

Scaled-back Anzac Day a poignant reminder of 1919...

By TAMARA MCDONALD

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Scaled-back Anzac Day a poignant reminder of 1919 pandemic

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CROWD-CONSTRAINED Anzac Day in 2021 recalls the impact of the Spanish flu pandemic more than a century ago, a Deakin University history expert says.

Bart Ziino, a senior history lecturer at Deakin's School of Humanities and Social Sciences, said a pandemic-affected Anzac Day would remind us a quieter day allowed for greater

reflection on how wars had been fought and endured.

"Anzac Day 1919 — as in 2021 — was a restricted affair, cruelled but not cowed by the persistent threat of the global Spanish flu pandemic that had already caused hundreds of deaths in Australia and millions worldwide," he said.

"What was obvious at the time, even if it is more difficult for us to see today, is that Anzac Day had to speak not

only to the experiences of soldiers but to the painful experiences of those who had remained in Australia, waiting for and supporting those at the front.

"The curtailment of major commemoration through the pandemic allowed for a more introspective opportunity to think about the effects of the war on the community.

"A quieter marking of Anzac Day this year might,

strangely enough, help us to commune with those who spent Anzac Day in similar circumstances and to think of the two world wars especially as communal and heartbreaking experiences for those who had to endure them."

Anzac Day in the influenza pandemic saw Australians beginning their attempts to recover from an experience in which 60,000 Australians had died, and 150,000 more

returned wounded. "As much as Anzac Day provided an opportunity to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of soldiers, it was impossible to ignore the sacrifices of those who had spent the war worrying about their loved ones at the front and now had to pick up the pieces," Dr Ziino said.

He said without official services, smaller communal services filled the gap, and focused

on those who mourned. Churches held short memorial services, while the Soldiers' Wives' and Mothers' Association conducted an open-air memorial service.

"In the quiet afforded by the pandemic, these people persisted in reminding Australians of how much the sacrifices of the war had been shared between the battlefields and those at home," Dr Ziino said.