



**Doug Parkinson, MLC**

Leader for the Government in the  
Legislative Council

Monday, 30 April 2007

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### **Frank MacDonald Prize winners part of historic Last Post ceremony at Menin Gate**

A Tasmanian delegation of students, teachers and RSL members have laid a wreath on behalf of all Tasmanians during the historic Last Post ceremony at Belgium's Menin Gate memorial.

Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council, Doug Parkinson, is leading the delegation, which includes the six student winners of the Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize, on a 12-day journey that included the laying of a wreath at Lone Pine on Anzac Day.

"8000 people, mostly Australians, were at Gallipoli on Anzac Day and to lay a wreaths at Anzac Cove and then Lone Pine on behalf of Tasmania was an experience we will never forget.

"Today we visited the battlefields of the Salient, where the British Army and Anzacs fought, and inspect surviving trenches such as Hill 62 and Polygon Wood, a piece of ground captured by the Australian 5th Division in September 1917 during the Battle of Menin Road," Mr Parkinson said.

"The highlight of our visit to the Belgian city of Ypres was the Last Post ceremony at the famous Menin Gate memorial.

"Every night since 1928, regardless of weather, traffic has been halted and the Last Post bugle call sounded under the arch of the memorial, which bears the names of nearly 55,000 missing service men.

"The ceremony is an expression of gratitude from the Belgian people to the nearly 400,000 allied service men who died defending the nation's freedom and independence.

"The dead and missing service men came from every allied country, including Australia and New Zealand, and it will be moving experience to lay a wreath under the arch of Menin Gate on behalf of all Tasmanians."

Mr Parkinson said the delegation would tomorrow travel to the small French town of Frommelles to visit the Australian Memorial Park and the VC Corner Australian Cemetery.

“Fromelles was the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front and included the single worst day of the Great War,” Mr Parkinson said.

“The troops of the 5th Australian and 61st British Divisions suffered heavily at the hands of German machine-gunners and the 5th Australian Division lost 5,533 men who were either killed, injured or taken prisoner.

“The VC Corner Australian Cemetery is the only all-Australian cemetery in France and its memorial commemorates 1,299 Australians killed in the infamous battle who have no known grave.

“There are no headstones and 410 red roses grow above the unidentified bodies of fallen Australian soldiers.”

Mr Parkinson said the Tasmanian students were gaining a sober appreciation of the sacrifice made by Australian soldiers and an understanding of the bravery and mateship that laid the foundation of Australia’s identity.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these young Tasmanians to stand on the ground on which Australian soldiers fought and gave their lives and to hear stories of their courage and loyalty,” Mr Parkinson said.

“Through the Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize, the State Government and RSL are ensuring the next generation of Tasmanians continue to recognise the importance of Gallipoli and other battles in our nation’s history and to honour Tasmania’s own hero, Frank MacDonald.”

Mr Parkinson said Mr MacDonald was a decorated serviceman, receiving the Military Medal for Conspicuous Gallantry and Devotion to Duty and the Legion of Honour from the French Government.

“Frank MacDonald was our last World War I veteran when he died in 2003 at the age of 107 and he fought with distinction in France and Belgium.”

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