

[Old Soldiers Relive 3RAR's finest hour - ANZAC Day Special Edition](#)

By Brian Woodley, The Australian, Edition 1, WED 25 APR 2001, Page 004

THE pomp and solemnity of the army parade was interrupted when the small and wispy 82-year-old frame of Bernard "Ben" O'Dowd was led out to fix the Kapyong streamer to the regimental colours.

As the white-gloved figure made his proud journey across the asphalt to where the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, was arrayed in its finery, the mates he led to victory in Australia's costliest post-World War II battle began clapping him. A moment later those under the VIP tent next door joined in. Then they applauded him again, all the way back to their ranks.

Seventy-six surviving comrades, drawn to the 3RAR barracks at Holsworthy, southwest Sydney, from all over the nation to mark the 50th anniversary of the Korean War's battle of Kapyong, were suddenly boys again -- the same young soldiers responsible for 3RAR's finest hour.

The army had promised something special yesterday. It came in buses from Victoria and aircraft from Western Australia, in the shape of men and widows of advancing years, with their heads bowed in memory and their chests weighed down with medals.

Army chief Peter Cosgrove confessed to a lump in his throat when the Kapyong veterans stood to watch the battalion troop past. "I stand here today in the company of heroes," he said.

For one army unit, their One Day of the Year comes the day before Anzac Day. Through the night of April 23-24, 1951, 3RAR took on and stopped a Chinese offensive directed at capturing the South Korean capital of Seoul. The battle cost 32 Australian lives and a 33rd soldier died in captivity.

Lieutenant-Colonel O'Dowd was the company commander who took charge of all four rifle companies in what Lieutenant-General Cosgrove called a "shocking, murderous battle" fought against "a resolute and dangerous foe".

"It's extraordinary that I've made it through these 50 years," said the sprightly veteran, who at the age of 80 wrote a book about Korea, *In Valiant Company*. "I'm going to have lunch with people I haven't met for 50 years."

His successors in his old 3RAR unit, Alpha Company, were on exercises in Malaysia and missed yesterday's parade. According to a recent parliamentary report, many of the problems of bullying and rough justice that swept through 3RAR in 1997-98 were confined to A Company.

Lieutenant-General Cosgrove alluded to those issues in his address to the parade. He said the soldiers who served in East Timor had added lustre to the history of the battalion, but that there had been troubled times since.

The army was "open and accountable" over its problems, he said, and would continue to work through the issues and resolve them "by the book".

"We'll put all that behind us soon," he promised.