



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

**70th Anniversary of the
Operations of Bomber Command**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 August 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Prentice, Jane, MP

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Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12:40): I rise to speak on the commemoration for the 70th anniversary of Bomber Command and to honour all those British, Australian and Allied servicemen and women who sacrificed their lives in what was one of the most perilous times that the free world has ever faced. On 28 June 2012, her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II officially dedicated the memorial in London to Bomber Command for the 70th anniversary, to recognise the remarkable service of airmen and women during World War II. Approximately 125,000 British, Australian and Allied airmen served in Bomber Command, 55,573 of whom died and a further 9,838 were taken as prisoners of war. Of these, there were approximately 10,000 Australians in the Royal Air Force or Royal Australian Air Force squadrons attached to Bomber Command, with 3,848 casualties.

The resilience of these men was amazing and was exemplified by Mr Robert Chester-Master OAM. On a trip on one of the Lancaster bombers as a tail gunner, the perspex glass at the tail of the ship shattered and Mr Chester-Master suddenly found himself stranded in a Belgian field. To his great fortune, his life was saved by a Resistance fighter who was able to hide him until the end of the war. As he parachuted to safety, he became—like my father—a member of the Caterpillar Club, a group for people who have successfully parachuted out of a disabled aircraft. The real story for the servicemen of Bomber Command was that they were willing to risk their lives every day in very dangerous and risky circumstances. For his service, Robert received and thoroughly deserved the Cross of Bravery and Fidelity from Belgium and was invited to unveil a plaque in honour of the 60th anniversary of his crash in the Belgian village.

Their willingness to risk their lives in the defence of the liberty of their nation demonstrates the underlying selflessness of a member of the Defence Force. This attitude led Mr Chester-Master to enlist in Brisbane in 1942, as an 18-year-old. Upon his return to Australia, this selflessness led him to dedicate his life to the community. I had the great pleasure to work with Robert over many years during our involvement with Brisbane Tourism. To this day Robert is still giving back to the community through his involvement in the Air Crew Association and many other organisations, as well as in his dedication to recording the stories of 31 RAAF members who were able to escape in Belgium during World War II in his book *Against the Odds*. It is wonderful that Mr Chester-Master is still alive today and was able to attend the commemoration in London in June. On that day, Robert was the only ex-personnel of Bomber Command who was able to fit into his Bomber Command uniform—and I have been told that this was much to both the jealousy and the delight of the more than 100 Australians who were able to attend.

I would also like to acknowledge the very important contribution of a constituent in Ryan, Mr Vic Henderson, who served in the RAF Squadron 150 in Bomber Command. Mr Henderson expressed his appreciation that he was able to attend the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial, and in particular the unveiling of the beautiful bronze statue which depicts a crew coming back from an operation. Quite poignantly, Mr Henderson met up with a man with whom he had served in Bomber Command, a man he had not seen or spoken to since that time.

For Mr Henderson the week brought back many memories, and he thoroughly enjoyed the gleam in the soldiers' eyes and the smiles on their faces as they finally achieved official recognition and an official memorial to their service after waiting 67 years for it to occur. During the week they were shown and were able to sit in what was one of the most common aeroplanes, the Lancaster Bomber, which certainly brought back strong emotions and memories. During the ceremony the Lancaster Bomber dropped one poppy petal for each of the 55,573 men who never came home, a very dignified recognition of those who lost their lives in the war effort.

I pay my respects to those who died and I thank all those involved who contributed to the official memorial and commemoration in London. We acknowledge and commemorate the roles of all former and current servicemen and women who have defended our great nation, and I thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their statements.