

**MINISTER FOR VETERANS ISSUES; HOUSING — EUROPEAN VISIT**

*Statement by Minister for Veterans Issues*

**MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee — Minister for Veterans Issues)** [12.16 pm]: I rise to make a brief statement about my trip to Belgium, France and England earlier this month. The main purpose of the visit was to represent the Western Australian government at the Armistice Day service held at Villers-Bretonneux in France to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cessation of hostilities and the end of World War I. I accompanied the participants of the government's youth tour group for part of their tour of the former battlefields of Belgium and France. The trip also provided an opportunity to discuss a range of housing issues with key individuals and organisations in England.

I was privileged to lay a wreath at not only the Australian War Memorial on 11 November, but also a very moving service to honour the 50 000 soldiers missing in the Ypres Salient at Menin Gate a few days earlier. Tour member Enfys Jerwood of Shelley and I laid a wreath as we all reflected on the sacrifices of that generation and our own fortune as the last post echoed through the night at Ypres.

Visiting some of the key battlefields of the Somme was confronting and humbling. Questionable tactical decisions and massive casualties were a constant theme. Tour member Natasha Meston from Woodlands described the battlefields of Fromelles as follows —

... a site which defies you to leave with any impression but that of the futility of war. Over 19-20 July 1916, over 2000 Australian men lost their lives as they “went over” trench lines with absolutely no clear objectives and no artillery support— I can't imagine the feeling of being commanded (let alone obeying the order) to run headlong at the German line with no further information. The situation was in fact so dire that the German forces were embarrassed by how easy it was proving to kill Australians, more like murder than warfare. However, their offer of ceasefire was rejected by an Australian general, and this resulted in devastating casualties.

They were left in no-man's-land. The memorial service held on 11 November was a credit to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Australian government. At the magnificent yet very exposed memorial site, approximately 2 000 Australians paid their respects and pledged never to forget a generation of Australians who risked, and in many cases sacrificed, their lives, and who fought and died for each other and for us.

I also visited London and while there met with a range of key people regarding housing matters, including a major housing provider, the peak body for housing associations, the Housing Finance Corporation and the shadow Minister for Housing. I also visited a major urban renewal project in central London. The meetings provided very valuable insights into different approaches to address issues faced by both Australia and England.