

# Podcast 87 – Sir John Monash

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,  
with Rob McCormack

*Podcast Number 87 – Sir John Monash*

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast87.mp3>

Hi,

In Melbourne every day, around 180,000 cars use the Monash Freeway, one of Melbourne's and Australia's busiest roadways. It connects the centre of Melbourne with the south eastern suburbs of our city and beyond that with the eastern part of Victoria. At the same time, as the freeway passes through the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, it passes only a short 3km from Monash University, one of Australia's biggest universities located here in Melbourne, where around 70,000 students attend. Both of these are named after one of Australia's greatest ever military commanders, General Sir John Monash. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about Sir John's life and his contribution to Australia.



Sir John Monash (taken in the 1920s)

John Monash was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1865 in Melbourne. He died on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October in 1931, at the relatively young age of 66. In those 66 years, he achieved so much. In particular, he was a commander of Australian army forces in the First World War and is considered to be one of the best military commanders on the side of the Allies in that war. He is certainly Australia's most famous military commander in our history.

John Monash's parents had migrated to Australia from Prussia in 1863 and, as they were native speakers of the German language, so too was John, as the family spoke German at home. In 1874, the family had moved from Melbourne to

Jerilderie, a small town in New South Wales, to run a store. In 1877, the family decided to move back to Melbourne in order to give John a better education and to give him the best chance to reach his full potential. John attended Scotch College, one of Melbourne's best private schools which still exists today. He passed his university entrance when he was only 16, showing how talented he was.

He attended Melbourne University and studied engineering. After university, he worked as a civil engineer in bridge and railway construction. In fact, he played an important part in introducing the use of reinforced concrete to building in Australia. He was eventually involved in forming and managing his own companies which used this type of construction. He was also involved in promoting the engineering profession and was president of the Victorian Institute of Engineers. From 1923 until his death in 1931, he was the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Australia's oldest and most successful university. It is no wonder that the new university created in Melbourne in 1958, Monash University, was named after Sir John.

As impressive as his working career was, it was as a soldier that John Monash achieved great things and for which he became so famous in Australia and internationally. His military career started when he joined the Melbourne University branch of the Militia in 1884, which at that time was the part time reserve army in Victoria. Today, the equivalent is the Australian Army Reserve. These forces are made up of people who continue to work in their normal jobs but at the same time train part-time to be soldiers, usually on weekends or evenings, or a certain number of days per year. John soon became an officer and by 1912 had become a Colonel commanding the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, John joined the full time Australian Army and, in September of that year, was

given command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, commanding up to 1000 men.

Monash and his brigade were soon sent to the war in Europe. His brigade was involved in the Gallipoli campaign on the shores of Turkey. Monash and his men came ashore at Gallipoli on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1915 and, like all the allied troops in this campaign, found the opposition from the Turkish Army to be very strong and the terrain extremely difficult. It was during this campaign that Monash was promoted to Brigadier General as a result of his skills and leadership qualities. Although this campaign was unsuccessful and the troops were forced to withdraw, Monash learned much about military command in battle. After the withdrawal from Gallipoli, Monash and his troops were sent to the battlefields in France where the battles were ferocious and the casualties high. It was here that Monash's skills as an organizer, planner and leader became truly evident and his skills as a commander were demonstrated.





Lieutenant General Sir John Monash, commander of the Australian Corps during the First World War. 1918.

In June of 1918 Monash was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General and he was given the command of all five divisions of the Australian Army Corps. He was therefore the first native born Australian to command all Australian troops in a theatre of war. John led a number of important victories in France in 1918 which helped bring the war to an end. One of his key beliefs as a commander was that the safety and well-being of the troops under his command were the top priorities for a commander, if victory was to be achieved. He also strongly believed in fully planning and using all the military components in the battle, including troops, weapons, medical and logistics functions. For example, in the midst of the battle, he had hot meals sent to the front lines for the troops.

John Monash was honoured by King George V in August of 1918 by being given a knighthood, so that he became Sir John Monash. He also received awards and honours from the leaders of France, Belgium and the United States, in recognition of his fine contribution as a great military commander in the First World War.

In addition to the Melbourne Monash freeway and the Monash University, Sir John's contribution is recognized in the following:

- The City of Monash, a local government area in Melbourne
- The Monash Medical Centre, a teaching hospital in Melbourne
- The John Monash Scholarships, awarded every year to Australians for study overseas
- The John Monash Science School, a special science secondary school in Clayton, Victoria
- The town of Monash in South Australia
- The suburb of Monash in Australia's capital city,

Canberra and

- Sir John Monash's picture shown on Australia's \$100 note.

300,000 people came to pay their respects at Sir John's funeral in 1931.

I have been thinking about the number of times that his name is spoken by living Victorians and Australians today, as they use, for example, the name of the freeway or the university in their daily conversations. Almost all of these people, included, rarely think about the real man, Sir John Monash and what a great Australian he was. But all of the things which are named after him are important and they all add value to the lives of Victorians and Australians. I think that is a great way to honour his life.

<https://johnmonash.com/john-monash>

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at [rob@slowenglish.info](mailto:rob@slowenglish.info). I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

## **Podcast 87 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?**

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

## Vocabulary

achieved = completed

Allies = the countries who fought alongside Australia in the First World War

attend = people who go to an event or course

battle = a fight between two armies of soldiers

battlefields = the place where a battle happens

beyond = further away

broke out = (here) the term used to describe that a war has started

campaign = a series of actions to achieve something. Here used to describe a series of battles

Colonel = a level of military commander

commanders = the bosses for the army, navy or airforce

components = the parts

connects = joins

considered = thought to be

construction = when you build something

contribution = when you do something which is good for others

conversations = when people talk to one another

demonstrated = when something is shown

divisions = a special name for a group of soldiers of a

certain size

education = when you are learning things in a school, college or university

entrance = (here) what score you must achieve to enter university

equivalent = the same

evident = when something can be easily seen

exists = something or someone that is here today

ferocious = very violent

front lines = (here) that place during a battle where the fighting is actually happening

funeral = when someone is buried or cremated, after they die

General = a high level military commander

honoured = when you praise or thank someone for the work they have done

impressive = when you find something to be very, very good

Infantry Brigade = a special name for a group of soldiers of a certain size

introducing = (here) when you bring something new to other people

leadership = the ability to lead others well

Lieutenant-General = a level of military commander

logistics = when you provide the workers and the things they need to do the job

midst = to be in the middle of an event while it happens

migrated = when a person has gone to live in another country

military = the army, navy or airforce

named after = when somebody's name is used in the name of something else

native born = when you were born in the country where are living

native speakers = people who have spoken a language since birth

opposition = the people who are against you

potential = the best that you can be in the future

priorities = the things that are very important

promoted = (here) to be raised to a higher level.

promoting = (here) to tell people that something is very good

Prussia = a country which existed before 1918 which included parts of Germany

recognition = when people know that you have done something good

recognized = when it is made known that you have done something good

reinforced concrete = a special type concrete which is very strong

relatively = when compared to others of the same type

reserve = something which is held back and only used later, a backup

respects = (here) when you go to a funeral to show that you the person lived a good life

roadways = all types of roads. For example, freeways, streets, highways, etc

Scholarships = when you are given money to help you study

suburbs = an area of the city where people live

terrain = how the land looks. For example, hilly, flat, mountains, valleys, etc

theatre of war = a large area where a war takes place

Vice-Chancellor = the boss of a University

Victoria = a state of Australia

victories = when you win a battle

withdraw = to go away from

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