

BROOME AIR RAIDS — COMMEMORATION

Statement

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [5.22 pm]: I would like to bring to the house's attention two events; one was last week and the other one was last weekend. These were the commemorative events of the air raids on Broome on 3 March 1942 by the Japanese, which we are commemorating some 70 years later. That was when the war came to Western Australia. Wyndham was also attacked on the same day in 1942. The first event was held on 23 February at the Dutch enclave of the Perth war cemetery in Karrakatta where some 35 Dutch victims of that raid are buried. I had the privilege of representing the Premier at a moving ceremony of remembrance where a rose was laid on each of the 35 graves.

The second commemorative event was at Broome to commemorate, some 70 years later, the anniversary of the air raid on Broome. This event was attended by the Premier; state and federal politicians; the Dutch ambassador, His Excellency Willem Andreae; the American consulate, Aleisha Woodward; the Dutch consulate; the shire president; councillors and many other dignitaries. The event was organised by the Broome shire, the Returned and Services League of Australia and the Dutch embassy. Approximately 1 500 people attended this memorial service. St Mary's College of Broome provided a story and dance. The young ladies who performed were fantastic; the town of Broome should be proud of them. History was displayed. There was a fly-past by three RAAF Hawk aircraft from No 79 Squadron. The 717 Qantas, which was given special allowance to fly low, was also lined up. In 1942 Qantas lost one of its aircraft at Broome. Privately owned light aircraft also participated.

Broome had been used in the evacuation of people from the Netherlands East Indies to Australia, but mainly military personnel and bureaucrats came from there. Broome was chosen because it was close to Java and could take both land-based aircraft and flying boats. I am told some 7 000 to 8 000 people went through Broome in 14 days. Around 60 aircraft were processed daily; this was mainly to refuel on their way to Sydney or Melbourne. Shuttle flights were discontinued after the Battle of the Java Sea on 28 February 1942, but they were opened briefly on 2 March 1942 to allow 81 civilians and 80 air crew members to escape. These people arrived in Roebuck Bay, Broome, in their flying boats—Dorniers and Catalinas. They had just flown some seven hours and were refuelling. They thought that they would be safe once they reached Australian shores.

How wrong they were. A surprise attack took place shortly after 9.30 am. It comprised nine Zeros, split in three ways—three went for the airport, three went for the flying boats and three others circled above to see if there was any resistance. Once they realised there was none, it was an open attack for approximately 20 minutes. It was a horrific massacre. All aircraft and flying boats were destroyed—a total of 22 aircraft. Of the 161 people who were aboard, 48 lost their lives—16 men, 12 women and 20 children—either by gunfire or swimming through the burning oil. There was one story told of a small boy, whose hair was burnt off, who had been picked up by life raft. He had obviously swum from the flying boat, was picked up and put in the life raft, but a Zero zoomed back in again. The person who picked him up turned around to see the small boy had been shot in the face. There were many memories recited. However, one heroic act that members might have read in the press was that of Mr Gus Winckel, who grabbed a machine gun out of a Lockheed Lodestar aircraft and shot down a Zero. In fact, it is claimed he shot down a second Zero because one of them had been shot in the tank and never returned to base. It crash-landed on the way back. Mr Winckel lives in New Zealand and is now 99 years old. They tried to bring him across but it was thought the travel was a little too far. However, four of his boys attended, as did many other survivors. That was their first time back to Broome since that fateful day.

Some of the references made in speeches that stuck in my mind included “freedom was a privilege; we should never forget”, and “If we don't remember history, then history has the habit of repeating itself.” These commemorative occasions are important to keep generations informed of our past history.

I thank all those who went to great effort to hold this special commemorative event on the raid of Broome; particularly the RSL club of Broome, the Shire of Broome and whoever else participated—private enterprises et cetera.