




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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ADJOURNMENT

Adopt-a-Soldier Campaign

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (7.27 pm): Tonight I want to pay tribute to the Adopt-a-Soldier campaign and the tremendous efforts made by Mr Matt Rennie to recognise all of Ipswich's forgotten war heroes. I also want to thank the Ipswich RSL Sub Branch for its work in helping to make the Adopt-a-Soldier campaign a success. Matt Rennie is a Malaya and Korean War veteran and a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia. He is a remarkable man who set out to identify veterans in the Ipswich Cemetery who were either buried in unmarked graves or who were buried without recognition of their military service. Matt started on this journey almost 20 years ago—and I remember it—and he worked with the Ipswich RSL Sub Branch to find out who these forgotten soldiers were.

Earlier this year, Matt and the Ipswich RSL Sub Branch launched the Adopt-a-Soldier campaign to raise funds for a memorial in Ipswich Cemetery recognising these unknown soldiers. The unveiling of the memorial on 30 October was a chance for the Ipswich community to come out and hear the names of those soldiers and pay their respects. Without Matt Rennie's painstaking research, we may never have known their names, nor would they have been given the formal recognition they deserved. I was honoured to attend the unveiling and listen to the names read out by Bremer State High School students who attended. All in all, 165 names were read out. Each one of them had a family and a story. Whatever their rank, they were important to someone and loved. Now, they will never be forgotten thanks to Matt's work and the Adopt-a-Soldier memorial. The memorial allows people to pay their respects by 'adopting' a soldier and helping to ensure their name and their legacy live on.

Many of these forgotten war heroes served in World War I before returning home and eventually becoming patients at the Sandy Gallop Mental Asylum, as it was known in Ipswich. Many of them lost touch with families and communities and tragically suffered from what we would now recognise as PTSD. With little mental health support available to these soldiers at the time, it is not surprising many of their lives were cut short. It is deeply unconscionable that at the time of their deaths these men and women were buried in unmarked graves or did not have military recognition on their headstone. For instance, Matt tells the story of a young soldier from Dinmore who enlisted in World War I when he was just 16. He was badly gassed in France when he was 17 and was back in Ipswich by the time he was 18. He tragically died at the age of 21. This young man probably suffered terribly in the last few years of his life and now the Adopt-a-Soldier dedication ensures that his service to the country will never be forgotten.

The memorial has also brought closure to the families of those forgotten soldiers who now have their military service recognised. However, Matt's work continues and he will not stop until he is able to recognise all of our forgotten war heroes. It is a remarkable commitment and I am grateful to Matt Rennie for his tireless contribution to veterans and the entire Ipswich community. For those who are interested, the Adopt-a-Soldier memorial is in the AIF section of the Ipswich General Cemetery on the corner of Warwick Road and Cooney Street.