

CONDOLENCES

Lieutenant Michael Kenneth Housdan Fussell

[Mr ROBERT](#) (Fadden) (4.58 p.m.)—I rise to honour Lieutenant Michael Fussell, the 25-year-old commando serving with the 4th Battalion in the Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) who gave his life whilst serving the nation in Afghanistan, in the southern province of Oruzgan during a night-time offensive operation.

He was born in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, on 17 November 1983 and enlisted in the Australian Army in January 2002, straight to the Australian Defence Force Academy—and having been there, I certainly know the shocks of arriving there at that time of year. He completed a Bachelor of Arts and was a keen sportsman. I believe he captained the rugby team. He graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, having been in Gallipoli Company, in 2005 and was posted of course to the 'A' Field Battery, 4th Field Regiment as part of the Royal Australian Artillery. During his time at 'A' Field Battery he qualified as a paratrooper, subsequently deploying to East Timor on Operation Astute in 2006 and 2007.

He was subsequently posted to the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) in January 2008 as the JTAC, the joint terminal attack controller. Lieutenant Fussell's military decorations include the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp, International Campaign against Terrorism; the Afghanistan Campaign Medal; the Australian Service Medal with clasp, Timor-Leste; and the Australian Defence Medal.

Michael leaves behind two loving parents, Ken and Madeline, his younger brother, Daniel, and two young foster sisters, Nikki and Nyah. His brother Daniel, incidentally, is a lieutenant with the 1st Field Regiment of the Royal Australian Artillery based in Brisbane. Michael's parents and family should be very proud of their warrior son and brother. He died a soldier's death. Lieutenant Fussell was the first officer since Vietnam and the first graduate of the Australian Defence Force Academy to be killed on active service.

Michael fought and died with a great battalion from a great regiment. The decision to raise the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was actually made in 1963. It was officially raised on 1 February 1964 at Woodside in South Australia, which was the first time a regular infantry battalion had been raised on Australian soil. Of note, the then Governor-General announced that the 4th Battalion assault pioneer platoon sergeant would be the only soldier in the Australian Army permitted to wear a beard. In October 1965 the 4th Battalion joined the 28th Commonwealth Independent Brigade Group at Terendak camp in Malaysia as part of confrontation.

In 1968, on 13 May, an advance party from the battalion moved by air to South Vietnam and the rest of the battalion followed on board the HMAS *Sydney*, relieving the 2nd Battalion on 21 June. The battalion would commence its second tour of Vietnam from May to December 1971. On 18 August 1971 Prime Minister McMahon announced the withdrawal of troops by Christmas, and in December '71 the Battalion less Delta Company and 1 Troop B Squadron 3 Cav returned to Townsville, again on board the *Sydney*. Delta Company remained at Vung Tau until March 1972.

In August 1973, due to the reorganisation of the Army and the cessation of national service, the 2nd and the 4th battalions were linked to form 2/4 RAR. The 2nd/4th returned from deployment on Operation Tamar to Rwanda in 1994 and they were delinked on 1 February 1995, with the 4th Battalion moving to Holsworthy. A decision was made in 1996 to convert 4RAR to a special forces unit within the Royal Australian Regiment and on 1 February 1997 the battalion was renamed the 4RAR (Commando).

Today the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, who Michael so proudly served with, is the commando battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment and one of the three combat capable groups within Australian Special Operations Command. Many descendants of the original members of the battalion are currently serving or have served in the battalion, and those who have served in the Royal Australian Regiment know that to serve is to serve proudly—as Michael Fussell certainly did.

I am especially proud to relay to the House this afternoon that over 150 Helensvale State School year 7 students and one year 6 student in my electorate of Fadden have been sending and are continuing to send letters to the officers and soldiers of the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment while they are serving overseas. The school liaison officer, Mrs Mary Anne White states that many of the letters are heartfelt and emotional, indicative of a score that cares and reaches out to its community. Let me conclude this speech in the condolence motion for Lieutenant Fussell by reading a letter written by Jake Gould from class 7W, Mrs White's class at Helensvale State High School in my electorate. This letter, like the other 150 letters, was sent to men of the fighting fourth, the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment in Afghanistan. The letter says:

Dear soldier,

My name is Jake but my friends call me Big Red which is weird because I'm not big and my hair is brown with blond bits. I think it's because of my big muscles, (narr I'm kidding my muscles aren't that big). This year I'm in year 7 and I'm actually enjoying it. The big year 7 test was on and it was a bit hard but I think I pulled it off.

If there's 3 things I enjoy doing they would have to be skate park, hanging with friends and rugby league and union. The skate park is so much fun on bike and scooter. I'm getting a bike soon. It will be the same as Barry's also known as Ryan. Ryan is my best friend (one of a million). Ryan is a good friend with a nickname Barry.

My other three best friends are Spasm, Big Blue and Timmy. Spasm's real name is Cam and Big Blue is Dean. Timmy doesn't have a nickname.

Anyway, I would like to hear the life of an army man. What are the grounds like? Because I can picture them quite hilly. When you get told to go out are you scared? I think that would be one of the most scariest things you could do that's why I truly look up to you guys. What type of weapons do you use and are they hard to fire? I don't know if you have kids of your own but if you do you should know that they would think the world of you. Well if my Dad was over there that is how I would think.

I don't know how you feel but if you get time to one day, could you please reply to this. Because that would mean the world to me.

I do not know which soldier of the 4th Battalion in Afghanistan received Jake Gould's letter. But, knowing soldiers as I do—and I am looking across at the member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly, who also knows soldiers—I would know that Lieutenant Fussell would have read one of the letters from Helensvale State School, and I know it would have brought him enormous comfort, as heartfelt letters always do. The year 7 students of Helensvale State School will never forget the men of 4th Battalion, RAR. They will never forget Lieutenant Fussell, who would have read one of their letters, and nor will this grateful nation.