



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Tuesday, 13 November 2007

PRIVATE ASHLEY BAKER

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.00 pm): Among the great days of national remembrance is the 11th day of November, the anniversary of the armistice of 1918—the day sacred to the memory of those who gave their lives in the war which was said to be ‘the war that ends all wars’. Sadly, history has shown that that has been far from the reality.

If our servicemen and women had not believed that liberty was worth defending in World War I, World War II and many theatres since, we would not be able to enjoy the incredible freedoms we take so easily for granted today. With freedom comes responsibility, and we must always be mindful of the obligation and duty their sacrifice imposes upon us. We often say that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. On these memorial days, we must reflect on that truth. We must fulfil that obligation by constantly guarding those freedoms won at such great cost.

Today I rise to pay tribute to a young man who died last week in tragic circumstances while deployed to East Timor. Ashley Baker, who days prior to his death celebrated his 20th birthday, graduated from Tannum Sands State High School in 2005. He was well liked at the school and cut a fine figure at his school formal. Ashley joined the Army and was a member of the Townsville based 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. He was deployed to East Timor only a short time ago as part of the international stabilisation force. Lieutenant-Colonel Ben James, the group commanding officer, said at the death of Ashley Baker, ‘2RAR has lost a fine soldier, the members of his platoon have lost a good mate, and the Baker family have lost a son and a brother.’

In a tribute to Ashley published by the Gladstone *Observer* last Friday, one of his high school friends and Army cadet mates, Iain Scott, painted a picture of a friendly, easygoing mate. The tribute continued—

‘He was just a quiet guy and a good mate,’ Iain said.

When asked of Ashley’s plans for the future, Iain said he had been committed to the defence force and there had been no question that he would end up as a soldier.

‘It was always going to be the army for him,’ Iain said.

Ashley was part of the 2nd Royal Australian Regiment serving the people of East Timor as part of the International Stabilisation Force.

However it was Ashley’s friends that were his main interest according to Iain, with him going out of his way to accommodate everyone.

‘I think he was there (at school) more for his friends, he was just a really friendly guy who always had time for everyone,’ Iain said.

‘Most people hang out with a certain group of people, but he didn’t hang out with just one group, he always had time for everyone.’

Iain went on to say that there was no one who didn’t like the softly spoken young man, with teachers and students alike speaking fondly of him.

Any mum and dad who are faced with the tragedy of losing a son or daughter endure a grief difficult to imagine. To lose a son who was serving his country so far from home and in such heartbreaking circumstances adds a measure of anguish which must be almost intolerable. His parents, I know, are still coming to terms with this and, while they have acknowledged to me that they have received wonderful

support from Army officers assisting with all the necessary arrangements, they still have a sad time of grieving, questioning and adjustment ahead.

The thoughts and prayers of the Gladstone and Calliope community, and indeed of all Queenslanders, are with Ashley's parents and families, his friends and Army colleagues. We have lost a fine young man. Lest we forget.