



MEDIA RELEASE

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Eagle Farm Heritage Park Reveals Brisbane's 'Secret War' in the Pacific

The opening of a new Heritage Park in Brisbane over the weekend has finally unlocked one of Brisbane's greatest wartime secrets.

Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove presided over the opening of the TradeCoast Central Heritage Park at Brisbane's Eagle Farm, unveiling the Secret of Hangar 7 – where a small group of US and Australian engineers and support staff working in an igloo-shaped building, cracked the mysteries of Japan's main air strike weapon, the Zero fighter plane, during World War II. Their work helped turn the War in the Pacific in favour of the Allies.

The TradeCoast Central Heritage Park also traces the complete, incredible historic journey of the site at Eagle Farm from a convict women's prison in the early days of the Moreton Bay penal colony, through the golden pioneering age of aviation in the 1920s, to wartime air base and modern International Airport.

The Governor-General attended the official opening of the Park, which includes an Interpretive Centre overlooking walking trails and outdoor interpretive art and signage with enhanced audio. The centre is now open to schools and the public and is free.

Joining Sir Peter and Lady Cosgrove were two special guests from the United States, descendants of key figures in the WWII secret mission at Eagle Farm.

Linda Grow, from Salt Lake City, Utah, is the daughter of Lieutenant Clyde Gessel who was specially commissioned by General Douglas MacArthur to embark on a top-secret mission to use every means necessary to unravel why the Japanese had quickly established superior air power.

Gessel travelled to the battlefields of Papua New Guinea and returned with five salvaged aircraft from which they built a single Zero. The retrieval mission allowed he and his team to determine that the Zero's main advantage came from the use of a new, secret lightweight aluminium alloy.

Other revelations from flying the Zero also forced the adoption of different tactics for Allied aircraft engaged in aerial battles with the Japanese fighter.

Owen Farrior, from Hawaii, is the son of Captain William Farrior who flew the first test flight and more than 850 missions of the rebuilt Zero and staged mock dogfights with American aircraft over Brisbane in 1943 which allowed the Allies to adapt their tactics in engaging the enemy.

The sight of an authentic Zero, complete with Land of the Rising Sun colours, flying over Brisbane during wartime caused significant alarm and consternation for locals.

Mrs Grow said she was overwhelmed and amazed to see such a public and vibrant showcase of her father's wartime work.

"I knew very little of what he did during the war as he never really spoke about it but I think he would be stunned to have a street at Eagle Farm named after him and that his service would be so honoured and remembered," she said.

"I hope this history between our two nations will be remembered and preserved for a long time and I can't wait to bring the rest of my family here to experience it all. Many generations will enjoy this history and I think learn from it and that's a very important thing to do."

The Heritage Park is the brainchild and passion of TradeCoast Central developer and history buff Bob Tucker who has financed the entire project.

"While I wasn't required by Brisbane City Council to go to these lengths, I thought there was such a fascinating history to this part of Eagle Farm that it was critical that it be preserved and be told," said Mr Tucker.

"I've always been a history buff and the idea of a Heritage Park and Interpretive Centre evolved over the past few years and I'm excited that we can now share it with the people of Brisbane and the world."

Just as fascinating as the wartime history of Eagle Farm, is the early convict history when the decision was made in 1836 to relocate women convicts away from the fraternising male officers in the city prison.

Fragments of the convicts' occupation remain today. Shards of glass and crockery, iron nails and other artefacts were found by archaeological digs. In 2014, the brick foundations of the Superintendent's Quarters were uncovered.

The TradeCoast Central Heritage Park, featuring a video history, interactive technology, audio walking tours and genuine artefacts is located at 87 Schneider Road, Eagle Farm. It is open to the public from Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm and will be open on weekends in July. Admission is free. Visit:

<http://tradecoastcentralheritagepark.com.au/index.asp>

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