



Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales

# NEWSLETTER

January 2025

## Battle for Australia Association 2024 AGM

The Battle for Australia Association AGM was held on Tuesday, 15th October, in the Imperial Services Club Room of the Royal Automobile Club of Australia, whereby the following were elected as office-bearers for the year:

Vice-President:	Dr Darren Mitchell
Treasurer:	Mr John Butcher
Secretary:	Ms Megan Lavender

The following members were elected as ordinary committee members:

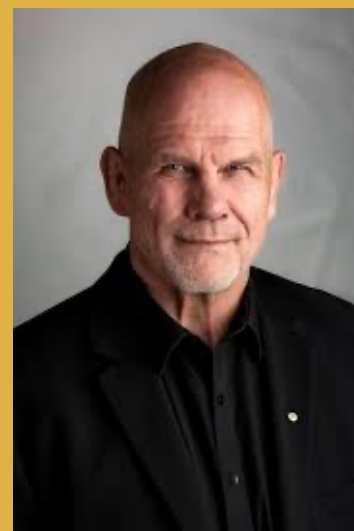
Mr Chris Dawson	Mr John Howells
Mr Ted McKeown	Mr David Ross
Mr Matt Vertzonis	Rev Geoffrey Usher
Mrs Eileen Henderson	Mr Doug Wood
Mr Ron Glew	Mr Michael Ali

Currently the role of President remains vacant.

## Battle for Australia Annual Oration 2025 – Peter FitzSimons

The ninth annual Battle for Australia Oration will be delivered by prolific author and journalist Peter FitzSimons AM at the Royal Automobile Club, 89 Macquarie Street, Sydney on Monday 17 February 2025 at 1000h. The Oration is held each year to mark the occasion in the Second World War when Prime Minister John Curtin coined the phrase "Battle for Australia" in communicating to all Australians the dangers that lay ahead, following the Fall of Singapore.

Peter FitzSimons was named a Member of the Order of Australia in 2011 for service to literature as a biographer, sports journalist and commentator, and to the community through contributions to conservation, disability care, social welfare and sporting organisations.



## **The Battle for Australia – Curtin’s Update, 6 October 1942 – A battle against complacency**

The Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 had caused Australia’s Prime Minister John Curtin to describe the situation as a “Battle for Australia”. In hindsight, we know Japan did not plan to invade Australia’s mainland. Nevertheless, Curtin’s phrase still captures the very real fears and uncertainties felt by Australians at the time. The Asia-Pacific campaign involved 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. Enemy intentions could not be predicted and more than eighty years ago the threat was indeed real.

Even throughout 1942 Curtin at times contended with a complacent public and a troublesome press causing him at one media briefing to exclaim he couldn’t understand the mentality of Australian people: “One day they were in a panic and the next they wanted more race meetings. Capricious newspaper leadership had a lot to do with it. When things looked bad in New Guinea,

morale sagged; now things were better, everybody would probably want Christmas off.”

The struggle was far from over, even after success at Milne Bay in August-September of that year. The days and weeks ahead were filled with fierce engagements in the Solomons Campaign at Guadalcanal and in the retaking of Kokoda. Curtin didn’t get Christmas off. He had spent almost a year away from home in Perth, attending to the war effort from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. He saw the carefree enjoyment of a holiday period as a time to be wary of potential Japanese attack. In Curtin’s eyes, the Battle for Australia also required a battle against any complacency on the home front.

*[Reflections shared at the Battle for Australia Association (NSW) AGM on 15 October 2024 by Vice President Dr Darren Mitchell, in his report on the Association’s activities.]*

### **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 through the website <https://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au>

### **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: [https://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/documents/Membership\\_Form.pdf](https://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/documents/Membership_Form.pdf)

## Battle for Australia 2024 Oration

The 2024 Battle for Australia Oration was presented by Commodore Timothy Brown AM RANR. His Oration, "Discovery of the Montevideo Maru", was held on Tuesday 20 February 2024.

CDRE Brown led a specialist team of deep-sea experts, endured the effects of a tropical cyclone, conducted hours of painstaking research, but also had some extraordinarily good luck before finally solving one of Australia's greatest naval mysteries; finding the final resting place of the sunken Montevideo Maru.

The Montevideo Maru was a merchant ship of the Empire of Japan. Launched in 1926, it was pressed into service as a military transport during World War II. It was sunk by the American submarine USS Sturgeon on 1 July 1942, drowning 1,054 people, mostly Australian prisoners of war and civilians who were being transported from Rabaul, in the former Australian territory of New Guinea, to Hainan in Japan. The sinking is considered the worst maritime disaster in Australia's history. The wreck of the Montevideo Maru was discovered on 18 April 2023.





## Battle for Australia 2024 National Day of Commemoration – 4<sup>th</sup> September

The 2024 Battle for Australia Commemoration was held in the Australian sun. It was great to be able to gather again with our fellow citizens and mark that time in 1942-45 when our nation was threatened by foreign invasion. The commemoration was notable for the Acknowledgement of Country speech by Lachlan Youll, the prayers by Geoffrey Usher, musical contributions by Piper Robert Pearce OAM, the Australian Army Band - Sydney with soloist Stuart Fong and bugler Imogen Barker, and the Sydney Women's Vocal Orchestra, the catafalque party provided by RAAF Richmond, Mosman Prep School Honour Guard and Prep School student Master Gideon Waker who recited former Association President Major General Gordon Maitland's poem, *Kokoda Pilgrimage*, and the excellent keynote address by Brigadier Phillip Bridie AM ADC. Our MC Dr Darren Mitchell OAM again excelled himself as did Junior Legatee Kelly Randall in reciting the ode.

Those who made it to the luncheon in the Fullerton Hotel enjoyed good company.



## Cowra POW Breakout – 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the breakout by Japanese prisoners of war was marked in Cowra on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

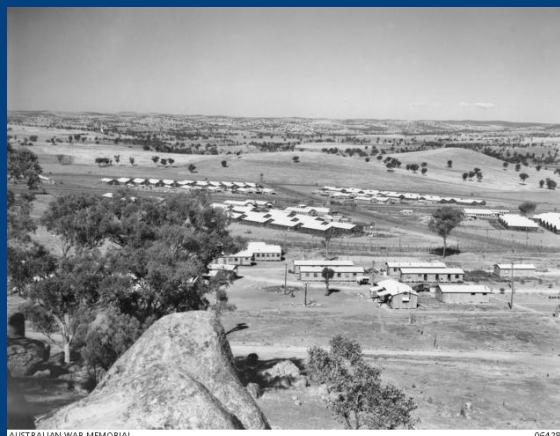
The traditional Services of Respect were held at the Australian and Japanese War Cemeteries. Wreath-laying by visiting dignitaries and leaders of community organisations was punctuated dramatically by a RAAF flyover of a F35A Aircraft, paying tribute to the current partnership of the RAAF with Japan Air Self-Defence in its first international deployment of its F-35As.

A commemorative dinner was also held with guest speaker Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales. The Governor, accompanied by her husband Mr Dennis Wilson was joined by many Japanese and Australian dignitaries, including Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Mr Yasushi Hosaka. Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made an earlier, private visit to lay tributes at the war cemeteries.

The Cowra Breakout occurred early in the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> August 1944. The mass escape attempt by Japanese prisoners of war led to the death of 234 POWs and four Australian military personnel (a fifth died from wounds some weeks after). Arguably the largest wartime prison break in history, the confrontation remains the only land engagement on the Australian mainland during the Second World War. Where the Breakout dead were buried in 1944 became two distinct cemeteries in 1964 when all

wartime Japanese remains from mainland Australia - prisoners, civilian internees, and combat deaths - were reinterred at Cowra.

Cowra is central to understanding post-Second World War reconciliation between Australia and Japan. The post-war response of Cowra's citizens, initially Australian war veterans caring for the graves of the Japanese POWs, and gradually a wider network of the town's leaders and the community, has led to it being the site of not only the two cemeteries but also an internationally regarded Japanese Garden. Cowra is well-known as the spiritual home of Japan-Australia friendship with Japan's only extra-territorial official war cemetery and of the Southern Hemisphere's largest and, arguably, most significant Japanese Garden beyond Japan. A landscape scarred by war and death is now a living space of peace and reconciliation.



Picture 1. Cowra POW Camp 1944

## 7<sup>th</sup> Division Association Annual Commemoration

The 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Reunion and Commemoration of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division Association was held on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2024 in the Dick Payten Reserve, Bass Hill. Organised by President Sue Swinfield, Secretary Maha Dunne, and Association committee members, the special guest speaker was centenarian Mr Reg Chard OAM, veteran of Kokoda and many other significant battlefields.

Mr Chard is a well-known storyteller and guide, especially at Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in Rhodes, where for many years he has communicated to young and old what it was like to serve during the Second World War. Gathered before the 7<sup>th</sup> Division Memorial on Australia's Remembrance Drive in Bass Hill, the crowd was privileged to hear Mr Chard share some reminiscences of his experiences and those of his mates in PNG, whose actions, as etched on the memorial, "helped secure Australia for future generations".

Rev Paul Webb, Senior Minister, Chester Hill Anglican Church, also spoke about his time living in PNG. Riverwood Hornets Australian Cadet Corps provided the catafalque party and band, with Battle for Australia Association Vice President, Dr Darren Mitchell, acting as Master of Ceremonies for the occasion.



Maha Dunne and Dawn Holden, both of 7<sup>th</sup> Div Association, along with Darren Mitchell at 2024 BfA Oratorion

## Anzac Day 2024 in Rabaul, East New Britain, PNG

### A Report by Doug and Laurel Wood

At the invitation of Andrea Williams, PNGAA Past President and a member of the Silent world team that discovered the wreck of the Montevideo Maru a year ago, my wife Laurel and I joined in with a group of thirty members of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Lark Force Association to attend the three memorial ceremonies on April 24 pm and April 25 am.

Monday 22 April saw us depart mid am with Air Nuigini to Port Moresby then transfer to the Dash 8 mid pm service to Rabaul. A short half an hour trip over the lush Owen Stanley Range with the Buna Gona coastline in the eastern distance. All quiet and serene now but the keeper of brutal secrets of bravery, death and hardship. A further hour over the beautiful blue Solomon Sea and half an hour over the lush green interior of Northern East New Britain. The island so named by William Dampier on his visit here in 1700.

Rabaul was once a picturesque small town which served as the capital of German New Guinea from mid-1800s until 1914 when World War One came to Bita Paka wireless station (more of this later). Located on the beautiful Simpson Harbour which is the north-western extension of Blanche Bay. This bay runs east to the seven islands that form the Duke of York Islands and is protected to the north and east by New Ireland.

Rabaul as you know sits on the junction of three massive tectonic plates (the Pacific Rim of Fire) making it one of the most volcanically active areas in the world. Major eruptions have occurred twice in the past century, 1937 and 1994.

Only days after the Japanese landing of approximately 5000 troops on 23 January 1942 with the loss of only sixteen men they captured Rabaul from Lark Force and quickly established it as their Pacific operations headquarters under the command of Admiral Yamamoto. He was later in 1942 shot down near Buin in the south of Bougainville thanks to information supplied by Coastwatchers during Operation Ferdinand. By May 1942 the Japanese deemed themselves invincible having established control of the corridor on the north and east coast of New Guinea covering Madang, Lae, Salamaua, Buna and Gona. Their land defeat at Milne Bay in August-September 1942 proved to be the high-water mark of their advance south.

Unfortunately, Yamamoto's network of underground bunkers, tunnels and hospital are no longer accessible due to the ash dumped on the town during the 1994 eruption. Perhaps a fitting finality!

Fortunately for visitors the Rabaul Hotel stands alone in the devastated Mango Ave and was a nice lunch venue and the accommodation for the Lark Force Association visitors. The nearby Cenotaph, Montevideo Maru Memorial, New Guinea Club and Rabaul Yacht Club also have been reclaimed from the ash and remain functioning.

On Tuesday 23 April we departed our beautiful accommodation on the shores of Blanche Bay at Kokopo (Kokopo Beach Bungalows) for a full day tour along the deteriorating coast road past two Japanese tunnels, the Blue Lagoon, a destroyed Japanese crane and Mount Vulcan. We drove into the once thriving CBD area, the overgrown and ash covered Rabaul airport to the Matiput hot sulphur springs where steam rises from the harbour water in the prevailing winds. After a nice lunch in the well-appointed Rabaul Hotel dining room including two SPs we continued onto the picturesque Old Governor's residence looking north over New Ireland and then to the Volcano Observatory looking over Simpson Harbour wharf area and the three

volcanos which ring the town. In the thousand-kilometre Bismark Volcanic Arc between Manam (near Wewak) to Rabaul there are eleven volcanos which have been active since records began in 1850.

Feeling safe with the Observatory doing its job monitoring the seismic activity we returned to Kokopo via the sealed inland road via Four Ways. After a sunset boat ride and swim at the Duke of York Islands we returned for a lovely fresh lobster dinner. Doing it tough in the Tropics!!

On Wednesday 24 April at 11 am we ventured via the island via Lark Force meeting place “Four Ways” just south of Malaguna in the mountains behind Rabaul. Just before Rabaul CBD we turned left up the hill and for thirty minutes drove along the North Coast road to the beautiful white sand resort of Kalua Lodge for lunch and a swim. Their welcome sign read “leave only your footprints and take with you wonderful memories.” Here our group of five connected with the Lark Force Association’s group of twenty-five. We heard about their emotional journey to Tol Plantation and the Memorial Cairn erected there in 1987 by the Australian Army during a training exercise called “Rabaul Walkabout.”

At 5 pm we assembled in a large grassed area on the foreshore facing west near two large basalt rocks that serve as the Montevideo Maru Memorial (Picture A). A service was held at dusk and all present were invited to lay wreaths. Most did so including the Rabaul Mayor and three members of Australian and PNG defence forces, namely:

1. LtCol Tony Evans, Head of PNG Army based in Murray Barracks
2. Commander Graham Lebitina, Head of Navy in PNG, and
3. Commander John Corker of the Royal Australian Navy.

A very nice meal and informal get-together at the nearby New Guinea Club organised by Rabaul Hotel’s Susie Alexander followed the ceremony.

At 3 am on Thursday 25 April our phone alarm raised us and by 3.45 we were in a three-SUV convoy in the pouring rain. Via a dark quiet inland road we ventured onto the fire lit Rabaul Cenotaph arriving at 4.30 am. Fortunately the rain ceased and about 100 people including the four dignitaries from the previous evening started to assemble in a semi-circle around the Cenotaph and lectern while Winston Churchill’s 1939 “we are at war” address was broadcast repeatedly. At 5.30 am with candles lit the ceremony began and addresses were given by LtCol Evans and the Co-ordinator of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Association Fraser Harry (son of the 1942 escapee Bill Harry). A very moving scene.

Again, all present were invited to lay flowers and Laurel and I took this opportunity to do so on behalf of all members of the Battle for Australia Association (Picture B). The ceremony was closed with Last Post, a minute’s silence, Reveille and the singing of the National Anthems of PNG, Australia and New Zealand. The Cenotaph glowed in the morning sunshine (Picture C). After an enjoyable Gunfire Breakfast (Bundy rum tea) at the Rabaul yacht Club from 7 am we returned to Kokopo Beach for a brief rest.

At 10.30 am we were back on the road travelling along Blanche Bay coast road past the beautiful Rapopo Beach Resort to Bita Paka Memorial Cemetery. Established in 1945 this is the resting place of both World War soldiers, including six who were killed six months prior to the Gallipoli landing during the taking of the German wireless station across the road from the Cemetery. The Cemetery is a beautiful grassland garden donated by PNG to Australia in perpetuity. It is dominated by numerous towering shade trees (Picture D).



The World War One Memorial has been rebuilt after being destroyed by the Japanese (Picture E).

Being Australian senior commander John Corker of the RAN emceed the 11 am commemoration. This time the Premier of New Britain and Mayor of Rabaul both gave addresses before LtCol Evans again delivered the Commemoration Address. Wreaths and flowers were again laid and the Ode to the Fallen was delivered by Commander Graham Lebitina – I learnt he was a Milne Bay boy raised in Alotau. He had told me earlier at the Gunfire Breakfast that his father helped the Allies in 1942 in the Milne Bay area. His father’s actions led him to pursue his naval career.

After the Bita Paka Primary School choir sang the three National Anthems the ceremony concluded with the dispensation of free cold water and soft drinks. LtCol Evans then approached the fifty-strong school choir addressed them and presented the School Captain with a red and white rugby league football (Picture F). It was greeted with huge smiles, giggles and laughter from the children.

This was a fitting end to our Anzac tour – three memorable services in nineteen hours. All three were well run and attended by approximately 100. The singing by the respective choirs was enjoyable and all the students seemed to be very aware of the importance of the occasion.

Doug and Laurel Wood

Kokopo Beach Bungalows

Friday 26 April 2024



Picture A



Picture B



Picture C



Picture D



Picture E



Picture F



## Vale Ian Guild MBE OAM

### Obituary provided to Legacy Australia

L/Ian Guild was a doughty and well-loved Scotsman who served Legacy well. He was born in Glasgow before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and went to School at Dollar Academy, Perthshire, Scotland.

L/Guild did his British National Service in the Black Watch, Royal Highland Regiment or the Forty Twa (42<sup>nd</sup>) in Scotland. He did some service in Nigeria and West Africa. At some point as a young man, he played rugby for the West of Scotland. He also later played for the Calcutta Rugby Club in India, where he was working; the same club that donated the trophy to England and Scotland – hence the annual Calcutta Cup between the two countries.

On leaving the British Army, he spent some time in Calcutta. Then he came to Australia, where he married Caroline Cotter (they later divorced), whose father had been a prominent Legatee. They had three children, Hamish, Dougal and Alex. He joined the Australian Army and served initially as Platoon Commander with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

He was sent to Vietnam as Assistant Operations Officer from May 1965 to May 1966. He took part in the battle of Gang Tot, Australia's first set-piece engagement in Vietnam.

L/Guild served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Pacific Islands Regiment in the Papua New Guinea Regiment as Adjutant and then came back to Australia as Adjutant of the Sydney University regiment. He attended the Army Staff College in Queenscliff before being posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment as second in command. L/Guild was then sent to Jerusalem to serve as Chief Observer in Lebanon (1980 to 1981). He was promoted to Lt Colonel. He then served with HQ Training Command, his last military appointment.

Later, he was a most active member of Legacy and also helped set up charitable operations at Abbotsleigh Girls School and Shore School in North Sydney. L/Guild played a significant role in charge of the budget for the commemoration organisation, Battle for Australia.

After all his work, he was awarded an OAM. He already had an MBE. L/Guild was well-liked by all those who worked with him and served on committees at Legacy. Unfortunately, his physical disabilities caused him to go on the Reserve List. His wife Ann had a challenging task looking after him, along with his children in his last few years.

L/Ian Guild died 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024. He is survived by his wife Ann, children Hamish, Dougal, Alex and two grandsons.

