



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP
Minister for Defence

Wednesday, 19 November 2008

1119/08

SYDNEY II Speech

(Geraldton Memorial)

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SPEAKER: The Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP, Minister for Defence

Sixty Seven years ago, 645 brave Australians gave their lives for their Country.

Today as we commit one of them to his final resting place, we reflect on that event - Australia's worst maritime tragedy.

We come to honour him and his mates. To thank them for their sacrifice – for what they did for us.

Of course, they all had families. They loved and were loved - many of those who loved them, are with us today.

So this morning we also think about all those who were left behind and who suffered such unimaginable grief – a grief which lasts a life-time.

Amongst them are those who, as a result of the tragedy, never met their dad, or were too young to remember his reassuring tone or his affectionate touch.

And those who grew up without a brother or were denied the chance to grow old with the man they'd chosen as their life-long partner.

Hopefully all those who still grieve, find some comfort in the fact that their loved one did not die in vain.

What if Sydney had not come across the Kormoran that day? What if she had failed to sink her?

The disguised German Raider was said to be carrying 360 mines. She was planning to lay them across vital Australian shipping lanes.

Sydney II was the only major Australian warship in the area at the time. If the Kormoran had successfully managed to block or even disrupt shipping along the West coast of Australia, the war may have taken a different course. Sydney II defeated that deadly threat.

It is hard for us to imagine the effect the sinking of the Sydney and another 8 RAN ships by the end of the next year - had on the psyche of the Australian people – both on our troops and on those who stayed behind to keep the home fires burning or the wheels of industry turning.

Sydney II left behind a proud legacy. Two other ships have gone on to serve the Australian Navy under her name.

- The Aircraft carrier Sydney III saw action off Vietnam.
- The Frigate Sydney IV has served in the Persian Gulf and off East Timor. Each ship and crew has made their country proud. Today of course along with HMAS Manoora the Sydney IV is on the water above the Sydney II, providing 248 family members with a chance again to pay their respects.

As we reflect on the unknown sailor we lay to rest today, we also honour both those who went before him and those who came after him - all those who have given their lives for their country.

And we pause in thanks to those who continue to serve. The men and women of today's Australian Defence Force continue to serve with courage, dedication and distinction.

In doing so, they keep alive the legacy of the crew of the Sydney II.

Today they will be joining me and all those not directly affected by the events of November 19, 1941, who hope that today's solemn ceremonies bring some closure for those who lost their husband, dad, son, brother or uncle.

Lest We Forget!

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