2010 Prize Topic
Question 1

- World War 1 had a devastating effect on Australian society. Why should we commemorate our participation in this conflict? How relevant is this continuing commemoration for children of the 21st Century?
"Until the day breaks and the shadows fade away"'

Prior to World War 1 Australians had not developed a true identity. We still bore the legacies of our convict past and were regarded as colonialists within the British Commonwealth, and not of the same character as those who resided in the 'motherland'. Through Federation Australians began to develop their identity, which to the British and other outsiders was rebellious, lacking in discipline and of a lesser moral fibre.²

World War 1 proved to be a turning point in defining Australia's worth and national pride. The Australian flag was raised in war for the first time.³ With a population of less than five million, approximately 8% (416,809) of the men in the nation volunteered to enlist. The war commenced in August 1914 and by the time Germany surrendered on 11 November 1918 over 60,000 Australians had been killed, and a further 156,000 were wounded, gassed, or had been taken prisoner.⁴

The effects of World War 1 were not only felt on the battle fields but also back home in Australia. Families and friends grieved the loss of loved ones. The traumatic experience did not stop at the end of the war; many soldiers were either physically or mentally damaged.⁵ These lasting effects led to suicide post war as in Pompey Elliot's case. Years after returning from war he committed suicide because he was never able to overcome the dehumanising things he saw. He wrote, "At times I get fearful fits of depression when I can see nothing but misery for us all, and I wake up sometimes in the night with a shock and my heart feels as if it is on fire and every nerve aches because I can see no way out anywhere, and no promise of getting on with the weight of debt over me".⁶

During the war the Australian economy suffered a downturn with the government cancelling trade agreements with Germany. Due to the decrease in the male population women were left to fill many jobs usually undertaken by men.⁷

Hedley G Royden Bowden was one of many who did not return from the war.⁸ On the 6th October 1914 he enlisted as a Sapper in the 3rd Field Company, Australian Imperial Force (AIF). While serving in Gallipoli Roy sustained a shrapnel wound to his right thigh and was evacuated by ship to 19 General Hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. A telegram was sent home notifying his father "He is not reported to be seriously ill".⁹ This was proven otherwise when on 23 July 1915, Roy died of his wounds. Roy was one of many who sacrificed his life for his new born country and was put to rest on far away shores, leaving a distraught family who were unable to mourn at his grave. Roy's death motivated my grandfather, Roy's nephew, to enlist in the AIF and serve in WW2.¹⁰ In 1972 my father, following in the footsteps of two previous generations, joined the Army Reserve.

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¹ See Appendix 3
² See Appendix 1 & 2
⁷ Pompey Elliot by Ross McMullin page 503
⁹ See Appendix 1 & 2
¹⁰ Bowden Family History written by Garry Bowden (my father)
¹⁰ See Appendix 4
My grandfather formed life long friendships through his time in the AIF. He and his mates continued to gather on ANZAC Day throughout his lifetime. In recent years I have marched in the ANZAC Parade which gave me a sense of pride and loyalty. I felt honoured to be involved and experienced the enthusiasm of the crowds lining the streets in remembrance of the men and women who embodied the ANZAC Spirit.

Over the years there has been criticism of continuing ANZAC Day celebrations because some people believe they glorify war. Today the increasing numbers attending ceremonies suggests these sentiments are diminishing. Our diggers demonstrated courage, endurance, mateship, and sometimes reckless valor. These unifying qualities and values deserve to be remembered and have become the model for modern Australia by reinforcing them in schools. The retelling of the deeds of Simpson and his donkey has become part of early education in Australia reinforcing the values reflected in the ANZAC spirit.

In both the past and present, we commemorate the service to country by Australians with commemorative services (at dawn) and commemorative ceremonies on ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day; at the Australian War Memorial Canberra, Soldiers Walks and various memorials (Cenotaphs, Honour Boards, Memorial Halls) throughout Australia.11

Commemoration of World War 1 is extremely relevant to children of the 21st century. It was due to the commitment and sacrifice of the diggers in the Great War that we can continue to enjoy the benefits and freedom a democratic society provides. Like any journey, we need to know where we have come from to achieve our future goals.

To quote John Wadsley, “For today’s children the benefit in commemoration of previous conflicts lies in a better understanding of … the past (to) hopefully not allow another world war to destroy a generation.”12 I support this statement and believe we have a responsibility to learn from past mistakes and tragedies.

Through commemoration of the ANZACs we are uniting as a nation with a sense of pride and loyalty toward our great country. This time of reflection also plays a role in connecting families as stories are passed down through generations. We need heroes to look up to and to learn from, and what better heroes than some of those involved in WW1.13 Great men like Tasmanian Harry Murray VC CMG DSO and Bar DCM C de G (MiDx4) who displayed great leadership and was an inspiration to all who served with him under horrific conditions. His leadership, courage and sense of duty are qualities which inspire us.14 Commemorative services may also provide the necessary inspiration to encourage future generations to join the services which are vital in maintaining world peace and the promotion of democracy throughout the world.

In her address to the 43rd opening of the parliament of Australia, Governor General Quentin Bryce referred to Australia as “one of the world’s oldest continuing democracies.” Surely then we have cause to continue to commemorate the important events that have shaped this nation!

12 John Wadsley, Director Military Heritage Foundation of Tasmania, (email from wadsley@bigpond.com to bowdenclan@iprimus.com.au)
13 Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Fred Ralph, October 2010
Appendixes

Appendix 1
*Taken from the Bowden Family History*

Hedley G. Royden (Roy) Bowden
3 Field Company, Australian Engineers

Appendix 2
*Taken from the Bowden Family History*

Hedley G. Royden (Roy)
Bowden's Identification Tag

Appendix 3
*Taken from the Bowden Family History*

Commonwealth War Grave
Chatby Cemetery
Alexandria, Egypt
(Note the inscription at the bottom of the headstone)

Appendix 4
*Taken from the Bowden Family History*

Corporal David Bowden - 1942
(My Grandfather)
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources: Unpublished
Bowden Family History, written by Garry Bowden (my father)
This document was helpful in gaining information and photographs regarding my relative Hedley (Roy) Bowden who gives me a personal connection to WW1. It was also helpful in locating a picture of my grandfather in uniform.

John Wadsley, Information regarding commemoration (email from wadsley@bigpond.com to bowdenclan@iprimus.com.au) 3 October 2010
Mr Wadsley is Director of the Military Heritage Foundation of Tasmania so I contacted him to expand my knowledge on the subject of World War 1 and its commemoration. The exchanges I had with him confirmed my research and helped to back up my opinions on the relevance of commemoration.

John Lennox, Information regarding commemoration (email from jolona@netspace.net.au to bowdenclan@iprimus.com.au) 3 October 2010. Mr Lennox is Chairperson of the Military Heritage Foundation of Tasmania. He offered similar information to Mr Wadsley.

Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Fred Ralph, 2 October 2010
Lt Col Ralph provided me with some other avenues to explore, such as heroes of war, which was useful in giving my research another dimension.

Primary Sources: Published
Books
McMullin, R. 2002, Pompey Elliott, Scribe Publications Pty Ltd, Carlton North Victoria
This book was useful for providing evidence of the devastating effects of war.

This book was useful in providing an account of an incredible war hero and supported my other investigations into how the ANZAC spirit was born.

Internet Sources
This site provided an excellent overview of WW1 and gave a good insight into life in Australia during the war.

This site was used for the sole purpose of verifying that WW1 was the first period of conflict that the Australian flag was raised.

I chose this site because I believed the casualty figures would be accurate. The site also gave valuable information on the evolution of the spirit of ANZAC, the economy during the war and the roles women played.

This site was useful for information on early commemorations and how ANZAC Day celebrations evolved.