

The ANZAC



Spirit

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The ANZAC Spirit – Peter Badcoe

Courage, mateship, resilience, compassion and self-sacrifice. These are all qualities found at the heart of the ANZAC Spirit which was first developed in the trenches of Gallipoli, World War I; when Australian and New Zealand soldiers fought side by side for the first time. In the many battles fought since, this same spirit has been reflected in the actions and attitudes of brave Australians, both overseas and at home. When thinking of these heroic soldiers who served in war, an old street sign from a small country town isn't the first thing that comes to mind, but this is where my research began. Badcoe Road, Loxton, is named after Major Peter John Badcoe, VC. Originally a young clerk from Adelaide, Major Badcoe served as a commanding officer in the Vietnam War from 1966 – 1967, and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.

Born in January, 1934, Peter was surrounded by the realities of World War II from the age of five. This shaped his experience and view of the world. As he grew, this developed into a passion for the army and by the age of eighteen, not even his father's disapproval of the notion could quench his eagerness to enrol. However, Badcoe could not join the forces without passing a simple medical examination; a near impossible task for a person with weak vision. It took ingenuity not unlike the retreat strategy of Gallipoli for Peter to be accepted into the Royal Australian Artillery, having memorized the eye chart before his exam. Badcoe spent the next six years working with the 14th National Service Training Battalion and the 1st Field Regiment, before becoming a staff officer at Army HQ. During this time, he met the love of his life Denise MacMahon, who he married in autumn, 1956.

While Badcoe was serving throughout the country and gaining the military's respect, a long and bloody conflict was waging overseas. As Vietnamese citizens stood for their independence after fighting back the Japanese in 1945, French forces launched an attack on the country, in an attempt to reclaim what had been their land in 1939. For eight years the nations fought without resolve, until a crushing defeat forced France to retreat from Vietnam's North entirely, and allow the South to be largely self-run. However, this formed a 'temporary' division in the country (Fig. A), intended to last until 1956, when a reuniting election was to be held. During this time, the two nations (North Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam) developed hatred for each other, and once the planned election was cancelled, they armed themselves and initiated yet another war. At the time both America and Australia were concerned with the spread of Communism throughout Asia, and chose to support South Vietnam as the North had allied with Russia. In 1962 the two western countries sent military advisors to train and guide local forces. The Australian division were known as the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV); the group that Peter Badcoe later joined in December, 1966, one year after Australia's first infantry battalion arrived.

By this time Badcoe had become a determined and knowledgeable leader, and had served with the army for almost fifteen years. (During this time he'd spent seven weeks in Malaya, which gave him experience and understanding in overseas work.) On the frontlines of Vietnam, Badcoe performed three outstanding acts of bravery, which clearly displayed the ANZAC Spirit in the way he gave up his own needs and cared for his troops.

In his first brave charge on the 23rd of February 1967, Badcoe showed both Courage in the face of fear and Compassion; two of his most prominent qualities and also two important aspects of the ANZAC Spirit. When he received a radio message telling of an American soldier who lay dead just short of an enemy post, and a wounded medical advisor that was in danger nearby, Badcoe abandoned his place of safety, and began a lone, 600m trek across open fire to help his companions. Over half a kilometre of

running through gunshots, with nothing to protect him and no one by his side. Six hundred metres where each step could be his last. Peter first reached the medical advisor and attended to him, but didn't stop there. He rallied a platoon of men and personally led a charge to the enemy post. By encouraging his team and leading the way, Badcoe captured the enemy position and killed the machine gunners. He found the American officer and carried his body over another stretch of exposed ground, back to their command base.

Only twelve days later, on the 7th of March, Badcoe performed a second exceptional deed. The company Head Quarters was under attack by a strong force of enemy soldiers and Southern troops were heavily outnumbered, panicking, and convinced of defeat. Badcoe and a group of officers had been called to the area for support. Although their vehicle broke down on the way, and one of his fellow officers was shot before Peter had even reached the men, he did not give up or lose hope. Badcoe gathered the soldiers, encouraged them, boosted their confidence and lead a death defying assault on opposing forces. His spirit of hope and resilience was just like that of the ANZACs in Gallipoli, who fought for and with each other in even the worst of situations. Badcoe's team succeeded that day. Against all odds they charged and against all odds they survived. The enemy fell and was forced to retreat, leaving the company of mates with smiles on their faces, and renewed determination in their hearts.

Badcoe's final attack on the 7th of April, 1967, displayed the two central qualities of the true ANZAC Spirit; mateship and self-sacrifice. When an enemy surprise attack hit during a mission, he found himself trapped 50 metres in front of his platoon, pinned down by enemy mortar, with no one but his loyal radio operator for support. Despite his position, Peter didn't despair, but instead rose from safety and sprinted back to his company. Rather than ordering a retreat, he rallied his friends and in the true ANZAC way he encouraged them and got them back on their feet. Leading by example he pushed forward once more and the team followed, but were stopped again. Badcoe ducked behind cover, and prepared to throw a grenade, remaining undeterred. He rose to launch his weapon, but was pulled to the ground by his companion as a burst of machine gun fire was brought before him. Crouched in the dirt, exhausted and risking death, Badcoe was a world from his life back home. He'd given up all the luxuries of freedom, all the time he could have spent with his wife and daughters, and all that he had for his companions and for his nation. The only thing he had left to give was his life. In one final act of bravery Badcoe overcame his fears, readied his grenade and got up a second time. As he stood a spray of bullets hit him in the chest, and in that moment Peter collapsed and died.

But Badcoe's story doesn't stop there. When news of his brave actions became known throughout the world, Peter began receiving posthumous recognition. In October that year the Queen awarded him with the Victoria Cross (Fig. G), the greatest military honour that can be given to an Australian soldier. He was also awarded six prestigious medals from Vietnam, three from the USA (including the US Silverstar and Purple Heart), as well as three more Australian awards. Several structures have also been named in his honour such as the Badcoe Club in Vietnam, Badcoe Hall (a training block at Portsea Officer Cadet School, Melbourne) and Badcoe Road, from my hometown, Loxton (Fig. F). He even has an AFL Medal named after him, which is awarded to a South Australian footballer on ANZAC Day each year.

Badcoe was never searching for recognition or accolades when he acted, but was a true hero of war. The epitaph of his gravestone in Malaysia simply states "He lived and died a soldier", and so he did (Fig. E). He didn't worry about himself or opt out when things got hard, but stood firm on what he believed, and fought hard right to his very last breaths. Through his actions, Badcoe has left a lasting impression on his companions and our country, and to this day is a perfect representation of what the ANZAC Spirit is all about.

When everything else is stripped away, the core essence of the ANZAC Spirit which everything else is based upon is simply doing your best for each other. That's what the brave soldiers of Gallipoli did all those years ago, it's what Peter Badcoe did each time he led the charge in Vietnam, and it's what many soldiers still do in the battlefields of today. But this attitude isn't limited to the warzones; it's something that everyone can do, wherever we are, in any situation. For us it could mean giving up time for someone else, lending someone a hand, standing up for someone's rights or even simply listening to other's concerns. Every day, each of us can choose to follow the example of Peter Badcoe, and the countless other soldiers of the war, to make a difference in our own community and keep the ANZAC Spirit alive.

Fig. A. Vietnam - 1962



After France's defeat in 1954, Vietnam was divided at the 17th Parallel to allow the leaders Ho Chi Minh (North) and Bao Dai (South) to avoid war and prepare for an election that was to bring the country back together. This election never occurred.

Fig. B. Vietnam Today



Today Vietnam is once again united, as it has been since 1975 when Northern Forces overran the South. Saigon was renamed 'Ho Chi Minh City' in tribute to the country's leader.

Fig. C/D. Peter Badcoe



The first picture of Badcoe details some of the equipment he would have carried, while the second features his determined facial expression. His large glasses also give evidence of poor eyesight.

Fig. E. Badcoe's Grave



Badcoe's gravestone, found in Terendak Cemetery, Malaysia.

Fig. F. Badcoe Road, Loxton

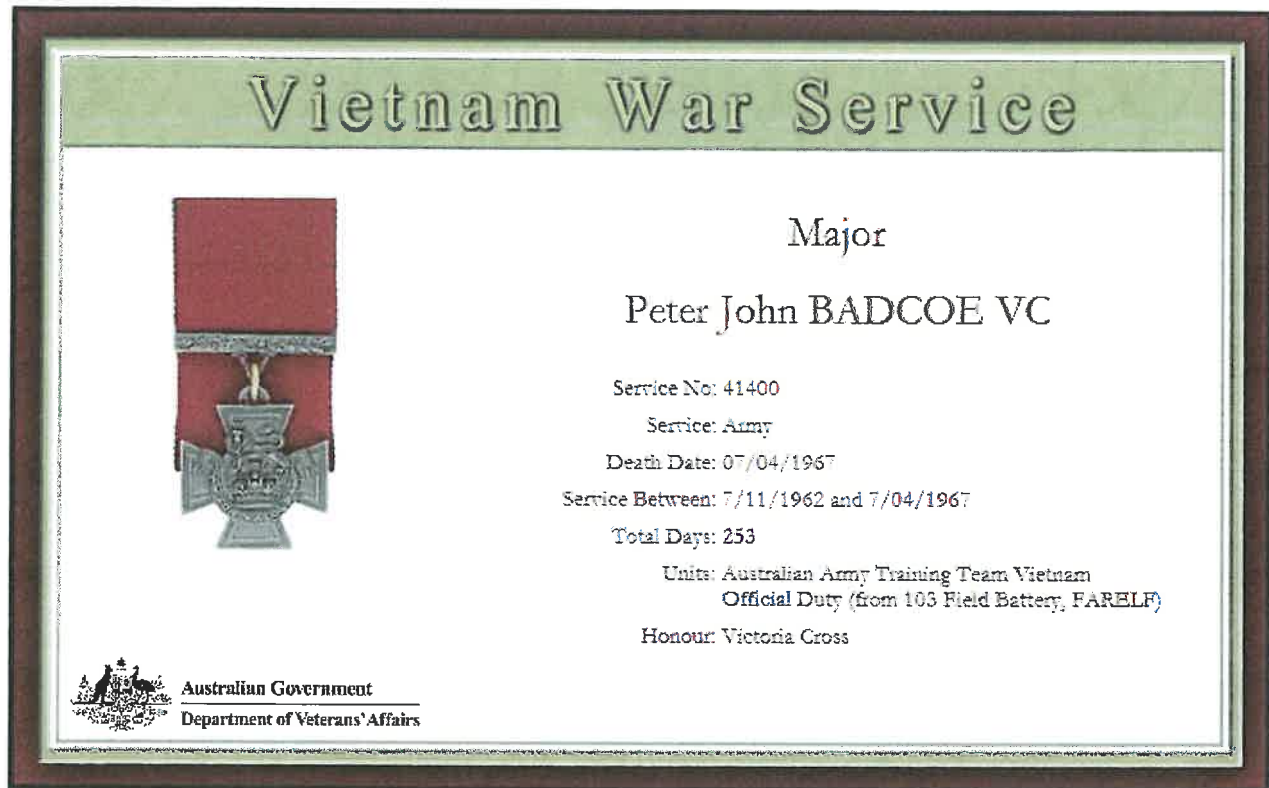


Many streets of Loxton are named after soldiers and battalions that fought in war. This is the town's way of honouring those of the past, remembering them in the present and passing on knowledge to the future generations.

Fig. G. Badcoe's Victoria Cross Medal



Fig. H. Certificate of Service



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