

Battle for Australia Association (NSW) Annual General Meeting 21 September 2021 President's Report

I'd like to commence my report by recognising the people who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting – in my case the CAMMERAIGAL Clan. I would also like to pay my respect to Elders, past and present, of the traditional custodians and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, meeting with us today: Uncle Harry Allie and Michael Ali.

I also pay my respect to First Nations men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war, remembering in particular those who lived through the era covered by the Battle for Australia.

My first year as President of the Battle for Australia Association (NSW) (BFAA(NSW)) has been dogged by the pandemic which has made inroads into the aspirations of all our members to properly commemorate the Battle for Australia (BFA) period of 1942 to 1945. But I'm pleased to recognise the resilience, commitment and application of our members and the Committee in particular, for ensuring that the two major events on our calendar were conducted in memorable style, albeit, in a tailored and abridged manner.

The 2021 Battle for Australia Oration

The 2021 Battle for Australia Oration was delivered by Eminent historian and academic, Professor James Curran at the Royal Automobile Club of Australia Sydney on Wednesday 17 February 2021. Prof Curran's topic was "Fear of Invasion: 1942 and Today".

The Oration gave a fascinating insight into our nations constant fear of invasion since the 1930s and how successive politicians have attempted to deal with the threats real and perceived. It would be intriguing to hear a postscript given the below the surface issues of the past week.

I'd like to acknowledge the critical contribution of Vice-President Darren Mitchell in identifying and arranging for Prof Curran to speak at the 2021 BFA Oration whose address continued the outstanding quality we have grown accustomed to.

Battle for Australia Day 2021

The 2021 BFA Day fell this year on Wednesday 1 September 2021 and whilst we had hoped to plan around the pandemic with an actual service at the Cenotaph, in the end, containing the COVID-19 strain of the pandemic meant that this could not occur. Instead, the consensus was to conduct a virtual service.

The conduct of our virtual service was made primarily possible by:

- the flexibility of Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd) in delivering his address by pre-recorded video;
- the unifying work of Vice-President Darren Mitchell in pulling together the disparate elements making up the service and working his talents as Master of Ceremonies in weaving it all into a virtually coherent enterprise; and

- lastly John Howells whose limitless knowledge of IT, the internet and videos, enabled the production of the virtual 2021 BFA Day service. Nothing was too much trouble for John in enabling us to provide a quality virtual commemoration, thus ensuring the pandemic did not have the last word on Wednesday 1 September 2021.

The outlook for BFAA (NSW) 2022

We now know what can be achieved virtually by way of meetings and services but I am hopeful that in 2022 we can revert to the traditional way of convening the BFA Oration and the BFA Day commemorative service, noting that the year 2022 will be the 80th anniversary of those momentous days of 1942. It will be my intent and I know yours too in ensuring we remember in the most appropriate manner.

BFAA (NSW) Members and Committee

I'm sure that all our BFA members appreciate the work undertaken by the Committee and concede that it is desirable to share the load as equitably as we can. To this end we need to keep our future in mind and maintain the flow of new members who are similarly inspired to commemorate the events of the Battle for Australia from 1942 to 1945. I ask that you keep this in mind in your dealings with other like-minded people not yet members of our association.

I'd like to thank all members of the Committee for their contributions over this last year and for their flexibility, tolerance, and good humour in weathering the pandemic storm. I'd also like to specifically thank our ex-officio committee members: Lisa Whitehouse of the NSW RSL, Nick Young of the NSW Office of Veterans; and John Hall of the Department of Veterans Affairs. We are privileged to have their commitment and their organisations' blessings to be involved in the Battle for Australia activities. We appreciate their support to our commemorative goals.

I also want to convey my thanks to the Committee executive: Vice-President Darren Mitchell, Secretary Megan Lavender and Treasurer John Butcher for their commitment and energy of this last very difficult year.

In concluding, I commend the commitment of all our members in publicly remembering the fearful time experienced by our forebears during the period of the Battle for Australia. Whether in uniform or civilians on the home front, their brave contribution to victory must be remembered.

Lest We Forget

David Ross
President