



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard 24 November 1999

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (8.30 p.m.), continuing: On Anzac Day in Ingham a commemoration was held for a very significant event that occurred in 1942. During the Second World War, an American Liberator bomber flying north towards Iron Range experienced mechanical problems and its pilots decided to return to Townsville. During its attempted return to Townsville, it encountered low cloud and its pilots became disoriented. The pilots of the plane, who thought they were getting close to Magnetic Island, were in fact very close to Hinchinbrook Island, which has a number of mountains around 1,000 metres in height, Mount Stralock being one of them. Unfortunately, during its attempted flight to Townsville the Liberator bomber struck Mount Stralock and the 12 American servicemen on board were killed.

As I said, this year the incident was commemorated in Ingham on Anzac Day. Some Americans attended the commemoration, including the son of one of the officers on the plane, Captain Carl Silber. A number of people who climbed Mount Stralock brought back pieces from the wreckage of the Texas Terror, including Captain Carl Silber's dog tags. I wish to read an excerpt from an article in the Herbert River Express which described the moment for Carl Silber Jnr. It states—

"Mr Silber said he could barely read the aluminium scraps for a minute because of the tears in his eyes.

'I was speechless ...

Tears came to my eyes and I could not even read them.' "

that is, the tags—

" 'I feel I am taking my father home with me.' "

That was a significant moment. The Americans recognise that a lot went on in the wars in which they were involved. Brigadier General Lawrence Stevenson, of the 5th Air Force, Japan, and a number of his attaches and American servicemen attended the commemoration in recognition of the major part played by American servicemen in the Second World War.

It was unfortunate that the plane ran out of fuel and crashed into Mount Stralock. However, given the navigational instruments available in those days, the situation could probably not have been avoided. We probably would not see that sort of thing happening nowadays. As I said, an impressive service was held at the Ingham cenotaph.

There had been some problems in the park area at Ingham; the night before the ceremony the police had to clear people from the park to make sure that there would be no disruption of the service the next day. After the dawn service at Ingham, the RSL always holds a breakfast, which is very well patronised. There is a march to the cenotaph in which a lot of schoolchildren participate. Traditionally, after attending the service at the cenotaph everyone goes back to the Ingham RSL, which is a great facility. The diggers have their nip of rum, get together and exchange their experiences during the war years.

A number of other ceremonies are held throughout the electorate. Tully's Anzac Day service, which is usually held at 10 o'clock, is very important to the people of Tully. One problem for me, given the size of my electorate, is that it takes quite some time to get from one area to another. Tully is some 96 kilometres up the road from Ingham and it takes an hour to drive between the two. I usually try to

attend the dawn service at Ingham and then go to the Anzac Day service at Tully at 10 o'clock. Normally, afterwards I go to the RSL, which serves an excellent lunch and invites guest speakers. The people of Tully are fully cognisant of what the war really meant. I remember Tip Byrne, one of the former mayors of the Cardwell Shire, describing how when a bomber would go overhead he would feel very concerned about whose it was, where it was going and what its ultimate fate would be. A lot of activity occurred in that area during the Second World War, particularly during the Battle of the Coral Sea. It is little wonder that at Cardwell so much effort is put into commemorating the Battle of the Coral Sea. The Cardwell RSL is also an excellent facility. It holds its dawn service a little after Tully's, and I make every attempt to attend it also. Very often, during the luncheon at Tully an address is given by people from the battle school, perhaps naval officers or personnel from the other armed services.

Innisfail is another area that puts on a great commemoration for Anzac Day. Its dawn service is held on the Fitzgerald Esplanade. There is a cenotaph out the front of the RSL, which is also an excellent facility. It serves great food and offers a good bar. In addition, people have the opportunity to play the pokies. Right throughout the electorate there is a strong association with the RSL and its clubs experience high patronage on Anzac Day.

I think it would be a pity if there is going to be a penalty or a concern about diggers having their traditional nip of rum, which really binds so many of them together. That is really a catalyst, one might say, for the camaraderie that goes on during Anzac Day right throughout my electorate, as I am sure it does throughout many electorates in Queensland. Yes, there are some problems associated with people who could cause disturbances. As I have said earlier, the park in Ingham had to be cleared. A group of people had taken over an area where there are some nice covered buildings and that sort of thing. They had to be cleared out to ensure that the Anzac Day service was not interrupted.

We are a much younger country than America, and as a result we have not reached the point at which history means a lot to us. It is gathering momentum—there is little question about that—and we are seeing a much larger contingent of people involved in Anzac Day marches and certainly Anzac Day commemoration services, which I believe are so critical as far as the recognition of people who fought very bravely for our country is concerned. As I have indicated, a lot of them did not return. Because the older generation lived through periods of war, particularly the Second World War and, of course, subsequent conflicts such as Vietnam, Anzac Day means quite a lot to them.

We are fortunate that, during the past 25 years or so, we have not experienced any great threats to our country and, as a result, I think some of the significance of Anzac Day was being lost. We are now seeing people who are very much aware of a tradition that is so important to us and are aware of events that over a period have ensured—and people have gone away to many countries—that Australia stays free. I think it is very heartening to see that, while for some people the memories about what happened in the war are not very strong—especially for the younger generation, of course—there is a strong element out there who are recognising what history is all about. That was really brought home to me when I witnessed the support that was given by those Americans who attended those Anzac Day services, including the brigadier general, and the recognition that the Americans are prepared to give to those people who were involved in the Second World War—the level of recognition that they deserved.

Time expired.
