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HMAS Sydney Memorial Service

Wednesday, 19 November 2008

Source: Queens Park Geraldton

E&OE.....

The man to whom we have come to pay our respects today once walked among us.

He was one of our sons, and one of our mates.

He joined with his shipmates in taking on the tyrants of the world. He did so bravely. He asked for no quarter. He stood up to the greatest enemies freedom had ever faced and above all he stood up as all sailors do to the magnificence, the omnipotence of the ocean.

It is said there are no atheists in a foxhole. I don't believe there are any atheists on the deck of a warship on the mighty ocean when they recognise that their fierce guns and their powerful engines are as nothing compared to that mighty, primeval, often cruel creation – the ocean itself.

No doubt he went to sea looking for adventure, patriotism, serving his country, seeing the world.

He recognised the brutalities of war; he recognised the risk of death, the risk of defeat.

But he went there filled with optimism and courage and looked forward to a life after battle, a life after the victories with his family and his friends, living a life of peaceful contentment. A life that was cut short in that cruel battle.

And so many of you today lost fathers and loved ones, shipmates, in that terrible battle.

So we remember him and we remember all of the men who sank with the Sydney that day, all 645 of them, and all the other sailors who have served Australia in wars defending our freedom.

These were deeply troubling times.

We know that, in that threatening world, he loved his country, and saw in Australia freedoms and values he should fight to preserve.

So he rose to the challenge history had set for him.

He sailed the world, under our flag.

He saw war in all of its fury, the ocean in all of its magnificence and cruelty but he did not flinch.

He came home a hero, at a time when this nation was in its greatest need of heroes.

And then came that awful day of November the 19th, 1941.

Keeping watch on our sea approaches, he saw on the horizon a ship that should not have been there and was not what it appeared to be.

As a part of that crew of 645 brave Australian seamen, he set off in pursuit; never to return.

The man to whom we pay our respects today died in our name.

Not only for the Australia he knew, but for the Australia still to come.

And that is why we honour him, and all who lie at rest today having served our nation.

They were all of them our mates, and they died in our name.

And that is why the unknown sailor and all sailors will be forever in our hearts.