

ADDRESS BY BRIGADIER S.L SMITH

TO

5TH BATTALION, THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT

COMMEMORATIVE AND DEDICATION SERVICE

AT

TWEED HEADS NSW

ON

1ST MARCH 2010

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, VETERANS OF THE 5TH BATTALION, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN.

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SERVED, SEEK TO UNDERSTAND THE STORY
OF THE 5TH BATTALION, THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT,
THROUGH OFFICIAL RECORDS.

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SERVED WILL READ:

- THAT THE BATTALION WAS RAISED FROM THE RANKS OF THE 1ST
BATTALION ON THIS DAY IN 1965¹.

-THAT THE BATTALION WAS ORGANISED AND REORGANISED
BETWEEN ACTIVE SERVICE IN SOUTH VIETNAM, EAST TIMOR AND
IRAQ.

BUT IT IS ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED THAT UNDERSTAND THE TRUE STORY OF THE 5TH BATTALION.

A STORY OF INSTINCTIVE COURAGE, FIERCE LOYALTY AND REMARKABLE INITIATIVE.

A STORY THAT IS ETCHED ON THE BATTALION ROLL OF HONOUR WITH THE NAMES OF FIFTY SOLDIERS KILLED IN ACTION.

A STORY THAT HAS TRANSCENDED TWO GENERATIONS.

A STORY PORTRAYED BY ORDINARY MEN WHOSE ACTIONS WERE EXTRAORDINARY.

THIS IS THE STORY THAT WE COMMEMORATE TODAY.

.....

IN HIS BOOK, VIETNAM TASK, ROBERT O'NEILL DESCRIBES THE ACTIONS OF THE FIRST GENERATION OF THE 5TH BATTALION DURING ITS TOUR OF DUTY IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN 1966/67.

HE REMARKS:

THE FEELING OF COMRADESHIP, OF MUTUAL DEPENDENCE, WHICH GREW UP WITHIN THE BATTALION WAS A MOST POWERFUL THING TO FEEL.²

THIS FIRST GENERATION, A MIXTURE OF REGULAR ARMY AND NATIONAL SERVICEMEN, SHAPED THE SPIRIT OF THE TIGER BATTALION, THROUGH EACH OF IT'S TOURS OF VIETNAM 1966/67 AND 1969/70.

THIS WAS ESPECIALLY EVIDENT IN THE ACTIONS OF CORPORAL NORM WOMAL ON THE STEEP SLOPES OF THE NUI THI VAI MOUNTAINS ON 17 OCTOBER 1966.

AS A SECTION COMMANDER WITH THE ANTI TANK PLATOON, CORPORAL WOMAL WAS DIRECTED TO CLEAR A VIET CONG AMBUSH IN A DEEP RE-ENTRANT.

WHEN HIS SECTION REACHED THE MIDDLE OF THE RE-ENTRANT, A SHOT RANG OUT AND CORPORAL WOMAL FELL, YELLING THAT HE HAD BEEN HIT.

A BULLET HAD PASSED THROUGH HIS NECK.

FROM THE POSITION WHERE HE FELL, CORPORAL WOMAL CONTINUED TO CONTROL THE COVERING FIRE OF HIS SECTION.

HE PROPPED HIMSELF ON ONE ELBOW IN AN EXPOSED POSITION TO INDICATE BY VOICE TO HIS PLATOON COMMANDER THE EXACT LOCATION OF THE ENEMY.

DESPITE THE BRAVE EFFORTS OF MANY, CORPORAL WOMAL DIED SHORTLY AFTER BEING EVACUATED FROM THE RE-ENTRANT.

FOR HIS ACTIONS, HE WAS AWARDED A MENTION IN DESPATCHES. HIS CITATION CORRECTLY REPORTS:

THE COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP DISPLAYED BY CORPORAL WOMAL UNDER FIRE WAS OF VERY HIGH ORDER AND AN INSPIRATION TO ALL MEMBERS OF HIS PLATOON.³

HERE THEN, WAS AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF THE INSTINCTIVE COURAGE, FIERCE LOYALTY AND REMARKABLE INITIATIVE THAT WOULD BECOME THE STORY OF THE 5TH BATTALION.

THERE WERE TO BE MANY OTHER EXAMPLES.

SUCH AS THE BRAVE DISPLAY OF LEADERSHIP AT THE BATTLE OF BINH BA ON 6 AND 7 JUN 1969, WHEN SOLDIERS AND JUNIOR NCOs STEPPED UP TO LEAD THE WAY TO A REMARKABLE VICTORY.

.....

IT IS TRUE TO SAY THAT THE FIRST GENERATION OF TIGERS WERE INSPIRED BY THE DEEDS OF THE 2ND/5TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION WHO ADOPTED 5 RAR AS THEIR SONS.

AND IT IS WONDERFUL TO SEE THAT GOLDEN GENERATION OF VETERANS REPRESENTED HERE TODAY BY MEMBERS OF THE 2ND/5TH BATTALION ASSOCIATION.

BUT IN THE SAME WAY, THE VIETNAM GENERATION OF TIGERS THEMSELVES INSPIRED THE NEXT GENERATION.

FROM 1973 UNTIL 2006, SOLDIERS OF THE 5TH/7TH BATTALION WERE MOTIVATED BY THE SPIRIT BEQUEATHED TO THEM BY THE VETERANS OF THE NUI THI VAI AND BINH BA.

THESE THIRTY THREE YEARS WERE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE BATTALION HISTORY.

DURING THEIR FIRST TOUR OF DUTY IN TIMOR IN 1999/2000, THE BATTALION DEMONSTRATED THAT A MECHANISED BATTALION WAS MORE CAPABLE IN A PEACE SUPPORT ENVIRONMENT THAN A STANDARD BATTALION.

USING THEIR M113 ARMoured PERSONNEL CARRIERS, THE BATTALION WAS ABLE TO RESPOND RAPIDLY AND PROPORTIONATELY TO PROTECT LOCAL TIMORESE AGAINST ATTACKS IN DILI, AND ALONG THE BORDER WITH INDONESIA.

THIS STRUCTURE BECAME THE MODEL FOR SUBSEQUENT BATTALION ROTATIONS IN TIMOR.

AND IT WAS A REFERENCE POINT WHEN THE 5TH/7TH BATTALION FORMED THE NUCLEUS OF THE ALMUTHANA TASK GROUP IN IRAQ IN 2005.

.....

IT IS ALSO TRUE TO SAY THAT THE BATTALION'S STORY HAS BEEN UNDERWRITTEN BY A WIDER BATTALION FAMILY.

FIRSTLY, THERE IS THE SUPPORT OF THE 5 RAR ASSOCIATION.

THIS IS PERSONIFIED IN THE COMPETITION FOR THE WARR/KHAN TROPHY PRESENTED ANNUALLY BY THE ASSOCIATION TO THE MOST OUTSTANDING JUNIOR LEADER IN THE BATTALION.

IN ADDITION, GATHERED HERE TODAY, ARE THE WIVES AND PARTNERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THOSE THAT HAVE SERVED.

MANY HAVE WAITED FOR A SOLDIER TO RETURN.

MANY HAVE NURSED A SOLDIER GRAPPLING WITH THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL LEGACIES FROM THEIR SERVICE.

MANY HAVE LOST A LOVED ONE.

BUT ALL HAVE ENHANCED THE STORY OF THE 5TH BATTALION, FOR WHICH WE ARE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL.

IT WAS THE RERAISING OF THE 5TH BATTALION IN DECEMBER 2006 AND SUBSEQUENT DEPLOYMENT TO IRAQ, WHICH PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS BATTALION FAMILY TO GROW AND OUR BATTALION STORY TO CONTINUE UNFOLDING.

.....

FOR THIS NEW GENERATION OF TIGERS, THE JUNGLE GREEN UNIFORM HAD BEEN REPLACED BY A DISRUPTIVE DESERT PATTERN UNIFORM.

THE 7.62MM SELF LOADING RIFLE REPLACED BY THE 5.56MM AUSTRALIAN STEYR WITH OPTIC AND NIGHT VISION SIGHTS.

THE M113 ARMOURED PERSONNEL CARRIER REPLACED BY THE BUSHMASTER PROTECTED MOBILITY VEHICLE.

THE THUMPING ROTAR SOUND OF THE HUEY HELICOPTER REPLACED BY THE HIGH PITCHED TURBINE NOISE OF THE BLACKHAWK.

ON 17 OCTOBER 2007, PRECISELY 41 YEARS SINCE THE ACTION BY CORPORAL WOMAL IN VIETNAM, CORPORAL ANTHONY GLYNN OF THE 5TH BATTALION FOUND HIMSELF IN THE LINE OF FIRE IN SOUTHERN IRAQ.

AS A SECTION COMMANDER WITH AN INFANTRY/ARMOUR PLATOON COMBAT TEAM, CORPORAL GLYNN WAS DIRECTED TO SECURE AN OBSERVATION POST NEAR TALIL AIRBASE.

AS HIS SECTION REACHED THE POST, THEY WERE FIRED UPON FROM A NEARBY BEDOUIN CAMP.

QUICKLY ASSESSING THE SITUATION, CORPORAL GLYNN ORDERED HIS SECTION TO HOLD THEIR FIRE AND SHOUTED TO THE BEDOUIN THAT HIS WAS A FRIENDLY FORCE.

SUDDENLY, A GROUP OF MILITIA WERE SEEN DEPARTING THE CAMP RELEASING A MORE INTENSE VOLLEY OF FIRE TOWARDS THE AUSTRALIANS.

PRIVATE ROBERT WIGGAN CRIED OUT THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A SERIOUS GUN SHOT WOUND IN THE UPPER LEFT SHOULDER.

IN THE NEXT THIRTY MINUTES, CORPORAL GLYNN TOOK CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. HE DIRECTED A CORDON AND SEARCH OF THE BEDOUIN CAMP, SECURED A HELICOPTER LANDING ZONE AND LED THE EVACUATION OF PRIVATE WIGGAN.

OBSERVING HIS ACTIONS, ONE AUSTRALIAN OFFICER COMMENTED:

HIS CLEAR THINKING AND SOLID JUDGEMENT IN A VERY COMPLEX SITUATION WAS AN INSPIRATION TO ALL RANKS.⁴

IT IS APPARENT FROM THIS ACTION THAT INSTINCTIVE COURAGE,
FIERCE LOYALTY AND REMARKABLE INITIATIVE REMAIN PART OF
THE MODERN STORY OF THE 5TH BATTALION.

.....

TODAY, TRAINING AT ROBERTSON BARRACKS DARWIN, 5 RAR IS NOT
LONG RETURNED FROM ACTIVE SERVICE IN TIMOR.

THEY HAVE BEEN WARNED FOR FURTHER SERVICE.

THIS TIME, POTENTIALLY AS THE NUCLEUS OF THE MENTOR TASK
FORCE IN AFGHANISTAN.

THERE WILL BE FRESH ACTIONS DEMONSTRATING COURAGE,
LOYALTY AND INITIATIVE.

UNDOUBTEDLY, THEY WILL ADD ANOTHER CHAPTER TO THE STORY
THAT IS THE 5TH BATTALION.

AND TODAY, AS WE COMMEMORATE THE RAISING OF THE
BATTALION,

AS WE REMEMBER ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT MADE THE SUPREME
SACRIFICE WHILE SERVING WITH THE BATTALION,

WE CANNOT HELP BUT FEEL THEM STANDING AMONG US,
WHISPERING TO THE CURRENT GENERATION OF TIGERS:

CONTINUE THE STORY OF OUR BATTALION.

A BATTALION OF AUSTRALIA,

A BATTALION OF AUSTRALIANS,

A BATTALION SERVING AUSTRALIA.

¹ McNeill, I, *To Long Tan – The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1959-1966*, Allen and Unwin, NSW, 1993, p. 74

² O'Neill, R, *Vietnam Task*, Cassell Australia, 1995 edition, p. 249

³ O'Neill, R, *Vietnam Task*, 1968, Cassell Australia, 1995 edition, p. 258

⁴ Bassingthwaite, A, *Interview*, 2010