



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



# **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

## **CONDOLENCES**

**Martin, Sapper James, Milosevic, Lance  
Corporal Stjepan, Poate, Private Robert**

## **SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 12 September 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Wednesday, 12 September 2012	<b>Source</b> House
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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Cobb, John, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr JOHN COBB** (Calare) (10:09): I say at the outset that I totally support everything said by the Chief Government Whip. A week or so ago I attended a dinner which was for a school reunion and when the apologies were read out one of those apologies was a very good friend of mine at school, Hugh Poate. We spent many years in the same house and the shooting team together. We had a lot of fun. We did a lot of silly things together. When the reason for his absence was given, it was that his son had died in Afghanistan, as one of the three killed by a rogue ANA sergeant. There is no decision we make in government and in parliament that you take as seriously as when you decide that you will commit Australian troops overseas into a war situation. I was part of the parliament and, indeed, the government who actually did that. I had never met Robbie. I rang Hugh as a very good friend and as somebody who had that responsibility. I realised Robbie must have been a pretty special person when Hugh just said, 'Do not be silly. Robbie was there because he wanted to be. He was there because he was a very good soldier and we are incredibly proud of him.' To be judgemental would have been a very forgivable and, in fact, natural thing for him to have been, but he and his family are just unbelievable. I said I would be honoured to speak on behalf of his family in the parliament about Private Robbie Poate and he accepted that, and what I am about to say now is what Private Robert Hugh Poate's family would want the parliament and the people of Australia to hear. His funeral is at one o'clock today in Canberra.

Private Robert Hugh Frederick Poate was one of three Australian soldiers killed by a rogue Afghan National Army soldier at a patrol post in the Baluchi Valley, Afghanistan, on Wednesday, 29 August 2012. He was just 23 years of age. Robbie was sitting down with his mates playing cards after a long day at work when he was killed. Five soldiers were hit with automatic gunfire from the rogue ANA soldier. Three died instantly, Robert being one of them. The other two who died were 39-year-old Lance Corporal Stjepan Milosevic from Penrith and 21-year-old Sapper James Martin from Perth. All five soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan in June with the 3RAR task group. The two soldiers who were wounded in the incident are expected to make a full recovery.

Robbie is survived by his parents, Hugh and Janny, and his sister, Nicola. Robert Poate spent 15 years at Canberra Grammar School, graduating from year 12 in 2007 after completing his final four years as a boarder in Blaxland House. He was a superb all-round athlete and was awarded House Colours and the Mark Sowell Award for Outdoor Education. He was captain of the Open Grade Third XV Rugby team where he played as five-eighth, and he regularly played with the Second XV. In his final year Robbie won the open 400-metre race at the school athletic carnival and came second in the cross-country. He was also an excellent swimmer and a cross-country skier. At school, Robert was a very level-headed boy with a mature moral compass far ahead of his age, but he also loved to let his hair down and have fun with his mates. This fun-loving part of him continued into his young adult life. He knew how to balance his life responsibly. A one-minute silence was observed in Robert's honour at the final of the 1st XV Canberra School Boys Rugby Union match last Sunday.

After leaving school, Robert worked in the building industry for a year then decided that he would like to be part of the Anzac legend and he enlisted in the Australian Army. After completing basic training at Kapooka, and infantry training at Singleton, he applied to join 6 Battalion RAR in Brisbane, and hoped to get into D Company of 6 Battalion. He asked for this posting because of the proud history of D Company, 6RAR at the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam. Of the 23 young men who applied, five were accepted, Robert being one of them. He had an enthusiastic quest for knowledge and completed an impressive list of Army training qualifications in a short period of time.

He went to Afghanistan as a commander of a Bushmaster armoured vehicle/troop carrier. In Afghanistan his senior staff had so much faith and confidence in his abilities that his vehicle became the lead vehicle in convoys and patrols. Robert would have had a very bright future with the Army had he survived.

In a statement issued by the Australian Defence Force, Rob was described as a wholly qualified soldier who was known for having outstanding leadership potential. Since enlisting in 2009, he had been awarded a number of

honours and had completed a promotion course for Corporal in 2011. Robert will be fondly remembered by his 'Brothers of choice' in 6RAR as a very popular and highly skilled soldier of the Australian Army.

Robert was proud of his family, his military service, his Canberra origins and his red hair, which he vehemently defended as being strawberry blonde. Robert was very gregarious. He loved to be with his mates and people loved to be around him. His nickname was Poate and he had a very quick and keen sense of humour with an incredible array of one-liners. Following Robert's death, his mates named his Bushmaster vehicle 'Poate' in his honour and this name is now painted on the side of his vehicle.

His father, Hugh Poate, said: 'Robert certainly did the Anzac legend of Australian military service very proud.' He loved the Army where he was performing his supreme duty for his country and, tragically, he made the supreme sacrifice in the process. He was a delightful boy who grew and matured into a truly wonderful young man. He possessed a gentle, caring nature and only saw the good in people. He would have made a wonderful husband and father. Hugh also said: 'Since Robert's death, our family has been overwhelmed by the support received from immediate family, friends, Canberra Grammar School and the Army. Since the day Robert enlisted, we have been made to feel part of the Army family and this was particularly so during his deployment in Afghanistan. It is not only Janny, Nicola and I who have lost a son and a brother, but the Army has also lost a son and a brother, and I know that the Army is grieving with us. I have seen it and felt it. The motto of 6 Battalion is "Brothers by choice". The brotherhood of these young men is something very special, which I have also personally felt. We are receiving wonderful support at this very difficult time from Robert's Army colleagues, his senior officers and other areas of the Australian Defence Force.'

Private Robert Poate has been posthumously awarded the following service honours and awards: Australian Active Service Medal with Clasp, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Australian Defence Medal, NATO Non-Article 5 Medal with Clasp ISAF and the Infantry Combat Badge. May he rest in peace, we will remember him.