

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
INVESTITURE OF MAJOR GEOFF KENDALL MG (RETD) (MEDAL OF GALLANTRY)
AND FLIGHT LIEUTENANT CLIFFORD DOHLE DSM (HIS WIDOW, MRS JOAN DOHLE
ON HIS BEHALF) (DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL)
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
17 AUGUST 2010

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome.

I feel privileged to join you today in a ceremony that observes two fine Australians, and that, hereafter, will shine eternal light on their contribution.

This is an important day in the life and history of two men and their families, and in the life and history of our nation.

We are here to acknowledge the gallant and distinguished actions of two fine men:

Australian veterans of the Vietnam War; a platoon commander of 6th Battalion's Delta Company; and an Iroquois captain of Number 9 Squadron.

actions performed in defence of enemy assault

on a single day 44 years ago

in the thick of a rubber plantation near Long Tan

and in the wash of relentless, hammering rain that fell into the darkness.

We acknowledge:

their discipline, training and skill
their stamina and selflessness
their incisive judgment
their dedication to the task and allegiance to their orders.

We acknowledge:

their leadership
their teamwork and solidarity
their courage
their humanity - to one another and their enemy.

All of this in a single day,

yet a day that was the sum of two young lives

and a flame and foundation for their future making.

Major Geoff Kendall,

and Mrs Joan Dohle, for your beloved husband, Flight Lieutenant Clifford Dohle:

we acknowledge your actions on that day, the 18th of August 1966

and we honour your character, values and way of living that enabled those actions,

and have guided and enriched your lives and countless others since.

You will say that you were trained to do a job, and you did it.

That's certainly true, in part.

But you could never have known the job that was ahead of you that day.

So you did the job you knew and you pushed on and did another:

one you rallied every strand of yourself for,

out there in the jungle, under fire, in the rain and mud, alongside your men,

18 of whom were killed, 24 wounded
no time for reflection,

and only a narrow window for action that would make a difference.

And you did make a difference.

With your men, you overwhelmed the enemy that day - those who survived, retreated.

With your fellow Australian servicemen and women, you helped to bring stability and security to Phuoc Tuy province.

You gave back more than you took - in your care and compassion for the local people and in tending to the wounds of the enemy.

You looked after your men - your mates, our Vets - on the battlefield and at home.

You have shown Australians exemplary conduct in war, and in life.

And you have personally suffered.

Your medals - the Medal of Gallantry, the Distinguished Service Medal - affirm and cherish these things, long known and long held.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell chance of circumstance
I have not cried or winced aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed…

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:
The captain of my soul.

Major Geoff Kendall,

and Flight Lieutenant Clifford Dohle,

on behalf of all Australians, I salute you.