



THE OTHER SIDE

9th April 2008

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) : The commemoration of ANZAC Day will have special significance this year for all those people connected with the *HMAS Sydney* tragedy since its recent discovery off the coast of Western Australia. It will evoke happier memories for those involved with the launch of a self-published book entitled *The Other Side* by Alex Wilson, which I now draw to the attention of the house. Alex recorded his experiences as a general hand in the RAAF in the Second World War in the north and west of Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines and, finally, on the island of Mindoro. Alex was mainly engaged in surveying for airfields and access roads. His last posting was with the Third Aircraft Construction Squadron. His laconic wit is typically Australian, as is his account of leaving Wyndham for Drysdale. In his book, Alex said:

We took off from Wyndham about 2pm...As we were all in the one compartment, busy talking and looking out the window, I could see all that was going on. I don't know if these planes had automatic pilot or not because our pilot started reading a book...About two hours later, he finally finished reading the book, looked at his watch and said, 'Hells bells! We should be there by now. All of you see if you can see a small clearing below.'

The clearing was not sighted, but they did get to Drysdale the next day. They had no transport at Drysdale, therefore the recognisance of a suitable spot for an airstrip was all done on foot with the help of local Aboriginals who acted as guides. Alex says that the local people had a very fun-loving nature. When the party came to a river and the guides were asked whether there were any crocodiles, they assured them that the only crocodiles would be 'little fellas' that would not hurt them. So, they stripped off and dived in. Alex said:

Those little buggers waited until we were under the water, then dived in. One came up behind me and grabbed my leg...Next thing they surfaced laughing their bloody heads off.

Wireless was an occasional break in the evenings, and a few times they heard Tokyo Rose. Alex said:

...a renegade American broadcasting from Japan and lo and behold she said that the small garrison at Drysdale River had been wiped out by a Japanese commando unit which had managed to land from a submarine.

The risks that men took came out in his description of their departure from Drysdale in an Avro Anson stripped down for use as a courier plane. Alex said:

...headed for that 300 foot hill in front of us, we must have been overweight as we had used up the entire runway still on the ground. We were going flat out through small bushes on the approach way, collecting leaves as we went. Finally, she lifted off and the pilot had to bank quite steeply to avoid the hill. Well, the tree tops were brushing our belly for what seemed like minutes, long ones at that, and my belly was where my mouth usually was.

Next day, they heard that the Japanese had bombed Drysdale killing several of their Aboriginal friends and a missionary. At a site near Yirrkala, one of the group constructed an oven from a termite mound, allowing them to cook bread and other delicacies that were not in the rations with which they were issued. Departing Sydney on the *Van Der Lin* (in which the army had refused to sail), Red Cross women gave each of them a little white comfort bag consisting of a woollen balaclava; a pair of long, heavy woollen socks; and a very long woollen scarf.

'Our movements must have been a well-kept secret because we were going to the blasted Tropics! We had to sleep shoulder to shoulder, head to toe, 550 men in the bloody hold of this ship.'

After active service in New Guinea, Alex's company went with American forces to Morotai, landing under fire from enemy planes, and eventually to Mindoro, having their first taste of Kamikaze pilots on the way and again landing under fire.

Ignorance about Australia was brought out in Alex's scathing comment: 'The Yanks, well the ones I met, thought we were all black and that kangaroos were man-eaters.'

Their task at Mindoro was to build a landing strip in five days to take transport planes, a job that the top brass thought was impossible. If the strip was not completed in the time limit, the men were told to abandon the project and join Filipino guerrillas in the hills, provided they could get past the Japanese. Alex commented, 'We made the deadline despite the bombings and lack of sleep.'

I quote some lines from Alex's poem 'Nowhere to Run and Nowhere to Hide', describing that feat:

Then the bombs started falling and the shrapnel flying

And close by the cry of a young man dying

And I prayed, dear Lord, please save my hide.

I have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

The sky is on fire from our shells screaming back

But their mission is suicide and they fly through the flak.

Time Expired.

Remainder of poem and speech as follows:

We built that airfield in five days flat

And I fear the Kamikaze no more

With the sun at their back

And I thank you dear Lord for saving my hide

When I had nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

As a tribute to all our service personnel I close with some lines from another poem in the book, *Faces in the Flame*, by Jim Moffatt, ex No4 Airfield Construction Squadron RAAF:

'He stood all alone on the grey Anzac morn

There were tears in his eyes, his face tightly drawn.

I was sure I was right, yes, he was calling names

In the dawn's early light as he stared at the flame.

He knew I had heard him as his eyes looked in mine

In the eternal Flame's light at dawn by the shrine.

I stood with him and listened as he called out each name

I knew he could see them, each face, in the flame.'

ENDS

Given to Parliament 2nd May 2006

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): The Anzac legend was born in 1915 at Gallipoli, when 8 000 Australians lost their lives in a nine-month campaign. However, the Anzac spirit lives on. It is important that we honour that spirit and those who sacrifice so that we can enjoy the freedom and the quality of life that we have. Some made the supreme sacrifice by giving their lives in the cause of freedom. The sacrifices made by others are less evident but nonetheless real: the months and sometimes years of absence from family, missing seeing the growing years of their children, and the mental and physical scars of war. There is currently war and terrorism in many parts of the world, places where people are living with the grief and anguish, courage and comradeship, pride and despair that war brings. Anzac Day gives an opportunity to those of us lucky enough to live in this wonderful part of the world to reflect on the wars that have affected us and our families and to remember with pride those people who made sacrifices and who are still making sacrifices to enable us to live as we do.

I am sometimes concerned that we do not always value what we have, despite what we see happening in other parts of the world on our televisions daily. The Gallipoli campaign is becoming synonymous with Anzac, and it is heartening to see the large numbers of young people, particularly, who are making the pilgrimage to Gallipoli and who are attending the marches across Australia on the day. Our family remembers France and the Somme where, on 25 April 1918, a 19-year old soldier, David Carman (my uncle and my father's brother) was killed on the Hindenburg Line. The previous year, 1917, his older brother Roland was killed on the Somme, and the year before that, in 1916, a second brother, Clement, was also killed. Back in South Australia, the family farm was sold, and the families and friends grieved.

Twenty-one years later, in 1939, a sister of these three young soldiers, Ruby, and the youngest brother, Kenneth, known as Jack, who was my father, joined up to fight in the Second World War. They were away from their homes, families and friends for six years. I often think of their mother, Elizabeth, after whom I was named, and wonder how she and her husband David coped. The anguish that families, friends and colleagues feel when they lose a family member in such or similar circumstances was brought home to us most recently with the death of the young Australian service man in Iraq.

In our home, as in many households, very little was ever said about the wars. People were expected to get on with life. However, I do not think that this was good for them, particularly for their mental health, nor is it good in my view for the younger generations who have not experienced a war. Remembering gives us all a chance to come to grips with what has happened. I remember clearly once, while delivering Meals on Wheels, commenting on a photo of an elderly gentleman I was visiting, taken when he was a handsome young man in uniform. He promptly dissolved in tears. He said that he had coped while he was busy working but, now he was old and alone, it was all coming back.

For those who have not experienced war, Anzac Day gives the opportunity to realise the full horror and to do what we can to prevent it in the future, and to give thanks and support to our current young men and women who are involved with peacekeeping forces and who are helping in disaster recovery. It is good to see the change of emphasis from the glorification of war to one of struggling to keep peace and to helping others in their times of greatest need, creating goodwill and understanding while still recognising the need for strong, well-equipped services to protect us if required. Anzac Day gives us all a chance to stop our mad rush and to think about the sacrifices that have been made and are being made by all involved in war, including the current one: not just those who died but those who survived and could not speak, those who wait at home and wonder if they will ever see

their loved ones again. It also gives us time to enjoy the camaraderie that is a special bond between people who have shared these particular stresses together, such as in war.