



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2015

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Bourke, Dr JR**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (10.23 pm): I rise to inform the House of the recent passing of Dr James Raymond Bourke, a great Australian from the Burdekin. Jim Bourke was born in Ayr on 15 November 1943. He attended Home Hill State School in the 1950s and then Ayr State High School, where he was head prefect. After a year at university in Brisbane, he joined the regular army. Enlisting at the age of 19 in 1963, Jim Bourke served in various postings until 1986, when he reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before opting for civilian life. I was honoured to meet Jim Bourke when he attended the Ayr Anzac Day ceremony earlier this year, together with his good mate the Mayor, Cr Bill Lewis.

As a platoon commander with 1RAR in the Vietnam War, in 1966 Bourke was shot in the face while trying to save a wounded soldier. The bullet tore through his mouth and exited below his left ear, but he recovered and returned to Vietnam in 1968 for a second tour of duty. Thirty years on, in 1998, he was awarded the Medal of Gallantry for his bravery in the Vietnam War, recognising the rescue of his comrades while under enemy fire in Vietnam in 1965. He was recommended for a Military Cross award under the British imperial award structure, but the Australian government had abandoned that structure in 1992. Bourke did not see it so much as a personal tribute; he considered the medal a recognition of the skill and courage of the men with whom he served.

Jim Bourke's ethos of never leaving your mate behind never left him, even after he left the Army. In the early 2000s, Bourke was on a mission to find and bring home the remains of six missing Australians: Richard Parker, Peter Gillson, David Fisher, Michael Herbert, Robert Carver and John Gillespie. He lobbied politicians and bureaucrats, but when that failed he led a privately funded team to try to locate the missing six. He never gave up. Bourke's determination paid off and, when the remains of two of the missing six were found in 2007, the government and Defence Force were embarrassed into action. The other four soldiers' remains were also located and repatriated back home to Australia, where they were given family services amidst strong political and community support.

Perhaps Jim Bourke's determination to never leave his mates behind stemmed from 1958 when he was just 13 and his best mate, his dad, a mechanic, became gravely ill from pneumonia. He ran three miles to the hospital because he was not allowed to ride in the ambulance. He was there when his father died, but was never permitted to attend his father's funeral.

Jim Bourke never gave up his studies and went on to receive his doctorate. His mission, Operation Aussies Home, was a success and the RSL made Bourke its 2009 Anzac of the Year, when he also became a Member of the Order of Australia for service to veterans and their families. Vale, Jim Bourke.