



Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales

NEWSLETTER

December 2020

President's Update

The last few months have been momentous for the Battle for Australia Association (NSW) as we grappled to work through the pandemic to convene a memorable commemoration service at the Cenotaph on 2 September 2020. With 50 guests seated and socially distanced, it seemed that our ranks had been decimated from the usually high numbers of participants. But our service, which can be viewed on our website¹, was remarkable for its achievement of solemn remembrance and was led by our Patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales who delivered an impressive address. Our own Association team was supported generously in conducting the service by the RAAF Catafalque Party, the NSW Police Band, the Custodians of the Cenotaph and the NSW RSL.

Our Association's Annual General meeting in late September saw our President of five years, Group Captain Doug Roser OAM (Ret'd) and our Secretary of four years Geoff Brown retire, and we owe them both a vote of thanks for their dedicated service in support of our objectives.

At the time of writing, Remembrance Day 2020 has just overlapped with NAIDOC Week which was postponed from its usual timeslot in July due to the pandemic. This concurrence of the two events has worked to remind us of the sacrifice of our First Nations' peoples who served willingly in uniform in Australia's defence but who were shamefully denied the fruits of their efforts at war's end. I am proud of the indigenous participation in our Association's Committee and thank them for their valued involvement despite the treatment of their forebears.

On Remembrance Day our Association recalls the 39,655 Australians who died in World War 2 and the gloomy shadow that extended over the home front of Australia for almost six years. Our veterans of that era are now almost exhausted but their service, their achievements and their endurance remain in our consciousness. As the number of WW2 ex-service/regimental associations declines, the BFA Association is committed to ensuring that the history of the period, when Australia felt so terribly threatened, will be remembered through our annual

commemorations and the fostering of awareness of Australia's wartime history.

As we wind down the year's activities, our Association is focusing on next year's events and I am delighted to reveal that our February 2021 Battle for Australia Oration will be delivered by Professor James Curran of the University of Sydney, and is titled "Battle for Australia: 1942 and today". The Oration is scheduled for Wednesday 17 February 2021, 10am to 12 noon at the Royal Automobile Club of Australia at Circular Quay. [For your 2021 diary:](#) please note the date for the Battle for Australia Commemorative Service is Wednesday 1 September at the Cenotaph.

In one sense, this strange year has been made difficult and laboured by COVID-19, but it is also hastening to an end as we watch world and local events with fascination. We should all look forward to 2021 in the hope of a rejuvenated and safe 12 months to come, that may once again be as fulfilling as possible for us all.

I'd like to conclude by wishing all members of the Battle for Australia Association and our friends a happy festive season and a prosperous and healthy 2021.

David Ross
President

Battle for Australia 2021 Oration

Eminent historian, Professor James Curran, will deliver the NSW Battle for Australia Committee's fifth annual lecture on Wednesday 17th February 2021 at the Royal Automobile Club of Australia, Circular Quay, Sydney. The Oration is held in the third week of February each year to mark the occasion when Prime Minister John Curtin coined the phrase "Battle for Australia". Curtin first used the term in a press statement released on 16th February 1942 when he communicated to all Australians the dangers that lay ahead for our nation following the Fall of Singapore and Timor-Leste the previous day.

Dr Curran is Professor of Australian History at the University of Sydney and a fellow at the Lowy Institute for International Policy. He is a frequent commentator across print, radio and television on Australia's foreign relations, particularly with the United States and with China, bringing a deep knowledge and understanding of Australia's twentieth century history to public debates on our contemporary international experiences.

Among his publications are two studies of Prime Ministers that are especially relevant to the Battle for Australia: *Curtin's Empire* (2011), and *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (2004). At 10.00 am on Wednesday 17th February 2021 Dr Curran will address the topic of *The Battle for Australia: 1942 and Today*.

Dr Curran joins an illustrious group of scholars who have given the annual oration, all of which are available on the Battle for Australia website: www.battleforaustralia.asn.au.

A changing of the guard at BFA

The Battle for Australia Committee NSW has seen a changing of the guard at its 22 September 2020 Annual General Meeting. Group Captain Doug Roser OAM (Ret'd) finished his five-year term at the helm as President and has been succeeded by Colonel David Ross CSC (Ret'd).

Doug led from the front in organising the annual BFA commemorations in September and his determination to carry on in 2020 saw a considerably reduced COVID-affected service, but a memorable service nevertheless. The normal attendance was reduced to around 50 socially distanced participants led in remembrance by the BFA's Patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, accompanied by Mr Dennis Wilson.

Doug also ensured that on his watch, the annual historical lecture in February was focussed and relevant to studying the unique aspects of the BFA period. In support of BFA objectives, Doug initiated new relationships with RSL NSW, the ANZAC Memorial, the PNG Australia Association along with Federal and State Offices of Veterans Affairs.

Throughout his term as President, Doug was strongly supported by Karen Roser especially in organising the February event and the September Commemoration and luncheon. The BFA owes Karen a huge vote of thanks for her generous involvement in Association activities.

The BFA Committee expressed its unanimous appreciation for Doug's achievements during his term as President and its pleasure at his decision to continue as a member of the BFA Committee.

BFA Secretary Geoff Brown has also called time, handing over his well-managed association records to Megan Lavender. Geoff served as Secretary for four years, applying his legal mind and attention to detail to his duties while ensuring the "backroom" operated smoothly and efficiently supporting organisational objectives. The BFA Committee was fortunate to have his steady hands and sage advice readily available. Geoff will be leaving the BFA Committee and will be sorely missed although he has agreed to share his institutional memory with the "new guard" should it be necessary.

Limerick from the Annual General Meeting 2020

By Rev Geoffrey Usher

Good chairmanship's sometimes a poser:
When asked, most people say: "No, Sir!"
From the B f A A
We all want to say
A heartfelt Thanks to Doug Roser.

He led without being a "boss".
His departure feels like a loss.
But the future looks grand
For, as carefully planned,
We're delighted to have David Ross.

We also say Thanks to Geoff Brown,
Our Secretary, now standing down.
He's been replaced by Megan,
Who will help David leading,
With the rest of us gathered around.

This September saw the resignation of both our president, Group Captain Doug Roser and the secretary of Battle for Australia, Geoff Brown.

President Doug said: "Both of us agreed to transfer the responsibility over to my successor, David Ross. We were fortunate to recruit Megan Lavender as the new Secretary from the AGM this year.

"This year was to be a year of transferring knowledge to the new team. However, with the COVID-19 restrictions from February, the year has not been in any way normal. "Keeping track of the events under COVID-19 was a major task and when the NSW RSL agreed that the Service could be conducted was a major task and not an event which we could pass to the new team.

"The organisation of the event was a roller coaster and kept us extremely busy until it was over. So, we have not transferred some of the knowledge to the new team but Geoff and I will continue to work with the new team until this is done.

"As the out-going President I express my sincere thanks to the Committee and thank all of you for your great support during my time as President. Our organisation is in good shape and has the necessary support from the Governor, the NSW RSL and the federal and state governments to continue the objectives of the Constitution."

Battle for Australia (NSW) 2021 Committee

President: COL David ROSS CSC (Ret'd)

Secretary: Megan LAVENDER

Treasurer: John BUTCHER

Committee: Uncle Harry ALLIE BEM
Michael ALI OAM
Christopher DAWSON
Eileen HENDERSON, OAM RFD
John HOWELLS, OAM RFD
Ian KAIN
Ted McKEOWN
Darren MITCHELL
GPCAPT Doug ROSER OAM (Ret'd)
Rev Geoffrey USHER
Liz WATTS OAM
Douglas WOOD

Meet our new President David Ross



David Ross, was a career Army officer for over 25 years before converting to a civilian job which continues to demand his part-time attention. When the Battle for Australia began on 16 February 1942, his father, John Ross MC, was commencing a three-and-a-half-year term as a prisoner of war following the surrender of Allied troops at Singapore the day before. So David has a personal connection to the World War 2 period through his father and other family members who endured the trials and tribulations of the home front in Sydney.

For 11 years until 2017 David was President of the 8th Australian Division Association, the first (and last) of the next generation to act in the position, and for 16 years the coordinator of the Fall of Singapore Commemoration held annually at the Cenotaph in Martin Place.

David has a proud lineage of uniformed service: in addition to his father, his mother served during WW2 in coastal artillery located at Botany Bay; an uncle who fought with the RAAF in Bomber Command in WW2 and a grandfather who experienced WW1 on the Western Front. His family's record of uniformed service including a stint of his own in troubled Northern Iraq after the 1991 First Gulf War reinforced his sense of Australia's wartime past and under-pins his motivation to remember the sacrifice and suffering of our Australian forebears in the Battle for Australia. David is committed to ensuring that service by Indigenous Australians is not overlooked in promotion of BFA objectives.

Australia's Newest Victoria Cross Recipient

By Noel Christensen

Australia's newest Victoria Cross recipient, Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean must wait a little longer for the award which came after a 78 year long struggle to have the 18 year-old Tasmanian's bravery fully recognised.

COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a delay in announcing when the medal, now known as The Victoria Cross For Australia, will be officially presented by the Governor-General His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley, and also where the ceremony will take place.

Those who fought hard on behalf of the late RAN Sailor's behalf - his relatives, friends and Tasmanian Government officials - would like the medal to be presented to his nephew Mr Gary Ivory, of Launceston, in his home state so as to increase attendances.

If that is the case, the ceremony would most likely be held in the northern township of Latrobe, where Teddy Sheean grew up after being born nearby in Lower Barrington.

Latrobe is the location of a memorial to Teddy Sheean in the form of a walk way, just off the town's main street.

What is certain though, is the Victoria Cross itself is already on home soil after being presented on behalf of Queen Elizabeth by First Sea Lord, Admiral Tony Radakin to Australia's UK High Commissioner George Brandis during a ceremony held on the flight deck of the Royal Navy's newest and largest ship, HMS Queen Elizabeth II.

Ex-Senator Brandis then handed the medal over to Australia's Chief of Navy Vice-Admiral Michael Noonan to bring home.

Teddy Sheean died fighting in the Battle For Australia on December 1, 1942 aboard corvette HMAS Armidale which was on a resupply and relief mission to Portuguese Timor, now Timor Leste, from Darwin.

The RAN ran a supply line to the island in support of greatly outnumbered Australian troops who were battling Japanese forces and were considered to be fighting behind enemy lines.

Japanese reconnaissance aircraft reported their sighting of Armidale which brought about two air attacks on the vessel, the latter proving fatal.

After being hit with two torpedoes and sinking, Armidale's skipper ordered an "abandon ship" to which all aboard responded.

With some men in the water and the ship obviously heading for the bottom, the attackers turned the guns on the floundering, flailing men in the water struggling to organise life boats and rafts and pick up survivors.

The youngest of the ship's crew, Teddy Sheean, witnessed bullets raining down on his shipmates and, despite being wounded and on the brink of jumping off the ship, he ran back to an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun and engaged the circling, menacing Zeros ultimately disrupting their attacks with accurate fire which damaged two attackers.

Survivors attributed this pugnacious and selfless response by Sheean as one which saved many of their lives and cost him his.

His gun only became silent when it slipped beneath the waves.

In July, PM Scott Morrison announced he would recommend to the Monarch a VC For Australia be awarded posthumously to Teddy Sheean, which the Queen approved.



Dale Marsh's painting of Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean depicting him strapped to a gun on HMAS Armidale.

<https://www.worldwars.com/extraordinary-valor-ordinary-seaman-teddy-sheean/>

Getting to know Megan Lavender

The Battle for Australia Association is very close to my heart given that my late father was a WWII veteran with the RAAF who served in the Pacific. On those very rare occasions when he would talk about his war service it was totally engaging to hear about British North Borneo and Zamboanga, the time he commandeered a tank after the Americans literally left it behind, the nights he slept on the billiard table to have first game before morning flying, his joy over night flying and the treks back to the base through what he always said was "the thickest jungle in the world", the veracity of the tropical storms, the care of the local population who would scale the palms to retrieve coconuts, his 'popularity' given that he never smoked so always had an over-supply of cigarettes to trade and his fellow airman who played the 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy' loudly and proudly across the parade ground! He also referred on even rarer occasions to the letters he sent home and the support he provided to his mother during this time especially with the loss of her own mother as well as the family moving to Sydney from Newcastle in this period.

BFA was an 'instant attraction' as I am keen to give back to an Association that links so closely with my immediate family and lend my experience to such a prestigious organisation which continues to honour war service as the Battle for Australia Association.

My career to date has been an amazing journey involving serving consecutively on 15 Boards across State and Federal Government, companies and the not for profit sector. At the same instant I have served in a professional capacity across roles including corporate affairs at a national level, chief financial and chief executive officer at state, national and internationally and project governance over industries ranging from health to sport to spatial science and banking.

The capacity to serve the organisation and make whatever contribution I can to the growth and ongoing sustainability of the Battle for Australia Association is paramount in my mind. At the same time the great privilege of being of assistance to and working with David as the President and supporting his leadership is a special honour.

Remembering Battle of the Beaches – Gona, Buna and Sanananda

For those in Victoria, author of A Bastard of a Place, Dr Peter Brune, will be the speaker on Saturday, 20 March 2021 at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. The address is 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm.

Our Website

Thanks to the efforts of John Howells, a member of our Committee, who manages our website a great deal of new material has been added to it. It can be accessed through the website <http://www.battleforaustralia.org.au>.

Membership

Our Association relies on the annual fees of our members and the many organisations, particularly RSL sub-branches, which are members to fund our activities. Our membership is steady but we will always welcome new members, so please spread the word. The Application Form can be downloaded from our website and contact details can be accessed on it here:

http://www.battleforaustralia.asn.au/documents/Membership_Form.pdf

A GLANCE BACK



Commemorative Service September 2,

