



Rear Admiral (select) Michael Holland
*Commemoration of the Battle of the Coral Sea and
Australian/American Alliance
Brisbane, Australia
May 7, 2016
As delivered*

Your Excellency, Governor (Paul) De Jersey (Governor of Queensland); United States Consul-General Mr Hugo Llorens from the Consulate-General Office Sydney; President Australian-American Association Brisbane Ms Janetta McDiarmid; Mr. John Burgess representing the RSL State President; members of the Australian-American Association; veterans; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of our Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson and the Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Scott Swift, my wife Angie and I are honored to be here to share in this most meaningful of occasions.

Angie and I also appreciate the many visits and tours that have helped bring the history of Brisbane to life for us.

It's with great satisfaction that we join your group today to affirm the enduring friendship and alliance between Australia and the United States. Officially we are here today to honor the men of the United States and Australian navies – as well as all the allied joint forces – who turned back an invasion force to New Guinea in May 1942 and slowed down what at the time was seen as an inevitable invasion of Australia. But our commonalities far transcend our naval heritage. Our mutual interests today and in a future free of regional intimidation and aggression only strengthen our bond.

The U.S.-Australia alliance has been an anchor of peace and stability in this region for decades now. The cornerstone of this strong and enduring relationship is its longstanding naval partnership, one of which I'm immensely proud to be a part of in my assignment at the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Our combined capabilities, coupled with our close relationships, have enabled our national alliance to become a regional anchor of strength, credibility and endurance.

Let me be clear: The strongest metal is forged in the fires of adversity.

It was Spring of 1942 when Japanese forces had occupied many of the islands east of Papua including the Solomons and Bougainville. A Japanese airfield was being established on the island of Guadalcanal and a seaplane base near Tulagi in the Florida Islands.

Naval intelligence understood a major Japanese flotilla was headed toward the Coral Sea. Its objective: The small but strategically important Papuan town of Port Moresby.

Allied ships – and their Sailors – OUR Sailors – sailed to intercept the enemy force. The Battle of the Coral Sea would take place weeks later.

This battle was, of course, historically significant for a few reasons.

It was the first sea battle in world history where opposing ships were not in visual range of one another during actual fighting. All damage to the ships was inflicted by aircraft.

Secondly, it represented the first time since the Dec. 7th attacks that the enemy advance in the Pacific was halted.

And finally, because of the battle's impact, it afforded the Allies in the Pacific a very much-needed confidence boost when our nations – and the free world – needed it.

The battle's climax came on the eighth of May, when aircraft struck blows against each other's capital ships. Allied dive-bombers inflicted heavy damage on the enemy carrier Shokaku, and the Zuikaku lost nearly all its aircraft.

Japanese aircraft attacked USS Yorktown and USS Lexington. Lexington was eventually lost, and the Japanese assumed so too was Yorktown. Were THEY surprised a month later when aircraft from USS Yorktown showed up during the Battle of Midway.

In reality, both sides withdrew in what might have appeared to a casual observer as a draw. But the Battle of the Coral Sea prevented a seaborne invasion of Port Moresby, and arguably saved Australia. More to the point, the Pacific ultimately was freed from tyranny, oppression and intimidation.

The Royal Australian Navy's overall contribution to the Battle of the Coral Sea ...the cruisers...the coast watchers...the intelligence staff...and other support ships contributed to victory. And not just at Coral Sea, but in and throughout the Pacific War. I fear to think what the Pacific may look like today if Australians had not done their part.

Today, of course, nations enjoy a prosperous commons. I'm amazed by the sheer volume of economic commerce and prosperity everywhere in the Indo-Asia-Pacific – all of which either depends upon, or travels over, the sea. Eight of the world's busiest container ports are in the region; 30 percent of global maritime trade, roughly \$5.3 trillion yearly, passes through the South China Sea alone. These economic interdependencies lie at the core of our national interest in, and focus on, this critically important part of the world.

Continued promotion of the rules-based system that evolved over 70 years from the ashes of World War II, remains the best possible way forward for all nations in this region – large and small – to continue to rise peacefully, confidently, securely and economically. The current system that has served us all so well is the foundation for shared use of maritime waterways and resources. Freedom from major conflict and adherence to these rules were catalysts for the economic transformation that spread across Asia in the post-war era.

We have all made great strides over the intervening years to improve our capabilities and our alliances. These strides certainly include a very poignant and historic, recent visit to Australia by a Japanese submarine. Efforts such as this and many other multilateral operations are key to our combined ability to face our current challenges.

There should be no doubt that the United States Pacific Fleet remains as committed to freedom of the seas as ever. We will continue to defend and protect it through routine presence, exercises with allies and partners, and especially with our Australian brothers and sisters. We will continue to promote adherence to the framework of norms, standards, rules and laws that have enabled prosperity for so many maritime nations in this region.

Despite the prevalence of contested waters, we will continue to promote peaceful resolution of disputes in those waters in accordance with international law – not because we have a stake in the claims themselves, but because we have a major stake in the rules-based system that has guided dispute resolution in this region for the last 70 years.

I want to thank you, the Australian-American Association (Brisbane Division), for hosting this commemoration. Our navies and countries are stronger and better for your dedication.

I close with the deepest gratitude for our valiant allied veterans who gave us peace for 74 years. Thank you, and rest assured that we are wholly committed to preserve the regional prosperity, freedom and stability your courage and sacrifice afford the world for more than 70 years.

Lest we forget!

Thank you.