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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Main Committee**

**PRIVATE EDWARD (TED) KENNA VC**

**SPEECH**

**Friday, 14 August 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Robert, Stuart, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (11.57 am)—I rise to celebrate and acknowledge the great life of Edward ‘Ted’ Kenna VC, who died on 9 July 2009 aged 90—married to his beautiful wife, Marjorie, a father of four, a grandfather of 12 and a great-grandfather of 15.

Future generations will ask where I was when the last surviving World War II Victoria Cross recipient died. I will say that I was here in the House speaking about a great Australian—an Australian who was part of the glorious fellowship of the Victoria Cross; a fellowship that knows no race or creed, no boundaries, no age, no nationality; a fellowship joined only by exceptional bravery and heroism; a fellowship that cannot be bought, that cannot be joined, but is only awarded and bestowed for acts so great, for acts so incredibly above what normal human beings would be capable of, that the majority of winners are awarded it posthumously. Those who have received it have done so because of what they have done in times of battle and conflict. Ted was part of the glorious fellowship of the Victoria Cross. By all accounts, and speaking to members here who knew Ted well, he was an incredibly humble man, an Anzac of the highest order who did not like fuss being made about his achievements. To fight one day and to score that winning goal for Hamilton in a later life says so much about Ted Kenna. And so too does the manner in which he won the VC. I have always contended that you will never truly know an individual’s character until you see them under great pressure, under great stress, and there is no greater stress in life than the field of operational service and, particularly, the field of battle.

Ted Kenna, with a company assault in Wewak in Papua New Guinea in 1945, with the assault being held up, stood up, with the enemy no more than 50 metres away—indeed, closer. The enemy’s fire engaged upon him, as you would expect from a target that bobs up in the jungle. Undeterred, he took a Bren gun and engaged the enemy, destroying the opponent and, when running out of ammunition, simply discarded the Bren gun and asked for a rifle while still standing, and he continued to engage, suppressing the enemy position, allowing the company to move forward, and achieving its objective.

The accolades regarding Ted Kenna’s achievement speak of bullet holes in his clothing, of rounds passing between arms and body—an incredible act of bravery. I can only imagine the horrors of jungle life in 1945. I have spent a lot of time in PNG. I spent five months in the civil war in Bougainville on one of the islands of PNG, and I have walked the Kokoda Trail. I know first hand the horrors of the jungle but I know nothing of the horrors of the jungle when you are in battle: when you are being shot at; when your equipment is falling off you; when your clothes are in tatters; and when you are hungry, tired and thirsty and engaged in a bitter assault against a numerically superior enemy. This is what Ted Kenna found himself against, and his character grew. In the mettle of that fire his character shone forth in such an impressive way.

Three weeks later this Australian hero was to be shot in the jaw and would spend 10 long days walking out of that forbidding, impenetrable jungle to get back to a first-aid station. Stories recount of a rancid bandage on his face when he finally made it back to some care and first aid. I can only imagine that Ted Kenna would not have complained and would not have been a burden. I suggest he was not carried, I suggest he walked out of that jungle a severely wounded warrior. I find it extraordinarily and incredibly Australian that the first person at the hospital to touch this brave warrior was a nurse, Marjorie, who would later become his wife. The care that that involves is so incredibly Australian. There are only two surviving Australian VC recipients out of the 97

awarded: Vietnam veteran Keith Payne VC and of course our own serving digger, Mark Donaldson VC, who was awarded the Victoria Cross—the first Australian Victoria Cross—for his service in Afghanistan.

It is interesting to read the citation to get a feel for the type of character that was Ted Kenna. It reads:

On his own initiative and without orders Private Kenna immediately stood up in full view of the enemy less than 50 yards away and engaged the bunker, firing his Bren gun from the hip.

He stood up and entrenched the enemy with machine gun fire in a bunker—no sandbags to protect Ted Kenna, just raw Australian courage. The citation continues:

The enemy machine gun immediately returned Private Kenna's fire and with such accuracy that bullets actually passed between his arms and body.

This is what you would expect from an enemy with machine guns mounted, sited in a bunker, against a lone Australian standing on his feet. The citation goes on:

Undeterred, he remained completely exposed and continued to fire at the enemy until his magazine was exhausted.

There are 20 or 30 rounds in a Bren gun magazine. The citation continues:

Still making a target of himself, Private Kenna discarded his Bren gun and called for a rifle. Despite the intense machine gun fire, he seized the rifle and, with amazing coolness, killed the gunner with his first round.

Ted Kenna could shoot.

A second automatic opened fire ... from a different position and another enemy immediately tried to move into position behind the first machine gun, but Private Kenna remained standing and killed him with his next round.

Two machine gun posts in a jungle, bunkered in and camouflaged, firing at young Ted Kenna, 26 years old, standing up in the jungle. Mr Panter, the surviving member of a dwindling 2/4th Battalion, said that when it was all over Mr Kenna had bullet holes in his pants and shirt. Mr Panter said:

He told me then, and always said later, that he just had to do it.

Mr Panter went on:

Ned reckoned he was the person on the spot and someone had to do something and he just jumped up and without thinking did what he did. That's what happens in war, you know: ordinary people do extraordinary things and Ned always thought of himself as just an ordinary bloke. History would suggest otherwise.

It was an incredible citation for an incredibly brave Australian. In the face of an overwhelming enemy, dug in and entrenched, and against sighted automatic weapons from different positions, Ted Kenna stood up and engaged the enemy. And when the ammunition of his main weapon was extinguished he threw it aside and called for another, still standing.

If we knew nothing else about Ted Kenna that alone would tell us something about his character, of his fortitude, of his mettle, of his love for family and friends, and of his care for his mates—held up in a jungle, suppressed by enemy fire. But we know so much more. Through those who knew him and loved him, through those who played footy with him, through his 15 great-grandchildren, his 12 grandchildren and his four children we know a man who was humble and who loved his country; who spent his remaining years serving his nation, going into schools, talking to kids and being the best he could be. We salute Ted Kenna—he is a great Australian. He set a great standard for the Anzac warriors who today continue to fight for freedom in various battles around the world. Only last week I was privileged to go to East Timor to visit our soldiers there in 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, who form the basis of the international security force, and to meet the Timor Leste Defence Force and the Australian construction team. I salute the commanding officer of 2nd Battalion RAR, Lieutenant Colonel David Smith, for his leadership of his men in Timor Leste and I wish them all a safe tour. I pray that they return quickly to their loved ones, their families and their friends, as I do, likewise, for our forces currently engaged in combat in Afghanistan.

Freedom alone is the privilege of those who are prepared to fight for it and defend it. With those words, can I say that Ted Kenna VC is missed. A great warrior has moved on and we shall not forget his heroism, his sacrifice and what he did for the freedom of his nation.