



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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### **LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—IND) (10.39 p.m.): I rise in support of the Bill tonight not because of what it might do or what it could do but because of what it is meant to do more than anything else. If we can stop one single disturbance, if we can stop one single drunken act on Anzac Day, that is one we should stop. I do not see any reason that we cannot have this Bill in place. I do not see any detriment to anyone in particular and, as I said in the debate on the motion, I think that most licensed premises' owners and operators would probably agree with the intention of the Bill and most of them would voluntarily give up that time in return for the dignity that we would like to bestow upon the day.

I would also like to reiterate the remarks of some of the members on the other side of the Chamber that no-one has a monopoly on patriotism. I do not think anyone on this side of the Chamber whom I have heard so far has tried to claim a monopoly on patriotism. I certainly have stood up in this Chamber on many an occasion and talked about my military service only to be ridiculed by members on the other side of the Chamber for that service. It was brought to my attention the other day that my little brother is actually serving with a construction squadron over in East Timor, reconstructing the Dili markets. I also know that the member for Cairns has family serving in East Timor. Probably every single one of us in this House has a family member who has served this country at some time or another.

I do not think that the debate tonight should ever have gotten to the stage where we are slinging off at each other about who served where and who did what. In common with all soldiers I know—as I said, I grew up around soldiers and police officers—I believe there is nothing better than telling a good warie or having a good yarn now and then and just basically spruiking off. I am notorious for it where I come from. Many people know that I like to have a good yarn and pull a story here and there.

I am sure that a lot of men and women in this Chamber who have perhaps served in uniform in the Army—and I know there are members in this Chamber who have—would also know that there is nothing that soldiers like better than to have a damn good time, have a drink and go off and do their block. I have on many an occasion had a very raucous evening only to have to mount guard the very next day. This brings me to the subject that when I was 18 or 19—when I was a young soldier—yes, I certainly indulged, often quite heavily and for too long. However, there was something that was instilled in me at the time which stopped me from misbehaving badly in public, and that was discipline. When it was my turn to go on duty the next morning, I did so with decorum and stood as straight as I possibly could with half a litre of rum under my belt. The point is that, when I was doing my duty, I had that discipline instilled in me so that I would behave and I would know what limits and boundaries there were, even in a heavily intoxicated state.

This is an age of what I would call lax discipline—in my opinion there are low moral standards, but other people have different opinions. This is also an age where respect for the good old days is perhaps not too forthcoming from other members of the community—but, as I said, it is everybody's individual right to believe what they want to believe. At the moment I am the youngest member of this House and I have a broad knowledge of what my mates are like, and most of them are pretty much rebels at best and probably reprobates at worst. I do know that in this day and age there are some boundaries that need to be explained to people; they need to be told, "This is a boundary that cannot be crossed."

I will tell honourable members a bit of a warie. A very good example of this relates to my former wife. She was a young South Australian lass who grew up in a completely different world to the one in which I grew up in north Queensland. Her family was a good, decent, honest hardworking family from the Barossa Valley. However, there was something that she had very little knowledge of at the time when she was growing up, and that was Anzac Day and its traditions. She certainly attended a few services here and there but to her it was not as important as it was to my family.

I can tell honourable members right now: Anzac Day in my house is bigger than Christmas. I think we celebrate Anzac Day for about a week, because my grandfather is an ex-serviceman and my father, my three brothers and I were in the Army. It certainly has taken on monumental proportions in our house. It was taught to me from a very young age how important the day was. Even though I personally never experienced the horrors of war in all its detail, I certainly had a lot of experiences in my military life that, though they do not even come close to comparing with the military service of some people, certainly describe to me what is inherently important about Anzac Day.

I do not think it can be more poignantly put than it was put to me by a World War II veteran just recently after watching the movie Saving Private Ryan. I do not know how many people in this Chamber have actually seen that movie, but I highly commend it to everyone as an example of the important discussion that we are having here tonight. It harks back to why we should be placing this level of importance on this one day of the year. I do not know anyone who can sit through that first 20 minutes of Saving Private Ryan without feeling abject shock and horror; when I sat there I was shocked. And, as I said, I never experienced that level of conflict. When I sat there watching that movie, I was shocked. I was literally physically and emotionally shocked by the horror that was portrayed in that 20 minutes and what those men at Omaha Beach and the Normandy landings went through. One considers that what they went through is nothing compared to what the soldiers went through at Iwo Jima, for example. However, one cannot say that one battle is worse than another just because of the number of casualties or other statistics.

That movie is certainly a credit to its makers and it is certainly very confrontational. It shows the horrors of war to a generation that has never experienced that horror—and that is my generation. I was born in 1973, at the closing stages of the Vietnam War and my generation has never had to experience anything more than peacekeeping actions, and praise be. I must say that I am glad that that is the case. But that sort of thing shows a generation—and, as I said, this is the generation that I come from—the actual reality of why we stand silently on Anzac Day and pay homage to a generation long gone and to the generations who have come after them to defend our country.

I do not know if any honourable members remember the movie Gallipoli where the two guys are travelling to Perth to enlist. They come across a camel herder in the middle of the desert who says, "Why are we fighting the Germans? What have they done to us? I knew a German once." They say, "Well, if we do not stop the Germans over there then they will be here", and he looks around the vast expanses of the Nullarbor Plain and says, "Then they're damn welcome to it." The concept of what these soldiers did to defend our nation and defend other people's nations as well is clearly hammered home by the reverence we give to Anzac Day and the reverence that is rightly deserved by Anzac Day, and nobody in this Chamber argues that point. We all agree on that point that it deserves reverence.

Even though members might not want to hear my speech, I am sure there are 27,000 people in the Tablelands who want to hear it. I draw the comparison of the images portrayed by sport in our society and the ultimate views that we put onto sport and how important sport is in our society. It is very poignant that we are debating this on the night when we are all up in arms over the furore on the sale of Olympic Games tickets.

**Dr Prenzler** interjected.

**Mr NELSON:** Yes, we could ban the advertising of alcohol. I went around my electorate, as I am sure many other people did, and talked to people about this issue. Let us look at the comparison with sport. I for one am not going to the Olympic Games. I have absolutely no interest whatsoever in the Olympic Games. I might watch one or two different things on TV.

**Dr Prenzler:** You wouldn't get a ticket, anyway.

**Mr NELSON:** I probably would not get a ticket anyway. My level of interest in sport, as honourable members can see from my wonderful physique, is probably not as high as that of other members. I will be watching few Olympic events, but the analogy I wish to draw relates to the Melbourne Cup, which is coming up very soon. I do not remember a day when at work or at play or wherever we did not stop to listen to the calling of the Melbourne Cup, and it would be almost sacrilegious to do otherwise. I have even attended the Melbourne Cup and have been right in front of the winning post. That happened when I was posted in Melbourne at the RAAF school of languages for a short time. I remember sitting in front of the winning post and thinking how wonderful the day was. The point is how important sport and our sporting icons are to us. I point to the outrage felt by the public over the Olympic tickets issue, and rightfully so. I point out how important sport has become in

this heroless age, in which our distinct lack of heroic action is replaced by what we would now call heroic action on the battlefields of Lang Park and the MCG.

The reason we should be supporting this Bill, more than ever before, is that it is almost like a speed bump. It is something that sits there and tells us to wait a minute. In the year 2000 and in the century beyond, with the detachment we have from the suffering of those men and women in the past, we must reaffirm and renew our links with the past. We have to remember that a full generation has come and gone since the Vietnam War. This is not about glorifying conflict or about glorifying death in service or anything like that. I know that people would like me to wind up, but I am on strict orders not to.

**Mrs Lavarch:** Who by?

**Mr NELSON:** The people of Tablelands have told me to come here and say this.

**Mr Feldman:** They want to hear you.

**Mr NELSON:** They do. Believe it or not, they like to hear what I have to say. I actually got in trouble the other day. I was at a meeting in Ravenshoe and was asked about this subject in particular, which is quite strange. There are so many subjects before the House and I was asked about this one. I gave only a very short speech, only to find out the other day that people were saying, "Shaun Nelson talked for only five minutes; he didn't talk for very long at all." Being in the political forum, I found it quite strange to get in trouble for talking for too short a time instead of for too long. So I made a solemn promise that I would ramble on for as long as possible from now on, if for no other reason than to stress the importance of this subject and why we should be debating it—not raising our personal ancestry and talking about how many people charged how many machine-gun nests on how many days. As I said, every one of us in this Chamber could probably do that.

**Mrs Lavarch:** Did you get asked about East Timor?

**Mr NELSON:** I certainly did. I get asked about Timor quite often. I suppose I could say, "Saya bkara Bahasa Indonesia sedikit saj a karena saya lupa banyak." In other words, "I speak a little Indonesian, but I forget a lot."

We must look at the importance of the debate. It is not about what this Bill might do or could do. It is about what this Bill is aiming to achieve. It will inconvenience no-one, it will upset no-one and we have more to gain from passing it than we could ever lose by not passing it. As the honourable member for Caboolture said before and as I am sure most police officers in this State would agree, if it allows nothing more than a couple of hours' breathing space to make sure that the streets are clear of stubbie bottles after the raucous party the night before, if it allows one dawn service to proceed unhindered and if it does nothing more than teach 10 or 15 primary school kids that there is something very important about Anzac Day that we must remember, then it is worth it. It is worth while in this age of debate over republican issues, over native title, over who we are as a people and over what we set out to achieve when we launched into Federation in 1901.

Today I read a statement from a First Fleeter. He wrote, "What possible use could the Australian colony ever be to Her Majesty? What possible good could Australia ever achieve for the empire?" When the Australians turned back the German assault on the Somme in 1918, when they were pulled off the line for rest and recreation and were then thrown straight back in to hold that assault, I would go out on a limb and break my history teacher's heart by saying that they actually changed the course of history in World War I and saved the world at that stage.

I would also say that when the soldiers held the city of Tobruk in World War II they actually changed the whole course of the north African campaign. The soldiers of the 25th Battalion Queensland Regiment—including Bruce Ruxton, whom I had the pleasure to meet recently on a flight home—who were untrained militia at the time, were the first soldiers in history to turn back the Japanese. The soldiers of D Company 6th RAR were charged to seek out and close with the enemy, to kill and to capture, to seize and hold ground and to repel attack by day or night, regardless of season, weather or terrain. They did their duty at Long Tan.

Even now, in 1999, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion are on the Timor border, patrolling and doing their duty in a peacekeeping capacity, which I assure the House can be just as dangerous as full level conflict. When the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion patrolled close to the border and were fired upon by Indonesian troops and without thought to their own personal safety or without thought to the—

**Mr Gibbs:** Can I ask a question?

**Mr NELSON:** I will let the Minister ask a question. I have three minutes remaining.

**Mr Gibbs:** Where did George Custer go wrong?

**Mr NELSON:** I am quite happy to go and have a drink with the Minister after this debate and tell him all about where George Custer went wrong in splitting up his forces on the Little Bighorn.

The point remains that those soldiers in East Timor went forward with aggression, as they are trained to do, to hold their position under fire.

We could look at our whole national psyche. This argument gets bigger and bigger the more we delve into the issues. Our whole national psyche is being called into question here and we are asking ourselves whether we as the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, in a unicameral system—we are the most powerful State House in the Commonwealth at the moment—have the ability to look at ourselves and say, "Can we pass this Bill through Parliament? Do we have the courage of our convictions to say that we want to respect and dignify this day just a step further—just a little more than we respect and dignify Melbourne Cup day, just a little more than the Olympics—because it is a day that we hold in common."

As I said, everyone in this Chamber has a story. Everyone in the society in which we live has a story. It is one unifying light in our national psyche at the moment. It is the one thing that every Australian can claim possession of and say, "This is mine and this is something I want forever, regardless of race, colour, creed, where we come from or where people served—whether they were a sailor, soldier or an airman."

In the next three or four months, if nothing else we should pass this Bill simply because of what it sets out to do and the lessons it sets out to teach us about where we are in the year 2000 and where we are going in the future. I will continue to remember Anzac Day long into the future. I will certainly be teaching my children to continue remembering Anzac Day in the year 2050.

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