

Address by MAJGEN David Morrison at 9 RAR Memorial Service

Soldiers past and present, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to begin by thanking the 9 RAR Association for inviting me to provide this memorial address on the 42nd Birthday of the formation of the Battalion, in Adelaide in 1967. It is a wonderful gesture to the Morrison family and, of course to Alby. He would have been very proud and I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity.

I am very conscious of the fact that I have no first hand experience of the Battalion's operations in SVN in 1969, but I can assure you that 9 RAR has played a role in my life, and indeed in the lives of all those who remained behind when the Battalion deployed in November of 1968. The absence of a father, and for Mum a husband is a very clear memory. It is one that is being experienced now by many families whose fathers and mothers, sons and daughters are serving in various operational theatres today.

As a soldier for over thirty years I have met many who served in the unit and who continued their military careers on their return to Australia. Many of them are here today, and I can assure you that my first encounter, as a cadet at Portsea in 1979, with the then Major Vickery, the senior instructor of the field wing, was a vivid and not entirely comfortable experience. I would like to acknowledge the award of an OAM that Brian received, largely for his care of veterans, in the Queen's Birthday honours list this year. I was lucky enough to be there with Carol and the Vickery daughters when the award was conferred.

But most of all, 9 RAR and the wonderful spirit of the Association that is so evident today, as it has been for over forty years, has been a feature of my life. The spirit of those who fought in SVN, the care and interest shown for those who shared that experience, and of course, the memory of those who did not return, is a tangible part of my life and I wear my father's Battalion tie today with real pride.

Dad never spoke much about what happened during 1969 after he returned to Australia. His pride in 9 RAR was palpable but he didn't dwell on the details. Maybe I was a bit too young initially and, by the time I had joined the Army, years had passed and he may have felt that it was not relevant to my particular circumstances. It was through books that I learned about operations such as King Hit One and King Hit two where the Battalion's first fatality, Ron Gaffney, occurred. Operations such as Goodwood where in the ferocity of the fighting against 274 VC Regiment thirteen soldiers lost their lives. Operations such as Federal where Ted Chitman won his MC, or Jack where Peter Cosgrove won his. Operations where during the course of a bloody and extraordinarily demanding year, 7 Military Medals were to be won, 11 officers and soldiers were to be mentioned in dispatches and above all of that thirty five men of the Battalion were to lose their lives for a Country that was not as aware of the loss and sacrifice as it should have been.

However, I think the real reason that Dad didn't speak much of was took place in SVN in 1969 was that it was so deeply personal that it wasn't for easy sharing. The cathartic nature of war, the indelible mark it leaves on those who experience it and the life long memories formed by it,

creates a special bond between those who live through it. It is a bond that does not seek to exclude others; there is great testament to that today with loved ones and friends of the men of the Battalion who are here to share this reunion - but some of what took place in that momentous year will forever remain the property only of those who were there.

And that is as it should be. The sacrifice and the courage shown by 9 RAR is part of the fabric of this great institution, the Australian Army. The names on the role of honour mark the passing of men who “died with their faces to the foe”. They are remembered here in a memorial service that builds on the private grief of those who knew them as fathers, sons, brothers and mates. Some memories are not for easy sharing, but ceremonies such as this are events where the private and communal remembrance honour their sacrifice and affirm our humanity.

I speak to many serving soldiers as the Forces Commander. I often remind them of the legacy left by those soldiers who have served before them. I ask them to think of the legacy that they will leave, through their service and their commitment. I can proudly say to this audience, that the legacy left by those who served with 9 RAR in 1968 and 1969 continues to guide this generation of Australians who proudly serve this great nation.

Duty First - Lest we forget.