

David Harris

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing,
Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for the Central Coast

**Media Release****Australia's worst air disaster commemorated 80 years on****Thursday, 7 September 2023**

Australian soldiers killed in the country's deadliest air disaster, on 7 September 1943, are being commemorated today at a service at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park Sydney.

No Australian battalion suffered a greater loss than the 2/33rd Battalion did 80 years ago when, in a matter of seconds, it lost 60 men, killed or mortally injured, and another 90 injured as a result of the US Liberator B-24 Bomber crash in Port Moresby.

In pre-dawn darkness, the Liberator was taking off for a reconnaissance mission with 4 x 500lb bombs fitted as opposed to the carrying capacity of 12 bombs. For reasons unknown, the Liberator failed to gain sufficient height and hurtled towards the men on the ground in the convoy of trucks lining the airstrip. The bomber came crashing down, spilling forward a wave of burning aviation fuel engulfing the five lorries and causing catastrophic damage.

Survivors were sworn to secrecy and details of the crash were kept from the families of those who died to keep up morale during the Second World War.

Minister for Veterans David Harris will attend the special commemoration service with members of the 2/33rd Australian Infantry Battalion AIF Association and the veteran community to lay a wreath in honour of all those who served, their families and loved ones.

Minister for Veterans, David Harris said:

"Today we remember the members of the 2/33rd Battalion who sadly lost their lives 80 years ago in one of the darkest days of the Second World War.

"In the blink of an eye our nation lost 62 men, 60 soldiers of the 2/33rd Battalion as well as two Australian truck drivers.

"We pay tribute to the ultimate sacrifice they gave for their country, to keep us safe. We also remember the 11 airmen of the United States who also perished during the crash. Lest we forget."

Mrs Yvonne Unitt, President of the 2/33rd Australian Infantry Battalion AIF Association also laid a wreath to honour the Association's fallen comrades.

"Today's commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Liberator crash, Australia's deadliest air disaster, marks another milestone in our Association's important work of honouring and remembering not only the courage, service and sacrifice of our 2/33rd Battalion soldiers.

"Formed in August 1945, four days after the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima our Association's work has become even more important because it is one of the few Second World War associations still in existence and has a strong support from the relatives of the 3,065 men who wore the battalion's famous red and brown colour patches into battles in the Middle East, Papua New Guinea and Borneo."

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