



Speech by

**ANITA PHILLIPS**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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### **WORLD WAR I ARTILLERY**

**Ms PHILLIPS** (Thuringowa—ALP) (11.56 a.m.): I wish to tell members in this House about a treasure hunt that has been undertaken over the past 12 months by some remarkable people in my electorate. They are searching for World War I German artillery pieces buried somewhere in Townsville. The 105 howitzer and 105 cannon were captured by two battalions after victorious battles on the Western Front in 1918, which effectively turned around the war in Europe. The battalions were the 9th, which was from south-east Queensland and part of the 3rd Brigade, now based in Townsville and, incidentally, the first battalion to land at Gallipoli, and the 26th Battalion, which was from north Queensland.

The battalions brought these trophies back to Australia and presented them to the Townsville City Council for safe keeping. They were put on display at the Strand, where they held pride of place, commemorating the brave actions of all who fought, particularly the local soldiers who lost their lives in these battles. Many people tell me that they remember them being there for over 40 years, and I have seen lots of family photos of children clambering over them. In the 1960s the guns were removed to make way for the new Anzac Fountain. They were taken to the council yards to be returned for display in the near future. However, they have not been seen by the public since. In the manner of all good detective stories, there have been lots of rumours over the intervening years as to what happened to them. Were they taken as souvenirs? Melted down for scrap metal? Who knows?

Last year a local resident, Sergeant Leon Coad, approached me for assistance. He had an interest in Army history and had read about the guns prior to being posted to Townsville. He went in search of them, asked around and talked to two retired council workers now in their 80s, Eric Myers and Pat Cunningham. They said that they had witnessed the guns being buried in 1969 as fill for a creek bed. Leon came to me to ask for my support for this treasure hunt, which he and Lloyd Hurlock, an ex-council worker, were about to embark on. And what an adventure it has been!

Their initial research led them to an area of reclaimed land that used to have a creek running through it. Kevin Parkes offered the assistance of his GIS equipment, and he came up with possible sites using old aerial photographs. This led them to a site on an area of Queensland Rail land that ran along the track and that was as large as a football field. Undaunted, they persevered. They then embarked on some exploratory digs using large backhoes provided by the council for a day and by QR for a week. At the end of the week we were really no closer to knowing where the guns were.

I then approached the Army, and Brigadier Mark Kelly agreed to lend engineering personnel and equipment. Unfortunately they came on site the day it rained in Townsville this year and the area became waterlogged. We decided that we needed a more accurate picture of what the site looked like when the guns were buried, so I approached the Townsville council to see if it had records in its archives, such as maps or photographs of the actual path of the creek in 1969. Unfortunately the council was not able to help. However, the local media in Townsville had taken on the story. The people of the area were intrigued by the unravelling mystery, and this resulted in offers of assistance from many sources. The most significant has been from a geophysicist who has detecting equipment used to find buried minerals for mining companies.

The geophysicist's search of the area identified two sites where the reading was of a solid metal buried more than three metres down. It also pretty much matched the dimensions of the guns. They were facing north-south, as the witnesses remembered. They were very solid—the guns weigh about

four tonnes—and they were the right size, about as big as a car. Of course, it may in fact be that the reading is just of old car bodies. But the group is very excited that it may have found the guns and is lobbying for assistance to dig in these two areas under the geophysicist's guidance. There will of course be very real technical problems in trying to get the guns out and then the momentous task of restoring them to their original condition.

I hope that all military personnel from our region see the determination to recover this memorabilia as a sign that the community values what they have done for us in every theatre of war and now in peacekeeping duties in East Timor. It is ironic that these symbols of local soldiers' courage may have been dumped on one side of Townsville at the same time as young men and women were being shipped off to war in Vietnam from the port on the other side of the city. I hope that the reinstatement of these guns may demonstrate to our ex-servicemen and women that we are proud of their commitment, and these symbols of their deeds deserve pride of place in our community.