

Real Heroes

Jul 12, 2010

On Sunday's program, Macca read out this email from Sam Halvorsen from the Gold Coast.

On the 21st June 2010 a helicopter went down in Afghanistan and Australia lost three of its young people. One of those I am proud to have been able to call a friend. He also happened to be the son of good friends. Quite simply he was the finest young person I have known, The 10 days which followed have changed my life. They have afforded me the opportunity to become acquainted with the most exemplary group of people one could meet. The group I refer to is the 2nd Commando Unit of Australia's Army to which the three fallen soldiers belonged. On Saturday June my children and I attended the ramp ceremony Where the bodies of the soldiers were returned to their families. Accompanying the bodies on the plane back from Afghanistan were the remaining members of the unit, brought home earlier than scheduled.

The dignity and solemnity of this occasion triggered emotion in all who attended but the overriding feeling in the aircraft hanger on that day can be summed up by just one Word - "respect".

At the end of proceedings I met and talked with a number of the commandos of that unit. The common thread of those talks is that Afghanistan is Where they all want to be assigned. It is Where they can put their training into use. It is a cause they believe in. It is where they think they can make a difference.

On Thursday 1st July I attended the funeral of that young man in his hometown. Over people were present, including immediate family and friends, military chiefs, political heads of our nation, and many people with whom his loss resonated.

However this was truly a ceremony about the "commando family", made up of the commandos and their direct family. It was the commandos who provided the guard of honour; it was they who carried their fallen mate's casket; and it was they who grieved deeply.

The strength and support shown by these same men to the bereaved family has been astonishing and something difficult for those outside this unique group to comprehend. It was this commando family that had people flown in immediately to offer emotional support and to take care of every detail of the funeral. They did this because they too had been to Afghanistan, They understood; they cared; and they had respect for the sacrifice involved, Equally the young man's family has accepted its loss with dignity and courage in the knowledge that their son's death had meaning and purpose.

So who are these people called commandos? They are young Australians from all walks of life and from varying ethnic backgrounds. They are dedicated, confident, highly trained and highly disciplined people who take enormous pride in their role as elite soldiers.

When not on overseas postings they Work in Australia on counter terrorism activities to keep our country safe. They also train constantly to ensure their skills are up to speed at all times.

In combat their body armour, rifle, ammunition and water weigh in at 35 kilograms yet on top of that they carry their backpack. Carrying more than their actual body weight, they jump out of planes. They endure privations that most could not envision.

Amongst the commandos I had the pleasure to meet was a 34 year old father of two whose back is so worn out that he will have no choice but to resign at year's end. Another is recovering from serious injury and at a mere 29 years of age realises he also will have to leave. Yet another is walking around with grenade fragments in the back of his head as a result of an accident on the range. The medic to the scene of his accident was the young man whose funeral he had attended earlier that day.

The inspiration for me to pen these words is not so much the commandos themselves for I know they seek no recognition. It is rather the fact that it is illegal for them to be photographed or even identified in the media as a commando. That is, While they are alive. Out of the 16 Australian soldiers lost in Afghanistan, 12 have been commandos.

Everyday Australians therefore have no idea who these people are. These people who die for us; who suffer life-long disabilities for us; who protect us from sinister influences within our very own borders.

In an age when we idolise so-called celebrities - TV performers, sports people, actors - I pose the question "where have we gone wrong?"

On a personal level it is this commando family that has inspired me to strive to do better, to put in more effort for those in need in our society, and to focus less on material wants.

On a national level is it not time we started to redress the unhealthy pastime of idolising those who are simply working at what they enjoy and who happen to feature on our television screens or in the media?

Is it not time for more of our young people to work harder in pursuit of their own goals and to pay more respect to the teachers and elders who endeavour to help them?

Is it not time for families to work harder at developing a work ethic for themselves and their children in order to make a better contribution to our country?

Is it not time for older Australians to work harder for those less fortunate and for all Australians to show more respect to each other regardless of their heritage?

I have met my heroes, They will hereafter be my inspiration. But I can't tell you who they are.

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