

ANZAC DAY AMENDMENT BILL 2004

Standing Orders Suspension - Motion

On motion without notice by Mr J.C. Kobelke (Leader of the House), resolved with an absolute majority -

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the House to consider forthwith the Anzac Day Amendment Bill 2004.

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR A.J. DEAN (Bunbury) [4.08 pm]: I wish to make a brief contribution to this debate today and in doing so I will point out an anomaly in the system of recognition for people who have served their country. Many members have contributed to this debate and I was pleased to hear what the member for Ballajura said this morning about Anzac Day. I remember my first few Anzac Days in the early 1960s when I attended Nannup Junior High School - now Nannup District High School. Every Anzac Day a person called Mr Stan Ford came and talked to the school. Mr Ford was the owner of the 4 Square store in town. He was also a merchant sailor in World War I. Therefore, I guess in the 1960s he must have been in the best part of his 60s or 70s. He used to get up at the Anzac Day services at Nannup Junior High School and tell us the same story year after year. He was a very endearing and warm man. The story remained the same.

I remember that I thought Anzac Day was good all through the 1960s because it was a holiday. Particularly in Nannup, with so many things to do, it was fantastic to get away from school in autumn weather. My first recollection of Anzac Day is that it was a holiday. It remained mostly like that through my early life - my teenage years and so forth. Anzac Day was a day when my father would ask where his medals were. They were always in the same spot - a drawer - into which he had put them 12 months before. The ribbons were pretty dishevelled by then; they were a bit dirty after 25 or 30 years of being worn. They always ended up back in the same drawer after each Anzac Day.

Anzac Day was a day when many people of many nationalities from within the local community, whether they were true-blue Anzacs or immigrants, met and commemorated Anzac Day and adjourned afterwards to the RSL hall in one of the back streets of Nannup. The RSL hall had a great tradition of feeding everyone who turned up. April is salmon and herring time. People would go to Black Point or across the coast to Margaret River and so forth. The Italians in Nannup would always turn up with plates and plates of fish fillets, mostly herring and skippy, which would feed the throngs. It was also a time when many jugs of beer were drawn and spilt, and many tall tales told.

My father joined the Australian Imperial Force 63 years ago on 14 May 1941. He went for basic training at Northam and departed from these shores about six months later on 14 November 1941. He disembarked about four months later in Egypt on 23 March 1942, and about four months after that he went missing in action and was reported as a prisoner of war. It took some 12 months before his status as a POW was recognised by Vatican Radio. He was interned at POW camp 106 in the province of Piedmont, where he stayed until he broke out. He then stayed in Italy and Switzerland until the end of the war. I have obtained his AIF records from the Australian War Memorial. The language used in the records is quaint in some ways. The records show that he "de-planed", which I imagine means that he got on a plane, from Italy to the United Kingdom on 27 July 1945. He eventually made his way back to Australia on the *Queen Mary*.

War memorials list the names of people who have lost their lives in action. However, I know hundreds of ex-servicemen, as do most people, whose names will never be remembered on any war memorial anywhere because they did not make the ultimate sacrifice. My father made quite a few sacrifices in the way that he conducted himself throughout World War II, some of which I have no doubt shortened his life. He died at the age of 67 almost 18 years ago. These days, that would be considered to be a short lifespan. Hundreds of thousands of the people who went to war and experienced arduous conditions will never be recognised in any way. I cannot find my father's name on my local war memorial in Nannup, which is the town in which he enlisted. It is not listed on the state war memorial or on the war memorial in Canberra. Those names are not placed on war memorials and will pass into history. It is fitting that proposed section 3A(2), which is inserted by clause 4 of the Bill, states -

This Act confirms the status of ANZAC Day as a day for the commemoration of the landing of Australian troops on the shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 -

It then goes on to state -

and recognises the sacrifices made by all Australian men and women serving their country in times of war and conflict and in peacekeeping duties.

It is fitting that my father and the fathers of many people here today who went off to war and came back successfully, although not always physically or mentally unscathed - my father had both physical and mental scars for the rest of his life - will be recognised. It is good that this legislation will enshrine their service in some small way so that the people of Western Australia will recognise their contribution, because that contribution will not be recognised anywhere else, except on Anzac Day. It is a bit of an anomaly and a bit sad that the efforts of those people are not recognised in some concrete form.

I stand here today with mixed feelings about Anzac Day. I was initially dragged along to Anzac Day services and failed to appreciate Anzac Day. However, over the years I came to appreciate the sacrifices made by those who went to war and returned with scars. I am glad to endorse this Bill today.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.16 pm]: I will wind-up the second reading debate on this Bill on behalf of the Premier. I thank all members for their contributions to the debate on this Bill. It has been an opportunity for members to express their feelings about the people who have served Australia in wartime and through peacekeeping duties, and to put on record for posterity what they think about those events. The speeches have been of quality and members have conducted this debate with a degree of generosity that we should perhaps extend a little more in this Parliament. I will also take this opportunity to say what I think about these matters and will clear up one or two matters about the Bill. First, I congratulate the member for Moore, who tried to make two speeches on this Bill. It showed how deeply he felt about these issues to try to make two contributions. I was particularly impressed by the member for Cockburn who succeeded in naming a fair contingent of RSL members from his electorate. He reminded me of a former member I sat next to in the last Parliament.

I will just correct an anomaly in the Premier's second reading speech. He meant to name every Victoria Cross recipient from Western Australia. However, we have received a couple of letters, one of which was from the former member for Bunbury, Mr Ian Osborne, who pointed out that his great-grandfather, I think it was - I do not have the letter in front of me although I meant to bring it with me - had been a VC recipient. I received one or two other pieces of correspondence that indicated that other Western Australians had not been acknowledged by the Premier. I will detail all the Western Australian recipients of the Victoria Cross, as far as we have been able to determine, for the various conflicts that Western Australians have been engaged in over the past 100 years or so. The Victoria Cross is the highest award for valour. Recipients include Lieutenant Frederick Bell, Lance Corporal Thomas Axford, Private John Carroll, Lieutenant Alfred Gaby, Lieutenant Lawrence McCarthy, Private Martin O'Meara, Lieutenant Charles Pope, Lieutenant Clifford Sadlier, Lieutenant Hugo Throssell, Acting Wing Commander Hughie Idwal Edwards, Private James Gordon, Private Percival Gratwick, Private Arthur Gurney and Private Leslie Starceovich. I apologise to anyone who was offended by the omission of the name of any recipient of the Victoria Cross in the Premier's second reading speech.

This Bill comes on top of a range of initiatives that the Government has introduced for the memory and the preservation of that memory of people from Western Australia who have served Australia in times of war and in peacekeeping duties. I will detail a couple of other matters, because we have a very fine record of trying to preserve that memory, of encouraging Western Australians to be aware of it and to promote it. I serve on a committee with the President of the Returned and Services League, Mr Bill Gaynor, who has done a marvellous job in assisting me and the Government on these matters. First, we have announced a \$250 000 grants program to do up any memorial around Western Australia that might need attention. We will shortly be announcing the outcome of that program, and I am sure members will be pleased with the outcome. We have committed up to half a million dollars to fix the State War Memorial in Kings Park, which is approximately 75 years old. I think it was finished in 1928. Work will commence later this year on taking the memorial apart and putting it back together to make sure it endures into the future. We have commissioned the construction of a statue of John Curtin, our great wartime Prime Minister who unfortunately perished just before the end of the Second World War. That statue will be erected in Fremantle in time for the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the sixtieth anniversary of his death. We have implemented a scheme across all schools in Western Australia called the Adopt a Memorial scheme, under which schools can adopt a memorial and do research projects, research the names that are detailed on the memorial and perhaps do minor repairs and maintenance work it. We have had a very good response to that program. Schools will win a prize depending upon the sort of work they do on the memorials. We have set up a web site listing all of the memorials and honour boards across Western Australia. We have put \$250 000 towards an Anzac Park in Albany. We have put together new school curriculum material about our Anzac history for all schools across Western Australia. We have also instituted the Anzac tour, the first of which was undertaken earlier this year, led by the Premier, consisting of 12 Western Australian school students selected from around the State. Some 700 schools participated and 12 lucky students were taken to the battlefields of northern France and on to the Anzac Day services in London where, by all accounts, they had an excellent time and learnt a great deal about our Anzac heritage.

Mr P.G. Pental: If you feel you would like some bipartisan support on these arduous tours, I would be quite willing to assist.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member for South Perth may well be too late. The next one will not be held until next year. The member for Murdoch accompanied the delegation this year and he did a sterling job representing the Opposition. This undertaking is about teaching schoolchildren our history. There is an incentive at the end of it, in that the student could get on a trip to an Anzac site. Next year we are hoping to send the students to Gallipoli, but it may be Singapore or -

Mr D.A. Templeman: Or Korea.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Some places are difficult to send students to, but it could be Korea or Vietnam.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: What about New Guinea?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Some places are difficult because they are reasonably dangerous. Next year we are hoping for Gallipoli, but we will have to wait and see where the student delegation ends up.

They are the sorts of things that have been put in place over the past eight months or so. We think that is a pretty good expression of the Parliament's support for the Anzac legend. Some fine young individuals were included in the 12 Western Australians who accompanied the group to France and Britain, one of whom was Timothy Grimes who comes from Parkwood in the electorate of the member for Riverton. Timothy stood up before the Prime Minister of Great Britain in the cabinet room at Downing Street and recited his Anzac speech word for word, without notes. The Prime Minister of Great Britain was shocked and impressed by Timothy's ability to speak without notes and make sense. That young man from Western Australia was much lauded in Downing Street, as were all of the young people who participated in that tour.

Finally, the Government is proposing this amendment to the Anzac Day Act. This Act was originally passed in approximately 1960. It has not been amended in any substantial way since then, but this Government wanted to put some meaning into the Act with a range of consequential amendments. That meaning is there for all to see, but it basically adds some scope and breadth to what Australians have achieved in the past hundred years in the service of their country.

At a personal level, I represent the electorate of Rockingham which has the largest defence facility in the State and one of the largest in Australia, if not the largest. I represent a range of citizens who have served their country in times of conflict, in times of war and on peacekeeping duties. I represent a range of citizens who have recently been involved in wartime activities. I also represent large numbers of people from the United Kingdom who have served Britain during wartime, particularly in the Second World War. In fact, I am proud to be the patron of the Royal Naval Association, Rockingham branch. They are great people. I am a member of the Rockingham RSL and the Rockingham Naval Association. I represent large numbers of people who have done a good job in arduous conditions and continue to do so. As we speak, hundreds of them are out there at sea, often in arduous conditions, doing what they are trained to do in the service of their country. I am proud that my electorate makes that contribution.

My personal view is that Australia has done an exemplary job in the 103 years since Federation. Prior to that, Australia was involved in a range of conflicts. On a state basis we sent expeditionary forces to assist, almost on every occasion, the forces of Great Britain in foreign conflicts, but since Federation the involvement of our forces could be distilled to 10 or 12 conflicts throughout the world. In my opinion we are not a warlike country, we are not a country that has as its foundation a birth in war or a deep warlike streak, as do a range of countries, but we have gained a certain spirit from our citizens' involvement during times of world conflict. We have gained a sense of pride and a sense of steel in our spines from what our citizens have achieved in times of war over the past 103 years. Our contribution as a State has been exemplary. When one looks at the list of Victoria Cross holders and listens to the stories and legends of people from various communities around Australia, one can feel nothing but pride and a sense of tragedy about what Western Australians have achieved. We have nothing to be ashamed of about our involvement. Australians and Western Australians have served in every corner of the world. In South Africa at the turn of the last century our forces served in the Boer War, as it is now known, where the lives of approximately 500 Australian citizens were lost. In the First World War 60 000 Australian citizens lost their lives on the battlefields of France, Belgium and the Middle East, and on the oceans of the world. Australian citizens also lost their lives in the conflict in Turkey and in a couple of other lesser-known conflicts such as New Guinea. The First World War was very much a conflict that provided a national identity for Australia. For the first time, Australians from all of the States came together to serve on the battlefields overseas, and they formed a bond of friendship and a spirit that endures to this day. I have been to the battlefields of northern France three times, and even to Belgium on one occasion. I could not help but feel moved when I walked those fields and saw the cemeteries with row after row of graves of the thousands of young men - often Australian young men - who died in that conflict. At the Australian memorial there is a wall

that is bigger than the wall in front of me in this Chamber that is covered in the names of the young Australians who died in that conflict and are without a known grave. They are not in the cemeteries, where two-thirds of the men who died are buried, but are without a known grave. That means their bodies are still out in the fields. Occasionally - very occasionally - their bodies are found, and it makes an interesting story in the newspapers when that does happen. At the Australian national memorial at Villers-Bretonneux in France there is a wall with the names of the approximately 11 000 young Australians who lost their lives and have no known grave. I found it a very moving experience. I recommend to all Australians that they go to the battlefields of France to see where our grandfathers, great-grandfathers and sometimes even fathers served, many of whom lost their lives. As I travelled through the villages of that part of France I recognised many of their names from the history books and from streets in our suburbs.

Just outside the door of this Chamber is a wall with the photographs of the faces of the men who sat in the very seats in which we are sitting and who served in the First World War. There is an amazing story about one of those gentleman, who was elected to this Parliament to represent the seat of Greenough but never actually sat in this place because he went off to war and was shot down while serving with Bomber Command over Germany in 1944, I think.

Mr J.P.D. Edwards: John Newton.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Yes, John Verdun Newton. They were people just like us. The names of many of our streets and parks, and the names on the memorials and honour boards in our towns, suburbs and cities, represent people just like us, with a family - a mother and a father, brothers and sisters - whose lives were absolutely devastated by the loss of that family member. Every one of us has loved ones. It is difficult to comprehend 60 000 of our citizens being killed in a conflict, but people in every street in Australia were dramatically affected by that event. To put that conflict in today's terms, 60 000 citizens in a country of four million people would equate to the entire population of a city almost the size of Canberra. That is the number of young Australians who were killed over that four-year period. Perish the thought that there will ever be a nuclear war, but I do not think that sort of loss is likely to happen again. I do not know that, other than in the defence of our homeland, Australians would put up with or go through that sort of national loss and national commitment again, with that number of people being killed. What is more, two-thirds, of those who served were either wounded or killed. Massive numbers of those who returned were injured in all sorts of horrific ways, at a time when we did not have plastic surgery and anaesthetics and the capacity that we now have to repair people. Those people lived in every town and suburb in our community, and some of them have passed on only recently. The First World War was an event that we must hope and pray will never be repeated. I recommend that everyone go to the battlefields of the First World War to gain an appreciation and knowledge of what our forefathers and a great many of our young women who served in the nursing corps and the like went through at that time.

Of course, in the Second World War Australia also lost a massive number of citizens. Over 30 000 Australians lost their lives in Bomber Command, the Army, and on the seas while in the Merchant Navy. About 10 000 of the 30 000 Australian citizens who surrendered in Singapore - one in three - lost their lives. The Second World War was a very traumatic event, perhaps in a slightly different way from the First World War, because the losses were not as great, but the threat to our country was very real. It certainly puts a different perspective on our current difficulties and the things that we worry about and that we get excited about in this Parliament today when we think about the fact that 60 years ago the members of this House were contemplating the invasion of our country, and the occupation of what they then viewed as the mother country by fascist powers that had a record of barbarism and destructiveness almost unparalleled in history. We need to remember what those people went through, and that is what this Bill is all about.

Since that time, Australians have served in a range of conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Malaya, Borneo and the Middle East. I have left out the contribution that we made to the conflict in Russia in 1919, in which two Victoria Crosses were awarded, and in which a number of Australians also died.

The lessons that we have learnt from those events as Australians are many. First of all, as I said, it puts a different perspective on our current difficulties when we consider that this country lost 60 000 people in the First World War. That makes everything else pale into insignificance, even what the United States is going through today in Iraq, terrible as it is; and it is terrible what is happening there for civilians and others in that part of the world. It is hard to comprehend that in Fromelles in northern France, which I visited recently, 2 000 Australians were killed in one day. It puts everything else into perspective. The effect of these events on Australia was profound. These events affected those who remained behind perhaps more than those who went. When those people returned from that period of conflict, particularly the First World War, they were of the view that they deserved a decent society and a decent community. Many of those people came back and became socialists. Others became communists. Others became pacifists. Others were completely angry and radicalised to the right because they felt their country and the world economy had let them down, and it created a community of great

passion throughout Australia and radicalised many people in many different ways. The events of the First World War, for instance, and the great conscription debates divided families. Fortunately, in many ways they also provided Australians with perhaps a bit of suspicion of their Governments and a little determination to ensure that they did not blindly follow what their Governments told them to do. Some members of this House learnt that lesson and acted in a way that was suspicious of their Governments in the 1960s when another divisive war was engaged in by Australia. On the other hand, those events can bring a country together. During the First World War, many of our citizens came together, and in the Second World War, of course, we pulled together as a nation. Many older citizens, despite all the terror and the trauma, regard it as some of the finest months and years of their lives.

We have developed a great maturity in our dealings with former foes. We have recognised that, as a nation, we need to work with other countries in a friendly and unified way as much as possible to prevent those events happening again. We were at war with Turkey, but we are now friends with that country. In fact, if we did not make friends with those with whom we have been in conflict, we would not have many friends around the world today, because the countries that we have been at war with are many and varied. However, we have risen above those events, as have they. These days people will find that in the Returned and Services League there is a capacity to forgive - perhaps not to forget but to forgive - and to attempt to operate in an international environment that is based upon a sense of fairness, rules and a desire to sort out difficulties without resorting to war, which of course causes the loss of many lives.

I suppose the most important thing that we must do is to appreciate the contribution made by those citizens who served our country and to remember them. If, when they were sitting in trenches in France or were on a ship on the high seas, with their lives under threat, they had been asked what they would like future generations to do, I suppose they would have said, "We would like them to build a decent country and to remember what we did." That is probably as much as we can do in an intellectual sense. However, in a material sense, we are implementing a range of measures to do that. That is what all those initiatives about which I spoke earlier are about. It is also what this Bill is about. It is about giving members of this House and of this Parliament the opportunity to express our thanks to those people who participated in uniform and those who participated on the home front in those traumatic days for our country.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Leave granted to proceed forthwith to third reading.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time, on motion by Mr M. McGowan (Parliamentary Secretary), and transmitted to the Council.

House adjourned at 4.43 pm
