Kokoda Track

SPEECH

Monday, 6 August 2001
Mr EDWARDS (Cowan) (1.16 pm)—I second the motion. I am very pleased, in a bipartisan spirit, to second this motion so ably moved by the member for Barker and to compliment him, indeed, for bringing this important issue before the House. This is an important issue. Like many in the chamber here, I am a baby-boomer whose father was a veteran of the Second World War; I and many others like me, I suppose, grew up learning the stories of Kokoda and learning about the heroes—the people like Damien Parer, of course—who were so well respected by the Australian service men and women of that time.

But, in doing a bit of research for this motion, I came across a speech that was made on Sunday, 26 April 1992, by the former Prime Minister Paul Keating. He was at Kokoda for the 50th anniversary of this battle. I will quote from his speech, because I think it is indeed a very moving speech. Paul Keating, on that date, said:

This is the place where the rock of friendship and the foundation stone of relations between our two countries rests and while we've had a long history together in places like Port Moresby and Lae and other places it is really here that the soul of the relationship sits, here in Kokoda. Because it was here that Australians decided to defend your liberty as well as their own and you decided to defend yourselves and help us defend ourselves. It was here young Australian men fought for the first time against the prospect of the invasion of their country, of Australia.

Never before, even though we fought in many conflicts, mostly imperial conflicts, in conflicts where we felt pangs of loyalty to what was then known as the “Mother Country” to Britain and to the empire to fight in Gallipoli with heroism and in Belgium in Flanders and in France and in other places, this was the first and only time that we've fought against an enemy to prevent the invasion of Australia, to secure the way of life we had built for ourselves. And those young Australian men fought here, 2,000 of them died, 600 Americans died later and we should never forget their sacrifice, that the families who live so distantly in the United States lost 600 sons here should never be forgotten and they cost the lives of 13,000 Japanese who fought for their country and what they believed were their country's strategic interests which were, of course, interests which we could not accept and could only abhor.

The lesson of this place is that these young men believed in Australia and we need to give Australians, all Australians, particularly young Australians, an Australia to believe in. We can't deny young Australians their birthright to a past with meaning for them and a future with meaning. It has to be a future with meaning and everything we see here—there can be no deeper spiritual basis to the meaning of the Australian nation than the blood that was spilled on this very knoll, this very plateau, in defence of the liberty of Australia.

So Prime Minister—

and that was, of course, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea—

...
by a sapper, H. Beros, who was in the 7th Division AIF with the Royal Australian Engineers. Bert Beros served, according to this note, in both World War I and World War II. He wrote this poem at 4 a.m. one morning on the Kokoda Track after having been on stand-to. It may never have been printed but for the fact that an officer sent a copy home to his mother, and she was so impressed that she had it published in the Brisbane Courier-Mail. The poem reads:

**The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels**

Many a mother in Australia,
When the busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty
For the keeping of her son.

Asking that an Angel guide him
And bring him safely back

Now we see those prayer are answered
On the Owen Stanley Track,
For they haven't any halos,
Only holes slashed in their ears,
And with faces worked by tattoos,
With scratch pins in their hair,
Bringing back the wounded,
Just as steady as a hearse,
Using leaves to keep the rain off
And gentle as a nurse.

Slow and careful in bad places,
On the awful mountain track,
And the look upon their faces'
Makes us think that Christ was black.

Not a move to hurt the carried,
As they treat him like a Saint,
It's a picture worth recording,
That an Artist's yet to paint.

Many a lad will see his Mother,
And the Husbands, Weans and Wives,
Just because the Fuzzy Wuzzy
Carried them to save their lives.
From mortar or machine gun fire,
Or a chance surprise attack,
To safety and the care of Doctors,
At the bottom of the track.
May the Mothers in Australia,
When they offer up a prayer,
Mention those impromptu Angels,
With the Fuzzy Wuzzy hair.

That concludes the poem. I think the spirit of that poem, the spirit of what was said by the member for Barker here today and the spirit of what was said by Prime Minister Keating embrace the spirit of what most Australians feel about the Kokoda Track and those who lost their lives there. The Kokoda Track is to those who fought in New Guinea what Gallipoli is to those who fought in that campaign, what Kapyong is to those who fought in Korea and what Long Tan is to those who fought in Vietnam. Though these battles were in fields far flung from Australia, they had one thing in common: the courage of the Australian servicemen, their love of freedom and their uncompromising approach to mateship. If we feel anything about those issues and if we feel anything about mateship, we should feel strong enough in that mateship to want to do something to ensure that the sacrifices that those men made on the Kokoda Track and the spirit of support that they received from the fuzzy wuzzy angels is not forgotten. The way to remember those people and those sacrifices is contained in this motion before us. I am very pleased to, in a bipartisan way, give support to the member for Barker and to this motion. While there are limitations on the number of people who can speak on the motion, I am sure that most members of this House, and of this parliament, would speak in support of this motion were there time for them to do so. I commend the motion to the House.