



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**MOTIONS**

**Vietnam Veterans Awards**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 1 September 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 1 September 2014  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Snowdon, Warren, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr SNOWDON** (Lingiari) (11:38): I acknowledge the three previous speakers: the member for Hinkler, the member for Bruce and the member for Fisher. They have canvassed the argument pretty well, and I endorse the comments made by the member for Bruce, in particular, around issues to do with the nature of the proposed resolution.

I stand here today as probably one of the few people in this place—in fact, sadly, probably the only person in this place, except for the member for Berowra—who may have been in the position of being called up for the Vietnam War. The member for Berowra is a bit older than me, so he would not have been called up in that period. To the people of my generation, the Vietnam War and Australia's involvement between 1962 and 1972 was an everyday part of our teenage and early adult lives. It scarred us in many ways.

The member for Fisher alluded to the very poor response that Australia gave to its fighting soldiers, men and women, naval and Air Force as well as army, who contributed to the Vietnam War, came back and were treated so abysmally. It was and remains an indictment on that generation of Australians who saw fit to undermine the confidence of the Australian community in those soldiers. Whether or not they were there for the right reasons is irrelevant; the fact is they were wearing the Australian uniform, and were instructed and directed by an Australian government to act and fight on Australia's behalf. It is very important that we acknowledge that that is the principal position we should all adopt around our fighting men and women when they go overseas, regardless of who is in power.

I was very, very fortunate and I understand the issues to do with the Battle of Long Tan where there were 18 service personnel killed and 24 wounded when Delta Company, as the member for Fisher rightly pointed out, along with others of the 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, engaged a much larger force of North Vietnamese army regulars. This battle demonstrated the courage, determination, tenacity and leadership that has been the hallmark of Australian military history, and they faced overwhelming adversity.

I had the great privilege to be at Enoggera on 18 August 2011 when the unit citation for gallantry was awarded by the Governor-General to Delta Company 6RAR at a ceremony. It was an appropriate recognition of the fighting qualities of these men and the leadership that Harry Smith gave those men in that battle.

We are here today to again acknowledge and recognise the importance of contribution of those men but also, most importantly, to understand that there were some 60,000 Australians, including ground troops, Air Force and navy personnel, who served in Vietnam for over a decade from 1962. This is a similar number of Australian serving men and women who have served in the Middle East area of operations over the last decade or so. This has had a tremendous impact on the Australian community, yet they came home and were so miserably treated. Now we have these older men and women and their partners, some still wearing badly the scars of their treatment and of that war.

We did not have in place at the time, I don't think, the appropriate mechanisms to recognise and address the scars that they carried with them and that many continue to carry to this day. I think we are very fortunate that we now have a system within the Department of Veterans' Affairs and across Defence which recognises what happens to soldiers, men and women, Air Force, navy, when they are at war and the possible outcomes.

Today all governments—governments of both persuasions in this place, the current government included—are committed to ensuring that treatment endured by many Vietnam veterans after the war never happens again but, most importantly, that we continue to look after their interests now and into the future; that the service and sacrifice of those who wear Australia's uniform are never forgotten; and that there is a range of services available through the Australian government, including the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service—a service founded by Vietnam veterans—to provide counselling support for 24 hours a day. The capacity

for that organisation to provide the service for others has been expanded over recent times. I congratulate the government for doing that. (*Time expired*)

Debate adjourned.