

**CHIEF OF ARMY SPEECH AT PORT NEPEAN
QUARANTINE STATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE
UNVEILING OF A TRIBUTE TO PETER BADCOE VC**

It is very fitting, indeed, that we gather here tonight to commemorate the life and sacrifice of a very brave and inspirational soldier - Major Peter Badcoe, VC.

The OCS operated on this site between 1952 and 1985 and made a vital contribution to Australia's security in the years following the Second World War when we fought in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. Over that time it produced more than 3000 officers for the Australian Army and some of our allies, notably New Zealand and PNG.

While the OCS Portsea produced many distinguished leaders, Peter Badcoe VC was deservedly immortalised through the naming of this building. He lived the OCS motto of 'Loyalty and Service' as his personal creed. And as you know, he made the ultimate sacrifice during the Vietnam War.

Some who knew him thought Peter Badcoe was an unlikely hero. As I reflect on his extraordinary acts of heroism I am reminded of the humility of our most recent recipient of the Victoria Cross, Trooper Mark Donaldson, VC. Australians - especially Aussie soldiers - mistrust big noters and self-promoters. We look for the common touch, rather than flamboyance, in those we admire. Our ideal hero is

the bloke who is mild mannered most of the time but produces something special in a crisis.

Peter Badcoe, VC was an authentic Australian hero. In his book about the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam, Ian McNeill provided this description of him:

Badcoe had always been an enigma to his friends. Short in stature, his rounded face, high forehead and heavy glasses gave him the appearance of someone who would be more at home behind a desk than in the activity which took his life. He did not smoke or drink, nor did he mix readily with his colleagues. Badcoe seemed most at ease when the conversation drifted to exploits of past military heroes, for he was very much the soldier at heart.

Such appearances were deceptive. Combat seemed to transform Peter Badcoe. His VC was awarded not for a single act of unselfish bravery, but rather for a series of actions over a couple of months. He very deliberately exposed himself to extreme risks on every occasion that he was in combat. As one of his mates from the Vietnam War, Major (later Major General) Ross Buchan said of him: 'He wasn't brave once or twice, he was brave all the time.'

Badcoe seemed to be almost impervious to danger. A man of few words he preferred to let his actions speak for him. One incident involved quite extraordinary courage.

On 23 February 1967, Badcoe was attached to a Vietnamese Regional Force company conducting an advance to contact. Two American advisers - Captain Clement and Sergeant Thomas - were moving with a flanking unit, which came into contact with a well entrenched enemy with well sited machine guns. This force was pinned down and both American advisers had been wounded.

Badcoe delegated command of his own unit to another American adviser and jogged across open ground attracting steady fire as he went, to offer assistance to the adjacent platoon. He quickly took stock of the situation and observed that Captain Clement was lying mortally wounded in front of the enemy position, where he had fallen trying to rescue wounded Vietnamese soldier. Closer to the friendly position was Sergeant Thomas, who had been shot attempting to reach Clement.

Badcoe reorganized the demoralized Regional Force platoon and led a frontal assault on the enemy. Single handed he killed the crew of a machine-gun which had been producing sustained fire against his troops and was then able to evacuate his two American colleagues. He personally recovered the body of Clements and also carried Thomas to safety. Badcoe came to be known as 'The Galloping Major' among the Americans in the wake of this incident.

Two subsequent incidents demonstrated that this was not an aberration for Peter Badcoe. He displayed exceptional courage and professionalism in significant contacts on 7 March 1967 and 7 April 1967 in actions near Hue. On this last occasion he willingly placed himself in danger, when he could have legitimately stayed on duty in the CP. He was already supposed to be on leave, but marched to the sound of the guns, when he realized that a Vietnamese unit was pinned down without a military adviser. On each occasion he led by example and organized assaults by forces that had been pinned down and lost momentum. Apart from exemplary bravery he was an excellent minor tactician - a tribute to the excellent training he received here at Portsea.

He led from the front. He was willing to risk his own life to save his friends. The similarity with the actions of Trooper Donaldson, VC in Afghanistan is remarkable. He too ran over fire swept open ground to recover a fallen coalition soldier. To me there is something very moving about a soldier who willingly risks his life to go to the assistance of a fallen mate. It is the ultimate act of unselfishness.

Of course the VC is the rarest of honours. I believe that every one who passed through OCS aspired to the same standards of professionalism that characterized Peter Badcoe. While to the lay person such spectacular courage under fire seems almost insane - those of us who proudly claim the OCS as our alma mater know that we all shared Peter Badcoe's values of Loyalty and Service. To earn

a commission from OCS was to have demonstrated a high standard of tactical proficiency, a willingness to lead by the highest example, and an instinctive commitment to put the needs of our soldiers ahead of personal safety comfort and convenience.

The OCS Portsea wrote a very special chapter in Australian military history. We were at war almost right through its existence and OCS graduates performed splendidly in every theatre. I am the second of its graduates to command the Australian Army. That is no mean achievement given the relatively short time it operated. And OCS graduates continue to serve with professionalism and distinction in senior ranks within the army or to make contributions as proud Australian citizens in many walks of life.

This is truly a very moving occasion for me, and I am sure for all of us to return to this place and to honour Peter Badcoe - who represents so impressively the ethos of OCS Portsea. Many years have lapsed since his death, but the recent recognition of Trooper Donaldson has reminded every Australian of the unique nature of the soldier's contract with the nation. It is an unlimited liability contract that can involve the ultimate sacrifice. Yet our young men and women undertake it willingly. I have great pleasure in unveiling this tribute to Peter Badcoe, VC tonight.