

Your Shortcut to... Australia at War

For over two centuries, Australians have answered the call to serve, taking part in conflicts close to home and across the seas. And even today, we recognise the importance of remembering their sacrifices. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Australia at War—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

So, Bryce, we had a pretty special day earlier this week.

Hmmmm... Halloween was a couple of week's ago, Christmas is still a month and a half away and my birthday was back in August. Nope, I can't think of it.

Do the numbers 11, 11, 11 mean anything to you?

Oh yes, that's right! The 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th hour. That was the exact time back in 1918 when the Armistice was signed—the agreement that ended the fighting with Germany and marked the end of what we now call World War I.

Exactly! Did you manage to get to a Remembrance Day ceremony?

As a matter of fact, I did! It was pretty moving. There were red poppies, the Last Post, and a minute of silence. It got me thinking, though... why do we go to such lengths to remember all this, even years later?

Great question, Bryce. Remembrance Day is our chance to pause and honour those who served in wars, especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice and gave their lives in defence of their country.

Today, we're diving into Australia's story with war—starting with when we've been involved in conflicts, why we've joined both fighting and peacekeeping missions, and how we keep the memory of those who served alive. So, strap on your boots as we explore Australia at War.

Listen carefully - there's a S'Quiz at the end!

WHEN

So, Bryce, Australia's story with armed conflict actually begins right here at home, with the Frontier Wars. These were battles between Indigenous Australians and British settlers during the early days of colonisation

Really? That's not a war we hear a lot about in history class.

It's a very important part of our past, Bryce. Indigenous communities bravely resisted the settlers, with heroes like Pemulwuy—a warrior from the Eora Nation—leading his people to defend their land and way of life.

So, was there ever a peace treaty?

No, Bryce. In Australia, Indigenous lands were taken without any formal agreement or treaty, unlike in other countries. Indigenous Australians fought hard, but their lands were claimed without consent. After the Frontier Wars, and because Australia was a collection of British colonies back then, whenever Britain went to war, Australia was involved too.

That's right. During the Colonial period, Australians served in British conflicts overseas, including missions in places like New Zealand, the Boer War in South Africa, and the Boxer Rebellion in China. And all of that was before Australia was even its own country.

Exactly. But after Federation, Australia began to forge its own identity. The bravery of Australian soldiers during World War I, especially at Gallipoli where the famous ANZACs fought, helped shape how Aussies saw themselves and earned respect for our country around the world.

Then came World War II and other conflicts, right?

Yes, and Australia has continued to be involved in places like Vietnam, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Today, Australian troops also participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions, helping people live in safety and peace in places like Rwanda and the Solomon Islands.

So, we haven't just been in battles but have also worked to keep peace. Australia's history of involvement isn't just about fighting—it's also about supporting and protecting others. But, Christie, why do we need to go to war at all?

WHY?

It's great that you've asked why, Bryce. Going to war or being involved in peacekeeping missions is a really big deal—it's literally a life-or-death decision.

Absolutely. And, I'm guessing alliances have something to do with it?

Spot on, Bryce! Australia's alliances have played a huge role.

And, let me make sure I've got this right: alliances are like friendships between countries. When countries form an alliance, they agree to help and support each other, especially in tough times like wars or emergencies—kind of like friends looking out for each other in the playground.

Great analogy, Bryce! Early on, our main ally was Britain. We fought alongside them in both World Wars because we were part of the British Empire and had close ties.

That makes sense. But has that changed over time?

It has. After World War II, Australia formed a closer alliance with the United States, which is now one of our strongest allies. Through groups like ANZUS—a security pact between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States—we work together to maintain peace and security in our region. And in recent years, we've built strong partnerships with countries like Japan and South Korea to help keep our part of the world safe.

But it's not just about alliances. Australia is known for some pretty unique values that come into play when we decide to get involved in conflicts.

You've probably heard of Kokoda, Bryce—the famous WWII battle in Papua New Guinea, where Australian troops held off a much larger Japanese force.

Christie, I've not only heard of Kokoda, I've actually walked the Kokoda Track.

Wow! That's amazing Bryce! What did you learn?

Well, besides the physical challenge of tens of days spent walking up and down steep jungle mountains, I learned about the Aussie values the soldiers showed there: courage, endurance, mateship, and sacrifice. Those values became part of our national character. And when Australia chooses to join a conflict, it's often to stand up for those values—not just for ourselves but for people around the world who need protection.

So, it's like that idea of a 'fair go'—but on a bigger, global scale!

Exactly! The idea of a 'fair go' means standing up for what's right and supporting our neighbours when they need help.

And, by protecting others, we also help protect ourselves and our way of life. And by standing up for freedom, safety, and fairness, Australia does its part to make the world a safer place. In return, our allies are there to support us, too.

But Christie, even though we're standing up for our values, wars are terrible. They're really dangerous, and in the conflicts I've read about, so many people have been injured or lost their lives. It's such a huge sacrifice people make when they go to war. So how, Christie, do we commemorate the battles we've fought and the people who have fought for their values and have even given their lives?

How?

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine this: it's a clear, quiet morning. People are gathered together, standing very still, heads bowed. And then, you hear it... the sound of a bugle playing the Last Post. This solemn, echoing tune drifts through the air, and for a moment, everything feels still and thoughtful. It's played to honour the soldiers who never made it home, and at Remembrance Day ceremonies all across Australia, it marks the time for us all to pause.

It feels... powerful, doesn't it? That one sound seems to say so much without needing any words.

And after the Last Post, there's a moment of silence where everyone stands quietly, thinking about those who served. This time to pause is an important part of both Remembrance Day and ANZAC Day ceremonies—a chance for everyone to reflect and honour those who sacrificed so much.

Another symbol you'll see a lot on Remembrance Day is the poppy—that bright red flower. People wear poppies as a sign of respect and remembrance. The poppy became a symbol after World War I, because they grew on the battlefields in Flanders, Belgium. After years of bombardment and destruction, these small red flowers began to bloom across the fields—a reminder of resilience and life returning, even after loss.

And then there's the Ode. At each ceremony, we hear a special part of a poem called For the Fallen. It goes, 'They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.'

I've heard that before. Those words feel so respectful, don't they? They're a way of promising that we'll never forget those who served.

In towns all across Australia, there are even avenues of trees. You might have one near you! Each tree is planted in memory of a soldier, standing tall as a reminder of a life lost but not forgotten. Remembrance Day and these symbols aren't just about remembering the past—they're also about hoping for a peaceful future. By honouring these sacrifices, we're reminded of the cost of war, so that we keep peace in our hearts and minds.

So, all these traditions, like the Last Post, the poppy, and the Ode help us remember... and they also guide us to make better choices. Commemorating the past reminds us of the value of peace and the importance of working together to protect it.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening..."

1. Who was the Indigenous hero who resisted British settlement?" Pemulwuy"

2 What is the name of the bugle call played at ceremonies to honour fallen soldiers?
(The Last Post)

3 What flower do we wear on Remembrance Day? The poppy

Well, that's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, where, when, why and how of Australia at War. Teachers, there are excellent classroom resources related to this topic on the Squiz Kids website and there's a link to them in the episode notes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.