

79th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin – Friday 19th February 2021

Report by Bernadette Lightfoot, Secretary of the Melbourne Branch of the Darwin Defenders 1942-45

“Bombing of Darwin Day marks an attack that is etched in Australia’s history and this year we mark 10 years since the inaugural national day of observance in 2011.”

The Hon Darren Chester MP, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Personnel

The Melbourne Branch of the Darwin Defenders 1942-45 were once again honoured and privileged to be able to organise the 79th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne on Friday 19th February 2021.

As we farewelled our veterans, families, school students and dignitaries at the conclusion of the Darwin Defenders service in 2020, little did know that the Shrine of Remembrance would not host another service on the forecourt for 12 months.

2020 became the year of COVID-19. We learned new words and a total new way of living – living alone and disconnected to our communities. We sadly watched the news of countries losing thousands upon thousands of their citizens, we watched families unable to be with loved ones as they died alone – situations evolved that we never thought possible. We stayed home to keep our communities safe. We often struggled to keep motivated, and we learnt new ways of living safely by following guidance from our leaders.

After months of lockdown and curfews in 2020, we hoped that all our planning for the 2021 would come to fruition. With only a week to go – a sudden lockdown was imposed for 5 days in Melbourne and we held our breath waiting for the Government announcement 2 days before the event.

We were blessed with beautiful weather and with the support of the Shrine Ceremonial Team – the service was able to proceed on the forecourt as planned.

The poignant words and music from *“Blood on the Frangipani”* (words and music by Gary Luck) wafted over the Forecourt as the Darwin Defenders flag was walked from the flag poles to the flame. This new version of the song reminded us all of the personal story of the bombing of Darwin.

Representatives from the ADF, State Government, State Opposition, RSL, Legacy, DVA, Veterans Council, Weary Dunlop Foundation, Ex-Service Organisations, the Consular corps from Japan, New Zealand, USA, UK, Schools, Teachers, Students and family members from Darwin Veterans.

Master of Ceremonies, Mr Tim Gurry OAM, expertly guided the service. With welcomes from Shrine Governor, Colonel John Coulson OAM RFD ED (Retired) and Patron of the Darwin Defenders Melbourne Branch, Rear Admiral John Lord AM, the service began with dignity, respect and acknowledgement of the sacrifices made in 1942. Rev. Siôn Gough Hughes from the Wesley Church in Melbourne led the service with prayers for those that had served during 1942.

We are also thankful, that our esteemed President, Mr Alan Day was able to attend the service and recite The Ode. Now 99 years old, we are honoured that he continues to serve the Darwin Defenders 1942-45 community.

The 2021 keynote speaker was our Patron, Rear Admiral John Lord AM (Retd). His address was titled ... *‘The Bombing of Darwin 19 February 1942 – Learning from Australia’s History.*

John spoke of the Bombing of Darwin and now 79 years later as we gathered to reflect in 2021, the following words seemed even more important and relevant to our lives.

Marking key events in our history, taking the time to stop and remember, and ensuring they are commemorated into the future, reminds us of our history, our development, and how we have become the country we are today.

A highlight of the commemoration service has always been the involvement of school students. With COVID-19, we were so delighted that several schools were able attend in 2021 – we especially want to acknowledge the Principal, staff and students from Puckapunyal Primary School – a school that annually travels to Melbourne for the service.

Students assisted during the service with reading of poems and the carrying the Darwin Defenders banner.

The 19th of February 1942 was a day that changed Australia and we all echo the words from the Minister:

“Today, I encourage all Australians to take a moment to reflect on this significant day in our history to remember those who died and honour those who fought to protect our nation and our way of life”

The Shrine Ceremonial Team lead by Dale Capron ensure that were able to host a COVID-19 safe event and continue to acknowledge and commemorate the service of those who were in 1942 when ... *the bombs rained down on Darwin.*

The Melbourne Committee of the Darwin Defenders acknowledges and is extremely grateful for the support of funding granted to them by the Victorian Veterans Council.