

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT

**501. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Premier:**

Could the Premier please outline to the house the important role our servicemen and servicewomen continue to play in Australia?

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:**

I thank the member for Peel for the question. Before I answer it, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of students from Willetton Senior High School and welcome them to Parliament House.

I had the privilege this morning of attending a function at Campbell Barracks at Swanbourne celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Special Air Service Regiment. I was very pleased that the Leader of the Opposition was able to attend. I thank him for that and I am sure he will agree it was a very good function. Also with us was the member who asked the question, the member for Peel, who was trained at Swanbourne Barracks and, as members know, served in the Iraq war.

As part of this year's event, which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the SAS, the state government has donated \$10 000 to the SAS resources trust. This trust was established by Mr Geoff Cazin following the Black Hawk helicopter crash that killed 15 SAS servicemen in 1996.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** How much did the commonwealth give?

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** As I understand, nothing.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Are you sure?

**Mr A.J. CARPENTER:** This morning I was informed that is the case. I did not want to refer to that, but the Leader of the Opposition asked the question.

The first SAS company was officially formed in July 1957 at Swanbourne. The regiment's role is to conduct long-range surveillance reconnaissance and offensive operations beyond the range and capability of other Australian Defence Force elements. The soldiers attached to this regiment operate in uncertain, dangerous and volatile security environments. All our servicemen and servicewomen who have seen active duty operate in dangerous environments.

It is worth reflecting on this issue. I had some interesting conversations today about the level of recognition by and support from governments around Australia and, indeed, other parts of the world for their servicemen and servicewomen. The Labor Party at state and national levels is very proud to have as candidates and members, for example, former decorated veterans such as Peter Tinley in Stirling; Rodney Cocks in the Victorian seat of La Trobe; and Mike Kelly in the New South Wales seat of Eden-Monaro. However, Liberal Party members, it seems, as we have seen demonstrated here at state level, cannot help themselves from sinking to the lowest depths we can imagine in some of their political attacks. I refer here specifically to the comments made by Peter Phelps, the chief of staff to Special Minister of State, Gary Nairn, in which he compared the Iraq service of Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Kelly to that of Nazi concentration camp guards during World War II. Peter Phelps' comments were deplorable and should be condemned. I take note that the Returned and Services League of Australia said today that Minister Nairn should consider sacking Peter Phelps as his chief of staff. I agree with that sentiment. In fact, I think he should have been sacked by now. He turned up at a public meeting and likened Lieutenant-Colonel Kelly's service to that of Nazi concentration camp guards at Belsen during World War II, I believe. That is completely unbelievable, but perhaps not surprising.

At federal level, where I assume an election is to be held, there has been personalisation of attack and people stooping to the lowest level possible and people being denigrated and demeaned. We have heard it here in the Parliament in the past couple of days from the state opposition. Numerous people have commented to me in the past couple of days, since last evening in fact, about what was said in this Parliament by the member for Hillarys. They were in disbelief that those things could have been said.

I return to the case of Peter Phelps. If he does not get sacked, he should resign. He has brought disgrace upon the federal Liberal Party and should go.