



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 12 December 2001

ROCKY CREEK MEMORIAL PARK

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (6.19 p.m.): The Atherton Tableland played a vital role during World War II in what was then known as the New Guinea war. So often forgotten are those Australian soldiers who fought in New Guinea to halt the impending Japanese invasion. These Australian soldiers fought in conditions no less frightening than those encountered in Europe and their wounds were no less horrific. The injured and dying were transported back to Australia for medical treatment. Rocky Creek is located about 10 kilometres north of Atherton and was particularly significant in that it was the site of a large Army hospital during that time.

A total of 164 soldiers died at this Army base hospital, a reminder of how close the war was brought to our doorstep. Due to a dedicated band of workers, memories of those who served Australia while protecting our northern shores from a possible Japanese invasion in 1942 will live on. This will give the younger generation and tourists alike a chance to see where these units were based all those years ago. On 15 August 1995 the Rocky Creek Memorial Park became a reality. The date 15 August was chosen because that is VJ Day, Victory over Japan Day, or, as some people call it, VP Day, or Victory in the Pacific Day.

On that day in 1995 a memorial was erected on a Crown land site to remember the work of the men and women associated with the two big medical units, the 2nd/2nd and 2nd/6th Army General Hospitals, and associated units. Since then a flagpole and many more plaques have been added honouring the Malaria Research Volunteers Unit and different field regiments and divisions stationed in the area at the time. The significance of this World War II campsite was again recognised recently with the unveiling and dedication of a sign depicting the permanent site of the 2nd/2nd Australian Army General Hospital which operated during the Pacific campaign from 1943 to 1946. This sign will complement the memorial markers erected across the tableland at the former campsites of the 6th, 7th and 9th Division 2nd AIF.

These medical units were each equipped with between 1,200 and 1,800 beds. Some of the concrete slabs from the hospital sites are still there today, spreading over a two square kilometre area. About 60,000 Australian soldiers were treated for war related conditions at the hospitals by a caring and efficient staff of about 2,000. The site was the largest military hospital complex in the Southern Hemisphere. As visitors pass this site today, they should spare a thought for the sacrifices made for the freedom and peace we enjoy today. They act as memorials to those who passed this way and went on to assist in the surrender of the Japanese in the south-west Pacific in 1942 to 1945.

Some of the buildings from the Army hospitals are still standing today and are scattered throughout the Atherton area as residential housing. As well as the actual site memorials, a dedicated historian has searched for and collated a wonderful collection of photos, stories and souvenirs from people from around Australia who served around the Atherton, Tolga and Rocky Creek areas. Most of these people are now in their 80s. With their help and vivid memories, an important part of Australia's history is recorded for future generations.

Time expired.
