**Speech by Mayor Logan K Howlett, JP**

**City of Cockburn RSL Sub-Branch**

**Remembrance Day 2021**

**Hamilton Hill Memorial**

Good morning Veterans, one and all.

Before moving to my speech proper, today is the 80th anniversary of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

The then Governor – General Lord Gowrie opened the memorial to honour those who died in World War 1.

It was a rainy day with 5000 people in attendance, including the then Prime Minister John Curtin.

I understand that 18 Victoria Cross recipients were also in attendance.

Today, in stark contrast just 500 people were present given the COVID- 19 restrictions in place.

Now to my speech.

Several years ago I contacted Jeff Cook, a prolific writer of wartime poems who lived in country South Australia.

We had a wonderful telephone conversation at that time as I gained his approval to recite one or more of his poems at a forthcoming ANZAC Day Service or other commemorative service in the future.

He wholeheartedly agreed not even seeking an acknowledgement of his work- he was a true gentlemen full of pride and enthusiasm.

As it turned out he was a long standing local government councillor and mayor serving his community for 37 consecutive years before passing away in May 2020.

His colleagues remembered him as a fierce friend, a loyal servant to his community, a farmer, a singer, a poet, and a gentleman.

Jeff Cook’s poems hold special sentimental meanings for so many who endured wartime service.

This poem in so many ways personifies those who endured the war or a military conflict and is titled:

***Grandpa, What Did You Do In The War?***

*I’d been mowing the lawn and pulling some weeds, and slipped inside for a breather*  
 *I picked up the paper and turned on the news, not paying attention to either*  
 *When my grandson came in with a look on his face and a question that hit me full bore*  
 *An innocent question, no intention to hurt, “Grandpa, what did you do in the war”?*

*My skin went all creepy, I had sweat on my brow, my mind shot back fifty years*  
 *To bullets that thudded and whined all around, to terror, to nightmares, to tears*  
 *I was crawling through mud, I was shooting at men, tried to kill them before they killed me*  
 *Men who had wives and children at home, just like mine, just like my family.*

*“What did you do in the war?” he had asked, a question not meant to cause pain*  
 *But it brought back the horrors I’d left far behind in a deep dark recess of my brain*  
 *I remembered the bombs being dropped from the planes, the explosions, the screams, and the loss*  
*of a friend - or an enemy - but a life just the same, replaced by a small wooden cross.*

*The visions attacked me of tramping through jungles, hot and stinking, with leeches and flies*  
 *Of orders that seemed to make no sense at all - of distrust, of suspicions, of lies*

*I lived once again all those terrible storms, the dysentery, fever, the snakes,*  
 *The blisters that lived with me month after month, all those blunders, and costly mistakes.*

*But how could I tell the boy all about that, ’Twould be better if he didn’t know*  
 *It’s a part of my life that I don’t talk about from a good half a century ago*  
 *So I gulped, took a breath and tried to sound calm, and bid him to sit at my side*  
 *Then opened my mouth to say a few words, but the tears welled up and I cried.*

*He cuddled to me with a look of concern, and I mumbled of feeling unwell*  
 *Then took hold of myself, blew hard on my nose, while I thought of some tales I could tell*  
 *“What did I do in the war,” I began, then the stories began tumbling out*  
 *And they flowed with such ease I felt better again, and got over my pain and my doubt.*

*I told him of how I had made many friends, how I’d trained and had gone overseas*  
 *Made a joke of how seasick I’d been on the way, almost dirtied myself when I’d sneezed*  
 *I told of the joy of the letters from home, of the hand-knitted socks and the cake*  
 *That I got for my birthday but three weeks too late ’cause it went somewhere else by mistake.*

*We talked about mateship and what it had meant to trust someone else with your life*

*And of when I came home to my family again, to my kids, Mum and Dad, and my wife*  
 *Of the crowd on the wharf, the bands, and the pomp, and the pride I felt in the parade*  
 *But I’m not ashamed that I hood-winked the boy, a decision I’m glad that I made.*

*He can grow up without seeing fear in my eyes, or know of the terror I knew*  
 *For he’d not understand - and neither he should - all those memories that hit me anew*  
 *But maybe someday when he’s older than now, I will tell him what war did to me*  
 *But with luck he won’t ask me ever again, about wars that never should be.*

*Lest We Forget!*