

## ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATIONS

### *Statement*

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [5.33 pm]: I wish to commence my brief member's statement by wishing all members of this chamber a happy and safe Easter break. I say that as a prelude to another day of recognition and commemoration that will take place during the brief adjournment of this house, and that is of course Anzac Day. That is one of the few occasions of secular solemnity and reflection that exists in our national calendar, and long may it remain so.

I want to recognise the encouraging surge in attendance at Anzac Day services in recent years, certainly within Western Australia and across the country more broadly. I find particular comfort in the gratitude shown by many of our community's younger members. Correspondingly, it is with some sense of disappointment that discordant and disrespectful notes are sounded in anticipation of that day or on that very day itself. I am sure that again there will be a motivated few who, for their own reasons, seek to demean the reputation of our service people and act to erode any sense of national cohesion and fellowship. This is the first occasion I have had to briefly reflect on remarks attributed to an academic at Murdoch University, Dr Dean Aszkielowicz. He has made three claims in lectures that I want to address very quickly because this is my first opportunity to do so in recognition of my responsibility as shadow Minister for Veterans Issues. The first claim made by the doctor is that our service people are killers. He is reported as stating —

“If you go and you kill people, whether it's in a foreign campaign or not, then you've killed people and you're a killer.

That quite clearly attempts to criminalise and dishonour the reputation of service people historically. Quite clearly, killing and murdering are reprehensible moral acts, but that claim is an intellectually hollow and ignorant one to make. Centuries of philosophical contemplation are devoted to what is colloquially referred to as the “just war theory”. Millennia have been devoted to those contemplations. Any charge of moral capability levelled against people who can no longer speak in their own defence, must, if it is to be an honest academic contribution, at least give due recognition to that theoretical framework. If charges are to be levelled, they must be made with some cognisance of universal conventions and laws of armed conflict. The doctor's remarks, as they are attributed to him, certainly did not do that.

The second objectionable claim that the good doctor has made is that Anzac Day is a cliché that will diminish in popularity. The facts speak for themselves. It is particularly galling to me that this gentleman seems to lack any self-awareness of or gratitude for the academic freedom that he has the right and responsibility to act upon that is formulated or buttressed by the endeavours, principles and sacrifice of people who have gone before him—blood shed by predominantly men who, for historical reasons, did not share his good luck and privilege. It is also a disgrace, frankly, that those who commemorate this day, whether it be in Australia or overseas, have been referred to as drunks. That is a disgraceful slur that requires a rebuttal.

The third issue, which is my second to last point, is the diminishment of the Australian War Memorial by the doctor. This stands in complete contrast to the facts. The quote attributed to the doctor and which he has not rebutted—he has had a number of weeks to rebut these charges—states —

“very few things that the Australian War Memorial claims ... about Anzac Day are true”.

I have visited that memorial more than a dozen times; it is truly a national treasure and its extensive collection repudiates all of this academic's claims. But it does not take the entire collection to repudiate those claims, they can be demolished by one record that lies in the memorial's extensive archives—that is, the military service record of Private Kenneth Norman McNamee, which I came upon at random. I will read in the description of that gentleman's service —

Private Kenneth Norman McNamee (4258, 14th Battalion) was born in Ballarat, Victoria. He was working as a printer with “The Sporting World” and not yet 16 years old when he enlisted in July 1915. Kenneth was awarded a Military Medal for his “daring and coolness” while running messages and maintaining communication between Company and Battalion headquarters during the battle of Mouquet Farm in August 1916. Kenneth was wounded on 11 April 1917 —

This example was chosen at random, but that battle was 102 years ago today —

during the battle of Bullecourt and was last seen being bandaged by two German Red Cross men. This was reported after the war by a fellow prisoner of war, who said that Kenneth had been badly wounded by a bullet just above his heart and was unlikely to live long. Kenneth is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial ... France. He was 17 years 9 months of age.

That brief service history of one individual who died 102 years ago speaks for itself and utterly demolishes the reprehensible claims made by this so-called academic of history at Murdoch University. I will leave it there. Lest we forget.