

ANZAC SPIRIT SCHOOL PRIZE



PETER JOHN BADCOE

VIETNAM WAR

ANZAC Spirit 2014



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PETER JOHN BADCOE VC

(11 JANUARY 1934 – 7 APRIL 1967)

Post World War II in 1950, Vietnam was separated into two different governments, the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam and the Republic of South Vietnam. Due to their contrasting ideas of communism and capitalism a conflict aroused between the two governments. By 1954, the Republic of South Vietnam called for security assistance from the United States of America and its ally, Australia.

Peter John Badcoe, born on the 11th of January 1934, in the suburb of Malvern, Adelaide, was an Australian father and military officer when the news of the Vietnam War was given to Australia.

Peter, the son of Leslie Allen Badcock and Gladys Mary Ann May (née Overton) was raised in Adelaide all through his life. He attended his senior schooling at the Adelaide Technical High School, now Glenunga International High School. During high school, Peter represented his state in hockey and played the fife in the school band. After he graduated, he was employed as a clerk in the South Australian Public Service.



Despite his father's opposition, Peter had always wanted to join the Australian Army. He did so in April 1952, joining the National Service Training Battalion for seven weeks. On the 15th of June 1952, Badcoe was accepted to the Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Victoria and trained for six months. At his graduation in December, Peter was ranked 19th out of 49 cadets and was later assigned as Second Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Artillery. Overall comments from his Portsea training commandant, complimented Peter as a 'very keen and sound student' and one who would 'make a very capable officer'¹.

On the 26th of May 1956, in a Methodist Church situated at Manly Sydney, Peter John Badcoe married Denise McMahon, after knowing each other at a military social gathering when Denise was a debutant receptionist.² In 1957, Carrey Badcoe was born. Soon afterwards, Peter and Denise had created a family of three loving daughters; Carrey, Kim and Susanne Badcoe.



26th May 1956: Peter John Badcoe marries Denise McMahon
(SA Museum Archives)

¹ *Peter John Badcoe*, Wikipedia

² Provenance, SAMA 1129 Major Peter John Badcoe, SA Museum Archives

From December 1958 to 1961, Peter served as a General Officer in Grade III at the Directorate of Military Operations and Plans at Army Headquarters. He was soon needed in Malaysia as a temporary captain of the 103rd Field Artillery Battery on tour of duty, and served there from September 1961 to November 1965.

On his return to back to Australia, Badcoe transferred from 1st Field Regiment to the Australian infantry. Peter was sent to Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam on the 6th of August, joining the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) in the position of senior advisor. In Vietnam, Peter first operated as Sector Operations Officer in the Nam Hoa district of the Thua Thein. In December 1966, he became an operations advisor at the provincial headquarters of Hue.

23rd February 1967: Peter an advisor to the Regional Force Company, was given an operation in the district of Phu Thu. At the time, Peter was monitoring the radio transmission where a call for help was needed; an US Army officer had just been killed, the body within 50m of enemy reach, and an US Medical Advisor wounded, in close reach of enemy hands. On arrival onto the fire-swept ground, Badcoe ran across 650 yards to support the South Vietnamese Platoon forces against the Viet Cong. He led the frontal attacks, averting certain defeat to inflicting heavy enemy casualties. Then Peter reached and attended to the injured US Medical Advisor 'as much as he could', until additional support arrived.³ Before enemy troops began to advance, Peter took the body of the US soldier and ran back to command in enemy fire. Peter's valiant deed under heavy open fire showed that instead of acting upon the safety of oneself first, Peter promised the rescuing of the two US militants. Even through 'the face of hostile enemy fire',⁴ he personally lead the South Vietnamese a successful assault against enemy positions and his encouragement giving hope, then victory against the attacker.

The following month on the 7th of May 1967, 0645 hours, an assault led by the Viet Cong was attacking the Quang Dien Headquarters. On the journey to counter the attack, Major Badcoe left the command group after the vehicle broke down and ran to support the Headquarters. He personally led the company out in open terrain, and 'in the face of certain death and heavy losses, his personal courage and leadership turned certain defeat into victory and prevented the enemy from capturing the District Headquarters.'⁴

The 7th of April 1967, Peter wrote his final aerogramme to his family at home in Australia.

"Only 108 days to go. By the time you get this it will be less than 100 my darling. I miss you and the little girls more than I can every tell you and I'm looking forward so very much to our little holiday together...I love you more than I could ever hope to tell you. Peter"

SA Museum Archives, Peter John Badcoe



³ Peter John Badcoe VC Interview with Ian Hogson, SA History

⁴ London Gazette



Picture taken of Major Peter Badcoe in Vietnam (SA Museum Archives)

On the very same day after sending aerogramme to his family at home, Peter went out to battle again after learning the 1st Division Reaction Company was struggling against enemy attack, near the village of An Thuan. Peter knew that unless advisors like himself were not present, the company would be denied air support. So with another US Army sergeant, he drove to the battle grounds by jeep and found the forces 'had fallen back'. Under such heavy fire, Peter crawled ahead throwing numerous grenades in attempt to 'silence a machine-gun'. *'His sergeant at one stage pulled him out of the line of fire. Rising again to throw another grenade, Badcoe was shot and killed.'*⁵ Badcoe passed away at the age of 33 and his eldest daughter, at the time, was only ten years old.



Denise Clarke, widow of Major Peter Badcoe VC, visits his grave during *the Vietnam Revisited: Three Decades On Pilgrimage*, 1996. (Department of Veterans Affairs)

Major Peter John Badcoe, who was also called the '*Galloping Major*', was a 'short, round, stocky' man with horn-rimmed glasses. Peter was always 'on the go', wearing his red beret in battle and led an example for others, 'often placing himself in the line of fire'.⁶ A conservative and well-respected man to the eyes of his mates during the Vietnam War, he didn't smoke, nor drank and preferred the 'company of a good book'.⁶ Being called 'outstanding', the people around him were 'proud to be in his unit'.⁶ He referred training the South Vietnamese soldiers 'as his kids', and 'immersed himself in their language and culture'.⁶ In his aerogrammes to his wife and family, Peter 'would talk of his frustrations' and concern for the South Vietnamese 'providing their welfare to the best of his ability'.⁶ Upon return to Australia from Vietnam, Peter was looking forward to spend a holiday he had saved for his family with the army pay.

⁵ Peter John Badcoe, Australian Dictionary of Biography

⁶ SA Museum Archives Provenance

Over many generations, the ANZAC spirit lives in each and every Australian and New Zealand family, friend and individual. The sacrifice, courage, mateship, determination and leadership, all represent the ANZAC spirit and the remembrance of those who have given so much for the lives we have today.



Major Peter John Badcoe Funeral Service (SA Museum Archives)



Mrs Badcoe with daughters (left) Susanne 6, Kim 7 and Kerry-Anne 10 reads Mr Harold Holt's congratulatory letter awarding Peter the VC (State Library of Victoria Collections)

Peter John Badcoe, was a leader, father of three and officer of the Australian Army. Wanting to be a part of the Australian force from the very earliest years in his life, Peter's journey from being a clerk to military advisor in the Vietnam War, is an honourable story. In the Vietnam conflict, Peter encouraged the South Vietnamese, Americans and ANZACs to never lose hope in maintaining peace, safety and rights for the people's freedom in the war-inflicted nation. At home in Australia while Peter was in Vietnam, his daughters grew up knowing their father 'was doing what he wanted to do'⁷.

The extent of running on an open terrain in open fire to lead young men against enemy attack. The courage and action of rescuing an injured medical advisor, and the body of a young soldier, over 650 yards in enemy target. Peter placed his duty as a military advisor his first during the war, and always was 'out in the front under heavy fire', leading and encouraging the South Vietnam soldiers who 'were much younger'.³ His bravery to be fearless in open fire for the rescue of his mates, his determination to provide the wellbeing of the South Vietnamese, his leadership for encouraging those around him in doubt, and his sacrifice to save those he cared for; the South Vietnamese, his friends and the country he loved.

Mike Thomas from USA, was a soldier who was recused in a desperate battle against the Viet Cong, the same battle Peter came to help and passed away. He

⁷ War hero's daughter journeys to Vietnam, 7.30pm Report, ABC News



sent an email commemorating Peter saying that for years, he had kept the Stars and Stripes article about Peter posthumous acceptance of the Victorian Cross. He mentioned ‘*I was very glad to see his familiar red beret he always wore leading the troops coming to our rescue*’.⁸

41 years later, his daughter Carey Badcoe talked about her father on ABC news report, and said, ‘*the whole person was what made him a hero*’.⁷

Mike Thomas, 2007

Take care of yourselves my darlings I love you so very very much.

Petrie



Grave stone of Major Peter Badcoe
VC at Terendak Garrison Cemetery,
Malaysia



Lest We Forget

Đừng quên

Many thanks to:

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My family for encouraging me all to the very end, the people who have supported the Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Competition who without their promotion I would've never had discovered what

I now know, and finally to

Major Peter John Badcoe, who I am truly honoured to have told his story, whose legacy lives on with the ANZAC spirit and whose sacrifice as well as the many others will never be forgotten

⁸ AATV Advisor News page

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