



Stuart Robert MP

Federal Member for Fadden

Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel

****MEDIA RELEASE****

21 April 2011

GROUNDING PARACHUTE REGIMENT WILL AFFECT OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY

Today's report that Defence is looking to disband its only airborne battle group based around the 3rd Battalion (3 RAR) is of extreme concern and the Minister for Defence should immediately explain why he hasn't come out against any such proposal.

Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel, Stuart Robert, who was a Platoon commander in B Company, 3 RAR in 1993, said that removing the parachute capability from 3 RAR will destroy the airborne battle group capability leaving a gaping hole in the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) operational capability.

'An infantry battalion with supporting assets, all capable of being inserted via parachute at night in dreadful conditions, provides enormous flexibility to a nation like Australia with a small but effective Defence force. Taking an air or port-head by force is only achieved via a few methods. One is via an amphibious deployment, a capability that Australia is presently unable to field; the second is an air-mobile deployment using helicopters, predominantly based in a secure area or launched via amphibious ships; and the third option is via airborne insertion using elements of the Airborne Battle Group based around 3 RAR,' Mr Robert said.

'Altogether removing the option of at least a company sized airborne insertion severely restricts your ability to conduct operations. Furthermore, Australia's Special Forces, who are already being significantly taxed undertaking specialist combat duties, should not be required to take over a role that is stock standard infantry work. Special Forces are a great capability, but they are not the answer to every question.'

Mr Robert said the Gillard Labor Government and the Defence Minister had no understanding of the vital role airborne assets play and have no appreciation for the role they have played in the past.

'On Easter Sunday I will be representing Tony Abbott, as 3 RAR (Parachute Battalion) celebrates the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong at Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney. It was during this decisive battle that 3 RAR was awarded the prestigious US Presidential Citation for holding their ground under a ferocious attack from an enemy over 20 times their size. Named 'Old Faithful' 3 RAR continues to live up to this namesake,' Mr Robert said.

'Considering the Gillard Labor Government is not even bothering to send a representative to celebrate the 60th anniversary of 3 RAR's fight at Kapyong, it is little wonder they don't understand the integral role of an airborne capability to military operations.'

'Defence Minister Smith has again and again assured the Australian public that the ADF's operational capability will not be cut under the so-called Strategic Reform Program, but here again we see that his words are hollow and meaningless.'

'This smacks of another cut to the ADF's operational capability in order to save money under the failing SRP and to offset the Government's wasteful spending in other portfolios.'

Media enquiries: Richard Briedis – 0401 056 054