



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

VIETNAM SERVICEMEN

Pilot Officer Robert Carver

SPEECH

Wednesday, 19 August 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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<p>Date Wednesday, 19 August 2009 Page 8445 Questioner Speaker Robert, Stuart, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (11.23 am)—‘When you go home, tell them of us and say, “For your tomorrow, we gave our today.”’ That is a simple inscription on a tombstone in Gallipoli. It is reflective of over 100,000 of our country men and women who lie buried on foreign soil, having given their lives in defence of the freedom that we enjoy so passionately today. One of those 100,000 is one of my cousins, Lieutenant Carthew, who died on 7 August 1915 with the 8th Light Horse Regiment, when he led his men to charge at the Nek. I have stood at the Nek, on the Gallipoli Peninsula, as it overlooks the beautiful Anzac Cove—and turning around you can see Suvla Bay—and I have wondered where he lay. He was buried where he fell, with no marked grave, as were many of the 8th Light Horse and the accompanying 10th Light Horse when they charged that fateful day over an area a few tennis courts in width. He was buried where he fell, with no marker, no grave to know of.

I have read his diaries and listened to his mother speak from those pages. She often wondered where her boy lay. She writes that, at the literal minute Lieutenant Carthew died at the Nek, his dog, the family dog, ran away and disappeared. She did not know why until three days later, when the historian CEW Bean wrote of the historic charge of the 8th and 10th Light Horse on that morning of 7 August, and she realised that was the time.

There are so many things we cannot explain in the tragedy of combat and the fiery battle of war. But one thing that can be explained is that wherever possible we must seek to bring our fallen home. Families give their loved ones to fight in the name of freedom, to defend the land they passionately love, with the expectation and the hope that their family will come home but, if they do not, that there will be the opportunity to bring their boy or their daughter home to bury them in the land they love.

In 1987, 22 years ago, I spoke about those missing in Vietnam. I spoke about Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver and I spoke about the soldiers, the infantrymen, who were missing, and the desire that they should come home to be buried in the land they loved. So it is with great pride that we reflect on what Pilot Officer Robert Carver and Flying Officer Michael Herbert have done. Stationed at Phan Rang in South Vietnam, they were sent on a bombing mission over Da Nang on 3 November 1970. At about 2022 hours Carver radioed Magpie Base that he had dropped his bomb load from the Canberra bomber from 7,000 metres. At 2215 hours radio contact was lost with the aircraft, and it subsequently failed to return to base.

With no eyes to witness, there was varied opinion, of course, on their fate. One popular theory is that a Vietcong heat-seeking missile tracked them down and sent the No. 2 Squadron bomber down into the dense jungle. We will never know exactly how that aircraft crashed but we do know that two warriors were lost that night. Search teams tried to locate Carver and Herbert and were clearly unsuccessful. It was never known for sure if they survived the crash, yet with a descent from such altitude into the jungle it was ‘missing in action, presumed dead’.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert was 24 years old when that Canberra bomber was lost. He was the pilot of Magpie 91 and a veteran of 198 operational sorties over Vietnam. He joined the squadron in February 1970 and was from Glenelg in South Australia. Pilot Officer Robert Carver was also just 24 years old. He was the navigator of Magpie 91 and had conducted 33 sorties in Vietnam. He joined in September 1970 and was from Toowoomba in Queensland. This morning in this House I pass on the condolences of the member for Groom, who represents Toowoomba, the Hon. Ian Macfarlane. He is away, unfortunately, and unable to speak in the House today. But he would want me to speak fondly of these two men, including Pilot Officer Carver from Toowoomba who, at such a young age, went to fight for our freedom’s name.

Greg Combet, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, says that their remains were found in an extremely remote area of Vietnam near the Laotian border. It is a testimony to the work done by the previous government and, indeed, this government, and I also acknowledge Operation Aussies Home—particularly Jim Bourke—for their resolute determination to ensure our warriors come home.

The very first bomber to go down in the Korean War was piloted by Squadron Leader Graham Strout, my mother’s cousin. The opportunity to recover Squadron Leader Strout’s body and to see the wreckage brought

great comfort to my family. I can only imagine the difficulty for the families of Pilot Officer Carver and Flying Officer Michael Herbert in not knowing for so many years. Now, 39 years later, we can bring two warriors home and we can bury them with the honours that befit them.

It will only ever be a small gesture by a nation, but it is a gesture that stands up tall and says thank you: 'Thank you for your service that came before self. Thank you for your sacrifice that came before comfort. Thank you for your endurance in the face of an enemy that came before your personal freedom.' We owe our service men and women and, indeed, our veterans a great debt of gratitude that in many ways we will never be able to repay. But we can stand in this place at this time and on behalf of a very grateful nation we can say thank you. We can proudly say, 'We did not leave our fallen soldiers and airmen; we sought to recover them.' Even though it may have taken 39 long years, we this year bring home the last two of our fallen warriors, as a nation should do for its heroes.