

**LINDISFARNE RETURNED SERVICES LEAGUE'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
LINDISFARNE, TUESDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2016**

It is indeed an honour for my husband Dick and me to be here today to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the chartering of the Lindisfarne RSL Sub-Branch.

May I begin by acknowledging your President, Barry Ginn, and Sandra Ginn, Barry's daughter; Robert Dick, RSL Tasmania State President and Deputy National President and Mrs Vivienne Dick; Chris Parker, Lindisfarne RSL Vice-President and Mrs Lorraine Parker; Kerrie Petrie, Clarence RSL President and Mrs Dianne Petrie; John Hebbink, Motor Yacht Club of Tasmania Commodore; and Julius Fitzgerald, MYCT General Manager.

Now, I am aware that your first ever meeting was held in March 1946 in Lindisfarne at the then St Aidan's Hall, which led to the setting up of your first premises, on leased land at the top end of Lindisfarne Bay — namely, an ex-Army hut purchased from the HEC. Today, as a result of a commercial arrangement with the Motor Yacht Club of Tasmania, you are able to use these wonderful premises. The MYCT, as the owner of the beautiful *MV Egeria*, has a special connection with Government House. The *Egeria* was once the Governor's launch but was sold to the MYCT in 2007 and the club has done a magnificent job in restoring this wooden boat to its former glory. The *Egeria* and other boats in the marina provide an enviable view for the Lindisfarne RSL Sub-Branch and a wonderful venue to celebrate this anniversary.

In my first 14 months as Governor of Tasmania I have acquired a much deeper understanding of the role of our defence forces and of war and its aftermath. Indeed I have had more than 40 engagements that have been associated with things military, and have accepted the role as Representative Colonel 12th/40th Royal Tasmanian Regiment. The extent of this degree of involvement, the number of wreath-laying ceremonies and other military-related activities was not something I had anticipated in relation to the role of Governor. I certainly had not anticipated that I would be dressing in army combat uniform and be

lying on the ground in the middle of winter at Stony Head artillery range being trained in the use of a F88 Austeyr. Nor did I think I would be, as I was last week, donning a helmet and life jacket clamouring into a large helicopter and landing on the *HMAS Canberra* somewhere near Betsy Island and sailing up the Derwent having breakfast with the Captain Chris Smith, touring the ship and then watching the enormous vessel docking at Macquarie Wharf No 2. At thirteen stories high the view from the bridge is spectacular. Earlier, when the *Canberra* was in Hobart for Anzac Day, we had a tour of the ship which had then just been commissioned. But landing on it and then being a passenger whilst it arrived in Hobart was a special experience. It is one of two Canberra class Amphibious Assault Ships (LHD – landing helicopter deck) owned by the RAN.

Of course the Canberra is not the only ship we have been invited to board – we attended an official reception on board the HMAS Sydney in February last year, its last voyage before sailing back to Sydney to be decommissioned. I later learnt that this Sydney was the fourth HMAS Sydney. In November we attended and I placed a wreath and gave an address at the Memorial Service for the *HMAS Sydney II*. Writing that particular speech I learnt the tragic history of the HMAS Sydney which was lost on 19th November 1941 with all of its 645 men after an engagement with the German cruiser Kormoran off the Western Australian coast. Both ships sunk but whilst 317 of the crew of the Kormoran survived, there were no survivors of the Sydney and it was not until 2008 that the ships were located on the seabed.

That was by no means the only wreath I laid last year. In March I attended the Parade to mark the conclusion of Operation Slipper. That parade and service was conducted to commemorate the service and the sacrifice of more than 33,000 personnel from the ADF, AFP and APS in Afghanistan over the 12 years up to 2014 and to welcome home the servicemen and women involved. We found it particularly moving to be part of the ceremony and it really made us think about the 40 Australian soldiers who were killed in action, and the 262 listed as wounded during that time.¹ The names of each of those who had lost their lives were read out. It was chilling. Present were the parents of Corporal Richard Atkinson, who was born in Hobart. Twenty-two-year-old Corporal

¹ <http://www.defence.gov.au/operations/afghanistan/personnel.asp> accessed 24 Mar 15

Atkinson was leading his combat engineer section as a search commander when he was killed in action in Operation Slipper in February 2011, leaving behind his fiancé, his parents and brother and sister-in-law.

Appreciating the numbers of servicemen involved in operations like Operation Slipper highlights the importance of the RSL today. The Operation Slipper ceremony and a ceremony in Burnie I attended, where memorial walls were unveiled to commemorate the Gallipoli landings and more recent past and future conflicts, sharpened that appreciation.² The Burnie Council and Burnie RSL had worked together to ensure that appropriate recognition is given to current soldiers. The new wall included the first addition to it: a memorial to Burnie's Corporal Cameron Baird, who was killed during an engagement in the Khod Valley of southern Afghanistan on the 22nd of June 2013 while serving with the 2nd Commando Regiment. He was the 40th Australian to be killed in action in Afghanistan. His actions that day posthumously earned him the highest award for valour, the Victoria Cross³. His citation reads (in part)

“For the most conspicuous acts of valour, extreme devotion to duty and ultimate self-sacrifice at Ghawchak village, Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, as a Commando Team Commander”⁴

Corporal Baird was the first Australian Commando, and the 100th Australian to receive the Victoria Cross since the award was created by Queen Victoria in 1856. At a dinner that night we heard from some of Cameron Baird's commando colleagues and gained some understanding of the difficulties many soldiers face in adjusting to civilian life.

This was something that gained some attention, at least if one was listening, in the lead-up to the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli last year. It seems that about 10% of older users of homeless services are veterans.⁵ That figure is consistent

² <http://www.burnie.net/News/Whats-On/Memorial-walls-and-plinth-unveiling> accessed 24 Mar 15

³ <http://www.army.gov.au/Who-we-are/Victoria-Cross-for-Australia-recipients/Corporal-Cameron-Stewart-Baird-VC-MG> accessed 23 mar 15

⁴

http://www.army.gov.au/~media/Files/Our%20history/Traditions/CameronBaird_VCCitation.pdf accessed 24 Mar 15

⁵ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/publications-articles/homelessness-general/which-way-home-the-australian-government-green-paper->

with a report finding that about the same percentage of younger veterans are living rough around Melbourne. Most of those have seen service in Afghanistan or Iraq. It seems that parallels can still be drawn between the plights of current veterans with the treatment of Vietnam veterans with issues as a result of their service. In the words of veteran Mike: 'You can't come home from a war zone then sit down and have dinner with everyone'.⁶

PTSD is a significant challenge for defence and the veteran community. It has been reported that almost 4000 ADF personnel have been assessed for mental health conditions since 2007 and that 930 were diagnosed with PTSD, with another 490 with both PTSD and another disorder such as depression or anxiety. Almost 2500 – representing approximately 5% of the workforce – had a mental health condition other than PTSD.⁷

When we consider that of those who served in Vietnam almost 30% have been diagnosed with PTSD⁸, we can see that there is the potential for a significant, ongoing health impact for our younger veterans that will require our assistance for some time to come.

It may well be true that, as Plato said, only the dead have seen the end of war. Regardless, as a society we must bear the responsibility of caring for those whom we have sent to engage in military campaigns and who have returned with injuries or illnesses as a result of that service. The need for the RSL and its sub-branches within local communities to care for veterans with mental and physical disabilities is clearly an ongoing one.

And on that note, congratulations to all of you for the work you do and all the very best for your 70th anniversary year.

[on-homelessness/which-way-home-a-new-approach-to-homelessness-full-report?HTML](#)
accessed 23 Mar 15

⁶ <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/help-our-homeless-diggers-the-disgrace-of-our-military-veterans-dying-on-our-streets/story-fni0fit3-1227175362714> accessed 23 Mar 15

⁷ <http://www.news.com.au/national/defence-health-boss-dismisses-mental-health-concerns-as-angry-diggers-call-for-her-job/story-fncynjr2-1227262451825> accessed 23 Mar 15

⁸ <https://www.mapw.org.au/files/downloads/Vietnam%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf> accessed 23 Mar 15