

**Address by Joan Karmelita
to the 66th annual commemoration ceremony
Lovekin Drive, Kings Park
15 November 2015**

My father, Charles Alfred Sadler, Chas or Charlie as he was known to many, Dad to me and my sister and brother, was not a famous man at any point in his life. He was not noted, in his war service, for any singularly heroic deeds. He was not a distinguished officer. So, in relation to his service on Timor and then in New Guinea, who was Private Chas Sadler? What was he noted for?

Today, in talking about my father, I am going to be talking about the ordinary soldier, the privates, the corporals, the men of lower ranks (no women in the regular army then), who volunteered and fought for their country, who followed orders and carried out plans, although from what I have read, not blindly or even unquestioningly. I'm not going to be speaking about major engagements or skirmishes with the Japanese. Rather, I am going to reflect, in the small way that I can, in a personal way, about what that war experience must have been like for our soldiers, like my Dad. They were men who engaged the enemy, and in spite of great odds, were instrumental in helping to prevent a Japanese invasion of Australia. In his introduction to Cyril Ayris's book, *All the Bull's Men*, former Governor of Western Australia, Lieutenant General John Sanderson, wrote "It is one of the most dramatic examples of leadership, courage, steadfastness and loyalty in the pantheon of Australian military history." I am going to reflect on the reality of that and on what the 2/2nd means to me, and perhaps to some of you, who, like me, are members of the next generation.

Dad, and his younger brother, Stan, enlisted in April 1941, as soon as they had been able to prove that the farm could be managed without them, farming being classified as an essential operation. Dad and Stan served together for almost the duration of the war, and their family was fortunate that they both came home, to continue a close relationship for the rest of their lives.

Dad didn't talk much about the war. By nature, he was a quiet, reserved man, so perhaps that was partly the reason. Perhaps there was too much he didn't want to remember. Perhaps he thought that as children, and even as adults we were still his children, perhaps he thought that there were things about life and human nature that we didn't need to know.

However, one of the aspects of the war that I do remember Dad talking about was the Timorese people and the native peoples of New Guinea. Always it was with a deep sense of gratitude, that he had survived the terrible experiences of war because of the bravery, friendship and commitment of these people. In spite of their own danger and suffering, they thought of our soldiers. They shared their relatively meagre food supplies, they offered

shelter, they provided information about the enemy. I feel sad that Dad never did tell us the name of his credo, if for no other reason than the fact that in part I owe my own life, my existence, to that Timorese man.

I do also remember Dad talking about some of the hardships – the shortage of food, the mosquitoes and the resulting malaria, the sores and the skin conditions that occasionally recurred, even after the war, when we were young children. But I don't remember Dad talking about the fighting, the wounding and the killing of other human beings. In thinking about what I should say today, I wondered if he actually knew whether any of the bullets he fired did kill someone. I am sure they must have, as at home on the farm he proved a reasonable shot against the crows, galahs and twenty eights that stole our eggs and feasted on our fruit trees.

In thinking about whether Dad knew that he had killed other men, I wonder how he felt about that. Dad had a strong sense of duty and responsibility. He knew why he was fighting a war – to protect Australia. To protect the Australian people and the Australian way of life, and coming close to home, to protect his farm, his town, his friends, his family. So I'm sure there would have been some excitement, some elation. The adrenalin would have been pumping. There would also have been relief, that it was them and not him. I feel sure, too, that he would have known that these actions were part of that duty, the reason that he was where he was, doing what he was doing.

I don't imagine that Dad would have thought of himself as particularly courageous. In fact, I imagine that a lot of the time, he and many of his mates would have felt overwhelming fear. I doubt that any of them would have talked about being scared. I don't think men did, in those days. I'm not sure if they do now. There is no shame in feeling fear and no shame in admitting it and I think all of those wonderful Aussie blokes would have been afraid – a lot of the time. Afraid, in those dark Timorese and New Guinean nights, about where the enemy was lurking; how close was he in those mountains and gullies, or those dense sweltering jungles. Afraid that if they went to sleep, they might not wake up; afraid, in those long weeks and months on Timor, when they were out of touch with Australia, that they might not leave that place, that they might not see Australian shores and the faces of loved ones again.

I have visited the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and seen the famous radio, christened "Winnie the War Winner", cleverly cobbled together so that contact with Australia could be re-established. To me that relatively small piece of engineering is a symbol of determination and ingenuity, of never-say-die, and again caused me to reflect that it was a campaign-changer, a life-saver, to which in part I owe my existence.

At this point, I want to talk about what I believe is the other major factor that enabled so many of the 2nd Independent Company to survive on Timor in harrowing conditions and against the enormous numbers of the Japanese forces, and not only survive, but achieve an unusual and amazing kind of victory. I think that factor is illustrated in the fact that we are

all gathered here today, almost 74 years after the group landed on Timor. The bond that united these men, forged so many years ago, tied them together in the strongest bonds of mateship, bonds which perhaps can only be formed in the face of some shared adversity, a shared extreme experience. This annual service has always been evidence of that bond and a tribute to it.

From as far back as I remember, we as children were familiar with the words, the 2/2nd. We saw The Courier arrive in the mail. We were aware of reunions – there was even one on our farm – and aware that these gatherings were of great significance – they were special events. We knew about this annual service, and as youngish adults, began to sometimes accompany Dad and Mum. In all of these events we observed the genuine joy in the meeting up again of mates, the sharing of stories, the laughs, the cold beers. These were men who were lifelong mates. They had fought side by side, they had watched each other's backs. They had been hungry together, afraid together, strong together, brave together. Some of the photographs taken on Timor attest to the fact that even in the direst of circumstances they had found occasions to laugh, with that larrikin humour that is quintessentially Australian. Some of them were incredibly young. They had all been lonely together, for home and loved ones.

Another childhood memory is the post-war attitude that prevailed in Australia for many years towards all things Japanese. With all the horrors that occurred as part of the war in the Pacific, I can understand the deep-seated feelings of anger and hatred that were felt by many Australians, and are still felt by some today, towards the Japanese people. However, in a twist of fate, the GP in Wongan Hills in the last years of Dad's life was a Japanese man. Dad attributed his many years of cigarette smoking to the habit developed during those years on Timor and New Guinea and he suffered from ongoing bronchial problems, necessitating regular visits to the doctor and regular stays in the Wongan Hospital in those last years. I only ever remember Dad speaking about Doctor Inoue with respect, and I believe the relationship between those two men was marked by mutual dignity and trust. I have always felt proud that Dad had achieved this peaceful state of mind during his lifetime. After all, I believe that war they fought was to enable us to continue to live securely in a peaceful place, valuing the lives of all fellow human beings. This doctor patient relationship epitomised that.

The men of the 2/2nd were quietly proud, and rightly so, of what they had achieved. And I am proud, as one of the next generation, a baby boomer, daughter of Pte Chas Sadler, that we are continuing the tradition of this service in their name. It is fitting that this service is held in the open, in the bush of Kings Park, as so many of those young men, like Dad, were from the bush. Here we annually honour those who, sadly, did not return, but also, those who did. We don't glorify them or the war of which they were a part. Instead we honour them as the heroes they all were, ordinary men with extraordinary resilience and courage, who achieved an extraordinary feat. Lest we forget.