




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszcuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Battle of Long Tan, 50th Anniversary, Motion to Take Note

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.33 am): Today we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, one of the largest battles fought by Australians in the Vietnam War. Since 1987, today, 18 August, has been designated Vietnam Veterans Day in recognition of the service of almost 60,000 Australians, with 521 of them paying the ultimate sacrifice.

The member for Mirani, as a former veteran, will be making a statement to the House today. Eighteen of those Australians killed in Vietnam were lost during the four-hour Battle of Long Tan. Another 25 were wounded. Most casualties were from D Company, 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment.

The 6RAR was established at Enoggera in Brisbane in 1965. The 6RAR has a long and proud service history, including a number of overseas deployments, including Vietnam, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. Just a year after its formation, 6RAR was deployed to South Vietnam. Within two months of arriving in Vietnam, the battalion was engaged in the Battle of Long Tan. The opposition leader and I will attend today's commemorations at the Gallipoli Barracks in Enoggera to be attended by the Governor-General and senior representatives of the Australian government. I was disappointed to hear overnight that plans for veterans and their families to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan today have been restricted by the Vietnamese government. I welcome that some veterans will now be permitted on the site today.

My sister's grandfather-in-law was Les Thompson, who was chaplain at the 6RAR base at Nui Dat on 18 August 1966. He toured the battlefield the next day and he later told author Les McAuley—

Dead bodies everywhere ... As you jumped off the chopper they were there ... I was glad I was the Chaplain, I was sorry I was there. I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else, but I wished I was a thousand miles away.

McAuley wrote in his book *The Battle of Long Tan* that Les flew by helicopter to visit the Australian wounded in hospital the next morning, 'then went back to write to the families of all the casualties'. Sadly, Les passed away last month.

For veterans of the Vietnam War, there was belated recognition of their service and the condition of post-traumatic stress disorder that many have endured as a result of their service. We must maintain national awareness of PTSD. Many veterans first develop PTSD years after their traumatic experience, but others might find their existing PTSD gets worse over time.

This morning my assistant minister, the member for Morayfield, along with the member for Noosa, will attend the Vietnam Veterans Day service in Anzac Square. As my assistant minister, the member

for Morayfield has been working with my department to investigate opportunities to acknowledge the service of our veterans, such as extending travel concessions to those veterans who do not currently have access to other age or disability concessions. Just as the Minister for Housing moved to expand income eligibility for the Bond Loan and Rental Grants programs to include Veterans' Affairs disability payments, my government is looking at ways to recognise and support the valued service of our veterans. I move—

That the House take note of this statement.