

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**PARADE AND PRESENTATION OF THE UNIT CITATION FOR GALLANTRY TO THE 1
SQUADRON GROUP, SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT**
CAMPBELL BARRACKS, PERTH
9 JUNE 2004

As Commander-in-Chief of the ADF and a very proud Honorary Colonel of the SASR, it's a great pleasure to take part in this special occasion to acknowledge the splendid battle record of the Regiment in Iraq, East Timor and Afghanistan.

I'd like to commend all those on Parade, particularly the smartly turned-out members of the Regiment, whose drill and bearing were quite excellent, and, as always, the Army band.

From a ceremonial point of view, we've broken new ground today.

We've seen the presentation of the first-ever Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry - to 1 Squadron for its outstanding actions in Iraq.

And it's been the first occasion on which streamers have been presented - to the Regiment and 3 Squadron.

It's appropriate that those streamers have been affixed to the Army Banner - which itself is a symbol of sacrifice, loyalty and devotion to duty in the service of our country.

Ladies and gentlemen.

From a personal perspective, given my 46 years of involvement with the SAS, one of the strongest themes in the development of this Regiment has been change.

Change in precision weaponry, global communications, capacity and the ability to see, move and fight 24 hours a day.

Amid all this technological change, however, there's one thing, one vital element of the Regiment, that hasn't changed.

And that is the man - the individual.

In 2004, the SASR soldier continues to demonstrate the personal and professional qualities that have made this Regiment so successful and so highly regarded worldwide.

Just some of these personal traits include high intelligence, initiative to a marked degree, physical and moral courage, superb fitness, personal and group discipline, composure under pressure, and an unceasing desire to find more effective and efficient ways of carrying out diverse tasks in a wide variety of operational situations, mostly at very short notice.

These unchanging but finely honed characteristics of the individual soldier are what the Regiment is all about.

Put simply, the soldier personifies the "special" in Special Air Service.

And we should make no mistake - this Regiment is special in every meaning of the word.

It is why the Regiment has, over the years, performed with such distinction in operational locations as varied as Borneo, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bougainville, East Timor, the Sydney Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Queensland.

Today, however, we acknowledge the latest chapter in a wonderful military history - first, the award of the Unit Citation for Gallantry to 1 Squadron for the extraordinary bravery it showed in Iraq in March and April last year as a key component of Operation Falconer.

From the very first night of conflict in Iraq, 1 Squadron conducted complex, high-risk insertions into Iraq and rapidly came to dominate its area of operations.

Its engagement in 13 major contacts within the first five days of the war, and another 16 over the next three weeks, sent a strong, clear message to the Iraqi leadership and military that they had lost control of the western desert.

It consistently outsmarted, outfought and, ultimately, overwhelmed its enemy.

Among its most noteworthy achievements, the Squadron captured, secured and cleared the Al Asad Air Base - the largest and, arguably, most prized military facility in western Iraq.

It made a significant contribution to the comprehensive success of coalition forces in Iraq, and some of its individual members were highly decorated.

So, well done and well deserved, 1 Squadron!

In regard to the two Meritorious Unit Citations, I'd like to acknowledge, firstly, 3 Squadron Group for its sustained, outstanding service in East Timor in 1999.

The sub-unit provided valuable support for the initial lodgement of forces into Dili, and it cleared and secured that city's port.

Further showing its flexibility, 3 Squadron supported Xanana Gusmao on his return to East Timor, helped secure the western border region, and conducted numerous humanitarian and medical aid activities.

It also dealt quickly and effectively with the militia opposition.

So, well done, 3 Squadron, and to those who won individual awards.

Finally, I'd like to commend the SAS Task Group, namely the Regiment, for its award of the Meritorious Unit Citation for its splendid service in Afghanistan in 2002 in support of the international fight against terrorism.

The group established itself in the heat and bitter cold of Afghanistan as a formidable and versatile force that brought valuable capabilities and a uniquely Australian brand of professionalism to the battlefield.

SAS troops operated in a harsh geographical environment and amid high levels of threat, especially during a 19-day special reconnaissance mission in the Helmand Valley.

It was during this mission that Sergeant Andrew Russell was tragically killed in a mine accident.

I know you all join me today in remembering Sergeant Russell and his family.

He was a shining example of the very best of what the SAS is all about.

In a subsequent mission, the intimate direction of Close Air Support missions by SASR patrols saved the lives of US soldiers under heavy enemy fire following two US Army helicopter crashes.

The Regiment, including a highly competent 2 Squadron, in all facets of command, operations and logistic support performed exceptionally in Afghanistan, a fact publicly recognised by the President of the United States at the White House in March 2002.

Ladies and gentlemen.

As you may have noted, the citations awarded cover operations in three very different environments.

Today, military operations are complex and dynamic, where many of the old paradigms no longer apply and the lines of delineation are frequently blurred.

They require a wide range of skills, flexibility and, increasingly, a deftness of touch.

Modern SAS soldiers, for example, may need to deal with a hostage-like situation in a counter-terrorist action, a "hearts-and-mind" initiative or a conventional high-intensity battlefield, possibly all in the same week.

In each case, the weakest link, particularly through indiscipline, may well lose the hearts and minds of the people both in-country and at home, and, thus, put at risk the success of the whole campaign.

Given this situation, it's very heartening to see that our SAS soldiers have continued to conduct themselves with true professionalism and splendid self-control.

The SAS Regiment is grounded in superb, insightful leadership at every level of command - and in families that support their husbands and fathers with pride, love and understanding.

And it's also grounded in a magnificent training system that ensures that soldiers are well equipped to handle the constant and evolving demands placed on them.

Ladies and gentlemen.

This Regiment as a whole, and the individual Squadrons, have done Australia proud, bringing enormous credit on themselves and the Australian Defence Force.

Today's citations are the culmination of decades of imaginative training, superb leadership at all levels and sustained performance by troopers, NCOs and officers.

But the citations are also an implicit recognition of those who supported the three operations from behind the front line and those who, in earlier years, helped develop the spirit, initiative and camaraderie that is the SAS today.

To everyone associated with the award of these well-deserved citations, let me offer my sincere congratulations.

To Lieutenant Colonel Burr and the Regiment, hold fast to your standards, look after one another and your families, and every good wish for the future.

Thank you.