

“Given the common vernacular ‘knowledge is power’, please explore Sir John’s thirst for knowledge, his quest for excellence and his passion for nation building infrastructure and relate it to life-long learning and personal development”.

Widely regarded as the greatest ever Australian, Sir John Monash's lifetime achievements have had a profoundly positive effect on hundreds of thousands of people, in both Australia and beyond. Monash is best known for his achievements as commander of the Australian Corps, for which he is widely considered one of the best generals the Allies had. However, he also had significant contributions as a civilian, in his professional capacity as a civil engineer and in his continued pursuit of service for the Australian people. John Monash's commitment to the pursuit of excellence, not only for himself but for his country, should be an inspiration to all Australians. In all aspects of his professional and academic life, Sir John demonstrated a transcendent level of commitment and drive, succeeding at all he achieved, in a wide variety of fields, such as engineering, military, education and planning.

John Monash faced many challenges throughout his life and career, such as his humble beginnings as the child of store owners in Jerilderie, NSW, as well as anti-Semitism, and harmful rumours that he was a German spy, due to his German-Jewish heritage. Sir John was able to be incredibly successful as a military commander, being able to draw on his education, and his wide range of knowledge to turn the tide of the war, and to ultimately revolutionise the way which militaries and governments think about armed combat. As asserted by historian Bruce Haigh, "Monash the engineer saw that the war was a matter of machines, timetables, roads, railways, resupply and - above all - meticulous planning". *Monash’s willingness to use his wide range of experiences and the depth of his knowledge to perfect his work allowed the best possible outcome for his army corps, and therefore the Allied Army.*

Monash was able to use his education and his scholastic prowess to bring a new way of thinking to the battlefield during World War One. This was indicated in his writings, where Monash was highly critical of the structure and planning of Australian divisions, which he reformed into a more formidable force. Monash implemented reforms such as streamlining the chain of command and shifting the strategic focus of planning from smaller units to larger, more strategic planning, allowing a more effective army overall, leading to the surrender of the enemy. Sir John was able to achieve this meticulously planned nature of warfare, even though he had one of the largest groups of men under his control, 208,000, with 50,000 American soldiers who were virtually inexperienced in war. His ability to go against conventional thinking and introduce pioneering new strategies such as the combination of foot soldiers, tanks and air support, brought an unprecedented amount of success for Australian military forces, under the newly made Australian Corps. Monash's performance as a General meant that a previously disorganised and "hastily improvised" (Monash)¹ army was able to successfully defend France from German forces and launch a successful counterattack, which turned the tide of the war. His prowess earned him the title of "the best General on the Western Front in Europe", as described by British Field General Bernard Montgomery. Monash achieved other various awards, such as being the last general to be knighted in the field of battle, being knighted by King

¹ *The Australian Victories in France*

George in 1918. Monash was able to use his expertise in planning and logistics, organising the repatriation of Australian soldiers in all theatres of war after the war's conclusion, and use the power of his education, and his way of thinking as an engineer, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the return of Australian soldiers to Australia, which had a huge effect on the soldiers and their families.

Monash also contributed significantly to Australian society as a civilian. Before joining the army, he worked as a successful civil engineer and demonstrated his commitment to the field of construction when he earned his Doctor of Engineering in 1921. Sir John's work post-war also is indicative of this dedication, due to his roles such as Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, as well as an advocate for Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, and an organiser of the commemoration of ANZAC Day as we know it. Monash also held many other significant leadership roles as a civilian, such as general manager of the State Electricity Commission from 1920 to 1936, during a time where it saw many infrastructure projects. He took great pride in Australia and went to lengths to ensure that the achievements of Australian soldiers were accurately recorded. Monash's book, *The Australian Victories in France 1918* revealed the essential role of Australians in battles such as the defence of Amiens and the breaking of the Hindenburg line. The book, published in 1920, opens by asserting that "The renown of the Australian soldiers, in all theatres of the Great War, has loomed large in minds and the imagination of the people of Empire", and the book continues with effusive praise to the brave actions of diggers during the First World War. Monash's writings demonstrate a sense of national pride and patriotism, which was significant at a time Australia hadn't existed for more than two decades, and there was a cultural struggle between allegiance with Britain and a unique identity and culture as Australians. Monash's actions are representative of his desire to build a strong national culture within Australia, as well as correct acknowledgment of our soldier's contributions and sacrifices in the First World War. Monash was able to use his elevated writing ability, and his platform as a successful General to provide previously unavailable information to the public. Before Monash's work, the achievements of the AIF weren't sufficiently recognised, and the publication of his book went a long way towards having a righteous acknowledgement of Australian soldiers.

Above all else, John Monash was committed to using his skills, talents, and education for the betterment of others, and the betterment of his country. He was able to use his extensive intellect and education to perform his work to the best of his abilities. Monash improved Australia, through the mechanism of the Australian Army Corps, Melbourne University, the State Electricity Commission, and many other pursuits. Sir John ultimately was able to use his knowledge, and desire to improve himself to reflect his dedication to nation building, and to the improvement of Australia.

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