



**Government
of South Australia**

Veterans SA

**Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs**

2015 Bombing of Darwin Day Commemorative Service

**Thursday, 19 February, 2015
Repatriation General Hospital Chapel
11.00am**

Acknowledgements

- Dr Duncan McFetridge MP - Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs representing Leader of the Opposition Steven Marshall
- Ian Kelly -Deputy Commissioner, Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Joe McDonald - Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Southern Adelaide Local Health Network;
- Paul Dickson - Assistant Commissioner for Police
- Sam Jackman - Chief Executive Officer, RSL State Branch
- Geoff Tattersall - Chief Executive Officer, RSL Care
- Service Chiefs and their Representatives, Presidents and members of ex-service and associated organisations
- Former Members of the Darwin Defenders 1942 - 1945 South Australia Branch and distinguished World War II veterans.

Welcome

- Good morning ladies and gentlemen
- I'm sure all of our thoughts are with Ray Buttery this morning. He's done so much work on behalf of Darwin Defenders over the years, and I was honoured to accept his invitation to speak today when he approached me about it some six months ago. I wish him a speedy recovery
- We are here to remember and commemorate a day that changed Australia.

History of Darwin Bombing

- Darwin, the largest population centre in northern Australia, was considered a vital asset in Australia's defences against an increasingly aggressive Japanese Empire in the 1930s. Its port and airfield facilities were developed, coastal defence batteries constructed and its garrison steadily enlarged. The outbreak of war in the Pacific resulted in the rapid enlargement of the military presence in Darwin and it was used as a base from which to deploy forces for the defence of the Dutch East Indies.
- On the 19th of February, 1942 Darwin was attacked. In two air raids, 242 Japanese attack aircraft and bombers carried out a pattern bombing of Darwin Harbour and surrounding areas killing at least 243 Allied service personnel and civilians and injuring between 300 and 400. Darwin was arguably Australia's most inclusive battle. Those who died that day included members of all three services. They also included merchant seamen, postal workers and civilians who were just doing their jobs. Those killed included nine South Australians in the Darwin Post Office. Darwin itself endured 64 bombing raids by the Japanese over 18 months destroying numerous civic and military buildings, boats and aircraft.

- On 18 November, 2011, then Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard M.P. announced that 19 February will be proclaimed as 'Bombing of Darwin Day' to ensure the attacks across Australia's north are appropriately remembered and commemorated every year.
- We must always remember that it was only one day in a long campaign that was fought in and around the Northern Territory.
- During the hard months that followed those remaining in Darwin suffered the ongoing privation of hunger and the insecurity borne of the unknown, all exacerbated by a clear lack of preparedness.
- As most veterans now know, the force that attacked Darwin was launched from four of the six carriers that had attacked Pearl Harbour ten weeks earlier. All four were to be later sunk at the Battle of Midway.
- The story of the Darwin air raids still remains largely untold and unknown and I believe there is a need to ensure we educate our community about this crucial part of our military and social history.

Military History & Anzac Centenary Coordination Unit

- An educative focus on our military history and its impact on our nation is a theme that will be highlighted more than ever over the next few years.
- Over the Anzac Centenary period all Australians will be encouraged to reflect upon and learn more about our military history, its costs and its impacts on us, as a state and as a nation.

- Preparations are well under way for our State's flagship Anzac Centenary project, The Anzac Centenary Memorial Garden Walk based on Kintore Avenue. The proposal is to create a reflective space that will physically and symbolically link the State's principal site of remembrance, the South Australian National War Memorial on North Terrace with Torrens Parade Ground and the Pathway of Honour.
- I am also pleased to announce that recruitment for the Anzac Centenary Coordination Unit has been finalised and Ms Sharon Cleary, has commenced as the unit's Manager. Sharon is here today, and I'd encourage you to make yourself known to her over a cup of tea following the service. An initiative of the State Government, the unit was established to work with state, federal and local government departments and agencies, ex-service organisations, schools and other stakeholders to ensure that South Australia's Centenary of Anzac commemorative program is coordinated and to provide opportunities to highlight the contribution of South Australians.

Conclusion

- Today we remember all those who served in Darwin whether they are servicemen or women, or civilians.
- Strict censorship was imposed on any information about the air raids or anything that happened in the area. No cameras, no diaries, no mention of any enemy action was allowed to appear in any letters home. Initially the government thought it would be better if the rest of Australia knew nothing about the whole matter.

- Nevertheless, it is a crucial part of our history and it must never be forgotten.
- We remember the Darwin Defenders' ability to improvise, their courage, their mateship and their determination.
- We especially acknowledge those of you with us today.
- We honour you and thank you for your sacrifice.