

Speech

Address By

His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)

On the occasion of

Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin

Darwin War Memorial, Darwin
19 February 2017

On this day, 75 years ago, bombs fell on this city, its harbour and its runways.

For the first time Australia's mainland was under attack.

Before this, Australia's Battles, Australia's wars, were fought in lands far away.

Our blood and our lives were lost fighting for others, on foreign soil.

The Bombing of Darwin changed that.

A World War that had already taken an enormous toll and claimed so many lives—had come to our shores.

In the first place, in two separate raids—planned and executed by the Commander responsible for Pearl Harbour—Darwin was devastated:

- Its harbour alight.
- 11 ships sunk.
- 30 aircraft destroyed.
- Its infrastructure ruined.
- Its defences breached.
- 235 lives lost, a further 400 injured.

We know now that these attacks, and the 100 or so more that would follow across the top end over the next two years, were not a precursor to an immediate full scale invasion.

Rather, their objective was to disrupt Darwin's capabilities as a base to support the wider conflict to the north and at the same time damage the morale of the Australian population.

But the attacks focussed our attention to our neighbourhood and our security.

Because—with the bombing of Darwin and the fall of Singapore just four days earlier—we knew that our part of the world, our sovereignty was at stake.

The time had come to put our interests and our security above all else above all else.

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And this is what we did.

The enemy advancing to our north was repelled

Our resistance at places like Kokoda and Milne Bay are the stuff of legend.

And the peace that was eventually secured came at a high price to our nation and our neighbours and allies.

And we do not take it for granted.

That is why, 75 years on, we remember this city and all it went through.

We pay tribute to the spirit and character of those who—in a time of crisis—proved to be resolute and resilient.

Characteristics which served them well and have continued to serve the people of Darwin well to this day.

On behalf of all Australians I pay my respects to those who lost their lives and I pay tribute those veterans, civilians and evacuees who are with us today.

I join you in remembering the enormous cost and suffering these attacks brought.

And for all this Darwin survives, Darwin stands strong, Darwin prospers.

Thank you.

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