

BRIAN FREDERICK COOPER, OAM — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [10.06 pm]: I rise tonight very briefly to honour the life of Brian Cooper. On 20 January this year, we lost Brian Frederick Cooper, OAM, JP. Brian was a force of nature whom I met through the Greenwood branch of the Liberal Party. It would be fair to say that some people might categorise Brian as one of life's quiet achievers. He undertook his achievements quietly but he was a very forceful advocate along the way as well. Brian was a highly respected member of the veterans community in Perth and he also made time to fulfil the civic duties of a justice of the peace.

Brian was born on 4 January 1939 and joined the Australian Regular Army just two days shy of his fifteenth birthday in 1954 as an apprentice in the Western Command Personnel Depot. This was the beginning of a combined 40 years' service in the Australian Regular Army from 1954 to 1976, and the General Reserve from 1976 to 1994. Brian finished his military career with the rank of Warrant Officer Class One. Brian maintained that no-nonsense, practical and stern warrant officer bearing until the very end of his days.

While with the Regular Army, Brian served in New Guinea, Thailand and Vietnam. His service at this time and with the Army Reserve was recognised through the course of his military career with the Australian Active Service Medal, the Australian Service Medal, the Vietnam Medal, the Defence Force Service Medal, the Reserve Force Medal, the National Medal of Australia, the Defence Medal Vietnamese Campaign, and the Returned from Active Service Badge. Those honours and awards recognised a man who served his country and was prepared to defend its honour, values, people and freedom.

Brian was acutely aware of the challenges and risks in serving his country in uniform, but he was equally concerned by and passionate about the welfare of veterans once they returned to civilian life. He was a tireless campaigner in this area. Brian served on the executive of the state branch of the RSL WA, was an assistant secretary and secretary of the regular Defence Force Welfare Association, a member of the Vietnam Veterans Trust, a member of the Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council, and a trustee of the Western Australian Aged Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Relief Fund. In all these roles he was a strong advocate for the rights of veterans and directly involved in improving their welfare through practical efforts. His knowledge and experience benefited a large number of veterans who returned to civilian life, and he ensured that this knowledge was passed on to others through his involvement in the development of a training and information program for pension officer and defence welfare advocates. It was for this work with the veteran community that he was awarded with a Medal of the Order of Australia.

Above all else, Brian had a true sense of community service, whether it be to the veterans or during his work as a justice of the peace in the suburb of Kingsley, where he provided not only a service but also empathy and practical knowledge of local issues. It was when he was in this capacity that I last saw Brian in October or November of last year. At some stage in our lives we will all most likely require the services of a justice of the peace, and it is worth noting then that Brian, like his fellow JPs, provided a service that is fundamental in our society and a practical example of what community service is.

I am saddened by Brian's passing. His advice and support to veterans and his local community were delivered with a tireless and no-nonsense attitude, and he had a genuine empathy for all the individuals he came across. Brian's passing will be felt by the community and I believe that the community is very genuinely poorer for his loss.

Brian was married to Rita, and they had three children, two of whom, Margaret and Cameron, sadly are now deceased. Throughout his entire life Brian had been a pillar of support for his community and his family, and Rita, who was married to him for 55 years, describes him as the hero of the family and her rock. These sentiments are shared by many who knew Brian. My thoughts and well wishes are for Brian's wife, Rita, his surviving daughter, Gail, and his grandchildren and great grandchildren. His legacy will live on through you and you have much to be proud of.