



MEDIA BACKGROUND

Battle for Australia

Important dates

- » **Battle for Australia Day – first Wednesday in September**
- » **Recognises all battles involving the defence of Australia between 1942 – 1943 including:**
 - **Midget submarine attack on Sydney – 31 May/1 June 1942**
 - **Air raids on Darwin – beginning on 19 February 1942**
 - **Battle of the Coral Sea – 4-8 May 1942**
 - **New Guinea Campaign – January 1942 to August 1945 including, Kokoda, Milne Bay, Wau, the Huon Peninsula, Wewak and Bougainville**

Casualties on Australian soil

- » **19 Australian and two British sailors died on HMAS Kuttabul in Sydney Harbour**
- » **More than 250 Australians and other nationalities died during the Darwin air raids**

Australian casualties in Papua

- » **Kokoda, PNG – more than 600 died, more than 1,000 wounded**
- » **Milne Bay, PNG – more than 160 killed or missing, more than 200 wounded.**

More information

- » www.ww2australia.gov.au
- » www.awm.gov.au

Overview

Battle for Australia Day is commemorated every year on the first Wednesday in September, marking the first defeat of Japanese forces in the Battle of Milne Bay.

It recognises all those who served on the home front in Australia, and who fought on land, air and sea in battles in the Coral Sea and New Guinea, including Milne Bay and the Kokoda Track, between 1942 and 1945.

History

Mainland Australia came under direct attack from the Japanese four days after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Two air raids were launched against Darwin on 19 February with heavy loss of life and enormous destruction.

In May 1942 the battle of the Coral Sea was fought, and later that year from July to September, the Japanese advanced through Papua New Guinea towards Port Moresby until they were held and then defeated on the Kokoda Track and at Milne Bay.

Meanwhile, Japanese submarines continued to operate along Australia's eastern waters, attacking Sydney Harbour on May 31 and continuing their campaign until June 1943. Air raids persisted against Northern Australia until November 1943.

Australia was defended by more than half a million full time Navy, Army and Air Force personnel and the women's services during this time.

Civilians also contributed, working in jobs geared towards the war effort and living with wartime controls including rationing and restrictions on movement.

Sydney under attack

On the last night of May 1942 Sydney harbour came under attack.

That night three Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour. 19 Australians and two British sailors died on the depot ship HMAS Kuttabul when she was struck by a torpedo.

A second torpedo fired by the same midget submarine ran aground on rocks on the eastern side of Garden Island, failing to explode. An unfired torpedo, recovered from one of the sunken submarines is now on display at the Australian War Memorial.

Darwin air raids

On 19 February 1942, Darwin suffered its first and most devastating air raids. The raids were intended to destroy shipping and inflict damage on the township and on military facilities.

Darwin was subjected to more than 60 further bombing raids, until the last in November 1943. Overall more than 250 Australians, and other nationalities died in Japanese attacks on Darwin.

Other areas of Northern Australia also suffered air raids including Broome where some 70 people died, many of them Dutch civilians and American Military personnel. Other towns attacked included Port Headland, Derby, Katherine and Townsville