**BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA 78TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION SERVICE CHERMSIDE HISTORICAL PRECINCT
BRIGADIER jason blain**

COURAGE, MATESHIP, ENDURANCE, AND SACRIFICE. THESE ARE NOT JUST WORDS, THEY REPRESENT TO ME THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE HUMAN QUALITIES OF WHAT MAKES our NATION it is today. These words are especially pertinent during times of unprecedented danger and adversity. THEY ALSO REFLECT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE TO YOUR NATION and EMBODY THE QUALITIES WE SEE IN THE SPIRIT OF those who served our nation in the Battle for Australia and all theatres of the second world war. At Sea, in the Air and on the Land, at home and in the island nations to our north, 1942, would see courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice halt the Japanese advance and the threat to our homeland.

His Excellency, The Honourable Paul de Jersey, Governor of Queensland, maj pat o’keeffe oam, mr frank mccosker apm bem, a veteran of the 9th battalion, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, fellow service men and women, veterans, families and students. As the Commander of the 7th Brigade, I am extremely honoured to provide the address today, on this, the 78th anniversary of the Battle for Australia

I am especially proud to SPEAK TODAY, knowing that I am serving in a Brigade WHO’S actions and sacrifices during 1942, at Milne Bay, played a critical role in our nations success. TO BE ONE OF THE CURRENT CUSTODIANS OF THE TRADITIONS SET BY THAT BRIGADE IN 1942 IS HUMBLING.

But Milne Bay was ONLY one of many significant struggles that defined that year, and the generation, the greatest generation, of Australian men and women who answered the call when the world seemed to be on fire.

The FALL of Singapore. The bombing of Darwin. The bombings of Broome and Townsville, and even my home town of Mossman in far north Queensland. The essential and dangerous role of the Coastwatchers. THE Midget submarine attacks in Sydney harbor, which brought the reality of war to the heart of the nation. The actions of a small Royal Australian Navy ship; HMAS *Yarra*, When while on escort duty encountered five Japanese warships AND turned headfirst into the foe.

The unrelenting fighting on the Kokoda Track. The momentous Battle of the Coral Sea. RAAF Kittyhawks and Beaufighters over the Owen Stanley Ranges. The men and women performing grueling shifts in the factories in Australia. The unforgiving battle of Guadalcanal, and the fierce sea battles off Savo Island. The resolute civil Defence effort at home, building airfields and CAMPS. And the exacting Battle of the Beachheads – at Buna, and Gona and Sanananda, which ended Japanese ambitions in Papua, and with that, the threat to Australia.

that list is long and not complete. it was A true whole of nation effort. Indeed the battle for Australia involved all Australians. On the day that Singapore fell, 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.” and “What the battle for Britain required, so the battle for Australia requires. That meant service and struggle and complete devotion for Britons in the defence of Britain. It means the same thing for Australians for the defence of Australia.

But as the current Commander of the 7th Brigade, ‘Brisbane’s Own’, I REQUEST YOUR INDULGENCE if I now speak more of the actions of the Brigade at Milne Bay. The 7th Brigade arrived in Milne Bay on 11 July 1942 and over the course the following months would engage in heavy combat against Japanese forces. The vicious fighting in late August and early September, at Motieau Creek, Koe Belle Mission and in defence of the airstrips, was critical in defeating the Japanese advance at Milne Bay.

The battles at Milne Bay are also special to me as I know them well through the service of my wife’s grandfather, Neville Larsen, a Corporal in the 61st Battalion. As a young officer I would visit Neville and he would speak to me of his experiences at Milne Bay. This was unusual, as Neville, like many of his era, spoke little about their experiences in the war. They had witnessed war in all its horror and loss, and for many seeing mates killed and maimed still impacted them greatly. In his later years Neville wrote a book about his experiences. It is called G’Day Mate’. I think it helped NEVILLE come to terms with what he had experienced. It is not about acts of valour, though I know there were many, nor is it about the fighting acumen of the Australians or the Japanese.

It is about young Australians. Young Queenslanders. Thrust into a war and the defence of their homeland. Young men in an environment as foreign as it was dangerous. Young men who were not soldiers by nature, but answered the call to arms nevertheless. It tells a story about Neville looking out for his mates, Tubby and Les, and they looking out for him.

It is actually a story about love. A love for your fellow man that they were willing to lay down their lives so others would live. A story reflecting the EXPERIENCES OF THE thousands of Australian men and women who served in 1942 and throughout the second world war.

The Official History of the 7th Brigade, written by LTCOL David Belham, states that the after the capture of Milne Bay the japanese intended to capture Port Moresby in one blow. RAAF air superiority and well‐directed attacks caused great disorder to the Japanese LANDING.

Most of all, the initial delaying defence by the 7th Brigade wore them down. For the Allies, Milne Bay represented a turning point. Victory here and a few weeks later on the Kokoda Track ended any Japanese hopes of taking Port Moresby. More important, perhaps, was the psychological victory. The seemingly unstoppable Japanese had been stopped. It marked the southernmost point of the Japanese thrust down into the south-west Pacific.

The militiamen of the 7th Brigade had proved that they could fight well and were resourceful and determined soldiers. The official historian of the 2/10th Battalion records the following accolade:

The … battalions of young Queenslanders fought like veterans, and set a STandard of conduct and performance which earned Australia’s gratitude.

Since that time we have been spared war on such a scale but we have not escaped the cost of peace. As a democratic and prosperous nation we have continued a proud history, set in those extraordinary years, to send our sons and daughters to foreign lands in the name of freedom

You see, no matter what is said and written, tyranny can never be wished away with a pen that is held in the hands of the safe and comfortable. It must be confronted by men and women who value freedom and justice. men and women like those who served in 1942.

As a nation we must never forget the debt we owe to these fellow Australians and we must never forget the responsibility we have to their SACRIFICE. iT IS SOMEWHAT POIGNANT THAT WE COMMEMORATE THE BATTLE FOR AUSTRALLIA DURING LEGACY WEEK. A WEEK WHEN WE REFLECT ON THE CURRENT 52,000 WIDOWS, WIDOWERS AND FAMILIES WHO’S LOSS OF THEIR LOVED ONES STARKLY REPRESENTS THE COST OF WAR.

When I was a young man, I had the privilege to walk in the footsteps of those who fought along the Kokoda Track. FOR THOSE OF YOU LIKE ME WHO MAY HAVE HAD THE opportunity TO WALK THAT TRACK YOU CAN BUT ONLY IMAGINE WHAT OUR SOLDIERS HAD TO ENDURE IN THAT CAMPAIGN. ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BATTLES OF KOKODA OCCURRED AT PLACE CALLED ISURAVA DURING THE 27 AND 28 OF AUGUST. AND IT WAS HERE THAT PRIVATE BRUCE KINGSBURY WAS AWARDED A VICTORIA CROSS, POTHUSMOUSLY, FOR HIS ACTIONS. HIS CITATION READS in part:

‘PRIVATE KINGSBURy….RUSHED FORWARD, FIRING THE BREN GUN FROM HIS HIP THROUGH TERRIFIC MACHINE-GUN FIRE, AND SUCCEEDED IN CLEARING A PATH THROUGH THE ENEMY. CONTINUING TO SWEEP ENEMY POSITIONS WITH HIS FIRE, AND INFLICTING AN EXTREMELY HIGH NUMBER OF CASUALTIES UPON THEM, PRIVATE KINGSBURY WAS THEN SEEN TO FALL TO THE GROUND, SHOT DEAD BY THE BULLET FROM A SNIPER HIDING IN THE WOOD’. EYEWITNESSES SAID THAT KINGSBURY'S ACTIONS HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE JAPANESE, HALTING THEIR MOMENTUM’.

halting their momentum. the story of 1942.

 AT ISURAVA there IS A MEMORIAL BUILT IN MEMORY OF people LIKE KINGSBURY, WHO GAVE EVERYTHING THEY HAD, INCLUDING THEIR LIFE, TO DEFEAT THE THREAT TO THEIR HOMELAND. AT THE MEMORIAL ARE FOUR STONE PILLARS THAT DISPLAY THE WORDS "COURAGE, MATESHIP, ENDURANCE AND SACRIFICE’.

TODAY LET US ALL REMEMBER THOSE WORDS AND LET US ALL STRIVE TO POSSESS THOSE QUALITIES, just LIKE THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO FOUGHT AND WON THE BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA..