



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Centenary of Anzac

SPEECH

Tuesday, 18 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 18 August 2015
Page 8734
Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (17:14): Other speakers have gone into some detail about the Gallipoli conflict itself. But I would like to reflect on the way that Australia remembered the conflict, because that in itself I believe, has been what has more than anything shaped the national character.

Prior to Gallipoli, the general pattern around the world had been that war memorials, when built, would honour the great generals; they would commemorate those leaders in battle. It is also the case today, in the battles where we do honour each and every member of our armed services, that when we lose somebody we have a commemoration here in the parliament. We then go on to a particular form of military honour when the plane returns home. And then, when the military funeral takes place, the most senior people from government attend.

Gallipoli occurred at a time when even had we wanted to return the remains of each of our soldiers the sheer scale of the carnage made it impossible. For family members, there was nowhere to leave flowers. For family members, in a world where travel was nearly impossible, there was no prospect of ever being able to go to visit the gravesite—and, if it were visited, it was extraordinary difficult to know which gravesite was the right one. It was out of this is that the tradition of suburban war memorials completely took off.

We need to remember that the previous conflict, the Boer War, resulted in a total of 109 war memorials around Australia, but at the end of the First World War there were 1,455. These provided the places where people could leave flowers. These provided the places where family members could stop and reflect, and hope and pray.

But these were also the places where Australia decided that we would not simply remember the generals; we would not simply remember the politicians or the national leaders who sent people into battle. We would remember each and every life. For each and every one of those individuals, the memory was very much of the soldier citizen—of the digger—of the ordinary Australian, who was not necessarily somebody who had chosen to devote their entire life to the armed forces but was somebody who had been willing to risk their entire life for their nation and for everything at that point in time that they believed their nation stood for, both within our own national borders and around the globe.

When we talk about the national character—the Gallipoli spirit and spirit of mateship—it is true that that was there on the field. But what must also be remembered is that the way we remembered Gallipoli changed our national character. Very early on ceremonies began around Australia, and very early on monuments started to be built. And at that point Australia started to recognise a number of things. In the first instance, Australia decided that the egalitarian nature of our society would extend to the egalitarian nature of our memory, and that every single person whose life had been lost would be remembered with the same authority and dignity. We also made a decision at that point that there would be a place for that memory wherever Australians lived. You cannot find a town—and often you do not have to look for anything that you could seriously call a town—where you are not able to find a local war memorial. Almost without exception, those war memorials carry the words: lest we forget. It was said at the time with a level of hope—hope that people believed we would in fact never forget those who had risked and given their lives. But that hope could never be proven until we got to the point where no-one who had fought there was left among us.

In remembering the centenary of the Anzac we do not simply remember the battle. We do not simply remember the way the nation changed and the way we decided to commemorate the battle and the individuals. A century later we also proved one further thing and that is that when we hoped with the words 'lest we forget' that their sacrifice and their memory would forever be part of the national character, we were right.