

EULOGY BY STEVE GOWER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
FUNERAL OF MAJOR GENERAL
D. M. BUTLER AO DSO SILVER STAR (US)

I have the great honour of being invited by David's daughter, Sue, to speak about his life and contribution as a senior officer. I had a very high regard for him, and we stayed on as friends in later life.

As is invariably the case as a younger officer, I knew a lot about David Butler, even though I'd never met him. I knew that: he was in the first attack ever conducted by the Royal Australian Regiment, and that was the Battle of the Apple Orchard in the advance northwards into North Korea. For his actions, he was to be awarded the US Silver Star; he'd been a very successful battalion commander of 6RAR on its second tour in Vietnam. Later when I was at the War Memorial, the Official Historian told me that he regarded him as being right up there with the best commanders; his Holsworthy-based Task Force had responded effectively at very short notice to provide aid-to-the-civil-power protection to the CHOGM retreat at Bowral following the Hilton Hotel bomb blast. His Task Force's quick response shocked and worried one very high-ranking Canberra mandarin. He told David, 'Your troops suddenly came from nowhere and took over the town' and that, 'the Army, if it wanted to, could easily take over the country!'

I first met David when he was Head of Army staff in our Washington Embassy. He soon became aware from his contacts in the US Army that it was undergoing a renaissance from its post-Vietnam malaise in its strategic and doctrinal direction. There was the development of the Airland Battle war fighting concept, the articulation of the link between tactics and strategy called the Operational Level of War, and its 9th Infantry Division had become the high technology test bed in an endeavour to increase the firepower and mobility of the standard infantry Division.

I was on integrated exchange with the US Army Command that was responsible for these initiatives, and David established close contact with me.

He came to admire the US Army's Chief of Staff, "Shy" Meyer, whom he regarded as a visionary, and he said to me that his RMC classmate, General Phillip Bennett, displayed similar qualities.

That high regard was reciprocated some years later by General Sir Phillip Bennett when he wrote, 'David has shown himself as an outstanding tactical commander, an excellent leader and a teacher in his profession of arms'. He came to be an immensely important contributor to the Profession of Arms.

I would add that he was one of the leading thinkers of his time. I observed this personally when I returned from the US to work for him when he was the General Officer Commanding Training Command.

As the Colonel, Doctrine, suffice to say it was a very busy time. He was full of ideas and he would always articulate clearly what he wanted, a great gift.

But we were never too busy not to end our discussions in his corner office without discussions about sport: cricket, and Australian football. I was never able to add anything of substance on his other great sporting passion, golf. But in the one golf match we did have, I thought he displayed a great capacity for gamesmanship. I, as a cricketer, would call it sledging!

During these discussions I discovered we had a common background in schooling: he went to Wesley in Perth, Prince Alfred for me in Adelaide; both Methodist-based.

I came to believe by his conduct and behaviour he observed the Methodist doctrine of doing your best with whatever attributes you possessed for the good of society; contributing actively to the community; helping others; and being humble.

I found him to be a kindly, courteous, and gentlemanly person, very well-read on a range of subjects and one who cared deeply about the welfare of those who worked for him.

He did, of course, like many of us, like to see the traditions and proprieties of Army life observed; and woe-betide someone who arrived late for his weekly conference or took liberties with their turnout or presentation. Nonetheless, he had a nice turn of phrase when handing out the rebuke!

Before he left the Army, there was talk of him taking an appointment in Canberra. But having been the Director General of Operations and Plans in the unforgettable Sir Arthur Tange period, a Canberra posting had no appeal.

So, it was a return to his lovely property with a pool and tennis court at Portsea, a place he had enjoyed when he was the Commandant of the Officer Cadet School. That was an appointment that he believed was very important. He and Ann immersed themselves in the social life there, particularly the Sorrento Golf Club, where he was a much-respected president.

He continued his interest in Army matters and, with several others, wrote a book, *The Fight Leaders*, about the first three COs of 3RAR in Korea (Charlie Green, I. B. Ferguson, and Frank Hassett).

In the last two years, David and Ann were moved to Sydney by the family where they could get the care that they needed.

It remains for me to farewell Major General David Matheson Butler AO DSC Silver Star (US). It was a great privilege to know and work with you.

RIP, David, and our hearts and thoughts go out to your remaining family members.

Steve Gower AO AO(Mil)