

**Speech
by
Mayor Logan K Howlett, JP
on the occasion of
The Vietnam Veterans
Memorial Day Service
(50th Anniversary of the
Battle of Long Tan)
Thursday 18 August 2016
Hamilton Hill Memorial Monument**

Good Morning.

Distinguished guests, Veterans, Serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force, ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys.

As we gather here today as a community of interest in commemorating our Vietnam Veterans it is against a backdrop of disrespect for many of our Vietnam Veterans and their families who have travelled to Vietnam to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan only to be advised late on Tuesday that the event had been banned by the Vietnamese Government.

For many of those Vietnam Veterans it was to be the first time since they were engaged in hostilities that they were standing on the soil where so many of their mates had made the ultimate sacrifice.

In the true Aussie vernacular, Veterans' Affairs Minister Dan Tehan described the decision as 'a kick in the guts'.

In the context of all things relating to the Vietnam war the Tuesday decision of the Vietnamese Government is and will forever more stand alone.

I know in my own heart that the Vietnam Veterans currently in Vietnam with family and friends will rise to the occasion and use good old Aussie ingenuity to overcome the challenge – they've been there done that before – they will ensure the ANZAC spirit prevails.

For those who have travelled to Vietnam and for those who have come together at various commemorative services around the world it is hard to imagine for those who

survived and their family and friends that 50 years have passed before us since the Battle of Long Tan.

Nor will many believe it is 28 years since the Vietnam Memorial Pavilion was dedicated in Kings Park.

As we know, the peacefulness and tranquility of Kings Park attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year.

They come from near and far to enjoy the opportunity of families and friends coming together, to admire the views, dine at restaurants or picnic on the lawns; it is a place of great beauty and also a place of reflection.

You will find the Vietnam Memorial Pavilion in Synergy Parkland on May Drive nestled amongst a backdrop of Australian bushland and in its foreground green manicured lawns leading to a unsurpassed view over Perth with the Darling Ranges in the background.

The structure was first built in the grounds of the Karrakatta Cemetery in 1899 before being moved to its current location in 1988 thanks to the efforts of the Australian Vietnam Forces Memorial Trust who raised the funds and created the impetus for its re-location to Kings Park.

While it is a somber place of reflection for our Vietnam veterans and their families, this Pavilion is also a tribute to the freedom that all Australians enjoy largely due to the efforts of our Aussie boys who stood in the glow of the ANZAC spirit and did us proud – they kept the ANZAC tradition alive during a difficult and at times tense war.

Those at home will vividly recall how the war invaded our airwaves, become the front covers of our newspapers and added to the homeland debate in a way never seen before in our communities.

Time has healed our divisions and sacrifice has sealed our destiny.

On the occasions that my family and I visit the Vietnam Memorial Pavilion to pay our respects to the fallen:

- we wonder at the Kookaburras calling for our attention in the nearby bushland;
- we admire the children laughing and playing on the manicured lawns;
- running in and around the majestic trees;
- dodging in and out of the water playground;
- families laying out their picnic blanket to enjoy a bite to eat;
- parents and grandparents enjoying their day in the sun, talking about their plans for the future, the next holiday, sporting day or the myriad of other things that drift into our minds or that are sparked by the conversations we are engaged in.

We all know without saying that our freedom has and continues to guaranteed by:

- those who made the ultimate sacrifice,
- those who became the Veterans we have grown to admire and respect; and

- those young men and women who stand tall as members of the Australian Defence Force in today's technological era where the pressing of a single button can result in a target being hit several hundreds, if not thousands of kilometers away – sight unseen.

Memory is more than a single word.

It is today's living reflection of yesterday.

The young men who gave their lives in the Vietnam War had foregone the opportunity to be lying in the sun, gathering with their friends and families, eager to talk about tomorrow, and making plans for the future.

Their tomorrows were never to be.

They would not return to see the flash of colour from the flower gardens, to admire the manicured lawns, to hear the birds singing from the nearby trees or to spend a lifetime with a loved one, age alongside friends, as we are lucky to age with our loved ones.

Their names will forever be held in our hearts, as will all that returned home – with each passing year their contributions will continue to be acknowledged and honoured – for they have kept the ANZAC spirit alive.

Lest we forget.