memorial has a very large collection relating to Australia's wartime and peacekeeping service. Every object, photograph, work of art, and document in the collection helps us to understand the stories of all the people who have served in conflicts for Australia. We look after all these things on behalf of all Australians.

Al: For example, this helicopter in the Vietnam galleries is one that I flew with the Royal Australian Air Force in Vietnam, more than 50 years ago. The Australian War Memorial reminds me of our shared past – our culture of looking out for others. That is why it is so important that we learn from that past, because it is our inheritance, and it points the way to the future.

Museum staff called 'curators' make a very careful choice of the objects from our collection that are put on display.

First World War

Let's start our tour today in the Gallipoli Gallery. As we walk through, think about why these objects and images have been chosen to tell the stories of Australians who served on the Gallipoli Peninsula, during the First World War, more than 100 years ago.

Joanna: What objects and images did you see in this gallery?
Some uniforms, artworks, photographs, a horse?

We started at this life boat. You might have noticed the bullet holes in the front of it showing the dangers that the Australians in these boats faced. Australian soldiers used boats like these to travel from their ships to the shores of Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915. We now remember this day as Anzac Day, a special day when we can think about the people who served with the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

This recruitment poster is a type of propaganda.

Propaganda uses messages to encourage people to do certain things. This one encourages young men to sign up and fight for their country. Almost 400,000 Australians served in the First World War. While many were of British heritage, some were Aboriginal Australians, and others who were born to Russian and Chinese families living in Australia.

I wonder what words you could use to describe this man's expression. Maybe curious? Determined? Adventurous?
Why has he been portrayed in this way?

The men in this photograph are waiting outside a recruitment office in Sydney. How are they dressed? How do you think they might have been feeling about volunteering to join the armed forces?

Often several members from one family were eager to enlist. One such family was the Kong Mengs from Longwood in Victoria. This photo was taken approximately five years before the war. This is George Kong Meng [front: second from right] and this is his brother Herbert [front: far right] when they were serving in a volunteer unit in Australia, in their hometown of Longwood.

Herbert enlisted soon after war was declared in 1914. We now know that he lied about his age. On his enlistment form he said that he was 38 years old, when he was actually 48. At that point, you couldn't be any older than 38 to join up. What might this suggest about Herbert's determination to enlist?

George also tried to enlist. He was turned down on the grounds that he was "not substantially of European origin", which was a rule for enlistment at the time. The Kong Meng family were of Chinese heritage and although Herbert was able to sign up, George was not.

Why might one brother have been able to enlist but not the other? What does this suggest about the enlistment process?

Herbert would have been issued with a uniform like this, called a tunic. Herbert departed Australia by ship for France with many others. During the war he became sick several times, and had to be sent to hospital. He finally returned to Australia before the end of the war and suffered from poor health for the rest of his life.

Let's explore more of the First World War galleries. As we walk through, look for objects and exhibits that might explain why Herbert and many others like him became ill or were wounded during the war.

Al: You've just seen some of the Memorial's dioramas. These give visitors a glimpse of what it might have been like to serve in the First World War. The Somme Winter diorama shows conditions in France during the winter of 1916. It was created less than ten years after the war by artists who were also veterans, including Louis McCubbin and Wallace Anderson. Why do you think artists who had served in the war were chosen to create this work of art?

Let's take a closer look at the diorama. Louis served in France as a stretcher bearer, carrying wounded men from the battlefield on a stretcher. Can you see the stretcher in the diorama? Wallace also served in France, including in the region shown here known as the Somme.

Now think about what is happening in this scene. What does the diorama tell us about the conditions in France? What does their body language tell us? How does this scene make you feel? Photographs can tell us more about the Western Front. What words could you use to describe this environment?

Later in the war, many artists worked in London for the Australian Imperial Force. Louis and Wallace were among them, producing art that helped to record the experiences of Australians. Many thousands of returned soldiers, their families and friends came to see these dioramas after the war. As a class you could discuss how they might have felt about seeing these works of art, especially on days like Remembrance Day, the 11th of November.

Jo: As well as reflecting on their own experiences, to whom might Louis and Wallace have spoken to produce this diorama? What could they have read to learn more?

Diaries and letters are also useful sources for researching. Here's a diary that belonged to Private Roy Procter, an Australian soldier who served during the First World War.

On the first page here we can see that Roy has drawn a Rising Sun badge.

Why is it so small? Maybe to fit in his pocket?

I can see on the side of his diary that Roy has recorded the dates, and on this page he's described how excited he and his friends felt to receive letters and parcels from home.

What do diaries add to our understanding of the past?

Second World War

Joanna: Al, every object at the Memorial tells a story. Would you be able to show us some of your favourite things?

Al: Well, as a pilot myself, I would like to take you to Aircraft Hall to have a look at some of the aeroplane. See if you can work out what countries these aircraft are from, and think about the people who might have flown them.

Al: We had a quick look at lots of different aircraft, including an Australian made Mosquito, and a Japanese Mitsubishi Zero from the Second World War, which started just 21 years after the end of the First World War.

Now we will take a closer look at an American-made aeroplane called a Kittyhawk. The Royal Australian Air Force received almost 850 of these aircraft during the war. This Kittyhawk was flown by Bruce Brown, who named it "Polly" after his girlfriend. It was damaged several times while fighting Mitsubishi Zeros in Papua New Guinea. Kittyhawks like this one were also used in the defence of Australia.

During the Second World War, in February 1942, the city of Darwin was bombed by Japanese aircraft. Japan had entered the war and their aircraft were targeting American ships in the harbour. At least 243 allied service personnel and civilians were killed.

In the following months, Darwin endured 64 air attacks. This work of art by Ray Honisett depicts the first attack and how he imagined the scene. It was painted almost 42 years after the event. The Memorial asked Ray to paint this to help tell the story of what had happened in Darwin during the Second World War. How might Ray have known that the scene looked like this?

Here is another work of art depicting the bombing of Darwin. It's painted by Susan Wanji Wanji, who is from the Tiwi Islands.

In describing her painting Susan explained:

'After the first bombing, the men thought of making songs and dance about the bombing and the planes. This painting is about that. One old man singing, while men, women and children dance around. Some people when the bombing started were standing around or hunting with their spears, when the bombing started they were throwing their spears to the plane and hiding to try to keep safe.'

As a class, you might like to discuss why it is important to have different perspectives on events. What new information can you gain from each?

Al: Aircraft Hall is a very interesting place. You can see that some collection objects take up lots of room!

Joanna: The Memorial's collection is actually so big, that most of it is currently in storage. Let's go and chat with one of our curators, who will show us just one item that is currently in storage.

Joanna: Thanks Kerry, what an incredible way for this soldier to create a record of his experiences. It's amazing to think that Clifford Gatenby's blanket would have started out like this grey army blanket! I wonder if he ever thought that one day it would end up in a museum.

Recent conflicts

Joanna: So far we have looked at some objects from the First and Second World Wars. Al, does the Memorial hold collection items relating to more recent conflicts?

Al: Yes, it certainly does Jo ! The Memorial's tradition of collecting objects has continued for a long time.

From the wars in Korea and Vietnam back in the 1950s and 60s, right up to more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are still objects that curators gather to tell stories. We can gain different information from various sources. Take a look at the following collection items.

What can they tell us about Australia's wartime experiences?

- *Medical Evacuation* – AWM ART40580
- Jungle green shirt – AWM RELAWM40186.001
- Vietnamese civilians fleeing from Quang Tri city to Hue, 1972 – AWM P04289.003
- Pile cap – AWM REL/14404
- *Off Sok-to from Warramunga* – AWM ART40022

Al: This photograph gives a glimpse into the experience of Australian Army medical officer Major Tam Tran, who served in Iraq in 1991. She provided medical care to Kurdish refugees ... and her service reminded her of own experiences as a refugee from Vietnam 30 years before.

Let's now take a look at the exhibition relating to more recent Australian service in Afghanistan..... In this cabinet are some objects that perhaps you were not expecting to see at the Australian War Memorial today; a toy camel and an Australia Post Box!

The camel was bought by Lieutenant Ross Shackleton of the Royal Australian Navy who served as a nurse in a military hospital in Afghanistan, in 2013. Here is a uniform similar to one Ross would have worn in Afghanistan. What do you notice about the colour and pattern?

Ross bought a toy camel like this one and named it 'Diana', and then posted Diana to his son's preschool in Sydney. The children were very excited to receive this gift. Diana became the class pet and each child was able to take her home for weekend adventures. They wrote about their adventures with Diana in a journal. The camel helped the class learn about Afghanistan, and what life might be like there.

The Shackleton family generously donated Diana and the journal and were very happy to see her on display in the Memorial's galleries. Why might the Shackleton family have decided to donate these objects to the Memorial?

Objects like these help us understand what it was like for Australians who served overseas, and how they kept in touch with their families back home. These images are records of experiences in Afghanistan.

True to Charles Bean's vision, the Memorial has never stopped collecting the objects and records that tell the story of our past. He wanted the Memorial to be more than a museum, though: he also wanted it to be a place of remembrance.

Commemorative Area

Here in the Commemorative Area, you can see the Eternal Flame sitting in the Pool of Reflection. The Roll of Honour contains the names of more than 102,000 people who have died as a result of their military service.

Inside the Hall of Memory, the walls are lined with more than 6-million mosaic tiles, and you can see 15 stained glass windows. Here too is the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier. This man died in the First World War and was finally laid to rest here at the Memorial on Remembrance Day in 1993. He was brought here from a battlefield cemetery in France, to represent all Australians who have died as a result of their service.

Many visitors choose to place a poppy on the tomb. Poppies were among the first flowers to grow on the battlefields more than 100 years ago during the First World War. Now the poppy is a symbol of remembrance, a flower to help us remember those who have served in times of war.

But of course not everybody can travel to Canberra to visit the Australian War Memorial and place a poppy. Some people visit their local memorial. It might be a statue, an obelisk, an honour board or even trees.

This tree is from the Avenue of Honour in Ballarat, Victoria. After the First World War, trees were planted – and each had a plaque, dedicated to people from the town who had served. As you can see, the plaque has almost been lost, as the tree has continued to grow for more than 100 years. Many local memorials have been added to a website called Places of Pride. Perhaps you could find out what memorials are in your area?

Joanna: Take a moment to think about the types of people who visit a war memorial. For example, we have international visitors, children, families who have lost loved ones, and VIPs. This place is also for veterans – those who have served in the past, and those who continue to serve. Sometimes the Memorial can be upsetting for our veterans, and sometimes it brings comfort.

Joanna: Today we've explored the stories of people who have served at different times in our history. Stories from the First and Second World War, right up to more recent conflicts, such as the story of Ross Shackleton in Afghanistan.

Interview with Al Bridges

Joanna:

We are very lucky to have Al Bridges with us today, who is a veteran of the Royal Australian Air Force, and served in Vietnam more than 50 years ago. Al, would it be ok if I asked you some questions about your experiences?

Al: Yes, of course Jo.

Joanna: Al, we have this photograph here of you with your brother soon after you enlisted. Why did you decide to enlist?

Al: Well, I'd always been interested in aeroplanes and in flying, and in model aeroplanes and the cadets ... so I thought it was a logical way to go, but not having any idea what the future would hold. But in fact my wife once we got married and I, we enjoyed it so much that we stayed on for a quarter of a century. Never went to the airlines to earn the big bucks!

Joanna: Al, I can see you've brought along your medals today. What do your medals mean to you?

Al: Thank you for asking that question Jo. As you can see, if you have a count, there are six of them. Three of them were about war – Vietnam, and they're the ones I'd prefer to not talk much about. But the other three are much happier times. They were times when I was in Australia, I was overseas, making great friends.

Joanna: Al, what can you tell us about where you are in this photo?

Al: Well Jo, it's our last day of training. We're about to get our postings, which meant that we'd be sent to wherever! I'm sitting in the cockpit of a Vampire, which the Airforce introduced much earlier on as a jet-fighter but here it's being used as a trainer. I did enjoy flying those as well.

The course itself was pretty tough. Two-thirds of those on the course didn't make it all the way through. They were scrubbed for one reason or another, and we were always worried that it could happen to any one of us. But we didn't. Four of us were posted from RAAF Base Pearce to Canberra to fly helicopters. Didn't even know what a helicopter was! Bit of a shock!

Joanna: In this photograph here we can see you're about to leave Australia to serve in Vietnam. How were you feeling in that moment?

Al: Very mixed emotions Jo. It's only six months since I finished pilot's course so I wasn't expecting to find myself in a war zone so quickly. I'm about to board an aeroplane which is going to take me to Sydney, and onto Singapore and then into Saigon. My fiancée is at the foot of the stairs, and we have since married. We've been married over 50 years, but you can imagine what might have been going through her mind as well – “will I actually see him again?” I wasn't actually thinking so much of that because there was a little bit of excitement there as well with the thought of going to a country that I knew nothing about.

Joanna: Al, how did it feel when you returned home to Australia?

Al: Well, pretty glad, I must admit. We flew over Darwin in the middle of the night and the captain came over the intercom and said “we're now over Australian airspace”. Well, you could hear the cheer from anywhere in Australia – I guarantee! We were just so happy.

When we landed in Australia, in Sydney – not much help, not much support. But as time went on, you started to forget. For a long, long time I'd forgotten about my medals, I was just enjoying the time that we had in Australia together.

Joanna: Al, thank you for so much sharing your story and these photographs with us today.

Photographs help us to understand what life was like in the past.

We have had a brief look through the galleries, to see how collection material can help us to explore history. So much of our collection has also been digitised and is available for you to view online on the Memorial's website www.awm.gov.au/learn .

Joanna: We hope that one day you might be able to join us here in Canberra.

Al: Yes and thank you very much for being with us today.