

to withdraw, badly mauled by the Australian forces. It was a hard won victory for the Australian troops. It cost 26 Australian lives and over 100 wounded. Coral and Balmoral saw Australia's first all-arms brigade-sized action since the Second World War. It is recognised as the longest and most sustained series of engagements fought by Australian forces in the Vietnam War.

Today I want to ask the House to join me in expressing our thanks to all the Australians who fought in the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral. The veterans of Coral and Balmoral added another chapter to the proud history of the Australian military. They showed all the qualities that Australian troops first displayed to the world at Gallipoli and during the Battle of the Western Front in the First World War and in the great battles of the Second World War and conflicts since—courage, determination and ingenuity. We in Australia have sometimes fallen short in our duty to recognise the veterans of the Vietnam War. We should not fall short in that duty any longer.

Today I want to make clear to everyone that the Australian government is proud of our veterans. The Australian government is proud of the way in which they have served. The Australian government on behalf of the Australian people is grateful for the veterans who have served their country with honour including in this action in Vietnam.

Today we remember the veterans of Coral and Balmoral, some of whom I had the pleasure of meeting last night together with the Leader of the Opposition. Today we also remember those who fell. We remember those who gave their lives in serving their country. We honour their memory. Today we also remember their families. The family members of those who died, whose suffering 40 years on still remains and remains felt deeply. To those family members I say that we cannot repay the price that you have paid but we can assure you of one thing—and that is the thanks of a grateful nation. Today we honour all those Australians who fought at Coral and Balmoral.

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (2.28 pm)—I join the Prime Minister in supporting this statement. Forty years ago last night Australia was a different country and it was quite a different world when brave Australian men, Australian soldiers, again in our uniform, went to Coral and Balmoral Fire Support Bases some 20 kilometres north of Bien Hoa in South Vietnam.

Over a 3½-week period 2,000 Australian soldiers would be engaged in what was very, very heavy contact. As the Prime Minister said, almost 60 Vietnamese were confirmed dead, but the reports are in the order of some 300. Three and a half weeks after the initial movement on the evening of 12 May, 26 Australians would have given their lives and 100 would be

wounded, but every single one of those men that returned to this country was a different man from that which he had been when he went.

It is very easy for us in this century to look back and settle for the broad brush strokes of our history and to not fully appreciate individual sacrifices that have been made in our name. But in our uniform, under our flag, under the Australian Army rising sun, they were wounded, they gave their lives and they suffered emotional and other traumas. Their families made enormous involuntary sacrifices to allow them to serve our nation. In doing so, their deep unyielding grief for those who were lost and those who were wounded in emotional and physical terms should remind every Australian that there are some truths by which we live that are worth fighting to defend.

As I said last night at the reception for these men and their families and the men and women who wear our uniform today, there are many things of which our country can be and is enormously proud. These men are one of the highest, if not the highest, examples. But one of the things that we must seek to do as a nation is this: whatever the circumstances and whatever the decisions taken by our governments to send men and women forward in dangerous ways in our name to fight for our values and our beliefs, we should never repeat the way in which these men were treated when they returned from the conflict in South Vietnam. We will honour them not only by this resolution but mostly by the way we choose to live our lives and shape our nation. We thank them for what they have done for us. Lest we forget.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Lance Corporal Jason Marks

Hon. John Norman Button

40th Anniversary of the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral

Reference

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.31 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the resumption of the debates on the Prime Minister's motions of condolence in connection with the deaths of Lance Corporal Jason Marks and the Honourable John Norman Button, and further statements by indulgence relating to the fortieth anniversary of the 13 May 1968 attack on Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, Vietnam, be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

CONDOLENCES

Ms Ruth Nancy Coleman

The SPEAKER (2.31 pm)—I inform the House of the death on Thursday, 27 March 2008, of Ruth Nancy Coleman, a former senator who represented the state of Western Australia from 1974 to 1987. As a mark of