



Speech by

**JOHN ENGLISH**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

---

Hansard 27 November 2001

#### **42 LANDING CRAFT COMPANY**

**Mr ENGLISH** (Redlands—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): On Saturday, 24 November, along with the member for Cleveland and the member for Capalaba I had the privilege of attending the unveiling of a plaque at Pioneer Park, Coochiemudlo Island, dedicated to 42 Landing Craft Company. Following the tragic attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, the forces of the Japanese Imperial Army swept down through the south-west Pacific. Australian troops were brought back from the Middle East to help defend our nation. It was realised at this time that there was a gap in our military forces. Australia had a significant blue water Navy and a very good Army, but it had no ability to operate in-shore and land troops from the sea. The ability to do so was a necessary part of the ongoing campaign in the Pacific theatre.

This gap was filled very, very well. Landing craft were built in the Brisbane River and floated around to Victoria Point. The troops to man those craft were then selected, quite ironically, from the Army. They had no boating skills and were drawn from elements of the commando units, mounted units and artillery units. Members of the Army volunteered to man those craft. Given the fact that they had no maritime experience, that would have been quite a challenge.

As I said, the craft were built in the Brisbane River, floated around to Victoria Point and then out to Coochiemudlo Island, where both 42 Landing Craft Company and 43 Landing Craft Company were based. A collection of ragtag personnel were thrown together; they had to change corps, coming under the Engineer Corps. They were thrown together to begin to learn the new craft of handling those ships. They had a not-quite-idyllic existence on Coochiemudlo Island. Anyone who has been there can attest to its beauty, but they had to learn to handle those craft in and around Moreton Bay. Apart from having to learn seamanship, they also had to learn navigation and the signalling skills required to operate those craft.

After practising in and around Moreton Bay and Coochiemudlo Island, they put their skills to the test in the Pacific theatre. On 8 June 1945, Operation Porton took place. Craft from the 42 Landing Craft Company landed troops at Porton Plantation in northern Bougainville. Due to heavy enemy fire, the troops who were landed could not gain a significant foothold on the beach. To save the life of the company on the beach a quite risky decision was made to perform a daylight rescue.

On the afternoon of 9 June, 42 Landing Craft company, again under heavy enemy attack, went in and proceeded to rescue many of the 31/51 battalion who were trapped on the beach under heavy Japanese fire. On that day 42 Landing Craft Company had five people killed in action and a total of eight wounded, a total of 50 per cent of the men at that time. That action certainly highlighted 42 Landing Craft Company to the Australian military; it reinforces the best traditions of the Australian Defence Forces around the world. The story of that action and many others is told in a book I have, *Sailors in Slouch Hats*. I can certainly recommend it as a good read.

On Saturday, 24 November, we were privileged to have seven surviving members of 42 Landing Craft Company present at the dedication ceremony. They were Wally Rice, Bill Best, Ron Kelly, Rawson Kelly, David Goode, Norm Bool and Sam Smith. I, along with everyone else who was there that day, felt honoured that they made the effort to attend the dedication ceremony. I think it is important that we all remember the debt we owe those proud and brave people.