

**BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA SPEECH**  
**GIVEN BY COMMANDER PHILLIP ANDERSON AT MIRANDA**  
**RETURNED SERVICES CLUB ON WEDNESDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2012**

Veterans, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as a serving officer in the Royal Australian Navy it is an honour for me to present this address to mark the Battle for Australia Day. I wish to commence by acknowledging and thanking all the veterans gathered here today for their service to the nation during times of conflict; but also for their ongoing contribution to the Australian community. I am privileged to be in your distinguished company. Today, we also pause to remember the five fallen diggers who lost their lives in Afghanistan and whose bodies will be received today by their families at Amberley RAAF Base in Queensland and Richmond RAAF Base in New South Wales.

The first Wednesday in September each year is a national day of observance known as 'Battle for Australia Day'. Today, in particular, we commemorate the service and sacrifice of all those who served in defence of Australia during a time that marked an important phase of our military history when Australia was directly threatened by a Japanese onslaught through Papua New Guinea and the immediate region—a time when our nation faced its gravest peril.

So today, we remember; the direct attacks on the Australian mainland; our brave fighting forces in Singapore and in Timor; the Battles of the Java Sea, the Sunda Strait and the Coral Sea; the heroic fighting on the Kokoda Trail and at Milne Bay; the Battle of Savo Island; the Battle of the Beachheads – at Buna, and Gona and Sanananda; and the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

When Singapore fell and more than 15,000 Australians had become prisoners of war, Prime Minister Curtin warned:

“The fall of Singapore can only be described as Australia’s Dunkirk ... [The] fall of Dunkirk initiated the battle for Britain. The fall of Singapore opens the Battle for Australia.”

In the three months following the fall of Singapore, Darwin and other Australian cities were bombed, while midget submarines attacked Sydney. The growing list of military defeats for the Australian, British, American and Dutch military and naval forces began to mount, and there was an expectation throughout Australia that the Japanese would invade at any moment.

There are a number of battles that followed the fall of Singapore that form part of what we refer to as the *Battle for Australia*, and took place during those few crucial years in 1942-43.

In May 1942 at the Battle of the Coral Sea, American and Australian ships and our air forces fought side by side against a Japanese fleet whose mission was to take Port Moresby and isolate Australia from its allies. It is a fact that the Japanese forces were also conducting preparations for the capture of the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa. There were losses on both sides, but Port Moresby never fell.

The Japanese then attempted to occupy Port Moresby by landing troops on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea and by advancing over the Owen Stanley Range along the Kokoda Track. They were stopped a mere 25 kilometres from Port Moresby.

The Battle for Australia involved all Australians; and not just our fighting forces. As our men fought along the Kokoda Track, the men and women at home were hard at work in support. As our airmen fought in the skies over the Pacific, the population at home was devoted to production and the civil defence effort. As our sailors sought to claw back control of the oceans, the population at home continued to sign up for the war.

And then there came news from the frontline that defeated the myth of the Japanese invincibility. In August 1942, the Japanese made a sea-borne landing at Milne Bay to assist their forces attempting to capture Port Moresby. In a fortnight's hard fighting, the defending Australian and American Forces inflicted the war's first land defeat on the Japanese.

After the Kokoda campaign, it took a further 18 weeks until January 1943 for the Australians to drive the Japanese back over the Owen Stanley Range and, in conjunction with American forces, to defeat the enemy in a series of battles at Gona, Buna and Sanananda on the north coast of Papua. And finally, in March 1943, a Japanese convoy of ships carrying reinforcements and supplies to their forces on the north coast of Papua New Guinea was almost totally destroyed by Australian and American aircraft in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. The Japanese no longer held the initiative and the direct threat against Australia had been defeated. Although fighting continued for a further two and a half years, the Battle for Australia had been won.

Today we honour all those who served and sacrificed their lives in defence of Australia—their duty was nobly done. I would like conclude with a few lines from 'A Sonnet' by Alf Woods:

*Sound the Last Post, lest we forget the freedom that we cherish has been bought.*

*Sound the Last Post to hold the memory bright, then sound the Reveille and keep the torch alight.*

**Bibliography:**

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