

# Opinion

## Young will value defending the nation if it's in their education

David Penberthy



When you work on the radio, the best shows are always the ones which feel like they are over before they began. Same with newspaper columns. If you find yourself getting bogged down and checking the word count six p.m., if the sentences aren't flying out of some corner of your brain, come up with another topic and start again.

The three hours of radio we did on Friday went by in an instant. The reason was that we struck upon a brilliantly simple way to commemorate Anzac Day with our listeners.

Just call in and tell us a story about a family member who served the nation.

I kicked things off talking about Great Uncle Perc who was a POW in World War II. He was such a tough-as-nails bloke that he once injured himself on his farm, ripping a bone clean out from his forearm after it got jammed in a harvester, and then drove himself 150km to hospital with his shirt tied around the wound.

The listeners' stories came piling in. There were many other POWs, Rats of Tobruk, men who marched Kokoda, machine gunners, soldiers who had served in East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, women who had worked in munitions factories to arm our troops during World War II.

My co-host told the story of how



Pulteney Grammar School's Patrick Longden and Isadora Tribe with the medal belonging to fallen soldier Arthur Hollow, which they took to his Belgian grave.

two of his great-grandfathers had a leg blown off in World War I, and how it wasn't until he had a grandfather of his own that he realised grandfathers could come with two legs.

Many listeners recited poems which their fathers and grandfathers had written during World War I and World War II and read them out on air.

The whole three-hour program was so dominated by these calls that we ditched the regular rundown. We could have broadcast all day. It felt like the show was over in the blink of an eye.

What it showed is that there is a

huge public appetite for this kind of first-person oral history, where massive, almost incomprehensible events such as a full-scale world war can be told through the micro form of one person's contribution.

Stories of the courage of one person from a small country town in Australia, who ended up taking part in something as momentous as the North African campaign against the Italian fascists during World War II, with Rommel leading the Nazis and Australia and New Zealand providing such fierce opposition against the Axis powers.

These are genuinely amazing and inspiring stories. And we don't hear

them often enough. Over the past years, probably since the end of Vietnam and the atrocious treatment our veterans endured on their return, an ambivalence or even hostility developed towards applauding those who fought for our nation.

There are still some who regard an event such as Anzac Day as a bit macho or tasteless, wrongly believing it glorifies war.

At the end of the radio program, I wondered out loud why it is that our schools seem to bend over backwards celebrating things like Harmony Day, or even innocuous stuff like getting the kids to paint pictures of rabbits at Easter, yet there is no comparable push to make Anzac Day such a major part of the school calendar.

I know that the teaching of Anzac Day is part of the curriculum and that my own kids have learnt some things about it at school. Last Remembrance Day they drew poppies and came home wearing sprigs off rosemary, which was nice. The curriculum states that in year 3, on Anzac Day kids should read picture books such as My Grandad Marches on Anzac Day by Catriona Hoy. They are also encouraged to bake Anzac biscuits.

But surely all this could be elevated to a different level with a bit more thought and effort, where young people could get a much richer sense of the sacrifices our soldiers have made, and the reasons they made them.

I can't remember the kids coming home saying they walked to the local suburban war memorial and learnt the identities and achievements of the local soldiers by using the virtual War Memorial.

There is so much weight to our military history that is being set to one side.

Elevating it does not mean we are slavishly endorsing the political wisdom of every campaign in which Australia has ever taken part. On the contrary, you can and should argue the toss around many of them, although I would like to see anyone mount a cogent argument as to why we should not have fought against Germany and Japan, especially with our nation under direct attack.

That's where these stories are especially important. Especially in the context of World War II, the ultimate values-based demonstration of the need to resist the worst brands of tyranny with force.

With the recent polling published by News Corp about the indifference of young people towards service, better educating young people specifically about World War II would be a good way to challenge this modern sense of indifference towards a career in soldiering.

If ever you thought national service or enlisting full-time was best left to someone else, the stories we heard on Friday from World War II challenge the assertion.

I did a check as to how many dawn services there were in South Australia yesterday – around 180, each organised by the local RSL branch, with some branches organising several services. With around 500 primary schools in SA, why don't we have a formalised system whereby every Anzac Day, the RSLs and schools link up in a formalised way to get kids involved in commemorating Anzac Day?

The only way to remember these stories is to keep telling them. And between Ukraine and now Iran, the idea that world wars are somehow a thing of a past is the most baseless notion going around.

## Three cheers for the wise words of Cats player Bailey Smith

Rebecca Whitfield-Baker



That changed last weekend. Of course, neither the tut-tuts, nor applause of a none-too-glamorous, suburban middle-aged mum who needs to work seven years to make what he reportedly does in a season, would trouble him in the slightest.

Still, I felt chastised when my teenage son asked me to stop what I was doing last Saturday to watch a post-game interview featuring Smith. Mid eye-roll at the anticipated nonsense I might hear, his raw and genuine words made me pause.

It followed news of the tragic death

of Crow's captain Jordan Dawson's brother Jaryd, a new dad, and much-publicised worrying on-field behaviour by Carlton's Elijah Hollands.

"There is one thing that I want to touch on which is maybe out of pocket ... I just want to shout out to the Dawson family and Elijah Hollands ... I think it is about time the AFL get a men's mental health round," the 25 year old told Seven's Abbey Holmes in a clip reportedly viewed more than four million times.

"It makes you feel sick ... I just hope the AFL community wraps their arms around them and we can do something."

Well said, young man and thanks for sharing your heartfelt words so eloquently to be heard – and considered – by young fans everywhere, none more so than our young blokes.

To me, Smith's call for a league-wide mental health round sounds like a good one. After all, footy seems the

perfect space to reach Aussie men – and women – given the game has been played here since the 1850s.

Perhaps even a round to raise funds for those organisations working to support those doing it tough – or homelessness organisations?

Yes, there are men who give their gender a bad name but there are a hell of a lot more who are bloody decent and, sadly, the sobering statistics show too many are struggling.

Men are three times more likely to commit suicide in Australia – and regional suicide rates are on the rise, according to Suicide Prevention Australia.

This month, Victoria has introduced the nation's first Minister for Men and Boys. SA's Health Minister Blair Boyer says the state government is also open to considering something similar. Opposition Leader Ashton Hurn says, "there is a clear need for a fresh approach ... any practical idea that can make a difference deserves

serious consideration". Meanwhile, Gidget Foundation Australia's Mathew Aquilina says peri-natal depression and anxiety affects more men than most people realise.

"We estimate around one in 10 dads will experience some sort of mental health concern throughout the peri-natal period (up to one year after the baby is born)," the registered psychologist says.

"In reality, it could actually be quite a lot more men ... recent data shows about one in four fathers rate their mental or physical health as either poor or fair in the first year of fatherhood; a significant number report distress or isolation, or feeling overwhelmed.

"The more we talk about it, the more we normalise it and create opportunity for early identification and intervention, increasing the possibilities for men to not fall through cracks."

As for me, I'm now proud to cheer on – and listen to – the Cats' No.3.