

An Address by The Honourable Phil Edman MLC, Member for the South Metropolitan Region at King's Park, Perth, 7 September 2016.

Today, we honour those men and women who fought and died to protect Australia from invasion by the Japanese Imperial Forces, during the Second World War.

In 2008, the then Governor-General, Michael Jefferies, declared that the first Wednesday in September will be a day of National observance for the "Battle for Australia."



Today marks the first time in our States history that a service has been held to pause and reflect on those who sacrifice their lives and served during this turbulent time. We are honoured to have both Mr Peter Hackett and Mrs Ronnie Roach in attendance today.

Both Mr Hackett and Mrs Roach were gunners in Western Australia who fought to defend the West Australian Coastline from the invading Japanese.

Mr Hackett was present at the bombing of Darwin, and was among the first Australians to take up arms in an effort to ward off the incoming Japanese aircraft from attacking mainland Australia.

On reflecting on the bombing of Darwin, no Australian there that day could have been prepared for the shock that emanated from the explosion of the first bomb, which hit at 09:55.

It is for acts of bravery such as these, that we gather today.

On the 15th of February 1942, Australian and British forces surrendered to the Japanese in the Battle of Singapore.

The defeat at Singapore severely compromised Australia's ability to defend itself. Not only had 15,000 Australian troops been captured, but the fall of Singapore widened the gap for the Japanese to push further south.

Prime Minister John Curtin said, "The fall of Singapore opens the Battle for Australia."

"The Battle for Australia" marks the pivotal point in our history where our very way of life was threatened.

The terrifying strength and determination of the Japanese Imperial Forces, heightened the fear of Australians about possible invasion. As a result, the country was called to arms, in order to defend the mainland from foreign aggression.

In preparation for air and sea based invasion attempts, coastal areas were fortified. Despite these efforts, the Japanese began a continued bombing campaign on the coastal cities of Australia.

Mainland Australia was bombed 97 times by the Japanese.

- Darwin had been bombed 64 times.
- Horn Island, nine times.
- Broome and Exmouth Gulf, 4 times, resulting in 88 deaths in Broome.
- Millingimbi and Townsville: 3 times.
- Port Hedland and Wyndham: Twice.
- Onslow, Drysdale, Katherine, Mossman, Derby and Port Patterson: Once.

More than 1,200 people died on our own soil as a result of these bombings on Australia.

In addition to the bombings conducted against these locations, more than 1,750 people died in Australian waters. 54 enemy warships sank 53 merchant ships, and three war ships.

The sinking of HMAS Sydney, Australia's worst naval disaster, is one such instance. 645 people died as a result of its sinking.

The Hospital Ship Centaur lost 268 souls when it too was sunk.

John Curtin realised that without adequate troop numbers to mount a strong defence for Australia, the country would not be able to withstand a full-scale invasion attempt.

He decided to initiate the return of both the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions from the Middle East.

This course of action ignited a heated confrontation between John Curtin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

But Curtin realised that his duty was to the Australian people, and the country he represented and the defence of Australia had to be prioritised.

Amidst the continued acts of aggression experienced by Australia, a small semblance of hope arose during the Battle of Milne Bay.

In 1942, the Japanese were intently focused on capturing Port Moresby. Doing so would have allowed them to launch an invasion attempt in the North of Australia.

In order to weaken the allies' defences, Japan would have to take Milne Bay, where it could have utilised the three air craft bases, which would have afforded the Japanese superior air power.

If Milne Bay were to be captured by the enemy, the odds of survival would have been further stacked against us.

The Battle began on the 25th of August 1942, when the Japanese attacked the Australian and American forces present at Milne Bay.

The Japanese had underestimated our numbers and faced determined opposition.

From the 25th of August, until the 7th of September 1942, the allied troops pushed the Japanese further back, toward their landing positions.

The Japanese objective was no longer to capture the air bases, but to evacuate.

The Allied victory marked the first instance in World War Two, where the Japanese had been defeated on land and required to withdraw from the landing.

It was paid for with a heavy price: 167 Australian lives.

The victory of the 7th of September 1942 is why we have this National day of Observance for the Battle for Australia.

It represents the point at which Australians saw a glimmer of hope that their country would not fall.

The first Wednesday in every September marks the day when Australians are called to remember those who fought in the Battle for Australia.

We honour those individuals that turned and faced the blinding rays of the "Rising Sun", and refused to give in. When the bombs rained down on Australian towns, they did not falter in their belief that Australia could survive.

We all stood together in a time of great uncertainty to protect our country's future.

Let us never forget these brave Australians.

Let us continue to observe this day long into the future, so that future generations are aware of the part Australia played during the Second World War, and the strength and courage exhibited by Australians when our country faced its gravest threat.