

VICTORIA CROSS RECIPIENTS — WAR GRAVES — HERITAGE LISTING

Statement by Minister for Heritage

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage) [9.05 am]: In late April I announced that I had directed the State Heritage Office to begin the process of identifying and heritage listing the graves of those Western Australians who served in World Wars I and II and who were honoured with the award of the Victoria Cross. I would like to acknowledge the work done towards this by the member for Girrawheen, Margaret Quirk. The Victoria Cross is the highest award an officer of the armed services can receive and is awarded for bravery or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy. This important project will be finalised in 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. This is a significant anniversary and should be marked with commemorative projects such as this one in recognition of the men who risked their lives for our country.

The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board's records note that the graves of Victoria Cross recipients should be retained for their historic significance. It is therefore fitting that the McGowan government will ensure that all these graves are heritage listed. Amongst those whose graves are to receive heritage listing is Private James Wood, who upon enlisting in South Australia was rejected because he was too short. He came to Western Australia to enlist and we gratefully accepted him. He reached France 12 months later, where he displayed great bravery by capturing a German post with a small patrol. According to Australian War Memorial records, he —

defended it against several counter-attacks by jumping onto the parapet and throwing bombs handed to him by his companions. He “displayed a splendid example of valour, determination and initiative”.

Private Martin O'Meara, whose grave I recently visited at Karrakatta, received his Victoria Cross for displaying —

a total disregard for danger, repeatedly going out into no man's land to rescue wounded men and to carry up ammunition.

The process of identifying and listing the graves will involve extensive research, and it is hoped that many of the individual stories of the lives of those Victoria Cross recipients, such as those I have just read out, will be uncovered and shared with the community. The McGowan government is proud to list the graves of the Victoria Cross recipients on the state Register of Heritage Places as a sign of respect and gratitude, so that their descendants and the community will continue to remember and respect the courageous efforts of these dedicated ex-servicemen.

Members: Hear, hear!