



Speech by

Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Thursday, 20 August 2009

CLEVELAND ELECTORATE, VIETNAM VETERANS

Dr ROBINSON (Cleveland—LNP) (9.44 pm): I rise today to pay tribute to the thousands of Australians who served in the Vietnam War. On Tuesday, 18 August thousands of Vietnam veterans commemorated Vietnam Veterans Day at services throughout Australia. In my electorate of Cleveland the service took place at the local war memorial cenotaph, where some 200 ex-servicemen and women attended.

Before a small crowd of onlookers, wreaths were placed in memory of the fallen comrades. Of particular note were the six wreaths placed in memory of local Redlands residents killed in action: Leslie Prowse, Kenneth Duffy, Erald Nilsen, Kevin Conway, Kenneth Gant and Dennis Brooks.

Australia's military involvement in the Vietnam War was the longest continuous engagement ever committed to by our nation. Australian involvement commenced on 3 August 1962 and ended on 23 December 1973. Over 50,000 Australian ground troops, Air Force and Navy personnel served in Vietnam during that period. Of that 50,000, 520 lost their lives and a further 2,398 were wounded.

Being the first Australian unit into Vietnam and the last out, the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam—AATTV—affectionately known as 'The Team', was operational for 10 years, four months and 16 days, achieving the distinction of being the longest serving Australian unit of any service in any theatre of war. A total of 114 individual decorations, including four Victoria Crosses, were awarded to members of 'The Team'.

The Australian task force headquarters were located at Nui Dat. It was from the Nui Dat rubber plantation that all of the combat operations and activities took place. Perhaps for Australia the most recognised of all the battles waged during the Vietnam War was the Battle of Long Tan, which took place in a rubber plantation to the east of the task force headquarters. It was as a member of Delta Company of the 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment that local Redlander Private Kenneth Gant was killed on 18 August 1966. The battle received recognition from the then President of the United States, Mr Lyndon B Johnson.

The service personnel who saw action in Vietnam continue to suffer the long-term physical and psychological effects of their tours of duty. In 1995 a new group, Redlands Vietnam Veterans Group, was formed to assist those locals requiring help. Totally run by volunteers, the association is located at the Redlands RSL Veterans Community Centre and has a membership of 120 Vietnam veterans. I acknowledge their good work among the residents of Redlands city.

I also wish to acknowledge Paul Field, a Vietnam vet and resident of the Redlands. Upon his return from Vietnam, Paul devoted himself to building a better Redlands through work and community involvement in the chamber of commerce, the Redlands Tourism Board, schools and sports groups and as a councillor from 1988-97 and deputy mayor of the Redlands Shire Council from 1994-97. Again I salute all of our Vietnam veterans.