

BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA

Statement

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [6.21 pm]: Last Friday night, along with some 120 people, including members of this chamber and members from the other place, I attended the launch of the *Battle for Australia* exhibit at the Gary Holland Community Centre in Rockingham. The exhibit is very extensive and a complete showcase and snapshot of Western Australia's history and effort during World War II. The exhibit came about due to the restoration of the derelict Point Peron battlement, which needed to be upgraded and which Hon Phil Edman became involved in. Anyone who knows Hon Phil Edman will understand that once he puts his heart into a project, it becomes a runaway train. He motivated everyone from soldiers in the 13th Brigade of the 11th/28th Battalion to the Rockingham Scouts and Army cadets in raising funds and doing work on the restoration of the battlement. However, as the story of the battlement unfolded, the member could not help himself and, as he dug deeper into its history, he started to create an exhibit of the Battle for Australia. I visited his office on one or two occasions and there were mannequins in the corner and rented firearms somewhere else; he amassed a lot of collectibles of the site's history. I am a little bit of a history buff, and I thought that our history since white settlement of Western Australia was a bit vanilla-flavoured. We did not have a Captain Starlight or a Ned Kelly or a Eureka Stockade. I think the best we had was Moondyne Joe, and he was not much of a highwayman; he was more an escape artist.

I was really taken by the exhibit, which was a very good snapshot of what occurred at that time. At the exhibit's launch, three short films were played. One was called *The Battle for Australia*, another was *Forgotten Battlefield*, and I cannot remember the third one. Those films detailed the Japanese bombings of Broome—most of us know about Broome—and along the coast, because the Japanese bombers came as far south as Onslow. There was also a torpedo event, just north of Geraldton at Port Gregory, and a lot of aggression occurred off the coast of Fremantle. One of the most interesting aspects of the films was the social impact on the community of Western Australia. The films showed interviews with United States and Australian servicemen about US soldiers and naval personnel who were in Fremantle at that time. What I found of particular interest is that 10 000 Western Australian women left Western Australia to marry US servicemen. Western Australia had a population of fewer than 500 000 at the time, so all those sisters, daughters and granddaughters left, without the benefit of the communications we have now—many of them, never to return. That was quite an interesting aspect of our history.

The Battle for Australia is celebrated in New South Wales and Victoria, but for some reason Western Australia does not give it much credence. It is held on the first Wednesday in September each year. I would like to see it celebrated in Western Australia with more vigour. The commemoration is third only in importance to Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

I am amazed that despite its being a very important part of our history that probably shaped a lot of the fabric of our society in Western Australia, I cannot remember being taught about the effect on Western Australians of that incident during World War II. That is something that should be taught more in our schools. I know that the Minister for Education has encouraged a lot of schools in South Metropolitan to visit. I received a text today saying that 2 000 people had been through that exhibit in the last four or five days, so it has created a lot of community interest. It would be good if that were included in the school curriculum, as it is part of our history and is something of which we should be more mindful.

One of the highlights of the evening was the attendance of 92-year-old Veronica Roach and 94-year-old Peter Hackett who were both gunners during World War II stationed in Western Australia. They received a heartfelt standing ovation for their service to Australia. I was very pleased to hear that Ronnie Roach, as she is known, still has a couple of glasses of red wine each day, so that is a good lesson for us all.

I encourage members, if they get the chance, to visit the *Battle for Australia* exhibit. Hon Phil Edman has done a very good job for the community and for the South Metropolitan region, which he represents.