



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Hansard 1 December 1999

MR G. GRAHAM

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (11.15 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise in this place to talk about a mate of mine, Gordon Graham, of Morningside. Gordon is one of those elderly gentlemen in our community who never complains, who has always done his duty and who has always been an exemplary part of the community. He is one of our unsung heroes who makes Australia and Queensland really what they are and a great place in which to live.

Some time ago, Gordon wrote to me looking for some recognition for the work that he and his mates did with the railway during the Second World War. The best way that I can put into the record some things about Gordon would be to read what Gordon wrote to me. He states—

"Pat,

'Australia Remembers'

It has been said, 'In history many things do not happen as they ought. Most things do not happen at all.' It is for the conscientious historian to correct these defects.

Relative to the above it is for this reason I am writing to you seeking some recognition for the vital role played by Q.R. in the defence of Australia during the Pacific War.

In 1941, with the advancement of the Japanese Tarees towards Australia the CSOO introduced the Manpower Act. Many rail employees were drafted into the defence forces. By 1942, with the invasion of Australia looking like becoming a reality, northern Australia from Townsville to Darwin was declared a war zone. The American Air Force had arrived, dozens of air strips were built, army training camps, hospitals, staging camps for troops going to and from the front line, naval ships for the Coral Sea battle, supply depots and many more maintenance divisions had been established.

As all factories were centred in the south a supply line had to be established both for material and the movement of troops. As our coastal shipping was not only poor but subject to Japanese sub attack, our roads were only dirt tracks, the only other means was Queensland Rail. To maintain this they needed skilled labour. The Essential Service Act was introduced. Many rail personnel who had been trained and waiting for embarkation to the front line were taken out and under the army reserve placed back into the rail service."

I can tell members that Gordon and his mate were just about to finish their training and disembark, but under that Act they were brought back to work for the railway. They felt deprived that they could not go and fight with their mates overseas and share in what at that time they regarded as an adventure. However, they did their duty. Gordon's letter continues—

"The goal of all people was to maintain and direct all efforts to the war effort in defence of this country.

All leave was cancelled for the rail service and the awards were set aside. Running men had to agree to work from sign on to sign off, seven days a week. Their only relief was one Sunday off in three, a shift was from 8 hours to 30 hours, a working week anything from 60 hours to 90. In the western area Maintenance—Porters—Night Officers— Station Masters and all personnel attached to the running of trains, worked under the same conditions.

One must remember, during this period there was no electric lighting or refrigeration. Many families at isolated sidings had one delivery of supplies for the week. Many of them never had a holiday for the duration of the war—some of their children did not see the Pacific Ocean until they 10 years of age. Under the harsh system of rationing many of these children and their parents were deprived of essential food lines and no-one knows to this day what permanent damage was caused to their health.

In relation to trains, no locomotive was allowed to carry headlights. The only lights were small markers that could not be seen from the air. At night time and during the wet season when floods occurred, the safety of the train rested on the shoulders of the driver, with his knowledge of the road and 90% good luck. Many tragedies occurred during these years but none were ever published because of the Defence Act, public morale and security.

Yet for four years the men carried on under harsh and deplorable conditions some of which if told today, the young people ... would not only find it hard to understand but impossible to believe that these conditions existed only 50 years ago.

Despite all this, statistics have shown that the Queensland Rail system at that time, taking into account the gauge and power of our locomotives, hauled the largest tonnage and was the most efficient of all systems in Australia. This can never be taken away from us.

So you see Pat, we are not seeking medals or fanfare but just some simple recognition for mostly past and present members, many past members who were also veterans of Gallipoli and France, who through their years overseas and the long hours and harsh conditions during these darkest days, paid the supreme price, never reaching the retiring age of 65.

Time heals wounds but it cannot wipe out memories and no matter what is said it was Queensland Rail which played the major role in maintaining the supply line ..."

That letter is signed "Retired Locomotive Driver, Queensland Rail, Gordon Graham".

Time expired.
