

78th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin – Wednesday 19th February 2020

Report by Bernadette Lightfoot, Secretary of the Melbourne Branch of the Darwin Defenders 1942-45

“Today, 19th February 2020, is the 78th Anniversary of the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese in the Second World War, recognising a time when our shores came under direct attack”

The Hon Darren Chester MP, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Personnel

The Melbourne Branch of the Darwin Defenders 1942-45 were once again honoured and privileged to be able to organise the 78th Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne on Wednesday 19th February 2020.

Accompanied by music of The Royal Australian Navy Band directed by Band Master Sharon Jarvis CPOMUSN, President Alan Day lead the march of the Darwin Defenders banner from the flagpoles to the flame.

Sadly, due to the unseasonable weather, the heavy cloud cover and the prospect of rain, for the first time in many years, we were unable to have the Point Cook Flypast of Museum aircraft.

Master of Ceremonies, Mr Tim Gurry OAM, expertly guided the service. With welcomes from Shrine Governor, Colonel John Coulson OAM RFD ED (Retired) and Patron of the Darwin Defenders Melbourne Branch, Rear Admiral John Lord AM, the service began with dignity, respect and acknowledgement of the sacrifices made in 1942. Rev. Siôn Gough Hughes from the Wesley Church in Melbourne led the service with prayers for those that had served during 1942.

We are also thankful, that our esteemed President, Mr Alan Day was able to recite the ode for the service. At 98 years old, we are honoured that he continues to serve the Darwin Defenders 1942-45 community.

The 2020 keynote speaker was eminent historian, Dr Richard Reid. His address *“Two Shy Youngsters ... Two Darwin Defenders of 19th February 1942”*. Richard’s meticulous research over the many years working for DVA and the Australian War Memorial brought to life the story of young men that were part of the bombing of Darwin during 1942 and how they were in fact men from the local area in NSW and the ACT – so close to where Richard had spent so many years – these young men were real people belonging to families and communities -yet the situation of the war took them to a place and event that would change their lives forever.

To enhance the student experience, our MC Mr Tim Gurry, prepared extra readings for students to read to accompany the keynote address, and also an activity sheet – giving the students an extension activity post the service.

A highlight of this service has always been the involvement of school students. Students assisted during the service with reading of poems and the carrying the Darwin Defenders banner. Students attended from **Ashwood High School, The King David School, Ivanhoe Girls Grammar School, Kilbreda College, Puckapunyal Primary School, Star of the Sea College, Wesley College, Xavier College**

The 19th February 1942 was a day that changed Australia and we all echo the words from the Minister – *“Today, I encourage all Australians to take a moment to reflect on this significant day in our history to remember those who died and honour those who fought to protect our nation and our way of life”*