




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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BATTLE OF LONG TAN, 50TH ANNIVERSARY, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.37 am): I join with the Premier and all the other members of the House, I am sure, to take the opportunity to pause to commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day and the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. Today is a day of solemn reflection as we remember the devastating loss of life during the Vietnam War, when 60,000 young Australian soldiers set foot on enemy soil and more than 500 lost their lives fighting for freedom.

We also extend our deepest gratitude to those who returned home with deep physical and psychological scars, who continue to suffer for what they had seen and we thank their loved ones who suffered alongside them. I am sure that there are many in this House who know, have friends or who have family who have suffered and have stories to tell.

The Battle of Long Tan was significant as it was the first major conflict involving Australian troops in Vietnam in 1966 at a time when the actions in Vietnam—the war in Vietnam—still enjoyed strong public support in Australia. On this day 50 years ago, 105 young Australian men from D Company 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment and three New Zealanders were ambushed by over 2,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops at a rubber plantation not far from Long Tan. After fighting in torrential rain for almost four hours and in the most abhorrent and difficult conditions, our Australian troops were almost overrun and would have been if not for reinforcements that arrived just in time to save them. Those reinforcements themselves had to fight to get to the plantation. The odds were undoubtedly stacked against our troops. They were ill equipped and outnumbered at least 10 to one. Helicopter suppliers had to fly in ammunition so that they could continue their battle. However, despite extraordinary adversity, the Australians prevailed, marking one of the most extraordinary chapters in our military history.

The Battle of Long Tan was not our largest battle in Vietnam, but it was certainly one of the bloodiest. Eighteen young Australian men lost their lives and another 24 were injured during the ambush while hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers were also killed. Six Queenslanders lost their lives: Private Glenn Drabble, Private Kenneth Gant, Private Warren Mitchell, Private Douglas Salveron, Private Francis Topp and Private Maxwell Wales. We remember them today.

The Vietnam War was one of the longest wars Australia has ever been involved in and was the first war witnessed live on our television screens. For several years after, Australia's role in Vietnam ignited much reflection and debate on the merits of our country's involvement. Today is a day when we remember the people who served, not the conflict when they came back. Today is also Vietnam Veterans Day when we remember all Australians who served in that lengthy Vietnam conflict. Already this morning there has been a special ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra attended by the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, with Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove laying a wreath at the Stone of Remembrance alongside other Vietnam veterans.

Sir Peter Cosgrove, of course, served in Vietnam with 9RAR, commanding an infantry platoon for which he was awarded the Military Cross for his work during an assault on enemy positions.

Today it is also worth recognising the efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith, who, after leading his men in conflict, in the best traditions of the Army continued to fight for their recognition back here in Australia for another 50 years. Lieutenant Colonel Smith's long and dedicated fight led to a decision just eight days ago from the independent Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal that 10 soldiers who fought in the Battle of Long Tan be awarded a military honour or have their existing honour upgraded. To Lieutenant Colonel Smith we say, 'We salute you,' and to those 10 soldiers, 'We thank you.'

Although we cannot erase the past or the pain inflicted on those who lived it, we must use days like today as a timely reminder that freedom must not be taken for granted. As Queenslanders we are incredibly privileged to live peacefully in the greatest state in the greatest country in the world. Sometimes it is easy to take this for granted but, put simply, we must not.

The LNP recognises the ultimate sacrifice made by thousands of young Australians and their families to ensure we could enjoy the individual choice and liberties we have been afforded today and particularly the liberties that we are afforded as representatives in this place. We can never repay them for what they have given us, but we can make the most of these opportunities and ensure future generations enjoy the same freedoms which came at such a great price for so many.

On behalf of my fellow LNP members I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Vietnam veterans and urge all Queenslanders to take a moment today to reflect and to acknowledge those who came before us and who gave so much. Whilst on every Anzac Day we remember the service of Australians in all wars, it is again appropriate that we remember the survivors and the people who fought for us at Long Tan and all Vietnam veterans with the immortal words 'lest we forget'.