



Speech by  
**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

Hansard Tuesday, 1 September 2009

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**JORGENSEN, MR EN, OAM, MM**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (9.44 pm): Tonight I speak of a wonderful Queenslander, Errol Jorgensen OAM, MM, who passed away recently in Toowoomba and was accorded a full military funeral on Friday, 21 August. With the approval of the Speaker, I seek leave to have Errol's obituary incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Errol Norman Jorgensen OAM MM

Born: Clifton, October 28, 1920

Died: Toowoomba, August 17, 2009

Milne Bay veteran

Recipient of Military Medal and Medal of the Order of Australia

Devoted husband and family man

KNOWN as the "living legend of the Milne Bay Museum", Errol Norman Jorgensen had a gift for telling the story of wartime that embraced his audience.

He had a passion to keep the Anzac spirit alive and to ensure that no-one forgot the sacrifice the men and women of the forces made to keep our country safe and free.

Errol related well with younger generations and was well-known around the school communities where he entertained and educated the children with his experiences.

Born on October 28, 1920 at Clifton Hospital, during the full eclipse of the moon, his mother used to say that "Lil Errol stayed awake all that night."

He was one of five children to Arthur Jorgensen and Wilhelmina nee Naumann—a brother to Mavis, Marjie (dec), Trevor (dec) and Fay.

At that time the family lived on their property at Ellangowan.

Errol first attended the Back Plains State School where he saw his first Charlie Chaplin film at the hall.

He then attended the Ellangowan State School.

When he was nine years old, the family moved to Toowoomba to the corner of Alderley and Ramsay Streets where they ran a dairy farm.

Errol attended Rangeville State School before finishing his schooling at South Boys State School when he was 14.

During Errol's school years, he exhibited a flair for sport.

He had represented Toowoomba in hockey and soccer and played cricket winning many awards.

Errol started his work life as a messenger boy for two chemist shops in Toowoomba, running medicines between the two shops.

He then started his training as a fibrous plasterer working for Charlie Penboss.

His call up to the Australian military forces came and he joined on December 23, 1941.

Errol joined the 25th Battalion, C Company, also known as the Koala Bears—couldn't be exported and couldn't be shot at.

The 25th Battalion left for Milne Bay in July 1942.

Errol said of the first night of the 10-day battle of Milne Bay, "When the shooting started that's when we grew from a boy to a man in five minutes."

The 25th also fought at Bougainville and it was here at the battle of Slater's Knoll that Errol was awarded the Military Medal.

The citation for which read, in part, "His leadership and courage inspired his men and assured success in repelling the continued attacks."

Errol's bravery on the battlefields of Milne Bay and Bougainville were nothing short of heroic.

Following his discharge from the Army on January 10, 1946, he married Estelle Bath.

Errol and Estelle had two boys—Gregory and Graham, both born in Toowoomba.

He formed a partnership with three plasterers and continued mastering his trade as a fibrous plasterer.

The family moved to the Gold Coast in 1954 where Errol continued to work as a plasterer with Cec Newport.

In 1972, Errol and Estelle divorced.

On March 12, 1977, Errol married his soul-mate Jacqueline in Toowoomba.

They spent some time in Victoria fruit picking and then returned to Toowoomba where they completed rearing Jackie's two younger children, young Jacqueline and Peter.

Errol's family grew to include Jackie's four children—Robbie, Bonnie, Jacqueline and Peter and their children became his grandchildren.

Errol's sense of humour was legendary but he never made a joke at another person's expense.

When Jackie was diagnosed with cancer in 1979 it was a huge blow to the family.

Errol's positive attitude held everyone together.

When Jackie faced cancer again in 1999, Errol was by her side once more—she was the most important person in his world.

Upon finding he had returned to Toowoomba, Errol's plasterer mates convinced him to come back to the trade.

He was a well-respected tradesman and a perfectionist—second best was never good enough.

Errol was a man of deep faith and commitment to his belief and his knowledge of the bible was extraordinary.

Errol and Jackie have been dedicated parishioners of St James' Anglican Church for many years.

The 25th Battalion Association was formed soon after the war finished and Errol, as a recipient of the Military Medal, was given free membership.

For 25 years he was voted in as president, holding the position from 1977 to 2002.

Errol was a great representative for the Association and his face could be found in The Chronicle or seen on local television on a regular basis.

The Milne Bay Military Museum became a large part of Errol's life—he sat on the committee, sometimes in executive positions, until this year.

On June 9, 2008, Errol was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to veterans through the preservation of military history and support of ex-service organisations, and to the community of Toowoomba.

Over the years, Errol and Jackie "accumulated" many family members.

Errol took much pleasure in his extended family and was very proud of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He was a valued volunteer at the cancer council and a strong support to Jackie with many fundraising ventures for the council.

Errol was known as a true gentle man—a man who faced adversity with grace and dignity.

The death of Errol on August 17, 2009 is a great loss to his family and to the Toowoomba community.

He is survived by his wife Jackie and his family.

Lest we forget.

**Mr HORAN:** Errol was a friend to all in Toowoomba but he had a special love and affection for his wife, Jackie, family and his wonderful mates of the 25th Battalion Association, those who were veterans of the Milne Bay conflict. He was also a very good friend and volunteer at the Milne Bay Military Museum. Errol was a member of the 25th Battalion and, along with many other young men from Toowoomba and the Darling Downs, was called up in December 1941, just two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbour. Together they all embarked to Townsville and joined other Australian battalions and Kittyhawk squadrons who fought to defend Milne Bay.

The Japanese intended to attack Australia via Papua New Guinea by two means—firstly through the Kokoda Track on land and secondly by sea to Milne Bay and there at Milne Bay to endeavour to take the three airfields that the Australians and other allies had built to defend Papua New Guinea. Through enormous battles in August and September over a period of 10 days, the Battle of Milne Bay raged. It was a savage battle, with over 700 Japanese killed, and 167 Australians died out of some 370 allied casualties.

Errol Jorgensen was part of that with his Toowoomba and Darling Downs mates in the 25th Battalion. Twice he was trapped and twice thought missing but he managed to escape back to the battalion. Errol made a great comment: 'We grew up from being boys to men in five minutes during that conflict.' He also said that Gallipoli made Australia but the Coral Sea and the Milne Bay battles saved Australia.

Errol was a leader of a wonderful group of old returned soldiers—all proud members of the 25th Battalion Association. They were part of a brave Australian force that turned and stopped the Japanese advance rolling towards Australia. Errol was a brave man, a jovial man, kind and caring to all but especially to the schoolchildren of Toowoomba. We were all fortunate just to know him and feel his genuine warmth. On behalf of this parliament I offer his wife, Jackie, and extended family our deepest sympathies on their loss of Errol and also the grateful thanks of a nation.