

Essay by Caleb Harrison

Are the lessons of World War Two still relevant today? Undeniably. We live in a time when the concept of cause and effect has never been more pertinent. Around the world, the health and prosperity of many are dependent on the actions of a few. I say a few because not everyone has the power to lay siege upon the sovereign soil of another people. Not all of us can influence an economy through rhetoric alone. This authority is bestowed only upon those whom we trust; in some cases, maybe we fear them. But what stops these powerful few from becoming too ambitious, selfish, and perhaps, even more powerful? Currently, expansionism similar to that endorsed by 1930s Germany threatens the sovereignty of many nations around the globe. Today, Russian forces invade and destroy Ukrainian cities and towns, while Beijing continues to creep through the South China sea. These are obvious examples of those who have forgotten or chosen to ignore the consequences of World War Two. They have forgotten the horrendous combination of power and ambition.

Even though much has changed since the 1930s and 40s, one of the few things that have remained constant is conflict. Conflict is inevitable, but the only thing standing between heated discussion and physical warfare is often the events of the past. Such events act as a reminder to all future generations, a warning. In 2020, approximately 80,000 people perished as a result of multiple conflicts occurring around the globe. In 2022, conflicts in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine have already accounted for more than 50,000 fatalities. That number is expected to rise and we are only halfway through the year! More and more nations are finding themselves teetering on the edge of war and peace. Have we forgotten what we had learnt all those years ago? Must we suffer once more before we become aware of the destructive nature of humanity? The lessons of World War Two are not to be forsaken. They are to be taken on. Only then will we enjoy unity and security. It appears that in the calm, we have ignored the brewing storm. And the only way we can turn around is with the guidance of the past.

But, our knowledge and wisdom will only live as long as we do. What stops it from dying at the turn of each generation? We must preserve the lessons of World War Two if we are to ever experience peace and unity. A great way that we are currently preserving the lessons of World War Two is through war memorials and commemorative services. Each year, we are called to remember the past and what it means for the future. We call this event ANZAC day. It would be impossible to find an Australian that doesn't understand the importance of this day. Thankfully, the lessons of World War Two and the many wars before and after it are inextricably linked to our cultural identity. Because of this, the Australian community understands the cost of warfare. This understanding has brought us peace with many among the international community. We use memorials to preserve the lessons of World War Two and to remind us of the dangers of deviating from the path. We remember what happens when we ignore rising military threats. We remember the wake of destruction left behind by Adolf Hitler and Hideki Tojo, which draws a frighteningly similar parallel to the actions of Vladimir Putin. We also know of the suffering brought about by genocide and ethnocentric ideologies, which are, unfortunately, still represented today. We commemorate the past to protect the future. And as the memories fade, it is up to us to ensure that we continue to uphold the values we have adopted as a result of the aftermath of World War Two.

In the early days of August, 1945, two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by American aircraft. It is through events like these that we have learnt that there are no winners in war. At the conclusion of World War Two, every nation involved came out with less than what they had started with. Everyone had lost something or someone. At the hands of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, more than 220,000 people were killed. More than 200,000 of those people were civilians. Due to the unprecedented destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, humanity has learnt that such weapons of mass destruction are just too wicked to ever be used again. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still today, the only nuclear weapons to be used in armed conflict. The lessons of World War Two have prevented their use

for more than seven decades. The relevance of these lessons has saved thousands of lives. If we are to forget just how dangerous we can be, the future will be grim.

Are the lessons of World War Two still relevant today? Yes, now more than ever. The Earth is governed by human decency, which has been established over thousands of years. The lessons we have learnt in our turmoil help to protect our future and save as many people as possible. For example, the aftermath of World War Two gave rise to a vigilant and human rights-oriented international community. Roy Bennett stated that "some things cannot be taught; they must be experienced". Australian culture is quite accepting of this fact. Our many war memorials help us remember what went wrong and how we can change for the better. By continuing to preserve what we have learnt as a result of World War Two, the world can be made a much better place.