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LETTERS

The Burial of Enemy Dead

I read with interest Major General Mike O'Brien's article on the recovery of Australian and British bodies from the 1916 Battle of Fromelles [*United Service* Vol. 61, No. 2, pp. 21–23 (June 2010)]. In the popular press, there have been many expressions of condemnation of the Germans for the indignity of burying the allied dead in a mass grave. In our Coffs Harbour newspaper, a Vietnam veteran wrote he had witnessed such an atrocity by Australians in Vietnam and was appalled. I responded that mass burial of enemy dead is essential in war. One must remove documentation from the bodies, place them in a prepared pit, cover the pit, place a marker over it, and then record the location. If this is not done, your troops suffer the stench of decaying bodies and the likelihood of disease.

We may not like the procedure, but it is essential that we recover our own and bury them in proper individual graves and dispose of enemy dead in a mass grave. I believe that young soldiers must be taught the grim realities of war – otherwise they may develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Captain W. H. J. Phillips, OAM, ED, JP (Retd)
Coffs Harbour, 5 June 2010

A flag for all Australians

Major Ken Meyers' letter in the last issue of *United Service* [Vol. 61, No. 2, p. 7 (June 2010)] suggested that Australia should adopt a new national flag that would identify Australia to other nations and serve as a unifying symbol. While times move on, I am reminded of the words of Australia's first prime minister, Sir Edmund Barton, who wrote in 1907:

"In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an Australian and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an Australian, and nothing but an Australian There can be no divided

allegiance here. Any man who says he is Australian, but something else also, isn't an Australian at all. We have room for but one flag, the Australian flag We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the Australian people."

For me, and I suspect many of your readers, these sentiments are still relevant. Indeed, the following poem entitled "Our Australian Flag" by an unknown author neatly captures my views:

"Our flag bears the stars that blaze at night in our southern skies of blue,
And that little old Flag in the corner that's part of our heritage to;
It's for the English, the Scots and the Irish who were sent to the ends of the earth
The rogues and the schemers, the doers and dreamers who gave modern Australia birth.
And you who are seeking to change it, you don't seem to understand
It's the Flag of our law and language not the Flag of a far away land.
There are plenty of people who'll tell you that when England was plunged into night
That little old Flag in the corner was the symbol of freedom and light.
It doesn't mean we owe allegiance to a forgotten imperial dream
We've the stars to show where we are going and the old Flag to show where we've been."

Captain E. A. Flint, MBE, ED (Retd)
Coomba Park, NSW, 7 June 2010

I take issue with two claims made for changing our flag. Firstly, that it 'fails to identify Australia to other nations'. How many readers could easily identify the flags of France, Italy, Mexico, Romania, Belgium, or Bulgaria, Croatia, Egypt, Hungary, Iran – all of which are basically designed with bars of similar colours? Yet, there are only four flags that have the Union Flag on the upper hoist canton. Of these, only three have stars on the fly – Australia, New Zealand and Tuvalu (population some 11,000). The Australian and New Zealand flags have a dark blue background with white stars (Australia) and red stars (New Zealand), making identification easy.

The second, to my mind offensive, claim is that 'many recent migrants do not understand why the British flag should be on the Australian one'. Surely, if one emigrates to another country and becomes a citizen, then one accepts not only the laws of one's adopted country but also its flag. The United States has absorbed millions of immigrants from all over the world. All respect the Stars and Strips and appear to wrap themselves in it at every opportunity.

Our Australian flag is one of the most beautiful and appropriate in the world. It shows the origin of our nation, its location under the Southern Cross, and that we are a federation of states.

One final plea – please, no more bloody kangaroos!

Lieutenant Colonel "Bushy" Pembroke, MC (Retd)
Pymble, NSW, 29 June 2010

²<http://earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/farewelltext.html>, para. 40.

³David Leece is a vice-president of the Institute and editor of *United Service*. These are his personal views.