

I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to Elders past and present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

The Vietnam War was a tragic and costly war that affected many people.

After France's defeat in the Indochina War in 1954, Vietnam was divided into the communist dominated North, and the democratic south - which was receiving increased financial and military aid from the U.S, to limit the spread of communism. In turn, North Vietnam began receiving increased support from both China and the Soviet Union.

In early August 1964, two U.S destroyers stationed on the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam were allegedly fired upon by North Vietnamese torpedo boats, resulting in the U.S President - Lyndon Baines Johnson's decision to wage war on North Vietnam.

Approximately 60,000 Australian defence personnel served in Vietnam over the 10 years of the war. Our initial commitment of 30 military advisers in 1962 grew to include a battalion in 1965 and a task force in 1966.

Australia's last combat troops came home in March 1972, about 3 years before the war ended. Some Australians returned to Vietnam in 1975 to help with evacuations and humanitarian work during final days of the war.

More than 500 Australians died in the war and over 3,000 Australians were evacuated with wounds, injuries, or illness.

One of Brisbane State High School's own, David Mitchell, fought bravely in the Vietnam war alongside many other Brisbane State High alumni. He was a Private in the 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit located in Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province between April 1966 and December 1971. This unit commanded the task force which included infantry battalions, an artillery regiment, an armoured squadron, a cavalry squadron, and other supporting arms and services.

During his years at State High, Mitchell was an incredible academic and was recognised as such. He received consistent A's across subjects such as German, Latin, Algebra, Chemistry and Physics. He was expected to go on to study science further at university.

David Mitchell was a member of the C II cricket team and received accolades for his fielding abilities. He was also a member of the Cadet Corps and a member of the team responsible for winning the Chelmsford Cup for rifle shooting in 1951. His contributions to the State High community reflect heavily though the cultivation of our school values and culture.

Private David Mitchell served for just thirty-one days until his tragic, and untimely passing on the 23rd of July, in 1968. He was only twenty-eight years old.

His story is one of many. He is another untold tragedy, another unsung hero of war. Another name on a plaque, long since forgotten. We as a generation are forgetting. We are forgetting more than just their names and faces, we are forgetting their stories, their battles, and the turmoil of those who have come before us.

Now more than ever, with growing wars and conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, and many, many more, it is our obligation and our duty as the next generation to remember and acknowledge loss at an individual level. To remember that each life is more than just a number and that each death toll is more than just a statistic. That these losses have names and faces. That they are a son or a daughter, that someone, somewhere is mourning. That these people are stories yet to be told. That they have cried, and they have laughed. That they are just as human as you and I.

As the future leaders and change-makers, it is our responsibility to remember their lives as exactly that- lives.

In the philosopher George Santayana's words "Those who cannot remember their history are condemned to repeat it."