



An artist's impressions of the new memorial, clockwise from left, onlookers inside one of the memorials, and views of each memorial from a distance.

# Memorial to shine on fallen

## A soldier's grandson, Richard Kirk, won a design award for a new shrine to war victims, **JESSICA WRIGHT** discovers

**L**IONEL Kirk had long been consigned to the earth when grandson Richard made his entry into this world.

That he lived long enough to bear children and grandchildren was no insignificant feat.

Enlisting in 1915 with the 25th Battalion AIF, Lieutenant Kirk fought in the desperation, the mud and the trenches of the Western Front from the early months of 1916 until the bitter end of the terrible conflict.

The World War I veteran returned to Gaider, Queensland, in 1919 leaving war and its horrors behind. Also left behind, 61,928 Australian men and women of a population of just 4.5 million.

He married a local girl, began a family and set about resurrecting his life, away from the killing and killed.

He would rarely leave the small town again, perhaps haunted by what lay outside this comforting rural hamlet in the state of his birth.

It is fitting then, some 92 years after Lieutenant Kirk set sail for Europe, that one of his bloodline be granted the opportunity to immortalise the contribution of the Australian men and women of World Wars I and II.

After nearly 100 years, Canberra is to have memorials to commemorate the two greatest conflicts of the 20th century.

Until now, there has been no dedicated memorial among the many edifices along Anzac Parade for the 1.4 million men and women who served in the world wars and the 101,086 lost, although there are monuments commemorating

individual conflicts and branches of the armed services.

It was a peculiar anomaly that a group of serving and former defence force personnel felt needed to be resolved. To that end, the Memorials Development Committee was established in 2005 and an international competition for the design of the memorials was launched in February, last year.

Initially 255 submissions of interest were registered and an eventual 43 entries submitted in April.

Architect Richard Kirk, and his eponymous Brisbane firm, very nearly missed the opportunity to contribute to the project.

Kirk discovered the competition just two weeks out from the first deadline, which closed in April, and immediately set to creating the four concept boards required for submission.

He says he felt an immediate connection to the project.

"The world wars are probably the most significant event to happen to Australian family lives even until this day," he said. "As the descendant of a war veteran, I remember as a child it was always discussed. So was I drawn to the idea [of designing the memorials?] Certainly."

A jury panel of eight, headed by RSL president Bill Crews and including National Capital Authority officials, artists, engineers and veterans, considered the original 43 entries before narrowing the selection to three.

Each firm was invited to Canberra for a briefing in July on the specifics of the project and then given just four weeks for final submissions. Chairman of the com-

mittee and Vietnam veteran Mike Buick says while each entry was of a high standard, the decision to award Kirk's design was unanimous.

The proposed structures, reaching 20m towards the sky, will be made from granite cut from the earth of each of Australia's geological regions.

They will take their place at the foot of Anzac Parade, on the stretch of red gravelled earth known variously as Gallipoli Ridge or more commonly Rond Terrace and will frame and complement Walter Burley Griffin's axis as it sweeps down from Parliament House, clear across his lake and rising to the Australian War Memorial and Mount Ainslie.

*'The world wars are probably the most significant event to happen to Australian family lives even until this day'*

Kirk's twin memorials will be linked by a granite pavement, each paver inscribed with the number of fallen from towns across the nation. A field of poppies interspersed among the granite walkway will evoke the battlefields of the world wars while the inside of the monuments' walls will be inscribed with words written by soldiers and their loved ones in letters ferried between home and foreign lands.

The monuments are layered in symbolism. Designed to represent the trenches, the sun will align with precise slits in the granite of the World War I memorial at the exact moment Australia falls silent for one minute on Remembrance Day.

The World War II memorial, evocative of the jungles of Papua New Guinea, will also let the sunlight through to mark the end of the battle for Kokoda.

Although rich and complex in detail, Kirk resolved the monuments' overall form would be free of compromising distraction.

"Some memorials use graphic imagery to relay the narrative of the event or idea, whereas I felt the narrative of the memory should be attached to the form, not the other way round," he says. "It should have a broad capacity to mean something to someone from their own experiences. They are designed to appear quite abstract, almost as if they were always here, made by another hand, perhaps by the sunlight."

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd unveiled models of the granite memorials at Parliament House on Thursday and committed on behalf of the Government \$250,000 to the estimated \$21 million cost of the project.

"The First World War helped shape our character, the Second World War saw us defending our own shores," Rudd said at the unveiling ceremony.

"Our servicemen and women who served in both world wars as they do today with courage, with resilience and compassion.

"These qualities not only shaped our past, but they also steel us for

the present and prepare us for the future."

Buick said the committee would be seeking to raise funds from philanthropic and wealthy individuals and from the corporate sector for the project which would take a minimum of two years to complete. It is hoped the memorials will be ready for the 100th anniversary of the Anzac landings in 2015, but this relies on the funds being raised.

Former deputy prime minister and inception patron of the project Tim Fischer said the memorials would complete a proud history of honouring Australia's serving and fallen.

"There are missing links in the centre of the nation's capital between the Australian War Memorial and Parliament House, the absence of specific world war memorials honouring the sacrifice of thousands in [both wars]," he said. "This goes to the core and fabric of our nation and our salute to the people of high rank and all ranks; our salute to the districts, towns and cities, large and small that gave so much for Australia in time of need. We owe them all more than we can ever know."

Lionel Kirk returned from war but its terrible imprint never left him nor his family.

Before the end of his life, a second world war would grip the earth, once more denying small towns their young men.

Young men, and women too, destined to become names and numbers etched into stone, among nodding, waving red poppies and shafts of sunlight.

As if they had always been here.