

## **An address by Colonel Glenn Ryan, CSC and Bar**

### **At the Battle for Australia Commemoration, Martin Place, Sydney 6 September 2017**

The Battle of Australia is a momentous event in this country's history. The people of Australia, with our partners and Allies stood resolute, and we have prospered.

Today we recognise "the service and sacrifice of all those who served in defence of Australia in 1942 and 1943.

In Feb 1942 Darwin was bombed by 242 Japanese aircraft with a further two raids occurring in that year.

In May and June 1942 Japanese submarines attacked targets in Sydney Harbour.

On 7 and 8 June 1942 34 artillery shells were fired at Newcastle and a further 10 artillery was fired at the Sydney, landing in the eastern suburbs.

The psychological impact of these events on Australia was immense. The rapid expansion of the Japanese South and South west had placed Japanese task forces in East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

In Papua New Guinea the Australian forces faced two sizeable well trained and equipped Japanese tasks forces. One traveling over the Owen Stanley ranges, and the other likely to land at Milne Bay.

The Merchant Navy and the Royal Australian Navy braved the dangerous waters to ship Army brigades to Port Moresby. On the Kokoda track the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade were poorly trained and equipped, but had set forward from Port Moresby with the help of local Papuans, to set defenses along the track over the Owen Stanley Ranges. It was the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn, a battalion that lives on in the Army working here in Sydney, that meet the Japanese at Kokoda station. The Australians supported by Papuans fought for several months holding until in many cases past the last safe point before withdrawing. At the point of bayonet, blast of grenade or dragging their wounded mates back, they fought for every inch while lacking the basic level of supply in food, water and ammunition. From there final position at Imita Ridge outside Port Moresby the Australian Force reinforced by members of the AIF returning from the middle east counter attacked back over the Owen Stanley ranges.

Similarly, at Milne Bay over the period of 25 August to 7 Sep 1942 the Australian 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigades supported by 75 and 76 Squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force had fought a bitter battle. Infantry fought tanks with sticky bombs, naval artillery bombard Australian positions and the relentless rain bogged man and vehicle alike. In these terrible conditions the Australians fought back to protect the airfields that would provide the launching pad to support other operations such as those at Guadalcanal, Kokoda, Buna and Gona which secured Australia's northern approaches and protect Australia from invasion.

I will highlight the bravery and commitment of all the men and women who fought in the Battle of Australia by reciting the action of CPL Jack French VC at the Battle of Milne Bay:

At Milne Bay New Guinea, on the afternoon of 4 September 1942, a company of Australian Infantry battalion attacked a Japanese position where it encountered terrific rifle and machine-gun fire. The advance of the section, of which Corporal French was in command, was held up by fire from three enemy machine-gun posts, whereupon Corporal French, ordering his section to take cover, advanced and silenced one of the posts with grenades. He returned to his section for more grenades and again advanced and silenced the second post. Armed with a Thompson sub-machine gun, he then attacked the third post, firing from the hip as he went forward.

He was seen to be badly wounded by fire from this post, but he continued to advance. Enemy guns then ceased fire and his section pushed on to find that all the members of the three enemy gun crews had been killed, and that Corporal French had died in front of the third gun pit.

We stand here today with the freedoms we have to thanks to and in recognition of the service and sacrifice of the men and women who defended this country 75 years ago during the Battle of Australia.

It is through their Courage, their initiative, their teamwork and their respect we stand here today.

We will remember.