

**Address to the
104 Sig Sqn Reunion Memorial Service
Twin Towns Services Club
Sunday 6th November 2011**

By Colonel Peter Diddams (Retd)

Welcome to you all here this morning.

It was my honour to serve with many of you in Vietnam. It is now my privilege to address you at this Signals Memorial Service.

This reunion is a celebration of fellowship and good spirit between members past and present of the 104th Signals Squadron. We welcome to it all units of our Corps and we gather here today to pay due homage to all who have served in our proud Corps of Signals.

Can I also take this opportunity to give due recognition to all those wives and partners who have persevered through much both during that war and in the years since – including this long weekend - **thank you all from us all.**

Present today are many who are Vietnam veterans - and since we served more generations of Signalers have been on operational service and now we have the latest generation of Veterans: those who have served in Afghanistan.

104 Sigs as we have heard already was raised in Wacol, Brisbane in November 1965 for Vietnam service under the guiding hand of Major Ian Godden present here with us for this reunion. The unit deployed to Nui Dat in April 1967 and it did not leave Vietnam until nearly five years later when the bulk of the unit boarded HMAS Sydney in November 1971 for return to Australia.

104 Sig Sqn saw significant operational service in South Vietnam including the well known battle of Fire Support Base Coral where Signalman Alexander Young died in action, and he is one of several we honour today at this memorial service.

If you name just about any Australian or Allied operation or base near Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuoy Province, and sometimes outside it (and quite a number of deployed Fire Support Bases) during those five years our 104 soldiers, and indeed many from our other sigs units, were there in some capacity or another, a unique record of communications support under arduous and hazardous circumstances, including a number under fire. I personally have vivid memories of Fire Support Base Clare in 1969, as do some of you here today. I know there are many others who went through similar and even more testing experiences!

Think of all those patrols outside the wire! Think about the detachments deployed to the infantry Battalions or to the other major combat units. What about all those intrepid operators with the LO's, particularly the ones with the ARVN units! **“Whoool!”**

As a consequence of this Service 104 Sig Sqn has some who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. I have already spoken of Signalman Alexander Young: Let us also honour

Corporal Denis Donnelly, and
Signalman Denis Abraham. Both of 104.

And let us also remember all those who returned with injuries or illness, and with issues that haunt us even to this day.

The unit is still serving some 44 years later in Afghanistan – what a great unit history it has.

After serving in Vietnam 104 returned to Holsworthy in support of 1 Brigade until the Brigade relocated to Darwin in the late 90s.

104 underwent a name change to A Squadron 1 Command Support Unit in January 1998 as part of Army re-structuring trials, but was then re-named 104 Sig Sqn in 2001 as part of the larger renamed 1 Command Signal Regiment.

Since Vietnam 104 has deployed as a unit to East Timor, to the Solomon Islands and to Afghanistan twice, with a third tour expected before Australia's commitment is finalised.

Our individual soldiers have also served in many different theatres over this time wherever there has been a significant contingent of Australian troops.

As we grow more distant from our time in that war in Vietnam and as we grow older we reflect on our time in 104 Sigs and on the friendships that grew from it – that is why so many of us are here today – to show that this matters.

At this time it is apposite that we also pay homage to our other Corps colleagues who have served – if any Corps knows the meaning of close ties it is our Corps – we depend on each other to get the message through – “Swift and sure” is our enduring motto.

You don't need another history lesson from me, but a roll call of the Signals Corps units that served in Vietnam serves to remind us of these units (and we have a number of their members who served with us here today):

- 5 members of Sigs first deployed with the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in 1962
- 709 Sig Tp supported the first deployment of 1 RAR in 1965
- 527 Sig Tp supported the HQ that deployed in 1965. Elements of 127 Sig Sqn, the project squadron, also deployed at this time and they were to have a varying but constant presence in Vietnam until the withdrawal in 1972.
- 145 Sig Sqn deployed in 1966 supporting HQ Australian Force Vietnam and the Task Force Task Force deployment to Nui Dat.
- This was when 547 Sig Tp deployed for Electronic Warfare support, and 152 Sig Sqn personnel for Special Air Service Regiment support.
- 110 Sig Sqn replaced 145 Sig Sqn and thereafter there were individual replacements;
- 103 Sig Sqn deployed in 1966 to Nui Dat to Support 1st Australian Task Force and then as I have already said: in 1967 104 Sig Sqn deployed to replace them. From then on individual replacements flowed from 139 Sig Sqn at Enoggera to 104 in Vietnam

- Other Corps members served in Vietnam in the various HQ, the Civil Affairs Unit, infantry battalions, small ships and so on.
- All units were out by 1971/72. Almost 50,000 Australian Servicemen served in Vietnam some 16% of which were RA Sigs – about 7,500 – quite an achievement!

But not without cost. We honour their sacrifice as we remember:

Warrant Officer Michael Gill AATTV
Signalman Barry Logan 145 Sig Sqn
Signalman Sydney Moore 110 Sig Sqn
Signalman David Wallis 110 Sig Sqn

Our comrades in 104 Sig Sqn have served twice in Afghanistan, have provided those essential communications, have faced death and injury, have still worried their families left at home - but they fill us with pride as they serve their country selflessly – just as we here present did all those years ago in Vietnam.

Signalers other than 104 are also on this front line in Afghanistan: At this point I ask you to remember Signalman Sean McCarthy who as an SAS qualified operator gave his life in Afghanistan in July 2008.

And we also need to acknowledge that even as we stand here today three more young Australian soldiers who gave their lives recently arrive home to Amberley Air base this afternoon for their final farewells from family.

To conclude:

It is with a great deal of pride that we remember 104 and indeed all our various Signals units - and our service to our country – and we are grateful that are able to meet here today and give thanks for our comradeship, and **give thanks that we are still around to give thanks!**

There are many who are not.

Good health to you all as we depart today here for our homes and loved ones: **stay safe and stay sane!**