**SOAP 2018 - ASSEMBLY SPEECH**

I would firstly like to say thank Dr Webster for being here to help us commemorate this important day in our history. Today I am here to speak to you about my recent experiences in the Spirit of Anzac Competition and the opportunity I had to continue the tradition of commemoration.

During the holidays just past, I had the tremendous opportunity to be a part of the Spirit of Anzac Prize Overseas Tour to Darwin and Singapore after winning the competition in December last year. This consisted of a 10 day tour to Darwin and Singapore with 22 students and 3 teacher chaperones to discover more about Australia’s involvement in WWII and the historical sites and stories there.

This process started back in September last year when I was encouraged to participate and I started writing my entry focusing on the legacy of the Anzac Spirit and its impacts within Australia during WWI and WWII. After finishing my entry I bravely hit ‘send’ without knowing what the future would hold. After a few months 22 winners were chosen and I had the chance to speak with other students who all shared the same passion I did about our different entries, and we remembered the soldiers who fought bravely for us and for our country.

We were offered a place in the overseas tour travelling to Darwin and Singapore for 10 days to various historical sites both past and present. We were also accompanied by 3 teacher chaperones from various schools, Frank McGuire MP from Broadmeadows was our Victorian government representative, 2 Veteran Representatives, Lieutenant Colonel Laureen Grimes from the Victorian Veterans Council, the sweetest Des Callaghan OAM, Vietnam Veteran Soldier and the wonderful Rebecca Hicks of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Veterans Branch, who organised and led the whole trip.

My short story entry was based on the true story of my grandmother, Lotte Mueller. Born in Germany she moved to Australia with her family when she was three years old. When WWII broke out her family were quickly recognised as ‘enemy aliens’ due to her German heritage. On the first day of the war, her father was taken from home to the Tatura mens’ internment camp. In 1942 Lotte’s mother and younger brother Wally (aged 10) were taken from home and also interned into the Internment camps located in Tatura, which housed families and Prisoners of War, in the Goulburn Valley region of Victoria,. This meant Lotte was left alone in their house aged 16 with no knowledge of where her family was taken. Bravely she journeyed alone to Tatura for voluntary internment to be with her family. Finally reunited they were moved to Camp 3, the family camp, housing families of German, Italian and Japanese descent. Sadly this did not last as Lotte’s father suffered a heart attack and passed away whilst in camp. What was astounding was how everyone in the camp came together and were able to live happily in the camp, creating a small school, church and theatre group with whatever skills people had, where Lotte worked sewing men’s trousers. Her family was not released until 1946 when they moved back to Sydney. She is now 93 and living happily in Adelaide.

Lotte truly displayed the Anzac Spirit despite being of German heritage. She chose to give up her freedom to be with her family, and I am proud to be her granddaughter.

On the morning of 3 of April at 6.30am in the morning all the students and teachers gathered at Melbourne Airport to embark on the trip of lifetime. Once checked in we boarded our flight and the beginning of a crazy adventure as well as, which I know Molly Ewens would agree with, the making of new lifelong friendships.

When we arrived in Darwin we boarded the bus with our new tour guide ‘Bushy’ and the heat of the early morning certainly took us by surprise. We spent the next few days exploring various historical sites and discovering the impacts of the Bombing of Darwin by the Japanese on the 19th of February 1942. This included discovering the Darwin aviation museum with Historian Craig Bellamy, the RAAF explosives and ammunitions storage bunkers, the WWII Oil Storage Tunnels, Darwin military Museum, East Point military precinct and the USS Peary Memorial with Historian Jared Archibald, not without stopping for a quick break at the local playground, all of us still kids at heart. All the places helped us gain an insight into the experiences of the bombing of Darwin and why it happened on that fateful day in February. We also had the opportunity the visit the Royal Flying Doctor service for a unique Virtual Reality experience of the bombing and Defence of Darwin Experience. We all agreed that a highlight of our time in Darwin as we all agreed was visiting the Australian Army’s Robertson Barraks in Darwin where we got to be driven around in their Army Trucks nicknamed “The Bush Master” and got to see into their Aviation Base to learn about their large and very intimidating vehicles, as well as experience their night training with special night vision equipment, truly once in a lifetime. The top off the day the commanding officer awarded each of us with a coin medal thanking us on our achievement in remembering and continuing the Spirit of the Anzacs as the next generation. We visited the Darwin Art Gallery and spent many afternoons in the hotel pool and wave pool, along with many amazing dinners on the Darwin Wharf watching the sunset, thus concluding our time in Darwin.

After another quick flight this time to Singapore, we arrived and checked into the grand Jen Tanglin hotel where we would spend the next 6 days. We had dinner and quickly went to bed all of us exhausted. On our second day in Singapore we visited the Kranji War Memorial where approximately 4,400 fallen soldiers are buried from Britain, Australia, Canada, Sri Lanka, India, Malaya and other, soldiers of all different backgrounds and religions with more than 850 of those unnamed, the youngest soldier being only 16 years old. There we held a small memorial service for the fallen soldiers who served for us during the advance of the Japanese and the fall of Singapore, similar to one we performed in Darwin. We also visited the Changi Chapel and Museum, seeing the large coastal guns and Changi prison where our soldiers became Prisoners of War, a devastating time in our shared history. The next day we visited the Fort Canning Centre and Battlebox, an underground bunker where we stood in the same room that the allies agreed to surrender Singapore and the old Ford Factory where the surrender was negotiated. We had many unique lunches at Balieu House, trying a variety of food including Peranakan cuisine and chilli crab, a favourite. Our afternoons were spent in the large hotel pool or at the Tanglin Mall to do a bit of shopping. My favourite night would have to be on the Singapore waterfront where we spent the night dancing to the free concerts happening with local university bands which we got to meet afterwards and a light show on the water.

After many days of visiting various historical sites we spent our last few days touring Singapore and visiting famous tourist destinations including the National Orchid Garden, Gardens by the Bay, The National Gallery and the Merlion Park where we had an enjoyable Bumboat cruise. On our final day in Singapore we got the chance to spend the whole day at Universal studios going on as many rides as possible and meeting all the characters. All of us extremely tired after our many adventures flew back to Melbourne eager to see our families but not wanting our time together to end. It truly was the trip of a lifetime, an extremely memorable experience and I would encourage all of you to have a go.

This trip was an amazing way for us as the new generation to come face to face with our past and help keep the legacy and Spirit of the Anzacs alive whilst commemorating the great bravery and sacrifice made by all soldiers in all wars, past and present. Thank you.