



CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE

Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Signing of the
Surrender of Japanese Forces at Rabaul, 6th of September 2020

CDF Address

Firstly, I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet — the *Ngunnawal* People — and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

I would also like to acknowledge the Rabaul and *Montevideo Maru* Memorial, in front of which we have gathered today to commemorate the Signing of the Surrender of Japanese Forces in Papua New Guinea.

‘Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won ... The entire world is quietly at peace.’ⁱ

Those were the words of General Douglas Macarthur on the deck of the *USS Missouri*. He was speaking on the 2nd of September 1945, following the signature of surrender of Japanese Forces and the Japanese Government. The moment marked the formal end of the Second World War.

As many as seventy-five million combatants and civilians lay dead; perhaps many more, uncounted. General Macarthur further declared that ‘in reporting this to you, the people, I speak for the thousands of silent lips, forever stilled among the jungles and the beaches and in the deep waters of the Pacific which marked the way.’

This was a truth we knew too well, no matter which country you came from. Almost 40,000 Australians lost their lives in the line of duty; their families never to hear their voices. Many more were wounded, or prisoners of war, or both. And many of those Australians who fought and died, or fought and survived were part of the campaign in New Guinea and Papua which ran from 1942 until the declaration of peace.

And today we remember all the combatants, regardless of side or nation. And we acknowledge the significant sacrifice and service of Papua New Guineans who defended their homeland. Who cared for and showed compassion to wounded Australian troops and their injured allies. Who suffered greatly in a war that came unwanted to their shores and their way of life.

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This memorial, is one of many that punctuate our landscape in remembrance.

It is dedicated to the prisoners who lost their lives when the Japanese Maritime Vessel *Montevideo Maru* was attacked and sunk on 1 July 1942. It was but one tragedy within the greater catastrophe of world war.

Today, the 6th of September, we commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the surrender of Japanese Forces in Papua New Guinea. The surrender was formalised in an Instrument signed by Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee – General Officer Commanding of the First Australian Army.

And by General Hitoshi Imamura – Commander in Chief of the Japanese Imperial Southeastern Army. Sturdee and Imamura put ink to paper aboard the British carrier *HMS Glory* which sat in the waters off the coast of Rabaul. The Instrument was but one of many surrender documents signed by representatives of Allied and Japanese forces across the region.

And with the Japanese surrender in Papua New Guinea, there were sighs of relief. From Papua New Guineans. From Australians. From the Allied forces who had fought in the skies above Papua New Guinea; in its jungles; and on the surrounding seas.

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And so today – reflecting on the Japanese surrender in Papua New Guinea specifically and the war more broadly – we commemorate. To honour those who served, and those who sacrificed on our behalf; to remember the principles and ideals that warranted the fight over six long years; and to reaffirm the hard-won, costly lessons of war.

Soldiers, sailors and airmen and women fought for their country, their community, their family and their mates. They fought for freedom – so that we could determine our destiny, and that our destiny would not be determined by others. They made a quiet promise – to defend liberty; to defeat evil – even with their last breath, if need be.

Ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, embodied the simple virtues of Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity, and Excellence in defence of their nations.

Every country suffers in conflict, and conflict comes at a cost to our common humanity. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, the Montevideo Maru Memorial, and thousands of others stand as a testament to this truth. Speaking on the surrender of Japan, General Macarthur looked to the future. He said:

‘I speak for the unnamed brave millions homeward bound to take up the challenge of that future which they did so much to salvage from the brink of disaster.

...

It is my earnest hope, and indeed the hope of all mankind, that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past.’ⁱⁱ

Hard words to hear, seventy five years on.

Weighed against the cost of that war alone, it is uncertain whether we have lived up to the standards of peace and common humanity it demands. Indeed, it is uncertain if we could ever live up to that great cost. And we must make sure that their great sacrifice was worth what it taught us in loss and grief.

But we have beaten our swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks, before. We have made once bitter enemies our close friends.

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Today we fight, when we must, alongside our hard-earned friends. We remember the principles for which we fight, and the cost of departing from them. Most of all, we must not forget the lessons of MacArthur's war-weary speech.

We must not forget historical occasions such as the coming to peace in Rabaul. The friendship between Australia and Papua New Guinea has only strengthened through our remembrance.

And we must not forget the significance of memorials like this one. They offer us this moment to reflect on what it has cost for our society to remain open, and free, and in service of our communities and families while respecting our common humanity.

Something that has come at such great a cost is truly invaluable. It should not be forgotten. We must forever cherish it.

ⁱ General MacArthur's Radio address to the American People, September 2, 1945.
<https://ussmissouri.org/learn-the-history/surrender/general-macarthur-radio-address#>

ⁱⁱ General MacArthur's Radio address to the American People, *ibid.*