



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Battle of Long Tan**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 21 November 2016**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Monday, 21 November 2016  <b>Page</b> 3845  <b>Questioner</b>  <b>Speaker</b> Littleproud, David, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House  <b>Proof</b> No  <b>Responder</b>  <b>Question No.</b></p>
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**Mr LITTLEPROUD** (Maranoa) (18:04): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) on 8 November at Government House the Governor-General awarded ten soldiers with military awards for actions at the Battle of Long Tan; and

(b) these soldiers received these awards 50 years after the Battle of Long Tan:

(i) which was the most costly single battle fought by Australian soldiers in the Vietnam War, involving 105 Australians and three New Zealanders from D Company 6RAR and more than 2,000 enemy troops; and

(ii) where a total of 17 Australians were killed in action and 25 were wounded, one of whom later died from his wounds; and

(2) acknowledges:

(a) the ten soldiers who received an award, some posthumously, including Lieutenant Adrian Roberts, Sergeant Frank Alcorta, Lance Corporal Barry Magnussen (deceased), Second Lieutenant Gordon Sharp (deceased), Privates Neil Bextrum, Ron Brett (deceased), Ian Campbell, William Roche, Geoffrey Peters and Noel Grimes;

(b) the service and sacrifice of all those who served their country in Vietnam; and

(c) all of Australia's service men and women who display courage, bravery and mateship above and beyond the call of duty.

More than 60,000 Australian troops fought in the Vietnam War from 1962 to 1975. In that time, 521 of our service men and women paid the ultimate sacrifice with the loss of their lives and more than 3,000 were wounded. Perhaps the most renowned battle within this 13-year conflict took place on 18 August 1966 in what became known as the Battle of Long Tan. One hundred and eight Anzacs in D Company 6RAR made their way into the Long Tan rubber plantation under heavy machine gun fire and mortar attacks to face a battle against the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese enemy force of more than 2,000 soldiers. Despite having the odds stacked against them at more than 20 to one, fighting in the pouring rain and having limited ammunition to sustain them, our Anzacs fought in one of the few recorded battles in history to be won against the most impossible odds.

D Company were assisted by an ammunition resupply by RAAF helicopters, close fire support from New Zealand's 161 Field Battery, together with additional artillery support from the Australian task force at Nui Dat, and the arrival of reinforcements in APCs as night fell. In hindsight we know that the courageous and brave actions of our 108 troops saved the base at Nui Dat from the risk of a far greater ambush by the 2,000 enemy troops on a night when Little Pattie and Col Joye had been brought in to entertain our troops.

Sadly, like all conflicts and battles, this battle did come at a cost. The Battle of Long Tan resulted in the loss of 18 Australian soldiers' lives and the wounding of more than 21 of our soldiers. To this day, many veterans continue to suffer from what was perhaps the most brave and distinguished battle of our Australian military history. The torment that many of these brave Australians have endured is a tragedy and only now are some prepared to publically speak of their service to this nation. The Battle of Long Tan is a testament to our Australian soldiers—of their sheer strength, courage and bravery that such odds were overcome in the most extreme case of adversity. It is unimaginable that any Anzac would have left that rubber plantation alive if not for the bravery of not only those directly in the battle but also those who supported them with mortars or by supplying ammunition.

This year 18 August marked the 50th year anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan—a day that is also commemorated as Vietnam Veterans Day. In fact, during a Long Tan commemorative service I attended at the Warwick cenotaph in my electorate this year I was fortunate to meet Private Tony Stepney, a veteran of the Vietnam War who fought in the Battle of Long Tan. Tony was called up for duty in 1965 and served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967. Tony regards the battle as a chance encounter, as he and his comrades were sent into the plantation to relieve other comrades, who had run out of rations after being in the field for a prolonged period.

As Tony spoke about the battle at this service, I felt incredible pride and respect for the actions of these brave men like Tony, in circumstances far beyond my comprehension and what most Australians would know of. That day was the first day that Tony had publicly spoken of his experience in that battle. The bravery of a man tortured by this day to stand proudly, in a humble and dignified manner, expressing his gratitude to those who helped him survive rather than his own brave actions, is testament to this great Australian.

This year on 8 November at Government House the Australian Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, awarded 10 of our extremely deserving soldiers with valour awards for their actions at the Battle of Long Tan, bringing the total military awards for Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith's men for their actions at the Battle of Long Tan to 15. I would like to acknowledge each of our service men and women for their valiant service in the Vietnam War, particularly in the Battle of Long Tan, as well as those who received medals of valour on 8 November, after more than 50 years.

I would also like to especially acknowledge the former member for Hinkler, Mr Paul Neville, for his efforts in ensuring that the heroic actions of our Vietnam veterans for their role in the Battle of Long Tan were recognised after more than 50 years. As my friend Paul Neville would say eyeball to eyeball, man to man, in the most difficult of circumstances the Australians took on a battle in which they were outnumbered by at least 20 to one—to think it has taken 50 years for Harry Smith's valour recommendations to be awarded is outrageous.

Paul remembers when Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith's star was upgraded to the Star of Gallantry. Paul tells me that Harry was offered a ceremony at Government House but there was not an inclination to fly Harry's former comrades in for the occasion, so in a form of gentle defiance Harry asked Paul whether he would present it to him at the military museum in Maryborough in the company of most of his comrades and the Victoria Cross awardees. So Paul did and, in Paul's words, this was one of the most moving moments in his time as the member for Hinkler.

Paul was also there at the Enoggera Barracks in 2008 when Harry's Second Lieutenant Dave Sabben in 12 Platoon and Second Lieutenant Geoff Kendall in 10 Platoon were awarded the Medal of Gallantry award that Harry tenaciously pursued for more than four decades. In Paul's words, 'Harry's ceremonial request and his determination to see his comrades recognised, like so many of Harry's actions over 50 years, is a mark of Harry's leadership and tenacity where for more than 50 years he has not stepped away from his comrades.'

The weight of these awards and how Australians feel about our Vietnam veterans was obvious to Paul when this year he attended a Long Tan commemoration ceremony at the cenotaph in Hervey Bay. Harry and a number of his comrades in the battle laid their wreaths simultaneously, walking side by side, causing those attending the ceremony to erupt in loud and spontaneous applause. Paul said it was one of those magic moments where Australia told Harry and his comrades that they regarded them as the bravest of the brave.

When Paul retired at the election in 2013 his commitment to the plight of Harry and his comrades resulted in him being asked to stay on by the Vietnam veterans as the patron for the Bundaberg sub-branch of the Vietnam veterans. I think this indicates how appreciative our Vietnam veterans are of Paul for his efforts and his unwavering representation. I thank Paul. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith and his comrades.

In closing, our Australian service men and women have been involved in 10 conflicts and countless peacekeeping assignments over the course of our history. Some 102,000 Australians have lost their lives and many more have been wounded and continue to suffer the consequences of war. I pay tribute and say thank you to each and every service man and woman, both then and today, for their bravery, courage and commitment to this country of which I and each and every one of us in this place should be incredibly proud to support.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Mr Hogan ): Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Buchholz:** I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.