



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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MACKAY NORTH STATE HIGH SCHOOL

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (11.24 p.m.): I rise to speak about the pride we should all have in a group of senior students from Mackay North State High School who travelled recently to Gallipoli, France and Belgium on a tour known as the Lest We Forget World War I Commemorative Tour. I hope that honourable members were fortunate enough—as I was—to see the ABC's Australian Story on 4 November entitled "Carve Their Names With Pride" which featured the students and their amazing story.

In late 1998, the senior history students asked their history teacher, Mike Goodwin, if they could go on an excursion in 1999. When Mr Goodwin asked his students where they would like to go, he was amazed to hear them say that they would like to travel to Gallipoli on Anzac Day. Unfortunately, Gallipoli on Anzac Day proved to be impossible, but after some research it seemed that a trip to Gallipoli later in the year would be possible. So began fundraising and the incredible amount of organising that had to be done to bring the dream to reality.

The tour was undertaken by 13 senior history students and five adult supervisors and historians from 15 September to 6 October with the aim of commemorating and further publicising the sacrifices made by Australians in World War I and to make meaningful and respectful tributes to the 60,000 Australians who died during the war.

Initially, the students had the idea of finding the graves of their own relatives but, as people began to learn of the project, more and more requests were made for them to find the graves of other people's relatives. As part of the research and community service component of the project, a commitment was made by the group to find, commemorate and photograph 98 names of those ancestors of local people who were killed in the war. The project received national recognition and requests for photographs came from as far away as Adelaide. Through detailed investigations and study the students were able to trace the burial details of these men.

The group spent five solid days travelling to each cemetery and memorial in France and Belgium and two full days at cemeteries and memorials at Gallipoli where they located the graves and commemorated each soldier by laying a wreath, reciting the ode and observing a minute's silence. A photograph of the grave was taken and this photograph was framed and presented to the family at a special presentation evening in Mackay in November.

Many of the students found the graves of their own ancestors and the tributes paid were very moving indeed, as honourable members would no doubt have seen if they watched Australian Story. As well as individual commemorations, the group undertook five special commemorative services at significant memorials to Australian sacrifices. These took place at the Lone Pine Memorial, the Australian National Memorial, the Menin Gate Memorial, VC Corner Memorial and the cemetery in Peronne.

A great honour was paid to the group at the Menin Gate Memorial when they were invited to lay their wreath as part of the Last Post service which is held every night at 8 p.m. The students, teachers and supervisors were given a wonderful welcome by the people of Villers Bretonneux where they were billeted for three nights. A touching comment was made by the principal of College Jacques Brel who said, when thanked for the wonderful hospitality shown, "You need not thank us. It is because you are who you are, Australians."

The students who participated in the commemorative tour are: Amy Wilson, Jessica Disteldorf, Mark Avery, Sara Chenery, Jane Allen, Georgia Pollock, Amena Heathwood, Rachael Browning, Amanda O'Brien, Corrine Clifton, Leonie Burrows, Paul Luck and Katrina Tunnah. The students were accompanied by senior history teacher Mike Goodwin and his wife Roz, teacher Bob Shaw, and Diane and Bruce Lees.

An educational video entitled "Living the Legend" is currently being produced and will be donated to schools throughout Queensland for use in history classes. In addition, a web site is currently under construction. Both are aimed at the younger generation and are designed to share the students' experiences and to ensure that the ideals of commemoration are passed on and not forgotten.

The tour provided the students with a unique opportunity to study and commemorate this important era in Australian history first-hand. Their contribution to the remembrance of our fallen soldiers and how their wonderful achievement has touched the hearts of so many Australians is highlighted by the hundreds of emails, faxes and letters they have received. My personal congratulations go to each and every student and all those involved in the Lest We Forget Tour. Well done!
