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The Editor

*The Navy*

Navy League of Australia

GPO Box 1719

SYDNEY NSW 2001

*Dear Editor,*

In your July-September 2011 edition your President posed the question about a 'naval' Anzac Day, a consideration which is a very appropriate and timely one to raise. He's right: of course we should reflect upon and honour the deeds and sacrifices of all Australian men and women who have served their country in peace and war in Australia's defence forces on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. However, it would appear that Navy has already lost the fight to ensure that the relevance of the naval contributions to the conflicts and campaigns of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries is not overwhelmed by Army. As the centennial of 25 April 1915 approaches, this situation can only get worse.

There are good reasons for this imbalance, not least the disparity of numbers who have served in the RAN compared with those in the other two services and the dreadful 'Silent Service' syndrome which still seems to afflict the Navy. But a lot of the unconcern for and unawareness of the dimensions and achievements of the navy's service to this country is our own fault. We bang the Navy drum too infrequently, too inexpertly and not loud enough. Oh yes; we also suffer from a chronic shortage of drummers.

That being the case, we need to choose a date for beating our drum that does not run the risk of it being overwhelmed by the other bands on parade. And, taking our lead from Anzac Day, I think it would be more appropriate to settle on a date that has some of the same elements to it – struggle, courage, and sacrifice - a military event rather than the commemoration of an administrative order turning our ships into the Royal Australian Navy instead of the Commonwealth Naval Forces. To make my point, I believe we have got the date wrong for the Navy's 100<sup>th</sup> 'birthday', but who cares.

One date stands out as the occasion when we should praise and reflect on naval service and, perfectly reasonably, invite our fellow Australians do the same. The first battle fought against a foreign power under Australian colours took place on 11 September 1914 at Bitia Paka near Rabaul. The force involved comprised the landing parties of the ships of the Australian Fleet, the military contingent of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force having been delayed. The sailors won the battle, incurred the first Australian military casualties and gained the first military honours awarded to Australians. This successful start to the strategy of ejecting the Germans from their Pacific territories ensured a short campaign, at the end of which Australia had gained its own 'empire' and had become a Pacific power into the bargain. We live with the ramifications of that victory today: the contrast with the outcomes at Gallipoli could not be starker.

The centenary of that important event in Australia's national and naval history occurs in just over three years' time. I suggest we get on with a concerted campaign to have the date and its significance enshrined in the calendar, starting now.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ian Freer". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a prominent initial "I" and a long, sweeping underline.