

**MOUNT PLEASANT REMEMBRANCE SERVICE AND HONOUR TITLE  
PRESENTATION**

**40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF CORAL/BALMORAL 14<sup>th</sup> MAY 2008**

Speech by Ian Ahearn GPO 102 (CORAL) Battery 1968

HIS EXCELLENCY Major General Michael Jeffery and Mrs Jeffery  
The Hon Alan Griffin MP – Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Major General Power – GOC Training Command  
Veterans  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Last but not least- the veterans of Coral; the men of 102 Battery, HQ  
Battery and 131 Divisional Locating Battery.

This is our day. This is the day of the Gunners!

It is a day filled with pride and melancholy

Pride in formal recognition of what we achieved some forty years ago.

Melancholy for those our brothers in arms who paid the supreme sacrifice all  
those years ago and for those of the battery who have since passed away  
and cannot share this experience with us.

This is both a commemoration and a presentation.

A commemoration to remember those of us who did not survive Coral - not  
only Gunners Scott and Sawtell - but all the other Australians that gave their  
lives in that battle.

A presentation that makes us all part of history. There has been no other  
Honour Title issued to an Australian Army unit or sub unit – so history will be  
made today when our Commander-in Chief bestows the Title "CORAL" on  
102 Battery.

Napoleon Bonaparte, another famous short Gunner, said "Leave the  
Artillerymen alone, they are an obstinate lot!!!!"

Forty years ago, the North Vietnamese Army proved Napoleon right. We  
were an obstinate lot on the first night that the NVA roared into our position,  
preceded by a rolling barrage of RPGs and machine gun fire. We all have  
our own distinctive memories of that night without end but my memory is of  
the steadfastness of all of you as you responded to the chaos all around you.

Some of my memories are still vivid.

The green glow of the incoming tracer.

The fiery trails of the RPGs; the fierce flames as the charge bags of No 1 gun  
ammunition burnt.

Doc Mackenzie treating the wounded in the Command Post;  
Peter Riley driving the Landrover through the position with its lights on, re-supplying ammunition;

The flashes of small arms in the turmoil that was the 1 RAR mortar position.

The crash of the rounds fired by No 4 including the breathless moment when an illumination round was fired point blank.

The pop of flares and the tearing sound of mini-guns from Spooky and gun ships.

The silence in the mortar position after the splintex from No 5 scythed across it; the sad sight of the wounded and dead Mortarmen when we moved into their position.

Through all of this, we were still able to answer the call for support from the infantry. Initially, three guns provided this support but shortly after dawn all five remaining guns answered a call for fire and Gavin Andrews, our Battery Commander, recorded his most vivid memory of the entire operation:

“First two guns fired, then three, then five. The gunners had shrugged off the events of the night and began to function in their primary role, that is, to give close support to the Infantry. I felt extremely proud of them as I did on many occasions, but that time was very special to me.”

You will all have similar vivid flashes of memory, each connected to your own experiences and perspective on the night.

We must not forget the others who shared our experiences that night and that the presentation of this title owes as much to them as to the efforts of 102 Battery. The men of 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, HQ Battery 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment and the Detachment of 131 Divisional Locating Battery must be included whenever we reflect on the award of the Honour Title. It is their day as much as it is ours.

Yet that was but one night over a long three weeks of days and nights. On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> May, the NVA came back. They announced their presence with a fierce bombardment of Coral mainly centred on the guns of 102 Battery and A Battery 2/35<sup>th</sup> US Artillery. I know I speak for all that experienced that bombardment when I say there is no greater feeling of helplessness than being on the wrong end of any type of artillery. I can only say that the experience filled me with admiration for those who suffered much greater bombardments in the two World Wars. The Infantry of 1 RAR bore the heavy lifting in this attack and we reverted to our fire support role albeit with enemy small arms fire zipping in and around the guns.

The endless fire missions including the all day support for the US airmobile group that repaid our efforts by the delivery of ammunition in the middle of the night, with cartridge canisters strewn all over our LZ which they lit up with their search lights.

The tour of the battery by the US Airmobile brigadier to thank us for a job well done and a promise of beers which, despite rumours to the contrary was never delivered and certainly not consumed by the officers in some hidey hole!

The constant mortar attacks and the arrival of the Centurion Tanks - a sight that gladdened us all.

Our experiences together have created a bond that has lasted these forty years. Those experiences have finally been recognised after a long and convoluted process with the awarding of the Honour Title "Coral". We, the veterans, need to give thanks to the people who laboured so hard over the last eleven years to reach this point.

I believe that some of those people need special mention. Major Terry Brennan has toiled tirelessly over a long period to achieve the recognition that you so justly deserve. On your behalf, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks for the outstanding job he has done. Thank you, Terry!

Brigadier Phil Winter has, as Head of Regiment, been unstinting in his support and enthusiasm. Thank you, Phil.

Chris Jobson, who made the mistake of answering his telephone 18 months ago and who has contributed so much. Thank you Chris.

Thanks must also go to the staff of DVA who have laboured so long to bring about these days of commemoration. Our appreciation and thanks to all involved but especially to Ian Cartwright, Susan Nolan and Kylie Matruglio.

Thanks also to the sterling efforts of the Gunner Members of the Committee not only for this day but for all the activities associated with the wider commemoration.

It has been an emotional few days but today is special for the Royal Regiment.

There is an old gunner saying:

"Gunnery will always fight together, drink together, laugh together, and mourn together."

We have fought together forty years ago

We have been drinking and laughing for all of those forty years and will do so again tonight.

Today, we will mourn together.

To the veterans of 102 Battery present here today and for those who are no longer with us, you have earned this accolade.

You can and should feel proud of this singular recognition of what you have achieved.

You have created a legacy for those that follow.

It is an honour to be so recognised and you should cherish it.

I feel privileged to have served with you.

Thankyou