



Speech by

Tony ELLIOTT

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

Hansard 25 November 1999

ANZAC DAY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (12.24 p.m.): I wish to make a few comments in relation to this Bill. In common with other members of the Opposition, I support this Bill. I think that it is a move in the right direction and I congratulate the Government on taking the initiative.

We on the Darling Downs are very fortunate to have two major Army establishments in our region. Although the school of army aviation at Oakey is now located in the electorate of my colleague the Honourable Russell Cooper, when it was created it was actually located in my area. It has been there for a long time. Over many years, I have been an honorary member of the mess and I have had a lot to do with the personnel from army aviation. I am also one of many land-holders in the area who cooperates with the army and allows them to use my property for training purposes.

I am proud of the role that all of those land-holders on the Darling Downs carry out to assist army aviation. I am sure that other people offer the same services for the Cabarlah facility. A large part of the forces at Cabarlah are involved in signals and intelligence. However, my experience through the years has been with army aviation at Oakey.

I believe that it is tremendously important that we do not underestimate the value of having a community that understands and cooperates with the defence forces, particularly around Oakey. I pay tribute to some of the colonels who have been in charge of the facility at Oakey, particularly Colonel Chin Chin, who went out of their way to ensure that the army aviation regiment at Oakey was integrated into that community. A lot of the personnel attached to that regiment live in Toowoomba and many also live out at Oakey. They have always prided themselves as being part of that community. They speak at many different gatherings, they speak at the schools and they are also involved in many community activities. They also are very proactive in lending tents for community facilities and get involved in the shows around the area. As such, there is no "them and us" feeling that at times exists between the military and the civilian community. I think that that has been tremendously rewarding for the downs. It has helped to make sure that those soldiers who are posted to Oakey feel part of the community and not as though they are part of some sort of different group. I think that has to be a good thing.

Since the troops have gone to East Timor, we have seen an absolute infusion of enthusiasm from the community in getting behind those people, not just the ones who come from Oakey but also from other bases. There is a tremendous feeling of goodwill towards the army. That has been demonstrated by the increased intake of army recruits. I have friends whose children—who are now grown men—who are in East Timor. They are very proud of what those two men are doing. I think that we can all be proud of the role that they are carrying out in East Timor. In that regard, I support the comments of the member for Crows Nest. It is amazing that the press feel that they have to sensationalise events instead of just reporting them the way they happened. Australian troops are in East Timor playing their part in ensuring that that country is able to exist as an independent nation. We should all be proud of them. We should support them to the hilt. We should not allow people to write stuff that denigrates them in any way at all. I think that is quite despicable.

I support wholeheartedly the RSL clubs in my area, and there are many of them. They are very fortunate that on Anzac Day they are able to bring in top speakers from the two Army establishments. We see them at the RSL on Anzac Day and other days. They are there supporting them. It really does give that added edge to those services to have someone from the military there on Anzac Day to speak to the people. The member for Burleigh indicated that some of the Canungra officers speak on Anzac Day down along the coast. I saw them when I was at school as the same thing happens on the downs, and we are very fortunate to have them.

I want to go on record as saying that I support 100% what the RSL does and what it stands for. I think it is a fantastic organisation. It is great to see more and more young people getting involved in Anzac Day. The numbers are building up. The Timor conflict has really brought home the awareness of how close we are to potential interaction and how vulnerable we could be. I think we all need to support them to the hilt. With those words, I support the Bill.
