



Patron: His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Ret'd) Governor of New South Wales

NEWSLETTER

March 2017

Welcome to this Newsletter of the Battle for Australia Association of New South Wales. Traditionally we issue one newsletter in September of each year to coincide with our Annual Commemoration Service but in order to increase our communication with the individuals and organisations who are members of our Association we will now issue two, one in March and one in September.

The Committee has been busy since the Commemoration Service last September at which Commander Rebecca Jeffcoat, RAN was a most outstanding Keynote Speaker. A copy of her address can be found in this newsletter.

Since then the major activities have been the establishment of the relationship with the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia (PNGAA), the conduct of our Special Event held on 17th February at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the development of our website.

Thanks to the efforts of John Howells, a member of our Committee who manages our website, a great deal of new material has been added to it. It can be accessed here:



Commander Rebecca Jeffcoat, RAN



<http://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/BAOverview.php>

Japanese Invasion Money from WWII



One Pound



One Shilling

Images from

<http://www.ozatwar.com/ozatwar/japmoney.htm>

Battle of Australia Day Commemoration – Sydney 07 September 2016

Commander Rebecca Jeffcoat, RAN

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, the Traditional Custodians of this Land on which we are gathered, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I am honoured to be invited to address you on this national day of remembrance. It is a privilege to be able to remember with you today, the events of 1942 and early 1943; the period of time when Australians and our allies fought to defeat Japan's plan to force Australia's surrender.

November and December of 1941 were dark months for Australia. HMAS *Sydney*, and all 645 crew, was lost to the German raider *Kormoran*. In the Far East the British capital ships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk. Hong Kong fell on Christmas day 1941. Malaya was invaded in December and, despite a fighting withdrawal, by 15 February 1942 Singapore was surrendered. This resulted in the imprisonment of 100,000 British, Indian and Australian troops.

This series of catastrophic events led to the Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin declaring on 16th February 1942: "*The fall of Singapore can only be described as Australia's Dunkirk... The Fall of Dunkirk initiated the Battle for Britain. The fall of Singapore opens the Battle for Australia.*"

He foresaw the impending massive struggle to defend Australia against Japanese military aggression; that in the weeks and months and years ahead this 'Battle for Australia' would be fought over land and at sea – challenging Australia's territorial integrity.

Today I would like to tell the story of Australia's Corvettes; their service goes hand in hand with the Battle for Australia. It is a story of courage over adversity, of Australian ingenuity, and of the incredible efforts of the home front to build 60 Australian designed ships in dockyards around the country.

When war looked imminent in 1938, the Royal Australian Navy realised it urgently needed a fleet of escort ships to guard convoys and keep the sea lanes open. The result was a ship designed by Australians who had never designed warships before, built by Australians who had never built ships before and manned by Australians most of whom had never been to sea before.

The keel of the first was laid down in February 1940. She was launched in August and commissioned in December as HMAS Bathurst. Corvettes were soon sliding down the slipways of eight shipyards and being commissioned at the rate of one every 26 days.

They served in every theatre of the war, they escorted convoys, sank submarines, shot at - and sometimes shot down - planes, swept mines, ferried troops, bombarded enemy shore guns, surveyed uncharted waters, towed damaged ships to safety, and even landed spies. They steamed a total of 11 million kilometres, nearly all of it in dangerous waters, and often behind enemy lines.

In 1942, seven corvettes fought in the Malayan campaign in the waters around Singapore. They were the last Allied ships to leave Singapore when it fell, then the last to leave Java when it, too, fell.

At the same time, others were tackling the Japanese across northern Australia. HMAS Deloraine, which had been commissioned only eight weeks earlier, took on a Japanese submarine, the I-124, 80 kilometres west of Darwin and sank it. Only a few short days later, on 19 Feb, she was in Darwin harbour when Japanese aircraft attacked.

By mid 1942, there were 24 corvettes conveying merchant ships around the Australian coast where Japanese submarines were operating. Two corvettes, Geelong and Whyalla, were in harbour the night war came to Sydney, when three Japanese mini submarines entered harbour, attacked with their torpedoes, and sunk the depot ship Kuttabul (my ship's namesake).

At the end of 1942 into early 1943, Corvettes escorted the convoys bringing vast quantities of military stores and equipment to the front line troops fighting in New Guinea through the Owen Stanley ranges and on the northern coast.

Through all of their extensive service, two corvettes were lost in collisions at sea, one was sunk by a mine,

and only one, HMAS Armidale, was sunk by enemy action.

She went down on 1 December, 1942, off Timor, while taking supplies and reinforcements to the commandos fighting ashore. Under attack by enemy torpedo-bombers and fighters, Armidale was hit by two torpedoes as a near-miss bomb blew a hole in her side. The Captain, LCDR David Richards, gave the order to abandon ship, but one man stayed - Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. He struggled back to the after gun, strapped himself in and fired at the planes which were strafing his shipmates in the water. He poured a stream of shells at the planes and sent one cartwheeling into the sea. Despite wounds from enemy fire he continued firing as he disappeared beneath the waves.

Ten crew and 37 soldiers had been killed in the action. 102 men were in the water. Of those, 52 left on two separate missions to seek help in the ship's motor-boat and their patched up whaler, they were eventually rescued by the corvette *Kalgoorlie*, 4 and 9 days later respectively.

The men left behind on the rafts, were sighted by a RAAF Catalina flying boat 8 days after the sinking, however it could not land as the sea was too rough. Food and water was dropped, but despite subsequent searches they were never seen again.

HMAS Sheean, a Collins class submarine, and the first of the new patrol boats, HMAS Armidale, were named in recognition of the courage and ingenuity that characterised the Australian corvettes in the Battle for Australia.

Although focusing on the service of the Corvettes, I cannot finish today without recalling the events of this period which rightly hold a place of honour within the Australian Psyche. Those key actions that eventually turned the tide on Japan's plans; we remember:

- the Battles of the Coral Sea, the Java Sea, of Sunda Strait, of Milne Bay and of the Bismark Sea,
- the actions in New Guinea in the Kokoda Campaign and the beach heads at Gona, Buna and San-an-anda, and
- the Guadalcanal Campaign.

In 1943 Japan's unconditional surrender was still far off - but the certainty that victory would come had replaced the deep fears of early 1942. John Curtin's worst concerns after Singapore fell had not been realized. Japan had been first checked and then defeated, by land, sea and air, north of Australia.

What do we owe to this heroic generation of young Australians, and our allies, who died defending this country in 1942 and who are now passing into history?

We honour the courage and tenacity of those who died fighting in the jungles of New Guinea.

We remember with gratitude the loyalty and skill of the Papuan men who played a vital role in supporting the troops, especially the sick and wounded.

We remember those in the ships sunk off our shores and the faithful sailors who stuck to their guns and died fighting; like Teddy Sheean.

We remember the brave airman who fought in the skies of the Pacific.

We remember the lonely Coastwatchers across the South West Pacific who kept up a vigil for months and years and tapped out their vital warnings of Japanese activity.

We remember the allied Merchant Navies; who *"brought the troops their lifeblood, and paid for it with their own"*.

And, we remember and honour the women and men who made their contribution on the home front, remaining strong and steadfast, despite hardship, the loss of life, and the threat of invasion.

We owe them all our remembrance and gratitude on this day and every day.

Their legacy to us is our life long liberty, prosperity and peace.

Today's Last Post bugle sounds for them all.

Lest we forget

Planning for the 2017 Commemoration Service

This year's Battle for Australia Commemoration Service will be held at Martin Place on Wednesday 6th September and planning for it is underway. As usual all members, member organisations and many VIP's and special guests will be invited so please note the date in your diaries.

Contact with Battle for Australia Associations of other States

Unfortunately the national organisation for the Battle for Australia is not operating so it has been pleasing for our Association to make contact with the Battle for Australia Associations from the other States and to learn of their activities. We are in contact with Western Australia which held its inaugural Commemoration Service last year and we are also in contact with the ACT Association. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who has contact details of other State Associations.

P r e s i d e n t

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Papua New Guinea Association of Australia (PNGAA)

For many years the participation of Fuzzy Wuzzies from PNG in our Association's Annual Commemoration Service at the Cenotaph has been arranged by one of our members, Michael Ali, who also contributed to the costs of this activity. Over recent years this activity has become a heavier burden on Michael and our Association has recognized the need to become directly involved in the arrangements. We have also recognized that the participation of the PNG veterans will become more difficult as the original Fuzzy Wuzzies age.

As a result contact was made with the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia (PNGAA) whose activities include the support of projects in PNG, working to strengthen the Australia-PNG relationship, and preserving historical materials related to

PNG, as well as facilitating communication and interaction between members. It was immediately clear that our objectives align in many areas given the heavy involvement of PNG in the Battle for Australia so we have agreed to cooperate and support each other where we have a common interest. The first area in which we have agreed to cooperate is to cooperate to ensure appropriate PNG representation at our Annual Commemoration Service. Andrea Williams, the President of the PNGAA, attended our last committee meeting on 7 February and briefed us on the role and activities of the PNGAA. Information on the PNGAA can be accessed via its website which can be accessed here:

<https://www.pngaa.net>

Special Event 17th February 2017

This year, 2017, is the 75th Anniversary of the Battle for Australia and many other events and military operations of the war in the Pacific in 1941 and 1942. While most of these events are commemorated individually our Association saw the need to remind Australians of the threat our region faced at that time and how it took a massive response from many nations and their people to eventually overcome the threat and defeat Japan. In short we wanted to put all of these individual events which are commemorated into the context of that period in our history. Hence, we arranged a Special Event to be held on 17th February which was the anniversary of a speech by Prime Minister Curtin in Martin Place in 1942 when he launched the appeal for War Bonds and in doing used the term Battle for Australia which we will commemorate at Martin Place on the 6th

September later this year.

Thanks to the support of the Department of Veterans Affairs in NSW, the event was held in its Offices and took the form of a morning tea followed by a presentation by Associate Professor Peter J Dean the Acting Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, at the Australian National University. His major research and teaching interests are in Australian strategic policy, the ANZUS Alliance, military operations and defence studies. He is the author/editor of a number of books including *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). His address reminded us of the events of that time, how Australia and other countries responded to them, and the changes to our region which followed. It highlighted just what a pivotal year 1942 was in our nation's history. Peter's presentation

also provided a great insight into Macarthur's attitudes to Australia and his question and answer session was most impressive concluding with his thoughts on President Trump.

Invitations were sent to all members and all associations which are members and some 50 attended the event. Representatives of the Fleet Commander and the Commander Forces Command attended and the Hon. Natasha MacLaren Jones attended on behalf of the Office of the Hon David Elliott MP the Minister for Corrections, Emergency Services and Veterans Affairs

A video of the presentation can be accessed here:

<http://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/2017.php>

Call for Committee Members and Volunteers

Our Committee meets bi-monthly at DVA's offices and is doing an excellent job of managing the affairs of our Association. However, we are always on the lookout for new talent and currently we urgently require a volunteer to take over from Elizabeth Ramsay to manage our luncheon at the Westin Hotel following our Commemoration Service in September. Elizabeth is particularly well organised and will brief her successor thoroughly but it is important that we find a replacement for her.

Membership

Our Association relies on the annual fees of our members and the many organisations, particularly RSL sub-branches, which are members to fund our activities. Our membership is steady but we will always welcome new members, so please spread the word. The Application Form can be downloaded from our website and contact details can be accessed on it here:

http://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/documents/Membership_Form.pdf

A GLANCE BACK



FEBRUARY 17, 2017

