



Speech by

**Simon Finn**

**MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY**

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## **ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT, NATIONAL MEMORIAL WALK; VIETNAM VETERANS' REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**Mr FINN** (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.28 pm): The Royal Australian Regiment's National Memorial Walk at the Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera is a special place and an important memorial to the contribution of our veterans community. Last week I visited the memorial, which is managed by the RAR Association, an organisation of past and present infantry servicemen who have served or are serving in an infantry battalion of the regiment. I acknowledge the member for Ashgrove, as the Gallipoli Barracks are in the electorate of Ashgrove. When I visited there, it was clear that the member for Ashgrove was well known by the RAR Association.

Our infantry battalions are our front line, and I acknowledge all those who have served in the Royal Australian Regiment. The RAR Association was formed 30 years ago with aims including perpetuating the close bonds of comradeship and esprit de corps in the regiment; preserving the memory of those who died in service; assisting the sick, wounded and needy who have served in the regiment and the widows and children of deceased members; and maintaining the regiment's memorials.

The association's National Memorial Walk is an impressive example of its efforts to achieve those aims. It is a tribute to those soldiers who have died while serving in the regiment overseas. A living memorial, the walk is composed of over 1,000 trees; a contemplation hall; a gathering area for visiting families, aptly named Digger's Rest; and a time line of the battles which have involved the RAR since its creation in 1948. The memorial traces through each of the theatres of operation which have involved the RAR, with a grove of Australian native trees for each location in which the regiment has fought. At the base of 695 of the trees, plaques memorialise the details of the individual soldiers of the regiment who have died in service. Most importantly, the memorial has provided a place of quiet contemplation for the more than 10,000 people who have visited the walk to remember their loved ones and acknowledge their contribution to our nation.

I was fortunate enough on my visit to meet 'Dad's Army' of volunteers who maintain the walk and the grounds and keep them in pristine condition for visitors. It is no stretch to say that volunteering makes the impossible possible. This government is committed to increasing volunteering in Queensland through the Q2 plan, which targets an increase in the proportion of Queenslanders involved in their community as volunteers by 50 per cent by 2020. We know that volunteering improves the quality of life in our communities and improves the lives of volunteers by creating friendships and networks, staying active, keeping healthy and sharing skills. This is alive and well in the RAR Association.

I would like to place on record my thanks to Mr Ted Chitham, the President of the RAR Association, for inviting me to visit the memorial, as well as Mr Kiwi Gibbons, the memorial's curator, and his wife, Margaret, for the wonderful work they do in coordinating the maintenance of the site.

Today is a particularly important day for our veterans community as it is a day to acknowledge the importance of the contribution of our service people in Vietnam. The importance of our war memorials are very special on days like today that acknowledge service in Vietnam.

Vietnam Veterans Day was originally marked to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan, the largest single unit battle fought in Vietnam by Australian troops. The date of 18 August was declared Vietnam Veterans Day by then Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1987 following the welcome-home parade for Vietnam veterans in Sydney. The Battle of Long Tan itself was significant as the first major conflict involving Australian troops in Vietnam. Delta Company from the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment were ambushed by thousands of enemy soldiers in the rubber plantation called Long Tan. The Australians were outnumbered by a ratio of almost 20 to one. Yet, from the afternoon of the 18th to the morning of the 19th, and in torrential rain, that small company of Australian soldiers held off thousands of enemy combatants. Eighteen Australian troops were killed in the ambush, and nearly 1,000 of the enemy died.

Today we remember all those who fought and died in Vietnam. We must always remember that it is governments that make the decision to send Australia troops to war and it is governments that should lead the way in working to improve the quality of life for veterans and memorialise their outstanding contribution.