

# **PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR THE 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION OF NSW**

## **Introduction**

This report covers the period from October 2017 until August 2018. During this period the Battle for Australia Association of New South Wales has been active with regular meetings of the Committee and arranged one event to commemorate the activities which constitute the Battle for Australia and has planned the 2018 Commemoration Service to be held at the Cenotaph on 5 September 2018.

## **The Committee**

The Committee has operated very effectively and efficiently since the last Annual Meeting in October 2017. The Office Bearers are

- President – Doug Roser
- Vice President – Vacant
- Secretary – Geoff Brown
- Treasurer – Ian Guild.

The other members of the Committee during the period of this report have been:

Michael Ali OAM  
Bob Auston  
Chris Dawson – Public Relations/Media  
Warren Glenny  
Eileen Henderson OAM RFD  
John Howells – Website  
Dick Matthews – Australian Legion of Ex-Service Men & Women Rep  
Ted McKeown  
Darren Mitchell  
Elizabeth Ramsay  
David Ross  
Geoff Usher – RAAF Association Rep  
Liz Watts  
Hadyn White, the Executive Officer to the Deputy Commissioner NSW & ACT, DVA, is an invited member of the Committee

4 meetings of the Committee were held during this period – 10 Oct 17, 12 Dec 17, 6 Feb 18, and 1 May 18. For this year and for the future the Committee has reduced meetings to quarterly rather than every 2 months. Our Secretary, Geoff Brown, does a great job of organising the meetings, and they are easy to chair with all members making a contribution. Our thanks to Department of Veterans Affairs for hosting the meetings.

## **Financial Report**

A copy of the audited accounts including the Auditors Report is available on our website and they are also attached to this report. They show that we have cash assets of \$61,734 which,

given our limited expenditure requirements, is adequate to meet our expected expenses. A vote of thanks must go to Ian Guild who does a great job as our Treasurer.

### **Membership**

Our Secretary, Geoff Brown, has also been looking after our membership and while membership of both individuals and organisations has declined slightly, membership is not holding up too badly. Bob Auston has recently taken over the membership and with his focus we hope we hope to see an increase.

### **Other Battle for Australia Associations**

Following the surprise last year to find out that a National Battle for Australia Committee exists and that the National Chairman is AVM Roxley McLennan AO Retd, we have made a number of enquiries to ascertain if any other state associations similar to ours exist. We can now report that we have contact with the following organisations which all have similar objectives to us and which will have a Commemoration Service on 5 September:

- Battle for Australia Commemoration Committee (QLD) Inc – President - Pat O’Keeffe – Service will be held at the Battle for Australia Memorial Chermside Historical Precinct
- Battle for Australia Foundation in Victoria – Chairman - John Coulson – Service will be held at the Shrine of Remembrance
- Battle for Australia Committee of ACT – Chairman & National Ceremony Coordinator - John Jackson – Service will be held at the Australian War Memorial.
- Battle for Australia Commemoration National Council – Chairman - AVM Roxley McLennan AO Retd.

We have agreed to publicise their Services on our website and we will keep them aware of our activities.

### **Website**

Despite some problems with piracy of our website addresses our website has flourished during this period under the management of John Howells. A special vote of thanks to John for his efforts in arranging and managing our website.

### **Events**

During this period our Association has conducted one event and planned our main event, the Commemoration Service at the Cenotaph on 5 September:

- A presentation on 16 February 2018 to highlight a specific aspect of the Battle for Australia. The presentation was given by Tim Gellel, the Head of the Australian Army History Unit. Prior to taking up this position, Tim was an Australian Regular Army Officer, whose thirty-year career included deployments to Afghanistan and Kuwait in support of Australian Special Operations Task Groups, and postings as the Commanding Officer of the Australian Defence Force School of Languages, and as a Defence Attaché and as a student in Japan. Tim’s presentation included a brief overview

of the Battle of Milne Bay, and also included new material that has not been previously been considered in Australian accounts of the Battle of Milne Bay including Japanese records and Japanese perspectives of the battle accessed by Tim on his 4 postings to Japan. The event was a great success.

- Our Battle for Australia Commemorative Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place to be held this year on 5<sup>th</sup> September. Planning for this event and the luncheon which follows at the Westin is well underway. Courtesy of the Air Commander, the keynote address will be given by Air Commodore Kitcher, AM, Commander Air Combat Group and as always children from several schools will participate in the Service.

Next year we are planning 2 events – a presentation in February and the normal Commemoration Service at the Cenotaph on the first Wednesday in September. Next year the Committee intends to have the focus of the presentation and the keynote speaker at the Commemoration Service to be on the role of PNG and its communities in the Battle for Australia. We are already working with the presenter for February.

The Committee has discussed the format of our Commemoration Service following some suggested changes and has agreed to keep the format under review. So, some changes to it may occur in the future.

I must express my appreciation for the support and efforts of all Committee Members who assisted with the planning and arrangements of our 2 events. We are fortunate to have Committee Members who work so well together as a team.

### **The profile of the Association and Publicity**

At last year's meeting the Committee expressed its concern that the Association and the Battle for Australia is not well known and does not receive very much general publicity. It has therefore taken the following steps to change this situation.

- Development of material to be used to publicise the Battle for Australia and our Association The Committee considered the objectives of the Association and noted that we really did not have much material which could be used to publicise its objectives and established a project to consider the development of new material. Ted McKeown agreed to head up this project and proposed that the material should be developed to be used to introduce and educate school children of the Battle for Australia and should be web-based. His strategy is to have short descriptions of the operations which comprise the Battle for Australia which are linked to material with greater detail. The Committee has developed a relationship with the Hyde Park Memorial which has a Schools Learning Program for 2018 – 2019 and Ted will liaise with the Memorial in the development of the material
- Contact with the RSL to discuss actions to increase the awareness of the Battle for Australia and our Association with RSL Sub Branches Early in the year I wrote to James Brown the President of the RSL in response to the following statement in a Discussion Paper issued by the RSL under the heading Our Values. *“Australians have an obligation to never forget the sacrifice of veterans and their families and to look after their interests. That requires an institution like the League to lead public commemoration and education.”* I went on to note that our Association is concerned

that while the “Battle for Australia Day” was proclaimed on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2008 by the Governor General of Australia as a national day of Remembrance to be held on the first Wednesday in September, it is not widely recognised as a special day on which we remember the efforts of Australians in the protection of our nation and the defeat of Japan during the period of 1941 to 1945. I concluded by asking that we wish to work more closely with the RSL to encourage a greater emphasis on the Battle for Australia. We have received a reply in which the President concluded “*The League is currently in a period of transition and I’m looking at a variety of ideas and suggestions for reinvigorating the way we remember our veterans. As such, I appreciate you taking the time to reach out with your thoughts at this crucial point in time*”. Our Committee intends to follow up this contact and reply with further updates on our activities and suggestions to increase the awareness of the Battle for Australia and the need to commemorate it.

- Increased contact with like-minded organisations

1. The Association made direct contact with the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in May and suggested we should seek ways in which we can cooperate to achieve our respective objectives.
2. We have also had meetings with the Anzac Memorial Hyde Park at which it was explained that its redevelopment is progressing well and that it is hoped to have the Memorial open either for Invictus Games or the 11<sup>th</sup> November. Importantly, it was explained that the vision for the enhanced Memorial is to include a place to educate future generations about the Anzac spirit. Accordingly, the design includes a new underground education and interpretation facilities. As per the Memorial’s website “Memorial visitors will enter the new ‘Hall of Service’ via a walkway through a symbolic water cascade. The Hall will function as a greeting and orientation space for the public, including tour groups and school children; and as a venue for ceremonies and functions, flowing onto exhibition galleries and education facilities. We have been invited to use the area for meetings and presentations and our presentation for the 15 February 2019 has been booked to be held in this area. In support of the education and research programs our Association has been invited to provide material which explains and educates the public on the Battle for Australia and to provide volunteers who may wish to assist in the Schools Learning Program. As reported above Ted will also liaise with the Memorial in the development of material to be developed to publicise the Battle for Australia.

## Publicity

The Committee understands the need to improve our Associations publicity and will use the actions we are taking, as described in this report, in an attempt to gain more publicity. The efforts of Chris Dawson in developing our newsletter and in issuing our public notices is deeply appreciated and we are hoping we can give him more material with which to work.

## **Sick Parade**

Our Association deeply regrets the passing of John Byrne and Norm Ensor and recognises the contributions they have made over many years. They are missed but remembered with great fondness.

## **Conclusion**

The period of this report has been busy for our Association and in addition to our normal Commemoration Service we have successfully introduced an annual Special Presentation in February. We are managing financially through the excellent support given to our Membership Program. However, we need to attract new members annually, both individual and associations to enable us to continue to conduct key events. Interested parties should contact Bob Auston email: [bob@auston.com.au](mailto:bob@auston.com.au)

We are very grateful for the general support we receive from DVA and from so many individuals, schools, other ESO associations and other organisations for our special commemorative events. We are reaching out to increase the awareness of the Battle for Australia, including with similar organisation in Queensland, ACTR and Victoria. We are hopeful that this will increase the awareness of the Battle for Australia and the work of our Association, but particularly with the younger generation and schools.

Group Captain Doug Roser RAAF (Ret'd)  
President Battle for Australia Association of NSW

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018