



ANZAC Address

2024

Good morning College. To special guests, including the Federal Member for Wannon Dan Tehan MP, to members of the College Board, including Chair Rosemary Merrin, and Deputy Chair Bill Hamill, to our many regular and welcome visitors, to our College staff and to students, welcome.

The Service that we hold here today is one of thanksgiving and commemoration. On ANZAC Day each year we collectively pause to remember and give thanks for the sacrifices of so many Australians who suffered or died in conflicts around the world across our short history as a modern nation. In a few moments we will read the Honour Roll of Old Collegians who served in conflicts from the Boer War in the late nineteenth century, all the way through to Afghanistan in the early 21st, and again confront the question of how it was that so many have died in conflict, often on the other side of the world, and how to make sense of this loss.

In my address today I would like to focus specifically on one Old Collegian, this year a former staff member who died in World War I – Horace Lisle Rintel. CEW Bean, Australia's best-known wartime correspondent of the First World War, is credited with writing that:

"The only memorial which could be worthy of them was the bare uncoloured story of their part in the war."

So our hope this morning is that, in this *one* story, we will humanise *all* names that will be read in Commemorations of Fallen today and tomorrow, and thereby remind ourselves that behind each name was a real person with a full human life, just like ours.

Horace Lisle Rintel taught at the College for only one year, 1910, while he was completing his teacher training through The University of Melbourne. He was placed as an assistant master and taught in his preferred disciplines of English Language, English Literature and British History. While Rintel was only at the College for a short time, he is an especially worthy subject because in his life we hear resonances of the ideals and pursuits that continue to animate us as a school today.

Horace Lisle Rintel was born in Clunes in central Victoria on the 26th of August 1891. His parents were Henri Rintel and Jane Eliza Herrity, the Rintels being originally from Poland and having been described as a family "of intelligence and education". While Horace was his parents' only child together, his mother had four children from her previous marriage, and he grew up in Toolangi and later in Warragul as a much-loved youngest child and sibling.

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Academically bright and energetic, Rintel went to school first at Toolangi before receiving a scholarship to board at Wesley College in Melbourne, which he took up in 1905. By all accounts the young Horace was well liked and did well at school, particularly on the field in cricket and on the river in rowing. He was second seat in the Wesley First Eight crew in 1908 and 1909. A leader within the Army Cadet Corps, Rintel attained the rank of Sergeant while still at school.

Rintel was admitted to The University of Melbourne, and initially studied for a Diploma of Education. It was during these studies that he was placed at Hamilton and Western District College. In 1910 the College was under the leadership of Headmaster John Ulbrich who stressed the importance of academic achievement and argued that honour was the best quality he could hope for in his students. Ulbrich also strongly encouraged sport with "swimming, boxing, gymnastics, rifle shooting, cricket and tennis" all available to students. The boys' College of 1910 was not so different then from our College today – valuing breadth of activity, service and academic engagement as part of a well-rounded and well-delivered education. Rintel taught at College while he studied through The University of Melbourne, just as today we have a staff member teaching while *she* studies through The University of Melbourne. Some things remain remarkably and happily similar.

With the opening of Ballarat Grammar in 1911, Rintel was appointed as assistant master there. He continued with great impact on the students in his care, again encouraging sporting involvement and being instrumental in Grammar's fledgling rowing program. He also joined the Wendouree Rowing Club and the Ballarat Cricket Association as an umpire.

Rintel's first early example to us comes in his ability to combine a full sporting and community life with his academic pursuits. He continued to study throughout his time working at Ballarat Grammar. He completed his Diploma of Education in 1913, then took a Bachelor of Arts in 1915, passing examinations in pure mathematics (just for fun it seems) in between in 1914. He was three years into a Bachelor of Laws when war broke out in Europe in 1914.

Rintel enlisted on the 20th of July 1915 in Melbourne; he was almost 24 years old. His medical intake notes list him as being 5ft 11 inches tall, weighing 12 stone 10lbs, and note him as having a "fresh" complexion. He commenced his army training in Seymour and remained there until October 1915. He then moved through several training camps including being barracked in Ballarat from October 1915 to March 1916, and then encamped at Castlemaine from May to July 1916, during which time he was given the rank of 2nd lieutenant. In late July 1916 Rintel applied for his commission and was selected for specific bombing and trench warfare training at Duntroon. Interestingly his medical on applying for commission gives his height as 6 ft 1/2 inch – military training must have agreed with him.

Rintel then awaited deployment at the Domain camp in Melbourne from July to October 1916. On the 23rd of November Horace Lisle Rintel embarked for England on the Hororata.

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To the record and to his unknowing family, this was the major event of his life in November 1916. It subsequently came to light however that Horace had at Christ Church in St Kilda on 17 November secretly married fellow teacher Gwendlyn Morey. Horace and Gwen spent less than a week together as husband and wife, before Horace embarked for Europe. They never saw one another again, had no children, and Gwendolyn never remarried.

Horace meanwhile arrived in England at Devonport on 29th of January 1917 after more than two months at sea. He was encamped in England initially and then on the continent. He saw no real action immediately, but by virtue of his leadership qualities and clear-headedness was promoted to full lieutenant on the 14th of August 1917.

By the end of September Rintel's battalion was in the Ypres Salient, moved out from Chateau Segard in preparation for the attack scheduled for the following day – the Battle of Menin Road Ridge. Heavy rain and some confusion in the leading battalions slowed their movement towards Clapham Junction during the early hours of the 20th of September.

With enemy flares lighting up the slushy ground, the troops were exposed to heavy shelling by the German artillery. Casualties quickly mounted. However, it was one of their own 18-pounders that was to prove the greatest problem, with one survivor recounting that "...This battery throughout the whole operation caused as many casualties as the whole Enemy fire..." Horace had only gone a short distance when he was struck by a piece of shell and killed instantly.

He was buried where he fell – some 800-yards east of Clapham Junction, 2¼ miles south-south-west of Zonnebeke. His body was ultimately recovered and reburied in Tyne Cot Cemetery, plot 47, row D, grave 4.

Horace Lisle Rintel embodies the tragedy of war loss in many ways – he possessed a fine mind combined with a spirit of activity to make use of it, he was loved by committed parents and siblings, he was esteemed highly by his students at Hamilton College and Ballarat Grammar, and was a newly-married man with what should have been a life of possibility and happiness ahead of him.

In the face of individual stories such as Rintel's, it is sometimes difficult for us to rationalise or even comprehend the human costs of war. That a young man of Horace's evident character and good humour could be killed seemingly for so little gain is almost unfathomable to us. Yet even here, I think we can see that there was a purpose.

At a memorial service in Ballarat shortly after Rintel's death, the Venerable Archdeacon Tucker spoke of Rintel's many qualities which would be missed, but he also he reflected that Rintel had died "In the faith that there are things of greater worth than any the world can give or take away, and which manifest themselves, not in material success, but in noble character." It is worth pausing to think through this idea. Tucker is arguing that Rintel died because he believed that the qualities that constitute noble

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character – honour, trustworthiness, commitment, leading by example – are worth more than success or happiness. This is a challenging idea for us and it is possible that Tucker was ascribing beliefs that Rintel never actually felt. But the idea starts to make sense if read in the context of the values that lead to Australia's participation in the war in the first place – respect for the law; respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of nations; freedom from coercion and despotism. It is perhaps not a stretch to imagine that a man such as Rintel died for “things of greater worth than any the world can give or take away”.

Tyne Cot Cemetery where Rintel is buried is in western Belgium, approximately 100kms from Brussels and only 40km from Ghent. Last month 11 students from our College, Rintel's former school, spent five days in Brussels and one in Ghent. Three of those five days in Brussels were spent participating in a Model United Nations conference, at which students from around the world debated topics which regularly drew on the values of respect for the law; respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of nations; freedom from coercion and despotism. It is possible to see a clear connection between the ideals that Rintel fought and died for, and those that still connect and motivate us today. I find comfort in the fact that these ideas were being debated and reasserted by students from the modern Hamilton and Western District College less than 100kms from Rintel's resting place.

Counterfactuals in history are a risky, hypothetical business, but it is not impossible to imagine a twentieth century where despotism in the guise of fascism restricted the rights and values that Rintel and others fought for in 1917. It is not impossible to imagine a world where 11 students from Hamilton in country Victoria were not able to travel so easily and quickly from our safe pocket of the world to the heart of international diplomacy in Brussels to stretch their intellectual abilities. In this example it is perhaps easier to grasp the very real benefits assured by this seemingly meaningless waste of life. Individuals can influence great ideas, and great ideas like the ones Tucker spoke of at Rintel's memorial service can affect then the lives of millions who follow.

So to return to the question with which we started: how do we make sense of the fact that so many Australians and so many Collegians have died in conflicts on the other side of the world, and how to properly memorialise their sacrifice. Part of the answer I think is to not focus on the geography of their deaths, the fact that they died so far away, but to focus instead on the *ideas* for which they died – which are much, much closer to home: respect for law; respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of nations and peoples; freedom from coercion and despotism. They gave of themselves so that collectively we could benefit and enjoy the freedoms and quality of life which afforded by these ideas.

I agree with CEW Bean that the best we can do to memorialise those who died is through "the bare uncoloured story of their part in the war." The image that sits with me is of Horace sailing away from his wife of only one week, never to see her again, and in doing so sailing away from his future happiness so that he could assure ours.

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