



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

**28 August 2008
Adjournment Speech to the Federal Parliament**

Newcastle Veterans

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.54 p.m.)—This morning I had the great honour of participating in a special wreath-laying ceremony with students from Waratah West Primary School at the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier at our very own Australian War Memorial. For young people particularly, learning about the human cost of war can be confronting, and I am proud of the way the students from Waratah West conducted themselves today. I hope the lessons they learned of the sacrificed made by those who have fought and died for our nation are lessons they will carry with them for the rest of their lives, and I acknowledge the excellent contribution made by the staff and volunteer veterans of the Australian War Memorial.

While the Unknown Soldier is and will remain unknown and symbolic of our defence forces' sacrifices, there are names and stories that we do know. This year I met with my constituent Scott Arthur, who told me the story of his great-uncle, Private William Phillips, who was killed in France on 22 August 1918. Private Phillips was originally commemorated at the Villiers-Bretonneux memorial to the missing, but 10 years of research by his great-nephew revealed that Private Phillips has actually lain in the Bray Vale British Cemetery at Bray-sur-Somme for the past 90 years. I am pleased to say that the Office of Australian War Graves has now marked Private Phillips's grave with the correct headstone, a fitting tribute to my constituent's dedication to the memory of his great-uncle.

I am also pleased to say that the day before Anzac Day this year the Minister for Veterans' Affairs visited Private Phillips's newly marked grave in France to lay a wreath on behalf of the Australian government. This deeply touched my constituent and the veteran community, particularly the members of the Adamstown RSL sub-branch, who have Private Phillips's name on their cenotaph. I thank the minister for taking the time to make this very special gesture.

I also know that there are many Vietnam veterans in my community who would also like me to thank the minister for recently moving to give proper recognition to those Australians who fought in the Battle of Long Tan. On 14 August the Australian government announced changes to military awards to properly recognise the individual and collective gallantry of those men on 18 August 1966, to provide an equitable mix of awards for the battle and to confer considerable honour on all the men of D Company 6RAR in Vietnam who fought in the Battle of Long Tan.

As I commemorated with my city's Vietnam Veterans Day this year, I was very pleased to be part of a government that was able to give these men this long overdue recognition. The service in Newcastle, at Civic Park, was conducted by my constituent Steve Finney—or I should now say Steve Finney OAM, because he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal this year because of his tireless work on behalf of our veteran community in Newcastle. Similarly, I acknowledge the wonderful service of Mrs Dulcie Giles, who also received the Order of Australia Medal this year for her tireless efforts representing women who served.

Steve Finney, though, during 1969 and 1970 was a national serviceman serving in Vietnam. In 1974, Stephen was a founding member of the Vietnam Legion, and his service with this organisation has been recognised with life membership. Steve has devoted a great deal of his time to the welfare of fellow ex-service men and women and continues to do so not least in his current role as Secretary/Treasurer of the Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Association in Newcastle.

TPI is one of the large number of ex-service organisations doing excellent work in Newcastle, many of which have shared in almost a quarter of a million dollars in government funding to support veteran services in Newcastle this year. These groups include Newcastle Legacy, the TPI Association, the Shortland RSL sub-branch, the Merewether RSL sub-branch, the National Service and Combined Forces Association, the Waratah-Mayfield RSL sub-branch, Alzheimer's Australia and the Lambton RSL sub-branch. It has been a very special year for us.

I am particularly pleased and proud to announce to the parliament today that New Lambton Public School in my electorate is the New South Wales primary school category winner in the 2008 Anzac Day Schools Awards. It is a very exciting honour for them. They have won \$1,000 and a commemorative plaque to display in their school. I congratulate all the students and their staff, particularly the principal, Mr Tony Negline, a former colleague and a mentor of mine in a former career. The New Lambton Public School entry showed the wonderful depth of the relationship they had formed with veterans from the local Lambton RSL club. The research they had done had embellished and identified the real people whom they had not known but so strongly wished to recognise. They researched and wrote essays about the soldiers' experience on the Western Front, and their essays demonstrate sound historical research, empathy and understanding. They have created a very special record by preserving their heritage not only for themselves and their school but for the wider community.