



PRESENTATION OF PRESIDENTIAL UNIT
CITATION TO THE SIXTH BATTALION, RAR

TOWNSVILLE, QLD.

18 AUGUST 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

The award which I have just presented on behalf of the President of the United States, and the streamer which I have just attached to the colours as a result of that award, is one which is not lightly given, and one which is rarely given outside the Armed Services of the United States itself.

It has perhaps a special significance, something different from the awards which we in the tradition of the British and Australian armies give for service in the field, for it is an award not to an individual for some specific act of bravery, but to a team, to a unit, who together supporting each other in full comradeship, won the right to obtain the award.

You have heard the words of the citation itself, and I want you to form in your minds, those of you who were not there - and I know that a number to whom I speak were there - I want you to form in your minds the pictures that lie behind the words. The picture of a Company in the green gloom of a rubber plantation in Viet Nam, with tropic rain pouring down, curtaining the distance, causing discomfort to the individual, turning the ground underfoot into mud and into morass. And to imagine that Company pushing out from the ruins of a derelict village called Long Tan, and suddenly in those circumstances being attacked and engaged without warning with a storm of small arms, machine gun and mortar fire.

To those who thus launched this attack on the company, with its platoons dispersed, it must have seemed as if the stage was set for another classical exposition of guerrilla warfare as written by the enemy's General Giap. For here was a small force by itself, able to be engaged with overwhelming battalion strength by the enemy, and encircled on three sides already, front and both flanks, shortly to be completely encircled from the rear as well. So it must have seemed that here again was a situation where one small force would be engaged by overwhelming enemy forces properly entrenched, properly prepared, and that that small force would be overrun, decimated and destroyed.

But it did not turn out that way. Instead was a coolness which must reflect the greatest credit on the unit, on the training the unit received, and on the characters of those - more than half of whom were National Servicemen - who made up the unit. The attack was received, the perimeter was formed; the attack was repulsed and repulsed until finally as other companies came to the assistance of "D" Company, and as such succour as could be given from the glowering skies was dropped from helicopters, finally the enemy withdrew, with over 200 dead, plus over 500 wounded. This in itself is a significant engagement, but over and above that, I think it has this significance.

It adds to the rich fabric of tradition of the Australian Army which can look back over the years to those engagements in the First and Second World War, and in Korea (where indeed another Presidential Unit Citation was won by Australians). Such initiative, such courage, such coolness, such steadfastness contributes to a tradition which, should the time come, will sustain the Army of the future in all its parts - because that is what traditions built by armed forces do.

It would be presumptuous of me, I think, to congratulate those men in "D" Company now. Some of them were not in "D" Company then, but they can wear this Presidential Citation while they serve in the Company. Those who were in "D" Company on that day will be able to wear this proud insignia as long as they serve in the Army and wherever they serve.

I merely wish to express, speaking I believe for the Australian nation, the admiration that we have for what then was done, and the belief we have that what was done will, should need recur, be repeated. It is my deep conviction that this addition to the annals of Australian arms will keep them furbished, bright and keen in the years ahead of this nation. And that is of great significance, for until the millennium arrives, we must rely, in the ultimate, on those men and women of Australia, coming from civilian pursuits, trained by those who give their lives to the Army, ready when necessary to defend this country.

That is all I wish to say to you, concluding with thanks from Australians for what you have done.
