



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Baird, Corporal Cameron Stewart, MG

SPEECH

Wednesday, 26 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Kelly, Craig, MP

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Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (10:12): I rise to honour our fallen commando: Corporal Cameron Baird MG, who was tragically killed aged just 32 while serving with the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan. Corporal Cameron Baird was born in Burnie in Tasmania in 1981 and is survived by his partner, his parents and a brother. He was on his fifth tour of Afghanistan and had previously served in Iraq and Timor-Leste. Corporal Baird becomes the 40th Australian soldier killed in war in Afghanistan.

Corporal Baird was a member of the Special Operations Task Group and was from the 2nd Commando Regiment based at Holsworthy barracks in Sydney, New South Wales. Holsworthy barracks is, of course, in the electorate of Hughes, which I represent in this parliament. Our elite soldiers from Holsworthy have paid a very heavy price. With Corporal Baird becoming the 20th member of the Special Operations Task Group to fall in combat in Afghanistan, this tragedy is heartbreaking for our local community. One thing that is often overlooked is that we have many people in the local community of Hughes based around Holsworthy serving in Afghanistan. We have many children of serving soldiers going to our local schools. When the news comes through that there has been a death of one of our soldiers it hurts greatly across the entire community, especially in those schools. The uncertainty for those kids is something that we wish upon no child in our schools.

The loss of any one of our soldiers is always felt hard, but this tragedy also comes in the same week as his unit, the 2nd Commando Regiment, received the highest and rarest honour—receiving the first battle honour award since Vietnam. The Governor-General, Her Excellency the Hon. Quentin Bryce, presented the Eastern Shah Wali Kot battle honour to the 2nd Commando Regiment at Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy on Wednesday, 19 June this year, just three days before the tragic events we are now discussing took place.

The mates of Corporal Cameron Baird MG describe him as one of the most iconic figures in the regiment. General Hurley said of Corporal Baird:

In combat, and as a Team Commander, he was the man to watch and never happier than when the situation demanded decisive action and courage.

The ADF stated that 32-year-old Corporal Baird:

... died how he lived—at the front, giving it his all, without any indecision.

Corporal Baird had been awarded the following honours and awards: Medal for Gallantry; Australian Active Service Medal with Clasp East Timor, Clasp Iraq 2003, Clasp International Coalition Against Terrorism; Afghanistan Campaign Medal; Iraq Campaign Medal; Australian Service Medal with Clasp—Counter Terrorism/Special Recovery; Australian Defence Medal; United Nations Medal with Ribbon United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor; NATO non-article 5 Medal with Clasp ISAF and Multiple Tour Indicator; Infantry Combat Badge; and Returned from Active Service Badge. We have lost one of our best, and today this parliament grieves with his family and friends.

But his sacrifice was not in vain. Over the last decade our forces in Afghanistan have made many great achievements. Perhaps the greatest achievement is the education of Afghani girls. Before 2001, there were virtually no girls in Afghanistan receiving an education. Today, according to officials from the Afghan education ministry, there are almost 3,200,000 girls receiving an education. We realise that the dangers and the threats are still there—earlier this month we read how 100 girls going to school were taken to hospital when a Taliban Islamic radical attacked the school with poison gas. These are the conditions these girls face when they go to school. Winston Churchill said:

We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us.

Today, 3.2 million girls in Afghanistan are receiving an education, learning to read and write and to become productive members of their society because men such as Corporal Cameron Baird stood ready. Lest we forget.