



## PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### **SPEECH BY PREMIER MORRIS IEMMA UNVEILING OF MEMORIAL PLAQUE HONOURING HARBOUR BRIDGE WORKERS KILLED DURING CONSTRUCTION SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2007**

(check against delivery)

Our Bridge is a much-loved icon. But let's never forget that it was built at a heavy cost in lost lives and shattered families.

Sixteen Australian workers died during construction – and the Bridge is their lasting memorial.

If you look hard you'll find a small plaque bearing their names tucked away on the stairs near the entrance to what is now the western cycleway.

It was placed there two months after the Bridge was opened.

In the words of the Minister for Public Works at the time, M. A. Davidson:

*“Those workmen made the supreme sacrifice in the cause of industry.”*

And in view of their sacrifice, we've decided, 75 years on, that they deserve something better.

A new, more prominent memorial.

Nothing too showy, nothing extravagant. They wouldn't have wanted that.

But a simple, elegant bronze plaque, situated near the entrance to the Southern Pylon, where hundreds of people walk past every day.

Sixteen deaths was a terrible toll.

Today, such loss of life would seem appalling and unacceptable by any standards.

Remember that during all the construction for the Sydney Olympics, at many different sites, only one worker's life was tragically cut short.

But 75 years ago, at the height of the Depression, a toll of 16 was acceptable, even cause for satisfaction.

The City Coroner, a Mr May, pointed out that *“those in a position to know”* considered the loss of life on the Bridge was *“very small indeed.”*

Those were his words.

He even congratulated the English contractors, Dorman Long, on their “efficiency” in caring for the lives of their 1600 employees, *“many of whom”* said the Coroner *“were engaged in difficult and hazardous tasks.”*

We only have to look at those old photographs to see just how “difficult and hazardous”.

Not so much as a safety harness in those days.

No construction helmets anywhere in sight.

No safety gear or protective clothing.

No on-site safety checks and inspections.

No-one would countenance such conditions today.

And we know who to thank for the improvements:

- a strong, vigilant and democratic trade union movement.

Unions that fought every inch of the way for better conditions for their members; for decent workers’ compensation; for enlightened codes of occupational health and safety.

Every one of those 16 deaths was a tragedy.

One worker was a 54-year-old dogman knocked off a punt by a load of steel at Milsons Point.

Another died of tetanus after injuring his thumb.

A 25-year-old ironworker fell from the arch of the Bridge when his spanner slipped.

William Wood, whose descendants are with us today, was killed in an accident off the western approaches.

Alexander Faulkner, whose family is also represented today, was struck by a metal part falling from a crane.

Let’s never forget our debt to them and their fellow workers.

They did not die in vain.

They helped build a marvel of engineering, a national icon

And they helped make life safer for countless working men and women who came after them.

As I read their names, I ask you to join me in reflecting on their sacrifice and remembering, even now, the sorrow of their loved ones and families:

- Sydney Addison
- James Campbell
- Francis Chilvers
- Robert Craig
- Alfred Edmunds
- Alexander Faulkner
- Frederick Gillon
- Robert Graham
- Thomas McKeown
- August Peterson
- Percy Poole
- Edward Shirley
- Nathaniel Swandells
- Henry Waters
- Henry Webb
- William Wood

I now invite the children in our audience – the grandchildren of Alexander Faulkner and William Wood – to come forward and join me as I unveil this plaque, erected in memory of the men who lost their lives for this Bridge.

Thank you.

ENDS