

28 August 2008

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Lindsay Electorate: Vietnam Veterans Day

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (9.37 a.m.) — I rise to pay a special tribute to the Vietnam veterans in my electorate, whose service and sacrifice were honoured at a special Vietnam Veterans Day ceremony at St Marys on Monday, 18 August. This year's service was organised jointly by the Vietnam Veterans Association St Marys outpost, the St Marys RSL Sub-Branch and the St Marys RSL Club, and I am pleased to say it was supported by a \$3,000 grant from the federal government.

Vietnam Veterans Day began as a commemoration of the Battle of Long Tan but has in recent years broadened to honour all of those Australians who served throughout the conflict. This year marked the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, which took place as part of the May 1968 North Vietnamese Tet Offensive. That battle claimed 25 Australian lives, all of whom were young and many of whom were sent to Vietnam as national servicemen.

Australia's contribution to the Vietnam conflict spanned 10 years, with more than 60,000 service personnel deployed. Of those, more than 500 did not return home to their families, and many of those who did brought with them the nightmares and tragedy of their experiences. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans and to publicly acknowledge not only their important contribution but also their sacrifices. Regardless of the range of political views about a conflict, there should always be support for the efforts of our Defence Force personnel, wherever they may be deployed, and proper recognition of the service of veterans to our country.

I would like to read into Hansard some of the words spoken at my local Vietnam Veterans Day commemoration by Mr Gary Fizzell, President of the Vietnam Veterans Association St Marys Outpost Sub-Branch, words which I think speak to the memory that we should be honouring:

I believe it is important that we remember these young veterans today by their name and age so that they are not just a statistic. They never had the opportunity to realise their dreams, to pursue their civilian occupation. They will never see their children go to school, or see them grow up, marry and provide grand children; they will never enjoy the advances in technology we have today; they will never go to another football game or experience a Grand Final and enjoy a beer and a pie; or go to the cricket at the SCG; they missed the spectacle of the Sydney Olympic Games. That was all taken away from them on a battlefield in Vietnam during some of the worst fighting of the Vietnam conflict in May 1968. Their young faces are forever etched in their families' and friends' memories, and they 'shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old'.

I would like to offer my congratulations to the Vietnam Veterans Association St Marys Outpost, the St Marys RSL Sub-Branch and the St Marys RSL Club for their commemorative service and for their ongoing contribution to our local community.