




Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

Battle of the Coral Sea

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (10.56 pm): Just five months after Japan had entered World War II and two months after capturing Singapore, Australia was in the enemy's sights. Although the Imperial Japanese Navy, with six carriers in the fleet, steamed towards Australia, it was Port Moresby that was the target. By taking Moresby it would neutralise the allied forces allowing Japan to concentrate on taking Darwin and Townsville and take Australia effectively out of the war.

Due to US bombers bombing Tokyo from Midway Island, the Japanese fleet was split into two—one fleet heading to Midway and the other to steam to the Coral Sea and towards Port Moresby. Fortunately, by splitting the fleet the Japanese abandoned their planned 300 aircraft raid on Townsville. Australia was prepared to deter any attempted invasion by Japanese forces between Cairns and Brisbane by mobilising militia. The 42nd battalion was tasked with patrolling the rail line and coast south of Townsville. Steam trains were strategically placed on rail sidings ready to evacuate civilians south.

By intercepting Japanese intelligence, the size and nature of the Japanese fleet was determined. Two US carriers—the *Yorktown* and *Lexington*—combined with Australian navy cruisers the *Hobart* and *Australia* on 4 May to intercept the Japanese fleet approximately 800 kilometres from Townsville in what became known as the Battle of the Coral Sea. On 5 and 6 May, two fleets manoeuvred but did not make contact as the Japanese headed towards Moresby. For the first time in naval history, two fleets would engage without sighting each other nor firing on each other, except for their aircraft. It became such a crucial point that the 42nd Battalion had then mobilised to Alligator Creek, just 15 kilometres south of Townsville. They were given 20 rounds of ammunition, told to fix their bayonets and face seawards. That is how serious it was.

At the end of the battle, the USS *Lexington* aircraft carrier was sunk, along with the several other ships, and over 130 aircraft. Between 7 and 12 May, Townsville based aircraft flew almost continually against the Japanese fleet. Port Moresby was saved and Townsville was spared major damage. Those excerpts were taken from the *Townsville Bulletin*.

My grandmother told me many stories of those days and the continuous armada of aircraft flying in and out of Townsville at that time. Back then they were only stories to me when I was a boy. On Monday, 1 May at the 75th commemoration of the Battle of the Coral Sea, attended by the Premier and Prime Minister, those stories came flooding back to me. We owe those sailors, soldiers and airmen more than they will ever know. Lest we forget.