

**MORNING TEA AND PRESENTATION OF THE
VIETNAM LOGISTIC AND SUPPORT MEDAL
MS SUZANNE ORTUSO
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE DRAWING ROOM, MONDAY 24 JUNE 2024**

Good morning, everyone. I welcome you all to Government House for the presentation of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal to Suzanne Ortuso.

May I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters.

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. After 11 years of operational commitment, Australia's involvement was ended by proclamation by then Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck on 11 January 1973.

During that commitment, some 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam, and 523, including 17 Tasmanians, were killed.

It is less well known that entertainers travelled to Vietnam to provide some respite for our soldiers serving year-long rotations. Those entertainers often travelled without military escort. They were mostly left alone by the Viet-Cong, who were aware that they were mostly young and female.

However, they were not immune from the sounds and sights of battle. Whether that was machine gun fire while moving along roads or mortar fire while performing in some of the forward operating bases, there was ever-present danger to the performers.

In the case of 'The Pussycats', that danger was realised during the Tet offensive in 1968. After performing some 200 concerts and traveling across Vietnam in jeeps, helicopters and trucks, the band was reported missing. This was amongst

the confusion of the series of significant attacks by Viet-Vong and North Vietnamese Army units.

With flights in and out of Saigon cancelled, the band members were joined by members of 'The Vamps.' They all stayed at a villa, where the fighting was taking place. Reports on the radio only made the groups more worried. Later, the girls heard sirens, then machine gun fire. They learned that some Viet-Cong had approached the villa and that five had been killed.

When the fighting eased, they were moved to a hotel. Then they were called and advised that a flight was leaving in half an hour. They grabbed what they could and went to the airport. Two of 'The Pussycats' came home that day. Two others, Suzanne Lutge and Marilyn Ockwell, returned to Australia on a later plane.

It is an honour for me to now present this Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal to one of the members of 'The Pussycats', Ms Suzanne Ortuso.

The Medal was established in 1993 to recognise people who served in Vietnam for short periods and who had not otherwise been recognised.

My congratulations to Suzanne. I am sure that you will remember the impact of your work with the band in service of your country during the Vietnam War. You should wear your medal with pride.