

## War Commemorations – Facts for Students

Australia has a long and proud military history, from involvement in African conflicts in the late 1800s to more recent roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is important to commemorate the bravery and sacrifice of the men and women who have fought for our country, or are current members serving in the Australian Defence Force. Here is some useful information about two ways that troops are honoured: medals and wreaths.

### Medals

A medal is something that is made to commemorate an event, or an award presented to someone. The men and women serving in the Australian Defence Forces (Army, Navy or Air Force) are presented with campaign or service medals when they have been involved in operations. These medals recognise their service to our country.

There are several awards which are given to individual Defence Force members who have done or achieved something remarkable. These include:

- The Victoria Cross (the highest award for gallantry)
- Distinguished Conduct Medal
- Distinguished Service Order
- Military Cross
- Military Medal



These medals and awards have been presented to Australians since the Boer War (1899 – 1902). A recent recipient of the Victoria Cross was Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith. He was awarded the honour for risking his own life to enable his patrol group to break through the enemy's defences, while stationed in Afghanistan in 2010.

At commemorative events you will see Defence Force personnel wearing their medals, and others wearing medals as a tribute to their loved ones who have passed away. As a sign of respect, only original medal recipients are entitled to wear medals on their left, above their heart. Someone wearing medals of a relative or friend should wear them on the right.

### Wreaths

Every year, thousands take part in memorial services, marches and reunions to remember those soldiers who have fought and died in conflicts, and to honour those who are serving in the Australian Defence Forces today.

At memorial services you will often see commemorative wreaths, which are traditionally laid at memorial posts by friends and families of veterans who did not return from a conflict. This is an act of gratitude (thanks) for the lives lost in war.

The wreath is a symbol of immortality, and is primarily made of 'laurel'. Laurel are the long-lasting dark shiny leaves from trees or shrubs grown in tropical and subtropical areas, and are known for their spicy odour. They are woven together to create the wreath. Rosemary, symbolising remembrance, is often added.

After WWI, the 'Flanders poppy', which bloomed on many French and Belgium battlefields, became a symbol of the tragedy of war and renewal of life. Today, these poppies are known as a symbol of peace and are usually combined with rosemary for remembrance.

Finally, the 'Lest We Forget' ribbon is always placed from the top left to the lower right hand side of the wreath frame, symbolising the bayonet and rifle position held by soldiers when presenting arms.

