




Speech By
Bart Mellish

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2022

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Bombing of Darwin Day, 80th Anniversary

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (2.28 pm): Last Saturday it was my honour to attend the 80th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin Day commemorative services as Assistant Minister to the Premier for Veterans' Affairs. The bombing of Darwin was the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia. On 19 February 1942, Imperial Japanese fighters and bombers attacked the port and ships in the harbour twice, during the day dropping 188 bombs over Darwin—more than that those used in the attack on Pearl Harbour just 10 weeks earlier. On the Bombing of Darwin Day we reflected on our past, paid tribute to the service men and women who courageously defended our country and remembered all those who were affected by the war fought over Northern Australia.

On this day alone over 250 Allied service personnel and Darwin locals were killed and countless more were injured. Prior to the Bombing of Darwin Day service it was also a pleasure to attend the commemorative service for the 80th anniversary of the sinking of the USS *Peary*. The USS *Peary* was sunk during the first Japanese air raid on Darwin Harbour and now lies in approximately 27 metres of water. The USS *Peary* was based in Manila at the beginning of the war and was amongst the last of the fleet to escape the Japanese blockade of the city. Arriving in Darwin in January, the USS *Peary* began antisubmarine patrols and escort work. On 19 February it was hit by five bombs, and over half the ship's crew lost their lives as a result.

One of those present at the ceremonies in Darwin was 101-year-old Brian Winspear, who was a brave defender of Darwin. He was on the ground when the Japanese air raids began. Brian was still very spritely and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting him. I have never been at a wreath laying service before where the crowd—and it was a very sizeable crowd—broke into a spontaneous standing ovation and several rounds of applause to pay tribute and their respects to Brian while he laid his wreath. It was an amazing sight to behold and one I will always remember.

Anzac Day and Remembrance Day are obviously our most sacred days and of course should remain so, but in my view the anniversary of the bombing of Darwin does deserve a more preeminent position than it does in the consciousness of modern Australians. It was the first attack on modern Australia and it signalled the next stage of our battle to retain our very country itself.

While in Darwin for the Veterans' Wellbeing Taskforce meeting it was great to hear the Queensland government's initiatives and discuss them with veterans' ministers from every other state jurisdiction as well as the federal minister last Friday. There is some great work happening in the veteran space in Queensland and through some fantastic organisations in particular. It was great to discuss how we can coordinate better with other states and the federal government in this regard. It was a productive meeting, and I thank the Northern Territory Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Paul Kirby, for inviting the task force to Darwin to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin. We have some fantastic initiatives in the veteran space: grant programs for infrastructure for memorial services; initiatives in the homelessness space; and good employment initiatives, including free TAFE and transitioning into the Public Service. I would encourage everyone to engage with their local veterans in their local community.