

Speech by Mayor Logan K. Howlett JP
Vietnam War Veterans Memorial Service
City of Cockburn RSL, Frederick Road, Hamilton Hill
18 August 2025

Distinguished guests, veterans, serving members of the Australian Defence Force, ladies and gentlemen.

As we come to the close of this morning's service, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on why we gather and why it continues to matter.

More than 60,000 Australians served in the Vietnam War.

It was Australia's longest military engagement of the 20th century, lasting over a decade.

For many, it was a time marked by political division, conscription ballots, and growing public protest.

And when the fighting stopped, the conflict continued in quieter, more personal ways for the men who returned, and for the families waiting for them.

I remember that time well.

I was a young man working up the coast as a professional cray fisherman when one of my mates was called up.

He left our tight-knit community of just 32 people, a scruffy, long-haired bloke with a wry grin.

He returned two years later almost unrecognisable.

He wore the discipline of the army in his bearing and uniform.

Despite surviving the war, he didn't survive the year.

Within weeks of coming home, he was lost to the sea.

His body later washed up along the same stretch of coast he'd once helped defend.

It was a cruel reminder that not all casualties of war occur on the battlefield.

That story has stayed with me — not just as a personal memory, but as a reflection of what so many veterans and their families faced.

Abrupt change, silent struggles, and an uncertain return home.

It's for them that we continue to gather and to remember.

To our Vietnam veterans, let it be known that your stories are not forgotten.

Your presence here today, and our presence beside you, is a mark of enduring gratitude.

To the RSL Cockburn Sub-Branch, thank you for your unwavering commitment to those who have served, those who continue to serve and to their families – we are a community of one.

For over 100 years you have stood for veterans, and for 51 of those years, you have helped guide, support and honour those who served in Vietnam.

We also acknowledge those veterans who laid the foundations for vital support services like Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling, which has now been saving lives for over 35 years.

Remembrance is not passive.

It is active.

It is something we choose to do, year after year, out of respect, out of duty, and out of love.

And so, as we draw this service to a close, we hold in our thoughts:

- Those who never made it home.
- Those who did but carry unseen wounds.
- The families who bore the burden of absence, and in many cases, the burden of silence.
- And all those currently serving around the world — far from home, upholding the values we honour here today.

Wherever the Australian flag flies, may it do so in the spirit of peace, justice and remembrance.

To all who served: your courage, your sacrifice and your stories will never be forgotten.

Lest we forget.