

REVIEW OF TROOPS OF FIRST BATTALION

RAR, HOLSWORTHY, NSW

22 MARCH, 1968

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.

JOHN G. GORTON, MP

It must have been a thrill to any Australian who today saw you marching past and demonstrating the discipline, the training and the ability which you have learnt.

I suspect, unless things have changed very considerably since the time I once wore uniform, this has been the result of some considerable practice, of some considerable rehearsals. And again I suspect, unless things have changed, that sometimes these practices and those rehearsals were a little dreary. But the end result has been, as the end result of hard work and application must always be, that you have today put on for all of us here a parade which I do not believe would have been bettered by any body of armed men from any country in the world.

You marched past -- half of you, so I am informed, Regular soldiers, half of you National Servicemen, and completely indistinguishable the one from the other as you will in the future grow even less distinguishable, if that is possible.

A Regular soldier or National Serviceman is now, and will be in the future, an Australian soldier and there is, and will be, no difference between them. You will be going because your Government and your country thinks it right, and for the safety of our nation that this should happen, to fight some considerable distance away, in terms of miles, from Australia, but no great distance away in terms of time. You have been asked to go, or you have been told to go, because in our judgment it is to the safety of all small nations to do what they can to see that other small nations are not allowed to be overrun by force, or by subversion, or by terrorism, but should have the chance to retain for themselves the opportunity to make a choice to build the kind of life that the Australian people have an opportunity to choose.

You will have before you, because this is a part of all soldiering, many times of boredom, of heat, of uncomfortable conditions, of tension, of strain, and I believe of fear, because I think that most men in battle feel but conquer fear. This will be punctuated by periods of action, but whether in action or in training, I would like you to know this. No matter what some columnists from time to time may indicate in what they write; no matter what attitude some members of legislature may from time to time indicate from what they say, your Government believes that you are serving this nation in the highest way in which it can be served and will stand behind you and guard your good name to the end to the best of its ability. And behind that, and far more important than that, 90 per cent of the Australian people are proud of how you bear yourselves, are proud of what you are doing, in some cases what you have done and what you will do. Never for a moment think that this nation and its people are not behind you and backing you, because they are.

I don't want to keep you standing there for long. I will just conclude by saying this.

Your grandfathers went to France and to Gallipoli, not for themselves to try and see that aggression did not succeed, but to help to see aggression didn't succeed. And for a while they were successful.

Your fathers went to the four corners of the world to try and see that that great attack on human dignity made at that time by Nazi Germany would not succeed, and they smashed that attack. You are carrying on in that tradition.

No man can say, and no generation can say, what I do now will, for all the future, make life better. But a man can say and a generation can say, what I do now I believe will make it more likely that in the future, life will be better for the people of the world. And when you come back, and when you leave the Army, you will have this to retain for the rest of your lives and nothing can take it away, and nothing can tarnish it. You can say I have been one of a regiment, I have taken my place in that regiment, I have borne myself as a brave and honourable man should. I have taken the risks that one must take. I have accepted that and I have served my country well.

Good luck to you all.

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