

**RECEPTION TO MARK THE 55th REUNION OF THE 1969 GRADUATING
CLASS OF THE ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE, DUNTRON
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2024**

Good evening. I warmly welcome you all to Government House to celebrate the 55th anniversary of your graduation from the Royal Military College, Duntroon. We also celebrate your shared experiences and the legacy of your class.

May I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

In 1966, you entered the Royal Military College as 104 cadets. Your graduation class in 1969 had 54 of you, all ready to serve. Many of you experienced Australia's involvement in Vietnam. You all exemplified the commitment and courage for which Duntroon graduates are renowned. We are fortunate to have 27 of you here. We honour the memory of those who have passed or cannot join us.

May I reflect on your time at Duntroon and key themes defining your legacy.

Firstly, your class faced significant challenges during your years at Duntroon. A widespread and longstanding culture of bullying at the College was uncovered during your graduation year. Measures taken to address the bullying issues were controversial but necessary. Your class was at the forefront of systemic reform, which forged a sense of unity and resilience among you. You were at the forefront of long-overdue change to shape a better Duntroon and its students and graduates.

In your own words, your class said: "We as a class this year were buffeted by the winds of change. Yet we look back on the past four years with much pleasure and few regrets. It is the wish of this class to extend our hopes to the Corps for a successful and united future." ¹

¹ 1969 Journal of the Royal Military College of Australia, p31. Schlyder (Ed)

Secondly, you moved forward. Your collective achievements, both in military service and civilian life, are exceptional. Many of you have excelled as leaders in academia, business, law, and government.

You were the last Class to proceed directly to serve in Vietnam. Twenty-two of you are here tonight, from 39 of 54 graduates deployed. Graham Kells was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery in operations in Vietnam. His award is a poignant reminder of your class's contributions during one of the most challenging periods in our Nation's history. May we not forget that one of your class, John 'Cuddles' Wheeler, was killed in action while in Vietnam.²

As we gather tonight, may I also recall the words of Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck at your graduation parade:

“Do not let either the gossip of bystanders or the soft words of friends take the place of your own conscience or your own standard of honour...When you march off this ground keep your heads high – not in vanity, but in honour.”³

These words resonate as strongly now as they did then. They speak to the enduring qualities of integrity and honour that define not only the graduates of Duntroon but the men and women who have served alongside you.

Finally, I must acknowledge the personal connections that make this occasion so special. Among you are long-standing friends, including Paul and Kerry Haddad. Paul's leadership in organising this reunion is a testament to the bonds forged over half a century ago. I trust that the program he has planned will showcase the best of what Tasmania has to offer – including, I'm told, an excellent wine tour!

To the Class of 1969, as Governor, I thank you for your service and the example you continue to set. May this reunion be a celebration of shared memories, renewed friendships, and the enduring spirit of Duntroon.

Welcome, and enjoy your time in Tasmania.

² Emails Paul Haddad / David Hughes 25 and 26 Nov

³ Ibid, p47