

Speech by Mayor Logan K Howlett on the occasion of Remembrance Day 2012 at the Memorial Hall Monument, cnr. Carrington Street and Rockingham Road, Hamilton Hill.

Mr Digger Cleak, OAM – President, RSL City of Cockburn, other Members of the Cockburn Sub Branch, Distinguished guests, Veterans, serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force, Bugler Andrew Symons, TS Cockburn Cadets, 1st Bibra Lake Scouts, the Halo Leadership Group Spirit Dancers, the Harmony Primary School Senior Choir, ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys.

I acknowledge the Noongar people who are the traditional custodians of the land that we are gathered on this morning and I pay respect to their elders both past and present. I extend that respect to Indigenous Australians who may be present today.

As we gather here today to commemorate Remembrance Day amidst a sea of red poppies that have long been a part of Remembrance Day, ANZAC Day and increasingly, other observances, I will briefly reflect on the fact that songs have long played a part in sending messages to the world about war and its impacts on individuals, families, communities and countries.

Examples of these include:

1966 - Barry McGuire's - Eve Of Destruction

1966 - Sgt Barry Sadler – The Ballad of the Green Berets

1969 - John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band – Give Peace a Chance

1969 - Rolf Harris – Two Little Boys

1974 – Paper Lace – Billy Don't be a Hero

and flipping back to 1966 - Roy Orbison - There won't be many coming home – the lyrics of which read in part:

Listen all you people

Try and understand

You may be a soldier

Woman, Child or man

But there won't be many coming home

No, there won't be many coming home

oh, there won't be many

Maybe ten out of twenty

but there won't be many coming home

Whatever our understanding of songs about war and the messages they send.

It is true that thousands of men and women left our shores and many didn't come home.

It is true that homefires kept burning for love ones who had ventured away from home, many for the first time.

It is true that for many of those who came home, life would never be the same.

It is true that visible wounds healed over time.

It is true that those wounds that were not so visible took longer to heal and for some they have never healed.

Perhaps the red poppies that adorn our jackets today provide an answer.

I'll recite a short story that I saw many people stop and read as they approached us to purchase a poppy over the past few days.

It can be found on the RSL website.

It is titled: Why We Wear a Poppy on Remembrance Day

"Please wear a Poppy," the Lady said, and held one forth, but I shook my head.

Then I stopped and watched as she offered them there and her face was old and lined with care, but beneath the scars the years had made there remained a smile that refused to fade.

A boy came whistling down the street, bouncing along on carefree feet. His smile was full of joy and fun, "Lady" said he, "Can I have one." When she pinned it on he turned to say, "Why do we wear a Poppy today?"

The Lady smiled in her wistful way and answered, "This is Remembrance Day, and the Poppy there is a symbol for the gallant people who died in the war. and because they died, you and I are free. That's why we wear a Poppy you see.

I had a boy about your size, with golden hair and big blue eyes. He loved to play and jump and shout, free as a bird he would prance about. As the years went by he learned and grew and became a man, as you will too. He was fine and strong with a boyish smile but he seemed with us such a little while.

The war broke out and he went away, I still remember his face that day when he smiled at me and said 'goodbye', I'll be back soon Mum, so please don't cry. But the war went on and I had to stay, and all I could do was wait and pray.

His letters told of the awful fight (I can see it still in my dreams at night) with tanks and guns and cruel barbed wire and mines and bullets, the bombs and fire till at last, at last, the war was won, and that's why we wear a Poppy, my son."

The small boy turned as if to go, then said, "Thanks I'm glad I know. That sure did sound like an awful fight, but your son, did he come all right?" A tear rolled down each faded cheek, she shook her head, but didn't speak.

I slunk away in a sort of shame, and if you were me you'd have done the same for your thanks, in giving, is oft delayed, tho' our freedom was bought and thousands paid.

And so when you see a Poppy worn, let us reflect on burdens borne, by those who gave their very all, when asked to answer their country's call.

Lest we Forget.