

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2015

BELVIDERE WAR MEMORIAL

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:18): I rise today to speak on the Belvidere soldiers' war memorial, a memorial which pays tribute to the great sacrifices servicemen from the area made for our country. Before I speak on the history of this memorial and its significance, I would like to advise the house of what has brought me to be speaking on this today. Work needs to be undertaken at the intersection of the Strathalbyn-Milang-Langhorne Creek roads at Belvidere as a contributor to the federal allocated Black Spot funding program.

However, at present, the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure has pegged out a proposed route, after six years of planning, which if pursued would result in the demolition of the Belvidere soldiers' memorial. Last Thursday, I attended a community forum where over 70 outraged residents of Belvidere were in attendance, and all attendees were in agreement to oppose the current route.

As someone who has had a brother, uncles and ancestors serve for this country, I understand the importance of war memorials. The Belvidere memorial was built in 1946 and is a triangle of trees which represents numerous locals who served in World War II. Specifically, I would like to speak about the story of three Belvidere brothers—Steve, Tom and Jim Collett—all of whom served their country proudly in the AIF and are known in the community as 'the Collett boys'.

Steve's story is very brief as the information on his war history is limited, although I can say he saw a great deal of action serving with the AIF, mostly in the Middle East and New Guinea. Many would remember the attack on Pearl Harbour and its utter destruction of property and human life, but fortunately for Tom and Jim they were not part of that catastrophe due to the fact that they were stationed elsewhere. Eventually the Japanese military attacked the small Australian garrison at Java where the two brothers were stationed and, at this time, both Tom and Jim found themselves to be prisoners of war to the Japanese army.

As brothers they always envisioned themselves sticking together and making it out the same way. Unfortunately their fate did not have the same path in mind. Tom found himself as a manual slave labour worker and, for three long years, Tom was exposed to brutality most of us could not even comprehend or imagine. After those three horrendous years, Tom found himself returning to Australia in 1945 after the Japanese surrendered. Tom, as the soldier he was, lived life once he returned and became a father to his daughter, Raelene.

I will now briefly speak on Jim's story. Jim, after becoming a prisoner of war, was drafted by the Japanese military to work in Thailand on the Thai-Burma Railway, a railway which is often referred to as 'hell on earth'. Jim slaved on the railway from 1942 to 1943 before he tragically died in October 1943 from circumstances unknown. Jim was one out of over 90,000 Asian labourers and 12,000 prisoners of war who perished during this terrible time of malnourishment, starvation and disease. Jim, along with many others, paid the

ultimate sacrifice for our country. Now, today, the Collett boys and the rest of the returned men and non-returned men are remembered in their home town of Belvidere in the sacred memorial of trees.

As a member of parliament, I listened and acknowledged what those present at the forum had to say. As a parliamentarian, I advised those attending that I would seek advice from the three ministers relevant to the area, which I have pursued. The Minister for Transport has since committed to further investigation for an alternative proposal put forward by the local residents at the community meeting and called by the community on 17 September. I appreciate the verbal commitment from the minister; however, Belvidere's sacred soldiers' memorial deserves the utmost respect as it pays tribute to those who served and sacrificed their lives for our country.

I will reiterate my comment that some of these Belvidere servicemen were among the many who paid the ultimate sacrifice and never returned home. In this year, the centenary of Gallipoli and the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, I will now name the veterans from Belvidere who are honoured with plaques in front of these memorial trees: Rex V. Aworth, Allan J. Aworth, H. Syd Bampton, Peter K. Coonan, Steve J. Collett, C. Jim Collett, Tom G. Collett, Ken M. Cross, Hurtle E. Flannagan, Clyde M. Hudd, Jack H. Murdoch, Doug P. Norman, Merv T. Pallant, Gordon B. Pallant, George E. Pallant, R. (Bob) E. Simcock, Fred L. Williams. Lest we forget.