

At 118 Years of Age: Newcastle Permanent knows the importance of ANZAC Day traditions living on

ANZAC Day Opinion Piece by Bernadette Inglis, CEO, Newcastle Permanent

This Sunday I'll join with fellow Australians to reflect, recognise and commemorate the defence personnel who have given so much in our nation's name.

Among them are the 102,000 Australians who have, over the last century, lost their lives protecting our freedoms in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

As it does for so many Australians, ANZAC Day holds particular significance for me.

It is a fitting tribute that each year we continue to pass down the memory of young boys lost to the enduring battles of war. Although many of our early ANZACs were likely never known by those living who honour them today, their memories live on as continue to never forget the sacrifices they made.

As I reflect on an ANZAC Day which is again very different to those where we could, in the past, come together to honour our service men and women, I am grateful that together, as families, individuals and organisations, our determination to mark this day remains unwavering.

I also feel great pride to lead, and be part of, an organisation which has such longevity and a history of supporting local communities and its customers through periods of at-home and global conflicts.

Established for 118-years in February, Newcastle Permanent was just 13 years old when the very first ANZAC Day was commemorated, in 1916, in the midst of World War I.

In the 105 years since that first ANZAC Day, our people have continued to mark this important national commemoration by acknowledging the brave Australians and New Zealanders who served and died in all wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

Many of our customers were men who were conscripted, those who volunteered for the frontline of war, loved ones left behind, and others supporting the war efforts from here at home. In the last 11 decades, that has spanned World Wars I and II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq War – to name just some. Some of those men are still customers today who visit our branches to be served by some of our people who have been a friendly and familiar part of their lives for decades.

It is this long, and personal, association that further strengthens the significance of ANZAC Day for Newcastle Permanent and our people.

This week, our people attended the Newcastle and Hunter Combined Schools ANZAC Service; an event we've proudly sponsored for nearly 20 years.

It was a touching tribute. Through the student portrayals, the mounting of the Catafalque, the sounding of the Last Post and silence of the Reveille, we gained insight into Australia's war history and the contribution and suffering of all those who served in our armed forces so that future generations like us could enjoy the country we live in today.

Men like Alf Carpenter who went to war at just 17 years of age and whose commitment was shared by students who honour him and his fellow soldiers so many decades on. Having enlisted at just 17 - Alf would have spent his late teens and most of his 20s in the major theatres of WWII including Palestine, Libya, Greece, Bougainville and the defence of Darwin. This week, the now Novocastrian turned 104.

As we pause to reflect this ANZAC Day, and hear the stories of Alf and his fellow servicemen and women, we are reminded of the ANZAC Spirit: of courage, mateship, fairness, persistence, integrity, humour, initiative, endurance, determination, ingenuity, respect and selflessness. As ANZAC Day traditions are upheld by new generations, and the day is commemorated regardless of the challenges of the current day, these characteristics are intrinsically Australian and should be valued by all of us.

In our own ANZAC tradition, Newcastle Permanent has proudly sponsored the Hunter & Newcastle Combined School ANZAC Day Service since 2003. This special service provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about the heritage of our ANZACs through researching their incredible stories and feats of courage and endurance.

I commend the students and teaching staff for continuing to acknowledge our armed services personnel through this moving event, through spreading the ANZAC message, and for helping these traditions and stories to live into the future and be shared in such an emotive way. What an incredible experience these young Novocastrians have had being able to learn about the rich histories of war, and the sacrifice of those who have protected us, from a living ANZAC.

It is through this experience, and our own enduring commitment to sharing our stories, perspectives and history, that the memory of our ANZACs will never be forgotten, and will live on for the future.

Bernadette Inglis is Newcastle Permanent's CEO.