

Battle for Australia Commemoration

4 September 2019

Introduction

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Today is a National Day of Commemoration, alongside other such days in our nation's commemorative calendar: Anzac Day, Remembrance Day among them.

It recognises the service and sacrifice of Australia's defence forces and home defences in protecting our land from 1942 through to war's end in 1945, with battles to the west, north and east, across our seas and on our mainland as well as on the territories of all our near neighbours.

We conduct our remembrance of this time at the Cenotaph, a site that holds special significance for this annual commemoration. Prime Minister John Curtin organised and spoke here at a rally on 17th February 1942 to stir all Australians to action following the fall of Singapore just two days prior.

On the day between, 16th February, Prime Minister Curtin had termed the threat from advancing enemy forces as a 'Battle for Australia'.

Today we commemorate 77 years since that 'Battle' began, more than 77 years since the term 'Battle for Australia' was coined.

Australia's casualties in the Pacific campaign were to number more than 17,000. Of course, the sacrifice was not ours alone.

We acknowledge today the presence of consular representatives of many nations involved – in particular:

- United States Consul General Ms Sharon Hudson-Dean,
- Consul General of Canada Ms Angela Bogdan,
- Acting Consul General of PNG Mr Leo Oaeke and
- Representing the New Zealand Consulate, Mr Greg Makutu

And so we remember too, the 15,000 PNG civilians who lost their lives and the more than 40,000 casualties in Timor, as well as more than 120,000 Americans and almost 10,000 Dutch who died in battle or as POWs. More than 1 million Canadians served in the Second World War, and New Zealand was to suffer the highest proportion of fallen to its population among Allied forces in the War. (I make reference to those nations officially represented).

The Battle for Australia was to see by war's end almost one million Australians serve in uniform when our population was some 7 million. Today we pay tribute to all those who served, and in particular those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defence of our nation.