

Hello, my name is Nioka Mellick-Cooper and I am one of the school captains at the Castlemaine Secondary College. I am honored to be a part of your ceremony today.

I would like to acknowledge the men, women and children who were affected by the wars in the past, and our defence force personnel who are currently serving.

I recently visited Arras in northern France - the site of the Battle of Arras where members of the British Empire were posted. I stood amongst the graves of over 35,000 soldiers, dead, but not forgotten because of the beautiful and long lasting memorial built to honor them. We all felt incredibly sad to be surrounded by the graves of so many young people.

And every day, if you listen to the news, there again is that sadness when we hear of the men, women and children who are living the horrors of a modern war for example, in Syria.

Australia is referred to as the lucky country, and indeed, we should be grateful that OUR lives are not shrouded in conflict on a daily basis like many people in other countries.

To imagine this country waiting for their loved ones to return home from war, is difficult for young people today. But it is *our* history and one that generations to come will continue to acknowledge, to learn from, to remember, and for a time, feel sad.

Thank you.