The Territory at War – A collection of stories

Honouring our wartime history
On 19 February 1942, Darwin was a very different place to what we know today. The attack on Pearl Harbour nine weeks earlier left locals feeling largely exposed and defenceless. It had only been four days since the Fall of Singapore; a catastrophe for the Allies. Darwinians knew the war was heading their way.

And so it was on a sunny Thursday morning, the greatest conflict in our history came to Australia. At 9.58am mainland Australia came under air attack for the first time when Japanese forces mounted two air raids on Darwin. On that day, 242 Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin in an attempt to prevent the Allies from using it as a base to contest their new-found victories in SE Asia and their intended invasion of New Guinea. 235 people were killed in the two raids, and more than 400 were wounded.

The raids kept coming. Bombing became the norm across the Top End. Broome saw 86 people die in early March in the second heaviest death toll for any raid of the war. The Territory was hammered relentlessly with raiding penetrating as far south as Adelaide River and Katherine. Isolated areas such as Milingimbi were not spared either. The final raid took place in November 1943, but enemy aircraft reconnaissance of the bomber runways continued until mid-1944. The war moved north through the Pacific Islands, involving eventually millions of military personnel battling each other for supremacy. It was not until mid-1945 it all ended with the Japanese surrender following the A-bomb strikes.

The Bombing of Darwin is to this day the largest single most destructive attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia. The Territory Remembers program commemorates the 75th Anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and the Northern Territory’s significant involvement in World War II. On 7 December 2011 the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia declared 19 February in each year as a National Day of Observance to be known as Bombing of Darwin Day. The recognition of this National Day of Observance ensures that the older generation has the opportunity to pass the baton of remembrance on to younger Australians so they too may understand the place this historic event plays in our lives today and ensure that our nation never forgets the horrors of war and value of peace. That such an attack on Australian soil has never been repeated owes to the courage and sacrifice of our service men and women, past and present, and we will forever honour them.

This collection of stories provides a commentary from the two years when the Territory held the line for Australia. It has been made possible by the generosity of each of the authors and we thank them for their contribution.
Contents

A collection of stories – Honouring our Wartime history ...................................................................................................................... 3
A Tassie Airman in the North ........................................................................................................................................................................ 5
The Cowra breakout, Matthias Ulungura and the capture of Toyoshima .................................................................................................15
The American Alliance – founded in blood and sacrifice in Darwin ..................................................................................................19
Bravery and Devotion to Duty in Darwin ................................................................................................................................................22
Darwin’s Submarine......................................................................................................................................................................................28
Berry Springs – a war history ......................................................................................................................................................................31
Mapping the Land and Charting the Sea for the War in the North .......................................................................................................34
Military detention in the Northern Territory during World War II ......................................................................................................39
Life in a Burnett House ...............................................................................................................................................................................50
A Fairmile’s Secret War ..............................................................................................................................................................................57
Japanese war widow finds peace off Darwin ...........................................................................................................................................66
The Little Ships ..............................................................................................................................................................................................67
The Coastwatcher and the Aborigines: World War II comes to Groote Eylandt ...................................................................................72
The Neptuna Porthole’s life as a Coffee table ........................................................................................................................................85
Living in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs when Darwin was bombed – through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl .................87
Darwin’s Chinatown and the Territory’s Chinese ...................................................................................................................................90
Darwin 1942: the missing year .................................................................................................................................................................96
Devastation and Heartache as Civilian Evacuation Badly Managed ...............................................................................................109
Commemorating the Filipinos ..................................................................................................................................................................119
From Darwin to Darwin – Recalling Gull Force .................................................................................................................................135
A Japanese Lady Speaks .........................................................................................................................................................................141
The Discovery of RAAF Spitfire A58-92 in Darwin Harbour’s West Arm ...........................................................................................143
Interview with Kaname Harada, Zero pilot ...........................................................................................................................................153
No.18 NEI Squadron and its Australian roots ......................................................................................................................................158
From the Jaws of Defeat...Darwin, Timor and Sparrow Force ........................................................................................................162
When war was declared in Europe in 1939 I, like many other 19 year olds, thought that it would be an interesting adventure to join the Air Force. I was sure that the blue uniform would impress my girlfriends, and it seemed the right thing to do at the time. From the start, I decided that if my feet were to leave the ground, I wanted to be in the driver’s seat. So, being assured by recruiting officer Squadron Leader Roy Reeman that I could sign on as ‘pilot only’, I took the plunge.

After a wait of nearly 12 months in the RAAF Reserve, on 5 December 1940 I became an AC2 and did the usual training at the Initial Training School at Somers, Victoria, on No 9 Course. There my hopes of being a pilot were dashed and I became a trainee wireless air gunner (WAG). After six months at Ballarat and one month at Evans Head, we were promoted to Flight Sergeants and judged to be ready to go to war.

In July 1941, I was posted to No 2 Squadron at Laverton with three other WAGs from No 9 course. I discovered that I was the only Tasmanian in the squadron air crew. We started flying in the squadron’s Lockheed Hudsons in August, sometimes as radio operators and other times as gunners, in the hydraulically-controlled turrets with two 303 Browning machine guns. The RAAF had bought 247 of these planes from the USA.

Lockheed built a total of 2941 of them, some as passenger planes and some as bombers. They had two 14-cylinder radial engines of 1200 horsepower each, and were designed to carry 1600 lbs of bombs and a total of seven 303 Browning machine guns. Their performance left a lot to be desired. The wing loading was very high; hence they glided like a brick if the engines stopped. They were also very susceptible to unbalanced loading when bombs were not carried. Later there were as many Hudsons lost to accidents as to enemy action in the Darwin area. But a Lockheed Hudson from RAF 224 Squadron is credited with being the first Allied aircraft in the war to shoot down an enemy aircraft, a Dornier DO 18, in October 1939.

In October 1941 a flight of four Hudsons flew to Hobart from Laverton, landing at Cambridge. They took two and a quarter hours to travel what jets now do in one hour. We did several flights around Hobart on photographic and army cooperative missions during our 15-day stay, boarding ‘in luxury’ at the Cambridge Hotel.

As I was the only Tasmanian in the squadron, one Sunday the CO – Squadron Leader John Ryland – said: “Let’s go for a burn to the west coast.” It was a beautiful day and we flew around the coast at low level to Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour, exploring all the waterways at about six metres before flying back over the mountains and Hobart to Cambridge. We were in the air for about two and a half hours. At that time the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary, both converted to troop carriers, were in Hobart, and when the Queen Elizabeth left at 4am we did an anti-submarine patrol for her, lasting four and a half hours.
Being a keen photographer and using a little black and white camera, I took some lovely photos of the ship at full speed from the rear gun turret. I made one of my many mistakes of having the film developed at Kodak in Hobart. When we arrived back at Laverton the next day, I was surprised to see half a dozen MPs waiting for our plane. Smelling a rat, I sent most of the negatives down the spent cartridge chutes to be retrieved later and, after three trials, I was severely reprimanded and had leave cancelled for two weeks. My camera and some photos were confiscated.

**Off to War**

By early December 1941 there were rumours of a war in the east. At short notice we were issued with tropical gear and the whole squadron of 12 Hudsons took off from Laverton at 4.30am on 8 December on route to Darwin via Oodnadatta and Alice Springs. Flying over Lake Eyre I fiddled the wireless, tuning into the civil stations, and heard the news that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. At our refuelling stop at Oodnadatta I told the mob but no one believed me. By the time we arrived in Darwin at 7pm after 12 hours in the air, the panic was on. Instead of going to bed we had to belt up ammunition for our machine guns all night in oppressive and soul-destroying heat of around 35 degrees and 97 per cent humidity.

The day after arriving in Darwin the whole squadron moved 100km south to Batchelor because it was expected that Darwin would be attacked. We were even instructed to wear our Smith and Wesson revolvers at all times. For the next few weeks the weather was so hot that I lived under a natural swimming hole which we often used when we were not on radio duty.

Soon after our arrival in Darwin we were issued with tracer ammunition for our Browning machine guns, which made aiming a lot easier. They were pretty to watch, so I called up the captain to tell him to watch for a burst over the front of the aircraft. I cleverly shot away our front aerial mast.

At short notice on 12 December we were roused early, told to pack and set off to Koepang (Kupang) in West Timor, a Dutch colony. With seven other Hudsons we refuelled at Darwin and then did the four-hour crossing of the Timor Sea. We were to become very familiar with the Timor Sea, considering it to be unable to defend itself. We arrived back at Darwin at 7pm after being in the water for four days. The full story of the 2/40 saga is told in Peter Henning’s book, *The Doomed Battalion*.

There was no time to admire the scenery, as at dawn on 13 December, we took off for a five and a half hour anti-submarine patrol with a full load of bombs and ammo along the coast to Dili. There was panic on board when the second pilot thought he saw an aircraft carrier through the clouds.

Over the next few days we flew half a dozen long patrol flights without any significant sightings. On 17 December, we took off for a five and a half hour anti-submarine patrol with a full load of bombs and ammo along the coast to Dili. There was panic on board when the second pilot thought he saw an aircraft carrier through the clouds. We were to become very familiar with the Timor Sea as we would repeat the flight often during the next few months, sometimes at night. On the same day the other Hudson squadron, No 13, flew to Ambon.

We arrived at Penfoei (Penfui) airport at 730pm. The natives and the surrounding jungle were strange, but the tent camp wasn’t too bad. The 2/40 Tasmanian Battalion was camped nearby, and I soon made contact with several ex-Scotch College Launceston boys as well as Geoff Richards of EE Richards Real Estate, who was engaged to my sister Rae.

The 2/40 Battalion Timor story is one of the black spots in Australian military history. The all-Tasmanian Battalion of about 1000 men had been in the NT for seven months in 1941 and were tired, bored and ready for the six weeks leave in Tasmania they had been promised. The *Zealandia* was in Darwin ready to take them home. However, as a consequence of the Jap advance towards Australia, their leave was cancelled and they were sent to Koepang to protect the Penfui airport there.

Apparently their Commanding Officer, Colonel Geoff Youl, refused the assignment because his troops were under-equipped and would have no naval or air support. It would have been a suicide mission and because of his protests he was replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt, who also argued against the mission.

Nevertheless, despite these protests, on 8 December 766 troops embarked a transport ship at Darwin, hampered by go-slow bloody-minded wharfies, who would not touch ammunition and purposely dropped fragile boxes of radio equipment.

The troops landed at Koepang on 12 December and set up camp near Penfui aerodrome. The battalion had 24 trucks, six Bren gun carriers and six Bofors antiaircraft guns. In February they received 100 reinforcements, but they arrived with no rifles. On our many Koepang-Darwin flights I would carry their mail and bring back some luxuries such as condensed milk and beer.

After the Japs landed 3850 troops on 20 February, many of the battalion took to the hills with 40 Timor ponies they had commandeered. Most surrendered after killing 439 enemy paratroopers and many ground troops. The final 2/40 casualty list was 50 killed in action, 42 died later, 70 wounded and 150 missing when a US submarine torpedoed a ship transporting 1200 POWs to Japan. Geoff Richards, Gay Wardlaw from Chain of Lagoons and other friends were among those drowned. Seventy men were later rescued by a US submarine (probably the same one that torpedoed their ship), after being in the water for four days. The full story of the 2/40 saga is told in Peter Henning’s book, *The Doomed Battalion*.

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Over the next few days we flew half a dozen long patrol flights without any significant sightings. On 17 December we flew for six and a half hours giving air cover for a landing at Dili by 270 men from the Tasmanian 2/40 battalion and 500 Dutch native troops, as the Portuguese settlement was considered to be unable to defend itself. We arrived back at Koepang with all tanks showing empty.

Soon after arriving at Koepang I developed the symptoms of malaria with a high temperature, but managed to continue flying. In between the flying program we went into the town such it was – very primitive with few shops and no hotels. We got to like the Dutch beer which was plentiful, and had no option but to like the water buffalo, black and tough, served with boiled buffalo grass (similar to a coarse spinach), interspersed with meals of rock-hard biscuits and bully beef.

The main objection I developed to air force life was the fact that all the flying days commenced with breakfast at 2am to 3am so we could take off at first light, often when one had
a hangover. I vowed that when and if I returned to civvies
I would not have an alarm clock in the house and would
never get up early!
After the usual early take-off on 14 December and a patrol
right around Timor, we were back in Darwin doing patrols
almost to New Guinea. Then we were back to Koepang
again. On Christmas Day we had a Christmas dinner of
sorts in Darwin and, later, tea in Koepang.
During the rest of December we spent days digging ‘fox
holes’ or trenches and flying more patrols. I noted that I had
lost a stone in weight since Laverton, due no doubt to the
climate and food. Boarding an uninsulated plane standing in
the sun, the inside temperature would be over 60 degrees
and you could fry an egg on the wing. We would fly in
nothing but shorts and the sweat would run down our
bodies in rivers to make the shorts sopping wet. After take-
off and climbing up to 4000m everything froze. We would
often take beer up with us to cool it down.
New Year’s Eve saw me on guard duty at the aircraft, which
were camouflaged and dispersed in the jungle. When I sat
down for five minutes a scorpion about the size of a king
prawn bit my bum and it hurt like hell. I went to the medical
officer, but he wasn’t much help. He said: “I haven’t struck
this problem before. Sit there a while to see what happens.”
By the end of January the health of the squadron in Timor
had deteriorated. Thirty per cent were on sick parade
with malaria, dengue fever, dysentery or tropical sores.
The Timor weather in January is hot and wet, with regular
storms. On one night trip from Darwin flying at 3000m we
ran into an invisible solid wall of water, which caused the
engine temperatures to drop to the point where they lost
power. We were forced down to 250m before coming out
of the storm. We had put on our ‘Mae Wests’, ready to ditch
in the Timor Sea.
On 29 January we flew nine and a half hours in two
sessions as a single aircraft, searching for enemy aircraft
 carriers in the South Celebes area.
Up to the time of the invasion of Timor on 20 February my
life was full of long reconnaissance flights north of Koepang.
When not flying we worked hard at trench digging and road
and track marking.
The aerodrome at Koepang was protected by two six inch
guns pointing seawards. As the Jap invasion was from the
opposite direction, the big guns were never fired.
It was a period of devastating losses of aircraft and aircrew for
2 and 13 Squadrons. Most of the enemy action losses were at
Ambon, while Koepang had more than its share of accidents.
On 20 January I was detailed to go to Ambon with three relief
crews and had packed all my gear, but was replaced by a more
senior WAG at the last moment by the CO.
At the time my job was to sit at the top of a 30m radio
tower with an Aldis lamp to send and receive messages to
and from an American cruiser 1km away in the harbour.
After unpacking my kit I went back to the tower which was
only 100m from the airstrip. I watched the aircraft A16-79
take off with Flight Lieutenant Cumming as captain. It was
obviously tail-heavy, as it became airborne on three wheels
and went straight up to about 70m. Halfway up I heard the
pilot put the throttles ‘through the gate’, and the engines
screamed. The plane flicked over and crashed vertically at
the end of the strip almost at my feet. No one could get
near the burning plane because of all the exploding bullets
ricocheting everywhere, and with a full load of petrol on
board, all that was left was a pile of 12 charred bodies. The
thought that I was nearly on that plane gave me a mighty
uncomfortable feeling, and I became a great believer in the
power of fate.
Then in February Flying Officer Mitchell, with whom I flew often, struck a hill when coming in to land on one engine at Penfui in a heavy rain storm with very poor visibility. All the crew were killed.

At that stage, out of the four 9 Course Wireless Air Gunners who had been posted to No. 2 squadron, I was the only survivor. I was either lucky or had a guardian angel. On 6 February we were on patrol for six hours to the Celebes, north of Timor, and we later learned that we had just missed running into a flight of 24 Zeros and 18 bombers.

On another occasion I was down to go to Ambon again when another WAG, Jack Maudsley, jumped the queue in front of me. He was killed three days later.

Earlier in January we were landing at Darwin after a flight from Koepang at night when we hit 44-gallon drums on the strip, put there to prevent enemy landings. The duty pilot was very drunk and not capable of guiding us in to land.

By the time of the Japanese invasion of Timor, No 2 Squadron had lost half of its air crew and almost all of the Lockheed Hudsons we had brought from Laverton.

The Americans were endeavouring to send reinforcement aircraft mainly to Java, with mixed results. On 11 February, nine new USA P40 Kittyhawks were flying to Java guided by a Beechcraft with a RAAF pilot. The fighters lost the Beechcraft in cloud, couldn’t find their refuelling stop at Penfui, and all nine of them crashed in Timor.

On 11 February, US Kittyhawks and Dauntless dive bombers, while landing at Penfui to refuel on the way to Java, were fired on by mistake by the 2/40 Battalion and several were damaged.

There are other amazing stories of US fighters being shipped to Brisbane in crates where nobody could assemble them. Because of the heavy losses incurred in trying to fly P40 fighters to Java, the Americans loaded 32 ready-to-fly P40s and their crews onto an old aircraft carrier called the Langley, built in 1922. This was sunk on 27 February by Jap bombers, while landing at Penfui to refuel on its way to Java, with 23 men each, we evacuated most of our ground staff.

The next day with two other repaired Hudsons overloaded with 23 men each, we evacuated most of our ground staff from Koepang to Darwin, leaving at 3am to dodge the Jap air raids. The aircraft was so heavy it took over half an hour to reach cruising height and five hours to reach Darwin. Shortly after we left the Penfui drome, it was attacked by a dozen Jap bombers and dive bombers.

By 15 February Singapore had fallen and a landing at Timor became a real possibility. On that day four transport ships escorted by one US cruiser, one US destroyer and two Australian sloops left Darwin for Koepang with reinforcements for the 2/40 battalion. The next day the convoy was attacked by 35 Jap bombers and nine flying boats, but miraculously no ships were lost.

The only combat aircraft available in northern Australia at that time, a P40 Kittyhawk flown by Lieutenant Robert Buel, was despatched to protect the convoy. It arrived just as a four-engine Jap Mavis flying boat was leaving. The inexperienced Buel attacked from the rear, running into heavy fire. The Kittyhawk crashed into the sea, while the Mavis crash-landed on the water on fire. Five Jap crew survived and were later taken prisoner on Melville Island.

We just missed this action while flying from Darwin to Koepang.

The next day the only plane available was our Lockheed Hudson A16-6. We were ordered to find the convoy and protect it to the limit of our fuel. (It should be noted that the Lockheed Hudson was originally a passenger aircraft converted to a bomber and was never intended to do anything except drop its bombs and protect itself – not made to attack a flight of Zero fighters.)

As the convoy was out of range from Darwin, we flew to Drysdale in WA to refuel. Taking off was another close call, as the landing strip there was grass with big sand patches everywhere. Every time we got to airborne speed the plane would almost stop in the loose sand. We just cleared a rock wall at the end of the strip by centimetres, reaching flying speed by dipping down on the other side.

We circled around over the convoy at 4000m for five hours as ‘fighter escort’, hoping the Japs wouldn’t return. For the first time in my life I took with me a packet of nine State Express 333 cigarettes and smoked the whole packet in my gun turret to calm my nerves. It didn't work, so I have not smoked since.

We learned later that having a friendly aircraft flying overhead did wonders for the morale of the 1000 men in the boats below after the heavy attack of the day before. On that day General Theodore Wavell ordered the convoy to return to Darwin as a Japanese invasion of Timor was imminent. The US cruiser escort sailed on to New Guinea, but all the other ships were in Darwin harbour at the time of the 19 February raid and were sunk or damaged.

Having watched a dozen mates burn and waiting in vain for another dozen to return from missions, I felt that my turn was well overdue and that the prospects for me reaching old age were zilch. So on 18 February I made a Will and left it with the squadron adjutant – not that I had anything of value to bequeath.

The next day with two other repaired Hudsons overloadsed with 23 men each, we evacuated most of our ground staff from Koepang to Darwin, leaving at 3am to dodge the Jap air raids. The aircraft was so heavy it took over half an hour to reach cruising height and five hours to reach Darwin.
Relieved to get back to Darwin safely, we had just had breakfast when the air raid siren sounded and at the same time Zeros, dive bombers and high altitude bombers – 188 in all – from four Jap aircraft carriers (escorted by four heavy cruisers and nine destroyers) arrived to do over the town, ships in the harbour and the RAAF aerodrome. I was in a slit trench 150m from the hangers which were one of their main targets. I could see the Jap pilots’ faces as they dropped their bombs a few metres above the hanger roof. From their point of view the raid was a huge success. Destroyed on the ground were eight Hudsons, one Liberator, three Wirraways, several US B24s and A24s, three Beechcraft transports – a total of 26 aircraft.²

The mission station on Bathurst Island had radioed Darwin on 19 February that a fleet of enemy aircraft was heading that way. It was not believed, so there was no warning of the disastrous raid that followed.

That morning 10 US P40 fighters had taken off for Java via Koepang, escorted by a B 17 Fortress. Half an hour out, an adverse weather report forced the fighters to return to Darwin, while the B17 flew on to Java. The P40s were just landing at Darwin when the Zeros arrived and shot down 9 out of the 10 of them due to shortage of fuel and the inexperience of the pilots. The survivor shot down two Japs and landed, but then his plane was destroyed by strafing.³

The Jap pilots shot at the P40 pilots floating down in their parachutes and also at those in the water.

I was wandering around the destruction after the raid, when half an hour later 54 bombers arrived from the south at 4500m in beautiful formation. At first they were thought to be US planes from Brisbane, but as I watched them I saw what looked like confetti coming down as the sun reflected off the bombs. I lost no time in jumping into the nearest trench with a cork in my mouth to stop concussion. All hell broke loose as bombs burst all over the RAAF station (their only target) and to within metres of my trench. My tin hat blew off and I got a hot metal splinter in a finger when I tried to hold it on.

Panic broke out after the raid, with the whole station going bush, thoroughly confused and demoralised by conflicting orders. Within an hour a train departed for Larrimah, 500km south, loaded with hundreds of locals and members of the three services. It was so full it skidded madly trying to get up the incline beside the RAAF station. The roads were also choked with traffic, mostly heading south. I believe that hundreds did not stop running until they arrived in Adelaide, and one airman made it to Melbourne in 13 days.

The CO, Group-Captain Scherger, later commended 2 and 13 Squadrons for having a 100 per cent turn-up for the first parade after the raids, but was very disappointed with the 278 RAAF station personnel (mainly permanent Air Force) who were still missing four days later.

After hiding in the bush until all was quiet, three of us returned to the station to find fires everywhere, fire trucks deserted and not a person in sight. We put out a fire in the RAAF post office in the recreation hall to save our mail and helped ourselves to a beer in the flattened officers’ mess. In about half an hour Scherger turned up and said we should go out and find the aircraft carriers which had initiated the raids. By then two crews had turned up, and as there was only one Hudson left that was capable of flying (a second one was ‘whole,’ but full of bullet holes). The captains drew straws to see who would go.

My crew won/lost, whichever way you look at it, so I missed that flight. After the raids there were no maps, radio batteries, no ammunition, no weather information, and the only Hudson left was A16/5, which was the oldest plane in the squadron. This, to the best of my knowledge, was the total air defence of the Darwin area.

A later report said that RAAF buildings destroyed or damaged in the two bombings included two hangars used by Nos. 2 and 13 squadrons burnt out; central store burnt out; transport, recreation hall and four airmen’s blocks severely damaged; hospital, workshops, officers’ mess, officers’ block, airmen’s mess partially damaged; also large amounts of equipment and spare parts were lost.

Two hundred and fifty people were killed and 350 wounded in the two raids, during which 150 tons of bombs were dropped. The Japs lost only seven of the 242 planes involved in the strikes. ⁴

The Air Commander of the four aircraft carriers which attacked Darwin was Mitsuo Fuchida. He had also led the Pearl Harbor raid with the same four carriers two months ago.
Earlier, and was about to repeat the exercise at Midway Island, but there ‘met his Waterloo’. On June 6, 1942, the Americans shot down 52 of his aircraft and sank his four carriers together with their 280 aircraft. 3500 of his men perished, but he himself survived. After the war Fuchida discovered Christianity and went to live in California. His two children married Americans.

At dawn the next day my crew with Flying Officer Norm Lamb as captain took off in the only Hudson, dodging the bomb craters in the runway. For our last trip to Koepang to bring back the remaining ground staff. The plane was stripped of everything including parachutes to minimise weight to enable maximum loading from Koepang.

We arrived at the south west coast of Timor at 11 am to meet the Japanese invasion fleet of an aircraft carrier, four heavy cruisers, three destroyers and five transports. Being a solitary aircraft having no bombs and no radio we could do nothing but fly around them at low level. Luckily all the 63 aircraft from the carrier were away attacking Koepang. They had 5000 men against the 2/40 battalion of 880 troops. When all the ships began to use their anti-aircraft guns against us, we headed back to Darwin. We had nowhere near enough petrol to reach Darwin, so we headed at the most economical cruising speed to Bathurst Island, landing there with no petrol left after nearly seven hours in the air.

The only habitation on Bathurst Island apart from natives was a mission station run by Father McGrath. Fortunately there were a few drums of aircraft fuel hidden in the bush, so we rolled these to the plane and hand-pumped the petrol into the wing tanks. We had not had a meal for two days due to bomb damage to the mess at Darwin and also to the fact that the cooks had ‘gone bush’, so I still remember how good a tin of pineapple tasted which was also to the fact that the cooks had ‘gone bush’, so I still remember how good a tin of pineapple tasted which was given to us by the mission staff. We finally arrived back in Darwin at dusk. The ground personnel whom we had been unable to pick up became prisoners of war.

At the RAAF station we slept in the old married quarters, some of which had survived the bombing. The standard routine when a crew did not return was to sort out their personal things and give them to the adjutant, then put all personal things and give them to the adjutant, then put all their clothes in a heap in a spare bedroom. By that time the heap was one metre high and we all delved into it to save our flying log book

That night I had just gone to sleep when we were roused with orders to fly to Daly Waters. As I was totally exhausted I said to the captain, Flying Officer Lamb, ‘As it’s only a cold weather was a shock. At that time my flying log book

They took off with 14 passengers, got lost and did not arrive at Daly Waters. We were just about to put their clothes on the deceased pile several days later when news arrived that they had crash-landed at 250km/h out of fuel at night in 1.2m deep Lake Woods, 250km south of Daly Waters and the only lake for thousands of kilometres. They were found by a boundary rider on his annual inspection of fences. They were hungry and hot, but alive.

Darwin was bombed 58 times over the following few months, so on 23 February, to get away from the air raids, we flew to Daly Waters in a DC2, a two and a half hour flight. I was not impressed with Daly Waters. The Yanks had taken over the only pub which was a prohibited area to us. Dust and flies were horrific and water scarce. After a shower of rain I sometimes drank from puddles in the road. We slept in tents on the ground and one morning I discovered a 1.5m snake coiled up under my legs.

It was so hot that we regularly grabbed a plane and flew up to 3000m just to cool off. One day I watched a Yank in a P40 single-seater fighter as he climbed to about 3000m and then started a series of loops all the way down. Halfway through the last one he hit the ground vertically at about 400km/h. He and the motor were buried 3m underground.

For the next month from 26 February onwards, after receiving some replacement Hudsons, we carried out dozens of reconnaissance flights from Daly Waters and Darwin looking for submarines and signs of an invasion force heading to Australia. We saw plenty of evidence of ships from both sides sinking or sunk, but no submarines or carriers. Returning from patrol on 28 February we hit trees when landing, putting a few dents in the wings. In between our flying we had to work hard clearing dispersal areas for the planes, burning out the pit toilets (always waiting for them to be occupied) and digging trenches.

A trickle of American planes began to arrive, but many were lost due to inexperienced pilots. On 11 March a Flying Fortress crashed killing one crew member and on 18 March we spent five and a half hours in the air searching without success for a lost Kittyhawk pilot in the vicinity of Lake Woods and Newcastle Waters.

Without any warning we were instructed on 20 March to fly an unserviceable Hudson A16-36 to Laverton for repairs. It had been stripped of everything including gauges not vital to keep it airborne, and on the way we had to land to top up the engine oil. Our first stop was Alice Springs, which we found after much searching. You have no idea how beautiful it was to sleep in a hotel bed, drink lots of cold beer and eat some decent food after four months of roughing it.

The next day we got as far as Oodnadatta where we had to land with engine magneto trouble. The hotel there was fantastic, the people hospitable and the food and beer wonderful. We had to stay- several days waiting for parts for the engines. After a short test flight we flew off to Adelaide, landing at Parafield. Here we had another very pleasant night in a city hotel, where we were very conspicuous in our worn-out tropical gear. It was great to arrive at Laverton at 10.30am on 25 March, although the cold weather was a shock. At that time my flying log book showed just on 350 hours.

We were granted five days sick leave, so I made the most of dining and at all my favourite Melbourne restaurants. The first one was Russell Collins where they wouldn’t let me pay because I was ‘returned’ from the war. My pilot Flying Officer Lamb kept on getting extensions to sick leave and I had to stay around Melbourne ready to go north when he fit. I was never able to find out what his problem was.

There is no doubt that if we had returned to Darwin we would have joined the casualty ranks, as I estimate that fatalities for air crew in 2 Squadron at that time were around 100 per cent every six months.
Both 2 and 13 Squadrons received a Citation from the US War Department for their outstanding action in the Darwin, Koepang and Ambon areas. In the meantime I enjoyed the three weeks living it up in Melbourne. As I was having trouble with a sore eye, I reported sick and they fished out a piece of steel that had been there since the Darwin raid. I passed out while they were digging for it. On 9 April I disobeyed orders and hopped on the Nairana for Launceston, where I had a few days reuniting with family and friends. Everyone remarked on how thin and how yellow I was, due to the anti-malarial tablets we had to consume.

In Melbourne I saw a lot of John Smith who had lost an eye flying in Singapore. He wore a big black patch to cover the gory mess where his eye had been, and when passers-by in the street made rude remarks about the patch he would horrify them by lifting the patch. Later when he was fitted with a glass eye he would pop it out into his beer as a party trick. In 1943 he married Helen Pickersgill, the nurse who had looked after him at Heidelberg Hospital.

By 17 May the RAAF became tired of granting me leave as my pilot was still on sick leave, so they posted me to Parkes, where for six weeks I did a crash course on navigation together with 30 other wireless air gunners. Phil Corney, of Richmond Tasmania, who later made an escape from captivity in Java, was on the course with me, as well as another good friend Frank Edgerton-Warburton from WA.

We flew in old Avro Ansons all over NSW as part of the navigation training and whenever I became lost, which was quite often, I would ask the pilot to find the nearest railway station and fly low over it to read the name of the town. We all qualified and could now wear the ‘N’ for navigator half wing, but as Phil had spent most of the whole six weeks drinking with the instructors his navigation skills were very limited.

**Western Junction Interlude; then to 12 Sqn Vultee Vengeances**

In July Corney and I were both surprised to get a posting to 7 Elementary Flying Training School at Western Junction near Launceston, my home town. For the next seven months we were attached to civil aviation to advise of all aircraft movements in and out of Tasmania by landline and radio. It was a terrific job. The two of us had to man the radio 24 hours of the day and sleep on the job.

We took it in turns to work four or seven days on and four or seven days off. Our office was right beside the ANA air terminal, so we would scrounge all the left-over chicken dinners from the domestic DC2s arriving from Melbourne. Being on duty all night, as was the girl on the telephone exchange at Evandale, I often had three-hourly conversations with her, but we never met personally.

We both gained our commissions on 28 December, 1942, back dated to 1 October, so from Flight-Sergeants we became Pilot Officers, and moved up to the officers’ mess. Our pay was the equivalent of $1.75 a day, plus 30c deferred pay, less 25c income tax.

For the seven-month period there was one long holiday, with parties, fishing at St Helens, swimming, climbing Cradle Mountain and more. I usually borrowed or rented a car, but petrol on strict rationing was always a problem. Every morning flight mechanics had to drain a cupful of aviation petrol from all the training and commercial aircraft to check for water. By following them around with a gallon tin I scrounged plenty and, mixed with a bit of unrationed kerosene, it made good car fuel.

By 23 February 1943, the long party was over and we were posted to No.4 Operational Training Unit at Williamtown near Newcastle for an eight-week course of navigation, radio and gunnery in preparation for a posting to a Vultee Vengeance dive bombing squadron.

After just 12 hours flying Wirraways we were judged fit to upgrade to the Vultee. Most of the flying was done in low level formation a few centimetres above the water of the many lakes in the area. The leader of the formation of four or five Wirraways would fly about 300mm lower than the others and would try to roughen the water with his propeller. Another favourite trick was to fly along the beach in the trough of the waves and jump over the breaking surf. There were many casualties. The air to ground gunnery was also hazardous and exciting.

In April we had our first Vultee flight. They were a unique two-seater aircraft. The RAAF ordered 342 of them from the US where they had been designed to be better than the successful German Stuka dive bombers. They are the only plane ever to be designed to fly straight down. Because of this the wing was parallel with the fuselage; hence they flew tail down like a crab. The single engine was a 1600 horsepower Wright Cyclone 14-cylinder radial, driving a three-bladed propeller. Their maximum speed was 450km/h, maximum height 7000m, with a range of up to 5000km.

The Vultee’s armoury was four forward-firing .5 machine guns in the wings and twin .5 machine guns for the rear gunner/navigator/radio operator to use. The bomb load was one ton, and they had basic dual controls in the rear cockpit for emergency use.

The big advantage of diving vertically was that the pilot could corkscrew the plane around to get the target on line. To prevent the aircraft from exceeding the speed of sound on the way down, it had dive brakes on the wings like latticework, which would give it a terminal velocity of just over 800km/h. Sometimes the pilot would retract the dive brakes too soon, and the speed would increase to the point where servicing flaps and other bits would blow off.

An obvious problem was that as the aircraft did a vertical dive, the bombs wouldn’t come out of the bomb bay, and if they did they could fall into the propeller. To fix this, the bombs were thrown clear by pivoting arms.

Another difficulty was that, because the pilot could only see ahead and not vertically down, he could not know when he was directly over the target to commence the dive. So he had a small trap door in the floor between his legs which, when it and the bomb doors were open, gave him limited vision straight down. During the dive he could fire his four wing guns and if the tracer bullets hit the target, he knew that his bombs would also be on target.

The attack procedure was for the squadron of 12 planes to fly in echelon to the target at 3500m, roll over in turn and all be in the vertical dive together, pulling out at 40m and leaving the area at a very low level. Both the crew members would...
black out for several seconds during pull out and, among other things, the rapid change in pressure during the dive gave me a stabbing headache between the eyes. Needless to say, there were many casualties. As time went on their reputation in action was not good so the squadrons I was associated with were used mostly for anti-submarine patrols.

On 15 April, I was posted together with Phil Corney and other friends to No.4 Embarkation Depot in Adelaide, then on to 12 Squadron of Vultee Vengeances at Batchelor, south of Darwin. There was time for more leave and more parties in Launceston on the way to Adelaide. On Easter Monday we caught the Guinea Airways Lockheed 10 to Mt Eba, then to Oodnadatta, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Daly Waters, Katherine and finally to Batchelor. It was a real ‘bread run’. The camp was much better than the ones I had been in 12 months ago. Being in the officers’ mess helped, and there was still a lovely swimming hole not far from camp.

On 2 May I was told that 50 Jap Zeros attacked Darwin, shooting down 16 Spitfires from 452 Squadron for the loss of three Zeros. My first patrol was on 6 May watching over a six ship convoy off Melville Island for over four hours flying with P/O Jack Killalea, a rookie pilot just out of training school. We did several more patrols and two flights searching for a lost Beaufighter around Daly River. I seemed to spend a lot of time swinging compasses, playing bridge and partying. Here I should explain that the swinging the compass of an aircraft consisted of towing the aircraft away from buildings and turning the aircraft to the four compass points to calibrate the reading to compensate for the magnetic influences of the metal in the aircraft.

Several aircraft and pilots were lost at that time:

- On 13 May a Hudson piloted by Pilot Officer Venn dropped his load of bombs on a 3000 ton ship in Ambon harbour at very low level. The ship exploded, but so did the Hudson. No survivors.
- On 21 May a B25 crashed when taking off, and next day one Vultee did not return from a flight of 15 off Darwin.
- Phil Corney could not be found on 30 May when his plane was due to go off on a job, and I was about to fill in for him when he turned up. I watched them crash on take-off. They were OK, but the Vultee was a write-off and the pilot Hank Morgan was sent south for further training.

June was spent flying around Darwin practising dive-bombing and gunnery. That month I applied to ‘remuster’ as a pilot as I did not like flying behind inexperienced pilots in whom I had little faith and no confidence. Again my application met with no success.

On 18 June 12 Vultees took off from Batchelor, landed at Bathurst Island to refuel, and dive-bombed an airstrip under
construction on the island of Selaru south of Tanimbar. It was the first Vultee action in the war. All returned and all bombs hit the target. For some unknown reason they were ordered not to fire their guns.

I could never understand why Vultees were not used more in action, as their bombing accuracy was unbelievable. When bombing a ship they could almost lob a bomb down the funnel, and could spray the ship's anti-aircraft gunners with the four .5 front guns during the dive.

In May RAAF Command in Melbourne decided that 12 Squadron should go to Merauke, the last Dutch outpost in New Guinea. For some crazy reason, possibly my seniority, I was put in charge of a working party of 64 ground staff to go there by ship together with another 200 advance party.

At Darwin, in between air raids, we had to load 32 truckloads of supplies and 17 trucks of men and baggage onto an 8000 ton US Liberty ship Charles P. Steinartz, built only three months earlier. With 500 on board we departed Darwin on 29 June for Thursday Island escorted by two corvettes, with a Beaufighter and a Hudson for air cover. We slept on stretchers in the hold and were fed from army cooks on the deck. We organised a few concerts and played cards to fill in time.

On 2 July we anchored off Thursday Island and, after unloading supplies into tenders until 4pm, my group clambered down cargo nets into motor boats and motored the 5km to Horn Island. Due to a mess-up there were no tents or supplies there, so at 8pm we commandeered a crash launch and went back to Thursday Island where we slept in the Padre's recreation tent (not with the Padre).

The next day we returned to Horn Island and set up a reasonable camp. Three days later we returned to Thursday Island to board a little coastal passenger steamer bound for Merauke.

My first class cabin was very comfortable and the first class dining room likewise. The let-down was that there was no food but bully beef and biscuits which we had to have for breakfast, lunch and dinner. To break the monotony I conned the cook into allowing me to convert the bully beef and biscuits into a pie, which was a vast improvement.

The Land of Mud and Mosquitoes

On 4 July we sighted land and promptly ran onto a sand bar. We got off at high tide and sailed into the Merauke River to unload the tons of supplies, all in heavy rain. Merauke has often been described as the arsehole of the world. Before the war it was a Dutch penal settlement. It was all flat, swampy, always raining and only 2m above high tide level, while the mosquitoes were the biggest in the world and in infinite numbers. In addition, big green frogs, scorpions and snakes were everywhere.

The RAAF station was all tents, which had to have split coconut palm logs for floors to avoid the soggy ground. For the next few weeks with my group, I worked on making roads and building a camp for the whole squadron to occupy. Conditions were horrific as it rained every day. The mud was bottomless, so that some of the roads had to be corduroyed with split coconut palm logs, while the landing strip was special steel sheeting. We also constructed miles of foot tracks over the sodden ground using split coconut palm logs set up on round cross logs.

I had at my disposal an Indian motor cycle and side car, an old Triumph motor cycle and a 30 hundredweight Chev truck, which had such a lovely gear box that you could change gears without the clutch. At 22 years of age I became a fast learner on road and bridge construction. The 60 men had four 6-wheel drive trucks plus loading equipment and worked well.

Within a few weeks I had a comfortable two bed tent and a garden with lettuces, cucumbers, tomatoes and coconut palms. I also adopted a skinny native dog I named ‘Clockwork’, which travelled everywhere with me, either on the roof of the truck or on the motor bikes.

The officers’ mess gradually grew into shape and the food improved. There was a limited supply of grog which we would occasionally supplement with proof spirit from the hospital. The toilets were pit types, on a mound of earth 2m high to be above the water table. One day I was doing my ‘job’ and peacefully reading the toilet paper – a two-year old women’s magazine – when there was a loud crack as the rotten superstructure collapsed and I fell with it into the hole.

The squadron of 12 Vultees arrived in October 1943, as the camp was ready, and remained there until July 1944. There was also an American Kittyhawk squadron based on the Merauke strip, so the Japs only tried a few ineffectual air raids. There were the usual crash casualties due to bad weather and bad flying by both the Vultees and the Kittyhawks.

While the squadron had been waiting for the Merauke camp to be ready the planes were based at Cooktown, where they did a lot of convoy patrol work. On 4 July an A27-217 crash-landed on the beach at Port Douglas, and on 4 August an A27-235 crashed on Ruby Reef, 73km east of Cooktown. The crew, including a Tasmanian friend Dennis Holmes, was rescued by a Catalina from Cairns.

In September I was appointed squadron photographic officer, which gave me endless opportunities to take photos and do my own developing and enlarging. A few weeks later I was also appointed acting squadron signals officer.

By this time we had an outdoor picture theatre showing regular screenings, and when not there I played bridge – lots of bridge – with the squadron medical officer ‘Doc’ Merrington and other air crew.

During the nine months I was at Merauke I flew 20 sorties, mainly on patrol plus one trip to Horn Island for grog. Apart from a few dive-bombing practices, they were fairly uneventful except for one occasion flying with Squadron-Leader Guthrie, the CO, when he practised his shooting by diving at white caps on the waves and forgot to pull up. I’ll swear we flew through the spray of our own bullets.

My 23rd birthday was spent on patrol over the Arafura Sea. The only way we could top up our grog supply was to send a Vultee to Cooktown or Cairns for stocks. It was quite a work of art to load the bomb bay with cartons and shut the doors, then catch the cartons when the bomb doors were later opened. We got 70 dozen on 28 October and 64 dozen on 1 January – very important events.
On Christmas Day it is an air force custom for the officers to wait on the airmen. With grog supplies plentiful that day it was a long party. Someone detonated some dynamite, someone else let off smoke bombs in the mess, someone pinched all the Padre's port and someone crashed the CO's car into a tree. I was thrown down the well (our drinking water supply) because they caught me lacing the dwindling beer supply with medical alcohol while serving behind the bar.

One day Phil Corney, an army officer, Jim Leach, the CO, Bill Guthrie and I went for a long trip up the Merauke River on the ketch Sylvia, calling at all the native villages. We shot crocodiles and bought bananas and bird of paradise feathers.

By January 1944 I had been in Merauke for six months, so I was granted a very welcome month of leave. The only way I could get south was to burn a ride in a Dutch B25 going to Brisbane. It was a terrific trip. Sitting in the perspex nose I could see everything, and after Cape York we flew at a low level following the coast all the way to Townsville where we had an overnight stop. Next day we flew on to Brisbane, and then I caught various flights to Tassie where I enjoyed a month of parties and a wonderful change from the Merauke living conditions.

10 February saw me on the Nairana from Burnie to Melbourne, and then I took the train to Sydney and Brisbane, then a Lockheed Lodestar to Townsville-Cairns-Horn Island, and 'home' to Merauke and business as usual. In early March two friends in a Vultee came out of a cloud going straight down for some unknown reason and crashed into the sea.

The next major event happened on 13 March when my dog 'Clockwork' gave birth under my bed to five pups, four boys and a girl. They survived well on a diet of condensed milk and bully beef.

I was getting a bit fed up with the boring Merauke life after nine months of it, so I submitted an application to do a Signals Officer course at Point Cook near Melbourne. This was approved after I passed an adaptability test, so on 29 March 1944 I departed Merauke for good.

After another six weeks leave in Tasmania I commenced the six month radio course at Point Cook. It was tough in places, but I enjoyed the officers' mess, played plenty of squash and spent a lot of time in Melbourne and Ballarat. Moreover I did learn to design and build radio receivers and transmitters.

I was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in November, backdated to 1 October and made a permanent squadron signals officer. My first posting in this capacity was to No 14 Squadron of Beauforts at Pearce, just out of Perth, WA.

On 22 November I caught a troop train to Perth. It took four days to get there, with stops for meals served from an army kitchen on a flat top wagon. There were nine carriages of men and one of service women, who were guarded by an MP at each end of their carriage. This did not stop some of the more enterprising male passengers from climbing out of their windows onto the roof and crawling along to the female carriage and in through their windows!

**West Australian Sojourn**

The RAAF station at Pearce was a permanent camp and very comfortable. I took over control of the 24 wireless air gunners and 24 ground staff and all the radio activities of the squadron and soon settled in. As I was not in a crew, I could pick and choose when I wanted to fly and rostered myself on all the interesting trips, sometimes as photographer.

The first trip was a seven-hour anti-sub patrol on Boxing day with Flight Lieutenant Humphries DFC as pilot, covering the Royal Navy cruiser London. Christmas Day in 1944 was spent on the traditional waiting on airmen for their Christmas dinner, and drinking heavily. Over the next six months I clocked up about 70 hours of Beaufort flying, mainly on submarine patrols and travel flights. The weather was uncomfortably hot, up to 42 degrees in Perth and 45 further north. One of my duties was to organise a mobile communication truck to go after dark to Applecross, a suburb of Perth, to base with an army searchlight company while one of our Beauforts flew overhead for their searchlight training. This exercise finished about 9pm, and there just happened to be excellent mud crabs just off the beach next door. We would light a fire on the beach, drink lots of beer and net lots of crabs which we cooked in a drum on the fire.

To make it a better party I arranged for several WAAAFs to come along (to practise radio operating with aircraft). Unfortunately an MP saw a girl out of uniform getting into the radio truck in Perth and reported the incident. I was subsequently court-martialled and received a severe reprimand by the CO. He had his tongue in his cheek, as he was also fraternising with WAAAFs.

**Notes**

1. Ed: There were in fact five survivors, who were later executed. Their graves were identified post-war. See various histories of the Edsall.  
2. Ed: later research shows 30 aircraft were destroyed: two Beechcraft Model 18; one Wirraway, one Liberator, four Catalinas, 12 x P-40, one Puss Moth biplane, two Douglas A-24, one Douglas C-53, and six Hudsons. See Carrier Attack, p. 279.  
3. Ed: this was later found not to be true, with that pilot shooting down no aircraft. See Appendix 9 of Carrier Attack. Note that Winspear is describing the situation as he understood it at the time and with some information added on later to form his composite picture. These editorial corrections are being made with the benefit of 75 years of later investigations carried out by many historians and researchers.  
4. Ed: the total number who died was 235, and the Japanese lost four aircraft: two Zero fighters, and two Val divebombers. 114,100kg of bombs were dropped on Darwin.  
5. Ed: research still ongoing suggestions around 120 incursions over two years. Many of the raids did target Darwin.
It has been well acknowledged that an Aboriginal was responsible for capturing the first Japanese prisoner of war to be taken on Australian soil during World War II, but the nature of the capture has for many years been shrouded in mystery. It is a sad reflection on our nation that the courage and determination of Matthias Ulungura was not rewarded until four decades after the cessation of hostilities; even worse, five years after his death. Less widely known is that this Japanese airman - POW No.1 - a hero of the infamous raids on Pearl Harbor and Darwin, was also a key figure in the Cowra breakout, sounding the bugle and calling his countrymen to arms. This is a brief account of the fates of two brave men - Matthias Ulungura and Haijame Toyoshima.

The Cowra breakout
The Cowra breakout, the most serious POW escape attempt in Australia, occurred on the night of August 4, 1944 at No.12 POW Compound. This was composed of four camps, each with accommodation for 1000 prisoners. Situated 2.4km north of the NSW town of Cowra and 319km west of Sydney, B Camp Japanese prisoners kept arriving until by mid 1944. There were 1104 of them, creating a most explosive situation.

The decision to relieve tensions by shifting the private soldiers to Hay only infuriated the Japanese and made them more determined to stage a mass breakout. Having been informed by the Commandant on August 4 that the move would occur three days later, the prisoners held a meeting at which it was decided to attempt the escape that night. The Official History records that: “At about 2am a Japanese ran to the camp gates and shouted what seemed to be a warning to the sentries.” This attempt to warn the guards is also well documented by Carr-Gregg and Timms, then a major-commandant of neighbouring C Camp.

Timms further recorded that “the four men of the quarter-guard raced for the southern Broadway gates, and got there only just in time, for even as they ran could be heard the thin notes of the Japanese bugle sounding the attack.” This was the signal for a frenzied rush at the wire by the prisoners, who were armed with a remarkable assortment of crude home-made weapons.

The threat of hordes of Japanese unleashed on the peaceful township of Cowra prompted many instances of gallantry amongst the Australian guards of the 22nd Garrison Battalion, Australian Military forces. None so great, however, was that demonstrated by Privates Benjamin Hardy and Ralph Jones who “punched their way through the prisoners, manned a Vickers gun and fired it until they were knifed and clubbed to death.”

The escapees were eventually killed, wounded or captured; 31 killed themselves while 16 of the wounded showed signs of attempted suicide. The garrison received several recommendations, while the courage of the two guards on the Vickers gun was recognised some six years later with the award of the George Cross to their next of kin.
We took off his clothing, everything except his underpants. He had been brought to Cowra having been taken prisoner following the first air raids on Darwin on 19 February 1942 — the first acts of enemy aggression on Australian soil. He was immediately accepted by his countrymen as the Camp leader both for his ability to speak English and for his reputation gained during the raids of December 1941 and the following February over Darwin. Following the first air raid over Darwin in 1942, Haijame Toyoshima crashed his disabled Zero fighter on Melville Island near Pickataramoor, now a Conservation Commission Forestry ‘township’. Unable to destroy his aircraft as it was out of fuel, he set off in search of food and water, stumbling upon an Aboriginal camp.

Here he met a number of Tiwi women and, bowing to one of them, the airman took one of the babies, perhaps as a hostage. The child’s mother, Mena Puantulura, later wrote a letter to her friends describing the events of that day: ‘When one boy saw the Japanee he yelled. Then that Japanee came to me and he salute me. I got properly big fright alright.’ Gathering her friends, Mena set off after the pilot, recovering her three month-old son Clarence who later became a lorry driver on Witness to Darwin.

But what of the Japanese man who gave the signal for the breakout — the bugle call which aroused his comrades to rebellion in the early hours of 5 August — Haijame Toyoshima?

Attempts to reward Matthias floundered in a sea of bureaucracy. Foremost in the attempt to see Matthias honoured was Doctor David Carment of Darwin when he was a member of the staff of the National Trust of Australia, with the able assistance of Senator Bernie Kilgariff. Finding Canberra and the Commonwealth unwilling to honour Matthias on a national level he approached several politicians, eventually gaining support within the Territory.

The project was well supported by the Chief Minister of the time, the Honourable Paul Everingham, while his successor the Honourable Ian Tuxworth, enthusiastically followed it to its fruition. David remarked that he was most fortunate not to have been present at the unveiling of the memorial, his work commitments precluding a flight to Bathurst Island. The memorial, a ceramic totem standing on the grass verge at the gateway to Nguiu airstrip, was unveiled on 24 May 1985 with Brother John Pye MSC, a member of the
Catholic Missionaries of the Sacred Heart order and long-term resident of Bathurst Island, delivering the address: "There is a trite saying or prayer ‘God make the nice people good and the good people nice’. Matthias Ulungura, the man we are honouring today, was both good and nice. Added to that he was courageous. His courage has written a line in Australian history that can never be effaced."4

The NT News recorded the spectacle of the ceremony in which six Bathurst Island men performed the Bombing of Darwin dance: "The painted dancers – mimicking Japanese bombers with their arms spread and faces stern – thrilled hundreds of spectators ... The planes – in the dance – were all shot down. And the dancers played dead. And everyone laughed."

Matthias was not present at the ceremony. He had died in 1980 after a long battle with cancer. His wife Marie was present however, as were Mena and Aloysius Puantulura and their son Clarence. "The visitors can meet these people today and they can fill in on my effort," Brother Pye concluded.

Carr-Gregg notes that, once taken into captivity, the Japanese would refuse to volunteer their true rank and name as an indication of their withdrawal from society. Referring to the work of Goffman in asylums and other institutions, she considers that this process of ‘self-annihilation’ and ‘role dispossession’ was a means of saving their family and government great embarrassment. By falling captive or surrendering they had ‘failed’, so it was preferable that their personal details were not recorded, leaving their family and government with the belief that they had died honourably in battle instead of having breached the Military Field Code.

She further notes that “often the prisoners assumed the names of famous warriors or culture heroes to hide their real identity.11” Once in the custody of the Australians, Toyoshima gave his name as Tadao Minami, telling his interrogators that he was a sergeant-major in the air force and had been an air gunner in a high level bomber from Ambon.12 The name Minami may have come from a famous Japanese leader during the Manchurian Incident a decade earlier in which the Kwantung Army invaded and occupied Manchuria. The commanders of this elite force, Generals Minami and Kanaya, engaged the Chinese on the night of 18 September 1931 without prior notification or approval from the government of Tokyo.

Indeed by the time Emperor Hirohito heard of this situation in China he was faced with a fait accompli, the generals arguing that operational necessities had prompted action contrary to orders from Tokyo. They were of course reprimanded by the Emperor, but now Japan controlled Manchuria and the social, political and military ramifications of this action are well documented.

Toyoshima, in the guise of Tadao Minami, claimed his plane had caught fire and he had bailed out, swimming ashore to Bathurst Island. Lockwood found fault with this explanation, recording that "Minami’s name is not included in the Japanese records of the action, nor was a prisoner captured on Bathurst Island ... at that time.12" Nevertheless, the first POW sent south from Darwin is listed in the records of the Australian War Memorial as Sergeant-Major Tadao Minami, and it was under this name that he entered No.12 POW Camp at Cowra.

Upon the arrival of Sergeant-Major Kanazawa, Minami relinquished his position as camp leader, although he was still very prominent in the hierarchy of the camp. When told of the decision to move the private soldiers to Hay, Carr-Gregg records that it was Minami who complained to the commandant: "Very bad business. Why can’t we all go?"13 Back in their huts they held a midnight conference, Minami and Kanazawa inspiring their compatriots to revolt, with Minami calling them to arms with his bugle on the morning of 5 August.

The leader of both the Pearl Harbor and Darwin raids, Mitsuo Fuchida, later revealed to Douglas Lockwood that he had broken radio silence to advise his admiral of their success and also to report Toyoshima’s
crash on Melville Island. It is a little known fact that the Japanese actually came ashore on Australian soil at this time, a floatplane landing a rescue party who were unable to locate the pilot\textsuperscript{14}. It is interesting to reflect that had Toyoshima made for the coast, his chances of rescue would have been far greater and subsequent events may have been vastly different. Toyoshima died under the name of Tadao Minami — he was shot three times during the Cowra melee and, while wounded, took his life in the traditional ritual of hara-kiri so that his honour might be preserved and his family and government not disgraced.

**Pickataramoor revisited**

The location of Toyoshima’s crash site on Melville Island today remains unclear. Conservation Commission workers based at Pickataramoor vary in their opinions as to its whereabouts but none have actually seen any wreckage, although they acknowledge that little would remain after many years of tropical humidity and rain and regular burning-off.\textsuperscript{14}

Two Tiwi workers from Pulurumpi (Garden Point) also know of Matthias’ bravery and of the aircraft, but again the site of the site is unknown. Some place it towards the south-eastern tip of the island some 8km from Pickataramoor along a ridge which terminates at Notch Peak; here, regular burning-off would have reduced the Zero to little more than rubble. Others have placed the site further north near Danyaru — a small settlement on the Tjipripu River, a suggestion which seems more credible as this is not far from Tuyu Creek, near which was during the 1939-45 war the Aboriginal settlement known as Tuyu.

From this area, Toyoshima could have moved in a southerly direction some 15km, being captured a short distance from the settlement of Tuyu, now a forestry reserve and pine plantation. Searches of the area on two occasions failed to locate aircraft debris, although the dense vegetation of the island may have long ago engulfed the wreckage obscuring it from all but the most proximate observer.

**Acknowledgements**

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The Territory Remembers

The American Alliance – founded in blood and sacrifice in Darwin

By Dr Tom Lewis

An important event that shaped the Australia of today occurred when Americans and Australians fought together against the first air raid on this nation on 19 February 1942. From that day onwards, Australia has depended on the Alliance began informally in that combat action.

Why were United States forces in Darwin? Following the attack of Pearl Harbour just over two months previously in December 1941, American forces in the Pacific, like those of other Allied countries, had been under attack from the Japanese Army and Navy. The Allies had been going steadily backwards, pressed hard by an under-estimated enemy that had done very well due to its aggression, high morale, modern equipment and capable strategy and tactics. Japan took the British fortress of Singapore, smashed the American presence in the Philippines, and kicked out the Dutch from their colonial towns scattered through South-east Asia.

Any attempt at holding back the Japanese advance was strictly a holding action by the Allies who, grimly in the face of defeat, had brought forward ships, soldiers and aircraft, only to find them outflanked, routed and decimated with considerable loss of life. Now the Japanese were investing what is now Indonesia; looking to turn left and take New Guinea, and cut Australia off for easy pickings later. To do that they had to stop the USA from coming to use the Great South Land, as one American general later put it, as a giant aircraft carrier which didn’t go anywhere.

Darwin could be a thorn in the side of this invading beast as it moved inexorably south and east. Equipped with runways, a deep-water port and infrastructure such as oil tanks, the northern capital was too good a base to be ignored. To negate its operations, the Japanese first tried with submarines in January 1942 to mine Darwin’s approaches and shut it down. The operation was a disaster: one of the giant 80-man vessels was sunk in a short fight outside the harbour, where it remains today. So the Imperial High Command summoned the same aircraft carriers which had assaulted Pearl Harbour and early one Thursday morning they turned into the wind and began launching their air armada. It flew south, and crossed the coast to the east of Darwin, circling to attack from the south and therefore achieve surprise. High-level bombers began raining death and destruction; the dive bombers swooped down to attack the 56 ships in the harbour, and the Zero fighters circled to guard their partners. Just before 10am Darwin was under attack.

The United States Army Air Force (USAAF) flew the only defending aircraft in the first air raid: ten P-40 Kittyhawk fighters against the 188 incoming attackers of the Japanese Navy. Four pilots from the Kittyhawks of the American 49th Pursuit Group were killed in action. Five of these USAAF aircraft were airborne and five were on the ground refueling when the enemy arrived. Those on the airstrip valiantly tried to take off to little avail. Those pilots who survived either parachuted out of their aircraft.
or survived the crash of their machine, with one escaping the onslaught to land later. The fighter pilots had joined with 16 anti-aircraft gun sites and the guns of the ships in harbour to bring down four of the enemy aircraft.

One US Navy member who was crewing a US Catalina flying boat died after the aircraft was shot down off Bathurst Island by Zeros of the incoming force before it reached Darwin. Piloted by Lieutenant Thomas Moorer, the Catalina crash-landed and the majority of the crew survived. Moorer went on to become an Admiral of his Navy. He was a lucky and skillful naval officer.

In the harbour and outside it, US vessels joined those of Australia’s in action against the enemy aircraft. The US Navy’s fighting ships came off badly, with the largest loss of life on board the destroyer USS Peary. Eighty-eight men of the Navy were killed on board, in the water nearby or of injuries received. Peary was hit by two of the bombs dropped by the 71 Val dive bombers. She sank within 15 minutes of the start of the raid off Darwin’s Esplanade and one of her recovered guns points to the wreck site today. President Obama journeyed to that spot in November 2011, where he made a speech. It was Douglas Lockwood in 1966 who came up with the phrase Australia’s Pearl Harbour: the title of the first book written about the attack. It is an apt name, and President Obama used that phrase in his speech. It binds us together to that terrible day in Hawaii where America lost so many of its own.

Fourteen men died on board another Clemson-class destroyer, the USS William B Preston. Converted to a seaplane tender and carrying a full load of fuel, the Preston was fortunately equipped with many spare machineguns which were swapped in and out of her seaplane charges. These were mounted on rails on the stern, and as the ship slipped her anchor and accelerated to manoeuvre defensively she gave a hot reception to any of the dive bombers who attacked her. Nevertheless, she was so badly hit the stern section nearly came away from the ship as it raced for the open sea. Later, Lieutenant Herb Kriloff tells us in his book Officer of the Deck the US Navy buried their dead over the side, and so too there is a patch of sea off Darwin that is always American, just as there is in Darwin Harbour. Herb later courted and met an Aussie girl; they went to the States but later chose to live in Melbourne.

The American civilian ships also were struck badly. Two US seamen died on board the freighters SS Portmar and USAT Meigs, which came under bombing and strafing attack. The Meigs was sunk, as was companion freighter Mauna Loa. Outside the harbour freighters in American service but manned by Filipino crews were sunk, the Florence D and Don Isidro also seeing lives lost, with the Don Isidro’s US Army defence team losing lives as they fired their machineguns at the attacking aircraft from on top of the vessel’s superstructure.

Many other civilian freighters were also semi-protected by armed forces members manning machineguns. Four members of the US Army 148th Field Artillery Regiment died on board the freighter Tulagi while it was under attack in the harbour.

A total of 114 US servicemen were Killed in Action out of the 235 people who died on the day. If those who were contracted to America are added, that gives a total of 128 United States citizens and contractors who died in the 19 February attacks. The precise figure for the total fatalities of the day has been variable over the years, but the Northern Territory Library Roll of Honour, which has done a sterling job of revising the total list of those killed, now stands at 235. More than half of those who died were fighting for the USA.

US involvement was not to end with the action of the 19th. There were many more air raids into Darwin, and at least 107 across northern Australia. Broome was struck by nine Zero fighters on 3 March. Eighty-six people died, many of them evacuees, women and children included, who had been evacuated south from the Dutch colonial possessions. Those who died were in the harbour in seaplanes – airliners of the 1940s – when the nine fighters arrived after an immense over-water flight, guided by their navigation aircraft. Not knowing there were civilians packed on board, the enemy aircraft strafed and cannoned, turning the seaplanes into flaming wrecks. They sank where they were, and their wrecks can still be seen at low tide off Broome. Other aircraft, some carrying US Servicemen, were attacked by the Zeros and brought down.

An American also had the dubious honour of being the first to fall in a fight off Australia’s coast, even before the carrier strike. On 15 February, four days before the first bombing
of Darwin, Lieutenant Robert Buel of the 3rd Pursuit Squadron was killed in action off Bathurst Island fighting a Japanese aircraft. He and his aircraft have never been found. Later, other Kittyhawk pilots died.

Then the bomber casualties started. In November Sergeant Glen Campbell was killed in combat on board a Martin B-26 Marauder off Bathurst Island. In January 1943, Corporal Robert Rafferty lost his life on board a B-24 Liberator. So too did Sergeant Harold Helzer who was killed over the Banda Sea. On 11 June the entire 12-man crew of a Liberator was lost over the Timor Sea. On 23 June, in an unusual action, all 10 members of a US bomber were lost when it was rammed by a Japanese Kate bomber over the Flores Sea.

The other USA deaths followed thick and fast; B-24 bombers sometimes with all of the crews, and occasionally with one or two members who were aircrew - gunners usually, trying to ward off fighter attack. But accidents took other American lives, for example when two members of the United States Army died when the Qantas flying boat Corinthian was sunk in Darwin harbor, during a landing accident.

A common factor for almost all of these is that the aircraft was lost and has never been seen again. The planes took the crews to the bottom of the sea with them. So around the Northern Territory, or in its waters, there are many unmarked graves of members of the USA’s World War II fighting forces.

And the story does not end there. There were many other American stories of deaths that are not fully recognised. For example, thousands of drivers traversed the Stuart Highway, then little better than a track, to bring vital supplies north. Americans died in the inevitable motor accidents. There were 41 airfields around the Northern Territory by the end of the war. US citizens died in construction work, some simply succumbing to tropical diseases.

Many thousands of Americans began to be based in the Top End or staged through it as the war against Japan pushed back the enemy. The enemy raids continued on an almost weekly basis until the end of November 1943, while radar and fighters fought the bombers. Eventually the Allies began to launch raiding missions into the land masses north of Australia. The price was heavy. Just including those who died near the Top End coastline or on land, there are 451 Americans listed on the Memorial Wall at the Darwin Military Museum: 121 United States Navy; 311 United States Army Air Forces, and 19 US Army names, over a quarter of the total 1672 remembered.

The fighting men of the States and their compatriots gave their all, and victory was won by the Allies against the forces of totalitarianism. 19 February 1942 was the beginning of a fruitful union between America and Australia that eventually saw Allied victory in the Pacific and which continues today.

America and Australia shared the causes of freedom of speech, of association, of religion and of mateship. In an uncertain world then we needed an ally of shared causes. In an uncertain world now we need that ally still, and we are prepared to come to the fight with our flag.

We in Australia don’t really appreciate what America did for us in WWII. We must never forget the battles of World War II. We must never forget the sacrifices of our ally on our soil. Darwin’s battlefront saw the beginning of the Alliance which serves us well in the uncertainties of today.

References
1. See Carrier Attack, Avonmore Books. The three other submarines of the Sixth Submarine Squadron were part of the force which struck from the carriers on the 19th.
2. Ed: research is still ongoing in this area. Incursions is a better raid than raids. Reconnaissance flights preceded raids, and without the former the latter would not have been launched: an observer’s summary of whether there were ships worth attacking was extremely valuable. Sometimes the reconnaissance aircraft was attacked, and fought back.

Dr Tom Lewis OAM is the author of 12 military history books and a former naval officer, in which capacity he commanded a US team in Baghdad in the Iraq war of 2006.
Sources for this article are contained generally in Carrier Attack, by Dr Tom Lewis and Peter Ingman, Avonmore Books, 2013.
On Tuesday 19 February 2002, a commemorative service was held in Darwin to mark the 60th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin. Before the Cenotaph, former Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen spoke of the two Japanese air attacks on 19 February 1942 which, “brought war to the Australian mainland for the first time” – attacks which were responsible for 292 known deaths.1,2

Other speakers, with political correctness, spoke of the actions of ‘the enemy’ on that fateful day. Only Sir Zelman, who, in February 1942 had been a Sub-Lieutenant at Naval Headquarters in Darwin, referred specifically to the Japanese and what their intent was believed to be.

As guest speaker on 19 February during the Northern Territory’s War Service Commemoration Year 1992, Sir Zelman had recalled his impressions on that day in 1942:

“I remember early morning talk in Naval headquarters about unidentified aircraft; suddenly the warning sounded and we streamed out to the trenches … I remember listening that night to the talk of more senior officers about the imminent prospect of attack, which was assumed as a certainty.” 3

One of those senior officers was Cowen’s Commanding Officer, Commander Laurance ‘Pup’ Tozer RAN, already a veteran of active service off northeast Africa, who came to have a significant association with Darwin.

Laurence Tozer was born in North Melbourne on 17 March 1902. At the age of 13 years and 9 months, he entered the new RAN College at Captain’s Point, Jervis Bay as a Cadet Midshipman, a member of the fourth intake.4

He first saw service in vessels of the Australian Fleet, and gained experience on Loan Service with the Royal Navy on three occasions during the 1920s and 1930s. Bill Cook, one of the Divisional Midshipmen in HMAS Australia (II), recalled that Lieutenant-Commander Tozer was Divisional Officer of the Foretop Division from 1934 to 1936:

“Pup, as he was known to his contemporaries – but never addressed by this nickname by Midshipmen! – was a short nuggety man, almost always in good mood, often grinning or laughing, generally of very pleasant disposition and well liked by sailors and both his senior and junior officers. He [was] what was known in the service as a ‘Salt horse’ – being considered more a seaman – as opposed to a gunnery, torpedo or other specialist.” 5

As a Commander, Tozer was Executive Officer of the 6-inch Cruiser HMAS Adelaide, escorting the first convoy of Second AIF and NZ troops destined for the Middle East. He returned to HMAS Adelaide in 1943-44 as Executive Officer, followed by five months as Commanding Officer and Commander Task Force 71.4. Fred Cooper, an 18 year old Stoker in 1943, recalled the day Tozer was first welcomed aboard HMAS Adelaide as Commanding Officer:

“Captain Esdaile was a rather remote and aloof type, whereas Tozer was rather the opposite. He was well liked by Adelaide’s lower deck ratings. When he first came on board, he was given the customary bosun’s pipe for senior officers,
Cooper recalled the difference in Tozer’s leadership compared to his more rigidly formal predecessors:

“I remember one Saturday, myself and three mates were on shore leave, having been ‘sampling’ beers in several Fremantle pubs since midday, decided to catch a bus to Perth, this was about 4pm, and it would be fair to say we were in a carefree mood. Whilst waiting at the bus stop, a sedan car pulls up, and a voice said ‘Want a lift lads?’ I jumped in the front and my three mates got in the back. The driver turned out to be our new captain in civvies. Of course we were rather taken aback as we had caps flat aback, jacket sleeves un-buttoned and turned back, and a little the worse for wear. He never said a word about our sloppy appearance and was most friendly … In the navy in those days officers and ratings only spoke when it was official duties so the gap between the two was rather wide.”

HMMS Melville, 1941-42

Commander Tozer first came to Darwin on 11 December 1941 as Commanding Officer of HMMS Melville (Naval Headquarters), at which time Captain Edward Penry Thomas OBE RN was Naval Officer in Charge (NOIC). Tozer had as his Secretary Pay Lieutenant Trevor Rapke RANVR, who some years later became Judge Advocate General of the Navy. In his recollections of life in Darwin, one of Tozer’s Petty Officers refers to Tozer affectionately as ‘the Captain’ and as ‘our Captain’.

Tozer’s first responsibility, in reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor and expectations of a similar attack on Darwin, was to facilitate a Cabinet direction for the immediate evacuation of women and children from Darwin. Tozer was present in Darwin on the morning of 19 February 1942 when the town and harbour were targeted by Japanese bombers, while the RAAF base was specifically targeted in the follow-up raid at midday. Despite some early criticism of the Navy, the Royal Commissioner Mr Justice Lowe subsequently reported: “Captain Thomas, the Senior Naval Officer in Darwin, anticipated that such an attack would take place. The Navy, in my opinion, had taken all proper steps in preparation for such an attack.”

Tozer was no stranger to enemy air attack. In 1940-41, he had been Executive Officer of HMMS Hobart on duty with Red Sea Force in the Mediterranean, shelling port installations in Berbera, British Somaliland, and the vanguard of the Italian invasion force, when she had suffered bombing attacks by Italian aircraft. In Darwin on the afternoon of 19 February, Tozer addressed his Petty Officers and told them that the Navy would remain in town while the Army would dig-in at the 14-mile, and that the care of all ships in the port had been turned over to the Navy. Tozer further gave his Petty Officers clear direction on their tasks for the next 24 hours:

“No army personnel or civilians at the Army base will be allowed to leave the camp so the town should be deserted. The code word will be ‘Waitzing Matilda’ and every person encountered by the patrols will be challenged. The Gunner’s Mate will detail three patrols of four men, with a PO in charge, and state the challenge procedure. These patrols will move out at 1800 and return to base at 0600. Tomorrow, unless the situation changes, working parties will commence to clean up the town and arrange the burials of those persons killed.”

Tozer detailed one group to the hospital to patrol from the center of town towards the harbour. Another group would be responsible for the rest of the town area and a third patrol would secure the docks area and the signal station. He directed that rifles were to be fired to summons assistance.

Commodore Cuthbert Pope RAN arrived in Darwin on 20 February as the new NOIC and the following day the Navy took full control of all facilities between Bennett Street and the port. Another veteran has recalled that lower deck was cleared at Naval Headquarters in Mitchell Street and Commodore Pope addressed the men regarding the expected invasion of Australia:

“As RAN personnel defending your native land, you are as of now expendable. You will defend this, The Fortress Area, to the last man. As NOIC HMMS Melville, this is an order as the Invasion of Australia is deemed inevitable. The Army has withdrawn to a defence position known as the Brisbane Line. The Navy is all that is between that line and the forces of the Imperial Army and Navy of Japan.”

As directed by Commander Tozer, that evening naval ratings were cleaning up the ships and wharf and, as expected, there were high level bombing runs the following day. Bill Bracht, one of Melville’s Petty Officers, recalled Tozer’s response: “As it was now evident that the Japs were trying to render the docks inoperative, our Captain decided it was too dangerous to have anybody working on the ships in daylight.”

The raids continued on a regular basis, and by 26 February the night parties had unloaded all ships and all burials had been completed. In documenting the history of that fateful day and its aftermath, Douglas Lockwood recorded:

“The Royal Australian Navy did much that morning in helping defend the port and rescue survivors. The behaviour of the RAN sailors was exemplary and forms one of the more creditable aspects of the overall story.”

Looting

The Army came under much criticism for the unchecked looting and systematic theft which occurred following the raids, and the civil police stood by helplessly, believing that martial law had been proclaimed. Lockwood spoke of the “attempted dictatorship by the military policemen whose only authority was a uniform and an armband”. Many servicemen went to the harbour and, for a small fee, sent their ‘loot’ south in a small ship.

One person however, did do something in response to this situation. In establishing a patrol program around the town area and the docks, Commander Tozer was concerned as much about a Japanese landing as he was of sabotage and looting within the largely deserted town. He gave his Petty Officers a very clear mission for the night of 19/20 February: “The Navy will patrol the town tonight to prevent any looting or sabotage”. The Administrator, the Honourable Aubrey Abbott, later reported:
An instance of the prevalence of looting is that when the Royal Commission appointed to investigate the air raid was taking evidence in Darwin from 5 to 10 March, soldiers, at that very time, were taking refrigerators, wireless sets, sewing machines and clothing in Army lorries to the wharf and selling them to sailors on the motor vessel Yochow for cigarettes and tobacco. Captain L E Tozer, RAN, saw what was going on, and the police at Brisbane, which was the vessel’s destination, were informed. When the ship arrived she was boarded by the police, who were able to prevent most of the stolen property from being thrown into the Brisbane River by the crew when they found the ship was to be searched. Twenty members of the crew were convicted.  

Honours

Sir Zelman Cowen observed: “while there were some who performed poorly, the record also shows that there were men and women who displayed heroism and high courage”. There were 27 decorations awarded for bravery and devotion to duty in Darwin on 19 February 1942, of which 15 were to Naval personnel. Commander Laurance Tozer was one of twelve personnel Mentioned-in-Despatches (all Naval personnel); “For courage and devotion to duty whilst serving in HMAS Melville during an air raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942”. Bill Cook recalls that Tozer had already demonstrated his determination and bravery in the 1930s while serving on HMAS Australia (II):

“There was drama in the Pacific Ocean when an American privately owned schooner sent out an SOS during very bad weather. We went to her aid and ‘Pup’ took away a volunteer lifeboat’s crew – in a 12-oared 32-foot cutter – to bring off the bulk of her crew.”

In Darwin a decade later, for his exemplary conduct, throughout the period succeeding that during which the Air Raid was in progress, the name of Commander Tozer was brought before the Australian Naval Board:

“This Officer has displayed exceptional zeal and considerable powers of leadership in connection with implementing the Emergency Organisation of the Port which has become necessary in the absence of a Jetty and other facilities, and he was largely responsible for preventing the total destruction by fire of SS Barossa. I consider him to be deserving of recognition for outstanding qualities of command, leadership, zeal and devotion to duty.”

SS Barossa was an Adelaide Steamship Company freighter which had berthed in Darwin Harbour inside the wharf. On the outer berth was MV Neptuna loaded with explosives and depth charges, with HMAS Swan on her seaward side, and moored on Barossa’s seaward side was a naval oil lighter. The first three Japanese bombs landed in the shallow water on the shore side of Barossa, quickly followed by direct hits on the wharf, Neptuna and Barossa. Barossa and Neptuna then became infernos, fed by the ruptured oil pipeline; Neptuna was about to explode and Barossa was trapped in its position.

On Tozer’s direction, Warrant Officer Andrew Gibson RAN(S) took the naval tug Wato quickly alongside and pulled the lighter clear, and then attempted to pull the Barossa clear from Neptuna. As Wato took up the strain the line broke, and then Neptuna exploded. Chunks of red-hot metal from Neptuna showered down, and fires broke out on Barossa’s decks, although she and Wato survived the massive explosion. Tozer then directed the crew of HMAS Tolga in fighting the fires on Barossa and brought them under control. Due to these prompt actions, no lives were lost onboard SS Barossa.

HMAS Melville, 1942-43

Following the re-establishment of control in Darwin, the Navy took full control of all facilities between Bennett Street and the port. On 1 October, Naval Headquarters HMAS Melville was established in the old stone courthouse and police station buildings on the corner of the Esplanade and Smith Street, overlooking Darwin Harbour. Commander Tozer commanded HMAS Melville throughout 1942, and was present during 49 further Japanese air raids in the Darwin region. He developed a good working relationship with the various other Service elements; of particular interest, on 21 October 1942 the men of the 2/14th Australian Field Regiment commemorated 'Trafalgar Day' by calling on Commander Tozer and drinking 'Nelson's Blood'. It is recorded that a salute of two rounds of grapeshot was fired.

By June 1943, medical supplies were arriving in Darwin, more general supplies were also coming through and better meals were available. Because of the hot weather, the incessant enemy threat and the inability to respond effectively, men were still losing weight and morale was practically non-existent. Towards the end of Commander Tozer’s term as Commanding Officer, in an effort to increase morale, HMAS Melville produced a magazine titled The "Buzz". Doings in Darwin. Issued in early August 1943, this inaugural issue carried a ‘Message of Goodwill’ from Commander Tozer.

NOIC Darwin and CO HMAS Melville, 1945-46

Tozer returned to Naval Headquarters in Darwin in 1945, as Acting Commanding Officer from 12 February. He was then Commanding Officer and NOIC Darwin from 23 March, as an Acting Captain. Accordingly, he resided at the NOIC’s Residence (Admiralty House), on the corner of the Esplanade and Peel Street. This historic building was later
rellocated to the site where it now stands, on the corner of Knuckey Street and the Esplanade.

To Captain Tozer fell the task of coordinating the last act of war in northern Australia, the Japanese surrender of Timor. A convoy led by HMAS Moresby left Darwin Harbour and at midday on 11 September, on the quarter-deck of HMAS Moresby in Koepang Harbour, the Instrument of Surrender was signed by Colonel Kaida Tatsuichi, commander of the 48th Japanese Division. Captain Tozer recorded in the War Diary: "HMAS Melville's part in this operation, known as Operation TOFO. The 12th/40th Battalion made up the bulk of 'Timor Force' under Brigadier Lewis Dyke, which went ashore on 12 September. Captain Tozer himself disembarked from HMAS Moresby on 12 September 1945, supervised the establishment of a Port Directorate, and returned to HMAS Melville on 14 September.

Tozer then represented the Navy in discussions associated with the post-war reconstruction of Darwin, and here came into conflict with the Town Planner McInnis and the Northern Territory Administrator, Aubrey Abbott. Following the evacuation of Darwin, the Navy had taken full control of all facilities between Bennett Street and the port and HMAS Melville had become a major establishment, occupying several premises in central Darwin.

Abbott very clearly intended that Darwin should not develop as a garrison town, and McInnis cut across this by taking over a number of naval buildings and facilities and relocated them to the Transmitting Station on the southern outskirts of Darwin. Tozer insisted that the Bennett Street area should remain allocated purely for naval use.

The senior military officer, Major-General Allen, similarly opposed the civil resumption of the land occupied by Navy, and there arose a clear delineation between Abbott/McInnis, the various departmental bureaucrats, and the military. Abbott called the Naval position totally unreasonable and totally beyond post-war requirements, although himself exaggerating Navy's stance:

"I must say that I entirely fail to grasp the point that it is essential to hold land and keep it vacant for half a century because it might be required at the end of that time for possible war expansion."

Following the death of Prime Minister Curtin, the Department of Post-War Reconstruction was created, which caused conflict between the Minister for Post-War Reconstruction and the Minister for the Interior, who was responsible for the Northern Territory. Cabinet deemed the rebuilding of Darwin to be the responsibility of both departments, so an Inter-Departmental Committee was established, which in turn established a sub-committee, which led to the involvement of the Department of Works and Housing – a stroke of "midsummer madness" according to Abbott. The Department of Works and Housing produced a new Darwin Town Plan in January 1946, which was adopted by Cabinet on 18 January.

Abbott blamed the Navy completely for the failure of the original McInnis Town Plan, opposing its intention to construct a Naval barracks where Abbott himself wanted to build an impressive civic centre. In a letter, Tozer accused Abbott of, "acting like a bosom companion to his face, and writing letters which were absolutely untrue behind his back." Abbott departed the Territory in May 1946, and Tozer's appointment with HMAS Melville ceased on 11 December 1946. The next Administrator, Arthur Driver, oversaw the reconstruction of Darwin but for various bureaucratic reasons little happened and by 1950 there had still been practically no progress.

Irony

The Naval occupation of the land on the toe of the Darwin Peninsula, seaward from Bennett Street to the wharf, was finally ended – not by Canberra or the Northern Territory Administration but by nature instead. On 25 December 1974, Cyclone Tracy destroyed both the Coonawarra Transmitting Station and the main buildings of Naval Headquarters, HMAS Melville. At the height of the storm, Captain Eric Johnston OBE RAN (NOCNA) and three of his staff were trapped under collapsing debris. Johnston then led the Navy’s clean-up effort, for which he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. HMAS Melville was decommissioned on 21 August 1975, and a re-built HMAS Coonawarra became the centre of Naval activity in the Top End.

The damaged buildings of HMAS Melville stood vacant for nearly six years before a contract was awarded to restore the structure to its original appearance. At the end of 1981, on the seventh anniversary of Cyclone Tracy, the buildings were officially opened by the Chief Minister. At the end of the war, these buildings had figured prominently in the dispute between the Administrator (Abbott) and the Navy (Tozer) over occupation of the lands between
Paul Rosenzweig is a graduate of the Northern Territory University, with a Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies. He is a non-professional historian, awarded the 2001 Centenary Medal for "long and outstanding research into Australia’s military history". Paul served in the Army Reserve for 20 years from 1979, and as a commissioned officer from 1985: he commanded the Defence Force Careers Reference Centre in Darwin, and was a squadron commander in the North West Mobile Force. In his civilian employment, he was Aide to the Administrator of the Northern Territory from 1991 to 1997. He then served in the Australian Regular Army for 12 years with the rank of Major, which included service in East Timor, and the Republic of the Philippines.

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Notes
1. The Rt Hon Sir Zelman Cowen AK GCMG GCVO QC DCL. Address for the commemoration service at the Darwin Cenotaph, 19 February 2002.
5. Captain W F Cook RAN (retd), pers comm, 3 August and 15 August 2001.
6. Mr F Cooper, pers comm, 2 April 2002.
7. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
18. Rt Hon Sir Zelman Cowen, Commemoration service at Darwin Cenotaph, 19 February 2002.
20. Third Supplement to The London Gazette, 1 September 1942, p.3818.
24. Up to 6 August 1943: excludes the various raids outside of Darwin town - on Hughes, Livingstone and Pell airfields, Batchelor, Cox Peninsula, Noonamah and Katherine.
27. See Gibson (1997).
33. Ed: to further clarify. The shore base HMAS Coonawarra was the Communications facility located down the Stuart Highway near Berrimah. It had a section inside the Army’s Larrakeyah Barracks in town for its ships and maintenance facilities. In the early 21st century the land component became a facility of the ADF; the Army established a new base at Robertson Barracks near Palmerston, and the Navy continued and enlarged its facilities in town.
Outside Darwin Harbour, an enormous Japanese submarine still lies with her 80-man crew on board. She is part of the secret history of the assaults on northern Australia.

The aircraft carriers of the famous February 1942 strike were not the first major attack on the Australian landmass – they were the second strike. The first attempt to close down the northern port was made a month earlier with a submarine squadron.

In January 1942 four giant vessels of the Sixth Submarine Squadron’s Imperial Japanese Navy were deployed to northern Australian waters. Darwin was a harbour of considerable strategic importance. Sweeping south after the assault on Pearl Harbor, and carrying all before them, the Japanese knew the deployment of any Allied warships or aircraft from the northern port would be a dangerous attack on their right flank as they drove east to secure New Guinea.

Built by Kawasaki Heavy Industries, the four submarines of the Sixth Submarine Squadron were armed with twelve torpedoes in four 21-inch bow tubes and a foredeck 5.5-inch gun. They carried 42 mines, launched through torpedo doors in the stern. Under the leadership of Commander Endo, they made their way south and deployed quietly around Bathurst and Melville Island.

On the morning of 20 January one of the submarines attacked the US Navy fleet oiler USS Trinity with three torpedoes. The tanker was escorted by two destroyers. As the torpedoes were seen, the USS Alden turned and launched depth charges. The response was unsuccessful and the destroyer lost the contact and broke off the attack. But the alarm was given in Darwin.

Later the Australian corvette Deloraine was searching near the scene with sonar. The Bathurst-class vessel, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Desmond Menlove, was a newly launched ship, and her first action was nearly her last. Deloraine was ambushed by the I-124. Frank Marsh, a stoker on the vessel, remembered seeing: “...the trail of the torpedo which missed our stern so closely that the wake thrown up by the propellers actually caused the torpedo to come out of the raised sea surface.”

The torpedo streaked towards the corvette. Deloraine turned right inside the torpedo’s course. It missed the ship’s stern by metres. Then she charged straight down the weapon’s track. An attack commenced with patterns of depth charges exploding astern of the warship as she wheeled and swooped as directed by her sonar. Then a Deloraine bridge lookout reported the submarine was breaking the surface, and abruptly the conning tower was seen ahead.

Deloraine powered towards her enemy and this time the depth charge explosion caught the submarine as it dived. Soon sonar confirmed it as motionless on the seabed. The boat’s captain, Lieutenant Commander Koichi Kishigami, his division commander Endo and 78 others were dead or trapped on board.
Later the boom defence vessel HMAS Kookaburra was deployed to the site and Australian divers attempted to find I-124. They were unsuccessful and engaged the help of divers from the American submarine repair ship USS Holland.

The divers found the submarine several nautical miles south of Bathurst Island with hatch gaskets blown out, suggesting the stern sections were flooded. Some reports claim that divers from the American ship Blackhawk descended and heard the Japanese crew, still inside, tapping on the hull. The Allies were interested in recovery: taking the submarine’s codebooks would be a great intelligence coup. Secretly the Navy began to make arrangements, moving personnel and equipment to Darwin in preparation. But three weeks later Darwin was struck a shattering blow by the same carrier task force that had devastated Pearl Harbor. It was now too dangerous to attempt recovery.

However, the submarine was not to quietly lie in her grave. Controversy was the I-124 companion for the next 50 years. Strange stories and theories surround the wreck. One sought to connect the I-124 with a supposed Japanese submarine working with the German armed raider Kormoran which sank HMAS Sydney in November 1941. Michael Montgomery, in Who Sank The Sydney? suggested a submarine was refueling or re-arming Kormoran when the Sydney was sighted, dived to escape detection and torpedoed the Australian cruiser, winning the battle for the raider.

Other stories say that a seaplane was sighted in the vicinity of the battle – many Japanese boats did carry folding planes in hangars on the foredeck. Suggestions have been made that a second submarine wreck, which some claim lies nearby, could be that alleged helper of the Kormoran. Other stories have the I-124 itself involved as the Japanese submarine. Other fanciful theories suggest inside the wrecked boat the captain’s safe contained an answer.

More than one source suggests codebooks were indeed recovered from the I-124, helping to win the Pacific war. Ed Drea in MacArthur’s Ultra wrote: “Shortly after the outbreak of the Pacific War, US Navy divers had salvaged the Japanese Navy’s Water Transport ‘S’ codebooks from a submarine that had been sunk off Darwin Australia in January 1942. With these documents in hand, navy cryptanalysts were able to read Japanese naval shipping messages...”

In the 1950s Atsuko Kishigami, the daughter of the sub’s commander, began a campaign to have the submarine raised and its entombed bodies returned to Japan. The Japanese Fujita Salvage Company, then in Darwin salvaging the wrecks of ships still lying in the harbour, made a brief investigation into the proposal before it was decided the costs were prohibitive.

In 1972 local salvage operators Sid Hawks, Harry Baxter, George Tyers and John Chadderton began preliminary salvage work on the submarine with three vessels. But ownership disputes arose between Baxter and the remaining three, including shots fired. After a split, the potential salvors were denied rights by the Federal Government and warned off the site.

In 1976 Harry Baxter tried new recovery attempts, claiming his salvage attempts had penetrated the hull. By this time he had probably removed items from the exterior. He was warned off again and in a fit of pique went out with explosives to destroy the submarine. In November 1984 Navy divers from HMAS Curlew carried out descents to the boat to verify its condition: they reported the conning tower had been damaged, but the casing appeared undamaged and sealed.

In 1989 the research vessel Flamingo Bay, captained by David Tomlinson, sent down a Remote Operated Vehicle: an unmanned mini-submarine equipped with a TV camera. The ROV sent back pictures of the I-124’s conning tower, still upright but with a list to one side. With personnel from NT and WA museums involved, the Flamingo Bay operation hoped to dive the submarine for research purposes, but the project was eventually cancelled due to political considerations.

Stories about I-124 continued to re-appear. Claims that a valuable cargo of mercury was present on board appeared in the media. Baxter continued to make claims about the submarine, saying he had “been arrested by ASIO”. His stories appeared in the magazine Australasian Post, stating that he had been visited by a Japanese ambassador from Darwin.
Dr Tom Lewis OAM is the author of 12 military history books and a former naval officer, in which capacity he commanded a US team in Baghdad in the Iraq war of 2006.

Washington who was worried about the “ship’s safe.” Baxter died a little while later, taking any secrets with him to the grave.

I-124 still lies outside Darwin today. Strangely, she is less known to Australians than the three midget submarines which attacked Sydney Harbour also in 1942. But I-124 remains one of the country’s most interesting stories of the country at war: a tale of bravery on both sides, loss and an insight into the secret war fought in Australia’s north.
The Territory Remembers

Berry Springs – a war history

By Bob Alford

Once a natural water course and abundant springs winding through a monsoon forest, Berry Springs became a popular swimming hole during World War II, a convalescent centre and a rest area for servicemen. It is now a popular tourist destination.

Berry Creek itself was named after Chief Draftsman Edwin S Berry, a member of the survey party that laid out the future capital of the Northern Territory and three satellite towns in its hinterland under George W Goyder during 1869 and 1870.

George Woodroffe Goyder had been commissioned by the South Australian Government to select, survey and initiate development of the colony’s northern capital, to be named Palmerston, following the rejection of an alternate site, Escape Cliffs, northeast of Darwin.

A permanent settlement at Escape Cliffs had been selected by Boyle Travers Finniss in 1864, a year after South Australia was handed control of the Northern Territory. Travers was instructed to survey and establish a settlement at Adam Bay but instead chose Escape Cliffs despite adverse comments by members of his party. In the event the settlement was a failure, and Finniss was recalled to Adelaide in 1865. Two years later the settlement was abandoned.

Goyder and his 128-man team of surveyors, chainmen, draftsmen and general hands – along with their equipment, tentage, horses and cattle – departed Port Adelaide in late 1868 and on 5 February 1869 the schooner, Moonta dropped anchor in Darwin harbour. Goyder was on the first boat ashore, along with Edwin Berry, and selected a well-watered site with a gently shelving landing area below the plateau upon which the future capital would grow. Establishing their camp site on Fort Point, Goyder and his men began their task of surveying the future capital and its satellite towns of Daly, Southport and Virginia. Over the next 18 months the crews carried out their surveys in the cool pleasant conditions of the Dry and in the trying tropical heat, humidity and monsoon rains of the Build-up and the ensuing Wet. In those 18 months they completed their task – the town of Palmerston (Darwin) and its satellites were surveyed and the plans drawn. Goyder named Berry Creek for Edwin Berry and the creek-fed springs, originally drawn on the 1869 plan as ‘Kangaroo Falls’ by surveyor Gilbert R McMinn, who also annotated the site as “Recommended for Reserve”.

West of Berry Springs, Southport was one of the satellite towns surveyed and laid out by Goyder’s men on the junction of the Blackmore and Darwin Rivers. With the Pine Creek goldfields in full swing, Southport became the starting point for diggers on their way to riches or rags and was soon larger and more populous than the capital, Palmerston. The Overland Telegraph, completed in 1872, also passed through the township, linking the world via Palmerston to the south. Southport boasted a jetty, a telegraph station and post office, an explosives magazine, hotels, boarding houses, blacksmiths and saddlers, shipping merchants and general and specialist stores of the ever resourceful and entrepreneurial Chinese, including one Kwong Sue Duk.
A herbalist and general merchant, Kwong thrived there before moving on to Palmerston as Southport’s relevance faded with the opening of the Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway in 1888. In 1889 Southport Station was opened for the railway. However its location bypassed the settlement itself and with it the township faded away. Southport had prospered over 20 years but by 1890 it was abandoned. In 1891 a 15 acre agricultural block developed by hotel owner, Samuel Brown, sold for £1/5 while seven township lots went for one shilling each. Only building foundations and the graves of some 60 people remain to witness Southport’s existence. There was a brief revival during WWII, when light shipping plied the Blackmore River to land military supplies at the Middle Arm Jetty, but with war’s end Southport lay abandoned once again.

Further along the line was Tumbling Waters, another of Goyder’s surveyed sites. Located to the south of Southport and on the Blackmore River it was first named after the rapids – the ‘Tumbling Waters’ – by Surveyor AC Burton, who discovered gold there in 1869. Initially surveyed by AH Smith it was later the site of a construction camp for the Overland Telegraph Line crews. Located on the Coach Road to Adelaide River and on to the goldfields it boasted a wayside inn and a few buildings before fading into obscurity when the Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway bypassed it and the Coach Road – now Mira Road.

With the fading away of the townships the area around, Berry Springs reverted to former days, accessed only by a rough track to Bynoe Harbour. In those prewar days the creek and springs were frequented by local families on picnics and outings before the military began to establish camps and facilities as World War II impacted Darwin and the Northern Territory. Closest to the area was the large supply depot at Firdan, where Noonamah now lies. The military erected the Noonamah Field Supply Depot, to supply a range of units including a number of airfields, while in 1942 a railway siding to service the depot was built a mile south and immediately south of Strauss airstrip at Noonamah, a highly appropriate Wagaman tribe Aboriginal word for “plenty of tucker and good things.”

While a large number of army units, including the 148th Field Artillery Regiment US Army, were camped in the area, it was the nearby airfields that provided the focus for wartime activities. Developed in late 1941 as part of the RAAF’s Aerodrome Development Program under Flight Lieutenant John Yeaman, the fighter strips at the 27 and 34-Mile pegs and Hughes, a bomber field between them, provided the early aerial defence of Darwin. What also developed was the offensive campaign by RAAF Hudson bombers of 2 and 13 Squadrons against the Japanese in the islands to the north. The Hudson crews suffered appalling losses against the Japanese and were later forced to combine and operate as a single unit.

From the 27 and 34-Mile airstrips, P-40 Kittyhawks of the 8th and 9th Squadrons of the USAAF 49th Pursuit (Fighter) Group flew against Japanese raids before moving to New Guinea in September and October of 1942. Both airstrips were named Strauss and Livingstone in memory of USAAF pilots killed in action over Darwin. Both the 8th and 9th Squadrons were aided by P-40s of the 7th Squadron based at Batchelor while personnel of the 49th Pursuit Group
that the 8th Australian Infantry Battalion was to commence a rest period there on 2 January 1943. The day prior to their arrival saw the establishment of Field Post Office 189 at Berry Springs by personnel of 12 Australian Divisional Postal Unit. Three weeks later personnel of the 19th Australian Machine Gun Battalion arrived for a week’s rest from 19 January.

While final construction at Berry Springs continued, more units arrived for their week’s rest periods. Personnel of 2/8 and 2/4 Australian Infantry Battalions, 2/1 Australian Docks Operating Company and 21/23 Australian Infantry Battalion all spent a week at the centre, as did 13 Australian Field Company, 2 Australian Army Troops Company, RAAF units, 16 Australian Infantry Battalion, 113 Australian Anti-Tank Regiment, 13 Australian Brigade, 14 Australian Lines of Communication Company and 2/13 Australian Field Ambulance, among many other units.

At the camp they were able to play a range of sports, watch movies, swim in the springs or relax as much as possible even with morning parades and ‘normal’ duties to perform. Facilities included a Red Cross representative, a YMCA office, Gardens and a Canteen. The rest Camp offered similar outlets and comprised eight individual camps each with its own water supply and kitchen.

Along with the Berry Springs Rest Camp, three other units were based at the springs; Australian Army Canteens Service provided amenities for the troops, No. 108 Convalescent Depot accommodated recovering medical cases and 18 Aust. Personnel Staging Camp provided accommodation for newly arriving or departing troops. Both the Convalescent Depot and Staging Camp had been established by mid-1943, the Convalescent Depot in June and the Staging Camp in July. A year later the RAAF’s No. 7 Medical Rehabilitation Unit moved in during August 1944 and remained following the end of WWII.

Following war’s end the combined facilities were surveyed and put up for the postwar auctions of military camps and infrastructure. The Convalescent Camp comprising some 130 structures including furniture, stoves and refrigerators was sold to PA Rawlings of Darwin for £330 while the Rest Camp and its water reticulation piping went to the Good Brothers of Darwin for £1133.

Further to the southwest on the old Southport Road and close to the old Southport railway station site, No. 224 RAAF Radar Station was constructed during 1943. One of eight Advanced Chain Overseas (ACO) radar stations established by No. 44 Radar Wing, the site became operational on 15 June 1944. The station comprised two radar towers, each constructed of timber, and its radar operators provided flight information to the Fighter Sector at Berrimah. Its High Frequency (HF) band provided better coverage than the normal VHF sets and was also useful in directing aircraft lost or during bad weather. The unit remained operational until war’s end, when the structures were sold at auction.

Following WWII, Berry Springs reverted to a place where local families from Darwin and the region could enjoy a swim in the springs or a picnic in the grounds developed by the military. For many years it was a popular spot maintained by the NT Conservation Commission before its potential as a fully developed tourist destination was recognised in the late 1980s. The Northern Territory Government set about developing an adjacent 400 hectare site to Berry Springs and in 1989 the Territory Wildlife Park was opened.

Situated in an area of natural bushland, the park contains representative native animals and plants of the Northern Territory, with an emphasis on the Top End tropical monsoon forest environments through three habitats, the woodland, wetland and monsoon vine forests. Their conservation is ensured through research and public education programs. The Park features a walk-through aquarium, crocodile tank, nocturnal house, fauna houses, a walk-through aviary and the popular Flight Deck and its displays of raptors – birds of prey.

From a remote series of springs set in a meandering creek, the adjacent Berry Springs Recreation Reserve and wildlife park is now one of the most popular venues for tourists and locals alike.

Raised in rural Victoria Bob Alford’s interest in aviation stems from his father’s involvement in early aviation and membership of the Victorian Aero Club in the 1930s, and the proximity of an active aerodrome near the family property, where Bob took gliding lessons and cadged flights in various aircraft types.

Bob served in the army briefly before joining the RAAF as an Armourer, serving 20 years in a variety of postings, including SE Asia. Following retirement in 1986 Bob and his family settled in Darwin where he undertook the location and documentation of aircraft crash sites and military sites throughout the Northern Territory. He wrote Darwin’s Air War in 1991, followed it with an expanded version in 2010 and wrote Japanese Air Forces in the NWA 1942-1945 in 2011. He has also written many papers and has provided detailed historical information to a range of authors and organisations.

This is his story on Berry Springs.
Defence forces need maps and charts for the effective waging of war on land, sea and in the air. The high command needs strategic maps to plan defences and campaign strategies. The combat troops in the field need detailed tactical maps over the battlefield to plan tactics to find and fight the enemy. The engineers need maps and plans to site and construct the infrastructure needed to support the war effort and the Navy and Air Force need charts for the safe navigation of ships and aircraft.

However, on the eve of World War II, there were no maps of northern Australia suitable for military purposes. The nautical charts then in use were those produced mostly from surveys carried out in the nineteenth century by the British Royal Navy.

Britain emerged from World War I as victor but with a badly battered economy that could no longer maintain regional forces to defend its far-flung Empire. Consequently the Singapore Strategy was adopted in 1923 to provide for the defence of the dominions and colonies in the Far East and the Pacific. Under this arrangement Australia would maintain forces for limited local defence but Britain would be called upon if a threat came from more powerful enemies. Singapore was to be fortified as the main naval fleet base from where operations could be launched into the region. The port of Darwin was included in the strategy as a refuelling station but not as a base for warships. Construction of the first fuel tank commenced in 1924 and four tanks were operational by 1928.1

The safe navigation of large warships into Darwin for refuelling called for accurate nautical charts showing water depths, tidal information, underwater hazards and navigation aids. The most recent chart of the harbour had been produced from surveys carried out by the Royal Navy’s hydrographic survey ship HMS Myrmidon in 1885.2 Most of the existing charts of the approaches to Port Darwin were based on surveys carried out by Royal Navy hydrographers PP King in HMS Mermaid (1818-19), JC Wickham and JL Stokes in HMS Beagle (1839-40) and J Hutchinson and J Howard in the Beatrice (1864-65). More detailed and accurate charts were now required for the safe passage of large warships.

The Royal Australian Navy had established a hydrographic survey service in 1921. The survey ship HMAS Geranium was sent north in 1925 to commence the huge task of upgrading and expanding the coverage of the nineteenth century charts.3 The methods of hydrographic surveying then in use had hardly changed since the days of the nineteenth century hydrographers. Depth measurements were made with the lead and line – a device comprising a lead weight attached to a line graduated in fathoms (one fathom = 6 feet) that was lowered from the vessel until hitting the sea floor. For coastal work the position of the “sounding” on the chart was fixed from horizontal sextant angles observed to trig stations established on land.

In the early 1930s the global political climate was becoming unstable and hostile. The economic woes of
the Great Depression had enabled extremist governments to assume power in Germany and Japan. The military controlled Japanese government had ambitions to dominate the Asia Pacific region as the leader of a Greater South-East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japan’s intentions soon became apparent when Manchuria was occupied in 1931. The Australian Government began to take notice and steps were taken to boost defences in the north. Additional oil tanks were constructed at Darwin Port and coastal and antiaircraft guns were installed on the peninsula. In 1933 the survey ship HMAS Moresby, which had replaced the paid-off Geranium in 1927, was sent north to continue the hydrographic surveying of the north coast. Moresby was to be deployed on surveys in northern waters for long periods before and during the war, and became a familiar sight in Darwin harbour until being paid off and sold for scrap in 1946.4

Moresby was equipped with the recently invented echo-sounder for taking depth measurements by recording the time interval between transmitted sound waves and the return signal reflected off the sea floor. Knowing the velocity of sound waves in water the water depth could be determined. The replacement of the tedious lead and line method by the echo-sounder in the 1930s revolutionised hydrographic surveying. Another stimulus to productivity and chart quality was the availability of aerial photography to assist with the accurate delineation of the coastline and offshore features.5

One of the tasks allocated to Moresby in 1937 was the survey of the waters off Groote Eylandt for a flying boat base. Port Langdon was subsequently chosen and became a refuelling depot for QANTAS flying boats operating the nine day service from Sydney to Southampton in England. The Moresby crew obviously found the going tough as related in the poem Farewell to the Gulf and Groote Eylandt penned by an unidentified sailor. References are made in the poem to a volcanic eruption on Vulcan Island near Rabaul, New Guinea, in 1937 where Moresby was despatched to render assistance; and the death of Stoker Petty Officer James Lambert who was buried on Thursday Island in July of that year.6

The QANTAS flying boat service between Australia and England operated for only 13 months until the outbreak of war in September 1939. In 1943 the RAAF occupied the base at Port Langdon, then known as Little Lagoon, for use as a staging base for Catalina flying boats flying out of Cairns on missions to the Dutch, East Indies.7 In 1937 after Japan invaded China, the threat had become serious. Australia was then totally unprepared to defend its territory against an enemy that had devoted time and resources to building up a modern war machine. The vast north of Australia was sparsely inhabited and lacking the basic military infrastructure, including maps, needed to defend the country. The government took urgent action to boost northern defences by despatching two RAAF squadrons to Darwin and raising the Darwin Mobile Force to defend the area from ground attack.

The Darwin Mobile Force (DMF) with strength of about 250 troops was raised in Sydney in 1938 and arrived by sea in Darwin in 1939. The unit comprised a rifle company, machine gun and mortar sections and a troop of 18-pounder field guns.8 However when the unit was raised in Sydney there were no existing maps of the Darwin area suitable for military purposes. Topographic maps showing the features and lay of the land were needed to support the DMF’s infantry and artillery operations.

The Cartographic Section of the Army Survey Corps in Melbourne was tasked as a matter of urgency to produce a topographic map of the Darwin area. Topographic maps are compiled from controlled aerial photographs with additional detail filled in from ground surveys. Aerial photography over Darwin was available from the RAAF and some ground control had been established by the crew of Moresby when undertaking a triangulation survey of Darwin harbour for charting purposes in 1937. The resulting map titled Sketch Map Darwin was published in colour in 1938 at a map scale of one inch to one mile (1:63,360).9 It was classified as a sketch map because the urgent time frame meant that accuracy standards had to be compromised for expediency. But at least when the DMF arrived in Darwin in 1939 they had a map covering their primary defence area.

Sketch Map Darwin was to have an interesting history. At the end of the war a printers proof copy was found among Japanese map stocks seized by US Forces in Tokyo.10 It was a copy of the 1938 original but with the legend and marginal notes translated into Japanese. The question of how the map got to Tokyo is a matter of some conjecture but it seems probable that Japanese agents, covertly fishing
for pearl shell off the Territory coast before the war, somehow obtained a copy.

In February 1940 the military high command embarked on an emergency mapping scheme to provide strategic map cover over the country. Seventeen map sheets were hastily produced by the Survey Corps in Melbourne to cover the Northern Territory at a scale of eight miles to the inch (1:506,880). These sheets were compiled from whatever material was available – cadastral plans, road maps and information supplied by pastoralists, mineral exploration companies and mission settlements. The urgent time frame meant that map accuracy standards had to be compromised, so the maps were regarded as approximate and only intended as interim coverage until better data became available.

While the 8-mile series provided broad coverage for strategic planning purposes, the troops in the field needed more detailed maps at a larger scale for tactical operations. In 1941 a survey section with an establishment of 45, comprising surveyors, draftsmen and support staff under the command of Lieutenant Lindsay Lockwood, was raised in Melbourne and sent to Darwin. The unit was attached to the 7th Military District which had overall responsibility for defence in the Northern Territory. From their base at Larrakeyah Barracks the initial task was to upgrade the Sketch Map Darwin and produce eight other map sheets at a scale of one inch to one mile of Darwin and environs. Although topographic mapping was the Survey Section’s main priority, other units within the 7th Military District requested their services. The coastal and anti-aircraft artillery batteries sought assistance from the surveyors to calibrate their guns. This involved using two theodolites placed a known distance apart to simultaneously observe angles to an exploding test shell. The bearing, elevation and distance from gun to target could then be calculated and the gun sights adjusted accordingly. The Engineer units had a need for surveys to assist with construction of camps and infrastructure. The headquarters staff kept the draftsmen busy with requests for miscellaneous maps and plans.

Life in Darwin was soon to change after 7 December 1941 when the Japanese attacked the US naval base and airfield at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The US declared war on Japan and Australia followed soon afterwards. Non-experienced civilians were evacuated from Darwin, the Northern Territory Administration relocated to Alice Springs and the northern part Territory placed under military control. The Survey Section was diverted from its mapping and surveying activities to construct air-raid shelters, dig trenches, prepare defences and practice their weapon handling skills.

On 19 February 1942 the Japanese bombed Darwin resulting in 242 deaths and inflicting considerable damage and producing eight other map sheets at a scale of one inch to one mile of Darwin and environs. The Survey Section follow suit and was given the task of defending the HQ perimeter from enemy invasion, then thought to be imminent. Reinforcements were sent north to boost defences. About 6 weeks after the bombing, units from Australia’s most experienced fighting force, the 6th Division AIF, recently returned from the Middle East, began to arrive in the Darwin area. The much larger army in the north was reorganised to become Northern Territory Force (Norforce). The Survey Section could now be relieved of infantry duties and resume the mapping program. A base camp was established at Adelaide River from where field parties were despatched to obtain ground control for an expanded mapping program. The coastline from Cape Hotham (Adelaide River mouth) to Anson Bay (Daly River mouth) and the hinterland to the Adelaide River township was identified as a priority area as this section of coast has beaches suitable for enemy amphibious landings. Another priority was mapping the Line of Communication along the North-South Road (later named Stuart Highway) from the Adelaide River Township to the railway terminus at Birdum. Maps were required to plan for the construction of airfields, camps and depots needed by air force and army units being deployed along the corridor.

In April 1943, a detachment of the 6th Army Topographic Survey Company, with a strength of 46 personnel under Captain James Tait, arrived in Darwin to relieve the 7th Survey Section. After 21 months of service in the NT the 7th Section relocated to north Queensland and was absorbed into the 2/1 Army Topographic Survey Company. In late 1944 the Company moved to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea and then to Morotai Island in the Netherlands East Indies to produce maps and terrain models for the final campaigns of the war in the Pacific.

General Headquarters, South West Pacific Area, gave 6 Topo the task of producing strategic map coverage at a scale of four miles to the inch over the vast area of the Top End from the east Kimberley to Arnhem Land. The field parties were now faced with surveying ground control points over remote country that had barely been explored since European colonisation. The extent and nature of the terrain called for a modification of the surveying methods used for standard mapping. Traditional methods of triangulation and traversing were not feasible over the coastal mud flats, mangroves, river floodplains and rugged terrain that prevailed over the country. Instead the astro-fix method of position lines was adopted. Although not as accurate as triangulation or traversing the results were adequate for four inch to one mile scale mapping. The field parties used various modes of transport to access the control point locations that were spaced at 30km to...
50km around the coast and through the interior. The army ketch AK121 Aroetta and the motorised yacht HMAS Southern Cross were used to land field parties around the coast and on islands off the coast. This was often a hazardous exercise when operating in uncharted waters subjected to huge tides. Ford Blitz trucks provided the main means for travelling over land where access was possible. In inaccessible areas the bush soldiers of the North Australia Observer Unit known as the Nackeroos assisted with packhorses. The RAAF also flew parties to remote locations. Warrant Officer Bryan Meehan of 6 Topo made the following entry in his diary of a trip to Milingimbi:

"We were to leave by bomber...driven to Hughes Field just after lunch. Arrived at Milingimbi after an uneventful but interesting trip....a Japanese reccy plane came over at about 30 thousand and then bussed off again.

The two bombers that brought us over crashed five minutes after taking off this morning. It seems incredible that the men who brought us over yesterday are now all dead. Saw the missioner re the aerial photography from which we would make a map of the island. Did night work on position lines... leaving straight away in a Hudson. Had a nice trip but frightened all the way."

The nature of the work and limiting conditions of the wet season required the field parties to spend long periods out bush. Periods of several months working in isolation and under difficult and unpleasant conditions were typical. Tinned food and 'dog' biscuits were the basic rations but the occasional barramundi, bush turkey or scrub cattle provided a welcome change of diet. On one long field trip through the Victoria River District Sergeant Jack Hunt recalled this incident:

"We set out and passed Bulita Station and reached the river but could go no further with the trucks. We made camp and opened a box of food which normally contained a weeks supply of tinned vegetables, meat & veg and spam. This box was full of baked beans and nothing else, so we ate 21 meals of baked beans. The drivers tried to shoot a bush turkey, kangaroo or even a steer but had to give up because the petrol supply was too short."

Water could not be carried in sufficient quantity to meet all needs so supplies had to be replenished along the way. Waterholes were often befouled by dead animals which necessitated treatment with coagulating tablets to clear the sediment and chlorine tablets to purify the water. It was soon discovered that the resulting foul taste could be rendered bearable with the addition of a teaspoon of Sal-Vital.

The arduous tropical conditions and nature of the work impacted on the health and fitness of the personnel. Almost everybody suffered from prickly heat and infected insect bites from time to time. Abrasions and cuts were common as a lot of axe work was required to clear vegetation along traverse lines for line of sight and chaining distances. Cuts readily developed into tropical ulcers if not quickly treated. Dengue fever became a major cause of casualties often requiring hospitalisation. The skin condition known as impetigo was a common problem. It produces yellow crusty sores on the skin that cause lot of discomfort when the pustules break and clothing sticks to the raw wounds. The unit was usually under strength due to personnel undergoing treatment in hospital or being declared medically unfit for the tropics and repatriated south.

Apart from the four miles to one inch strategic mapping program, the survey unit had other demands for its expertise. The RAAF had a need for survey information on the network of airfields, landing grounds and radar station scattered across the Territory. The latitude and longitude coordinates of aerodrome reference points, early warning radar and Loran (long range navigation) stations had to be determined to facilitate accurate navigation and accurate position fixing. The height above sea level and magnetic variation at reference points were needed by aircrew to calibrate altimeters and adjust compass readings.

An air warning radar unit was first installed at Dripstone Caves near Darwin in February 1942 but was not operational at the time of the first bombing raid. However, soon after becoming operational the effectiveness of radar was demonstrated when enemy aircraft could be detected in time for warnings to be given. Over the ensuing months a network of stations was established around the north coast including remote islands off the Kimberley and Arnhem Land coasts.
Survey parties were called upon to take astro-fixes to determine the coordinates of the radar antennae. Transport to the site was usually by RAAF aircraft to the closest landing ground and then by vehicles and boat to the station. On one job Sergeant Jack Lowe and a party of three flew to RAAF Base Truscott in the north Kimberley and then by boat to 344 Radar Station on West Montalivet Island.

On returning from the trip he commented:

"I have often thought of that unit stuck on that little island, nothing to do and nowhere to go. When you think of it we had it made, periodically going off in small parties on different jobs and as tiring and difficult as they may have been, they kept you from going round the bend from boredom."  

A member of the station recalled his experience in a publication on the history of RAAF Radar Stations:

"My main recollection of this station was the loneliness – about 30 men, no changes of personnel for approximately seven months. The same faces, the same food, no fresh water, no ‘flicks’ and no mail for seven months initially. 344RS was a tough posting. Six months was almost more than any man could bear and the initial crew spent about nine months there."  

By 1944 the tide of war was beginning to turn in the Allies favour. The last Japanese raid to affect the Top End occurred on 12 November 1943 when nine enemy bombers attacked targets in Parap, Adelaide River and Batchelor. Eleven RAAF Spitfires intercepted the raiders and two were destroyed. This was the final of 64 raids recorded in the Darwin area since the first and most destructive raid on 19 February 1942. RAAF and army units were now being moved north to bases in New Guinea and the Netherlands East Indies for the final campaigns of the war.

With the end of the war now only a matter of time the Commonwealth Government started looking at the future of Darwin. An Inter-Departmental Committee, comprising military and government personnel was set up to examine the post-war requirements and reconstruction of Darwin. The Survey Corps was called upon to produce detailed topographic maps of the greater Darwin to assist the Committee plan for the return of the civilian population and post war reconstruction. Seven map sheets covering the area from the town south to Manton Dam were produced in colour at a scale of 1:25,000.

The detachment of the 6th Army Topographical Survey Company was withdrawn from the Northern Territory in March 1945 after 23 months of creditable service. They joined the rest of the Company in Queensland and moved to Lae in New Guinea to prepare maps and terrain models to support the final campaign against the Japanese in New Guinea.

The contribution of the NT based Survey Corps units to the war effort in the north is commemorated by a plaque on the Memorial Wall at the Darwin Cenotaph.

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23. Units of the Royal Australian Airforce, op.cit., p.35
24. Hillier, John, op.cit., p.159

Trevor Menzies was employed in Darwin by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments for 32 years that included appointments as Land Surveyor, Assistant Director of Mapping and Land Information, and Surveyor-General. He is currently Heritage Program Manager for the Mapping Sciences Institute, Australia. His interest in WWII mapping and charting stems from the experiences of his late father-in-law, Jim Aitken, who served with the Australian Army Survey Corps in the Northern Territory, Queensland and the Netherlands East Indies from 1940 to 1946. In this story he describes how the Army’s Survey Corps and the Navy’s Hydrographic Service responded to the call for maps and charts needed to defend Australia’s north in World War II.
The Territory Remembers
Military detention in the Northern Territory during World War II

By Graham Wilson

Prior to the outbreak of World War II the Northern Territory, which, from a defence point of view, basically meant Darwin, was very much a backwater. The first soldiers to form a permanent garrison – officers and 42 men of the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) and Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) – arrived in Darwin in September 1932. ¹

This first small group was known as the Darwin Detachment and was administered originally by the 1st Military District (1 MD – Queensland). ² The original garrison was supplemented by a second detachment of three officers and 29 other ranks, who arrived in Darwin on 20 September 1933 as part of the Lyons Government’s imperial strategy to contain the Japanese.³ The gunners were formed into the 9th Heavy Battery, RAA and the engineer detachment was designated the 7th Fortress Company, RAE in 1936. These units now formed the Darwin Garrison. ⁴

The Darwin Garrison manned two 6-inch Mark VII guns at East Point, two guns at Emery Point and an anti-aircraft battery at Elliott Point overlooking the approaches to Port Darwin.⁵ Three ammunition magazines were built, partially below ground, at the tip of Emery Point near the lighthouse. HQ for the Darwin Garrison was located in Larrakeyah Barracks. The barracks were developed from 1934 as one of the first major commitments to national defence in the north of Australia.

Some defence construction work began in the 1920s but it was in 1934 that work began on quarters.⁶ In 1939 the Darwin Garrison was supplemented by the Darwin Mobile Force (DMF) and work began in earnest on the construction of a major base at Larrakeyah.⁷ The garrison was also reinforced in 1939 by the deployment of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Cadre, armed with four outdated 3-inch 20 cwt. anti-aircraft guns.⁸ The defence build-up transformed Darwin from an isolated outpost into a rapidly-growing and modern town and by late 1941, at the commencement of the Pacific War, more than 7000 service personnel were based in and around Darwin.⁹

Some of the buildings in Larrakeyah Barracks were brought from Thursday Island after the garrison there was removed. However, most of the new buildings owed their design to BCG Burnett (1889-1955), Principal Architect to Works Branch, Department of the Interior from his arrival in the Northern Territory in 1937 until his resignation in 1946.¹⁰ The Other Ranks (OR) Mess, built in 1939, was steel-framed with louvre panels while the Sergeants’ Mess, built in 1940 (and still in use today), was a two-storey Burnett design of steel frame and concrete.¹¹ The headquarters building at Larrakeyah Barracks was one-storey of reinforced concrete with a tower which housed the air-raid siren.¹²

In December 1940 the Militia 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) Battery arrived in Darwin to release an AIF unit, 2/2nd HAA Battery, which had arrived in Darwin in June, for duty in the Middle East.¹³ The 2nd AA Cadre was absorbed into the 14th HAA Battery.¹⁴
Military Detention – Establishments and Administration

Armies are not made up of robots but of human beings, with all of the strengths and failings of the human race. Human beings will always be human beings and soldiers will always be soldiers, and in every group of people there are always some who will offend against law and regulation. It goes without saying that the Australian Army of World War II was not immune from this. To manage the punishment and rehabilitation of military offenders, the Australian Army raised a complex of detention barracks and guard compounds around Australia.

It needs to be understood here that these facilities existed only to hold men who had been convicted of purely military offences – desertion, absence without leave, offering violence, striking a superior, escaping custody, theft of military stores and such forth. Men who committed civil offences were handed over to the civil authorities for trial and, if appropriate, imprisonment. Servicemen sentenced to undergo a period of detention were referred to as either ‘soldier undergoing sentence’ (SUS) or ‘soldier undergoing detention’ (SUD). The terms were interchangeable but ‘SUS’ was the more commonly used and is the term that will always be used in this brief history. 1

During the war 21 detention barracks operated in Australia at various times, as listed below:

- 2/1st Australian Detention Barrack (2/1 ADB) Grovely, Queensland (subsumed 1 ADB)
- 2/2nd Australian Detention Barrack (2/2 ADB Gladstone, South Australia
- 1st Australian Detention Barrack (1 ADB Grovely, Queensland
- 2nd Australian Detention Barrack (2 ADB) Puckapunyal, Victoria
- 3rd Australian Detention Barrack (3 ADB) Warwick, Queensland
- 4th Australian Detention Barrack (4 ADB) Charters Towers, Queensland
- 5th Australian Detention Barrack (5 ADB) Holsworthy, New South Wales
- 6th Australian Detention Barrack (6 ADB) Orange, New South Wales
- 7th Australian Detention Barrack (7 ADB) Bendigo, Victoria
- 8th Australian Detention Barrack (8 ADB) Geelong, Victoria
- 9th Australian Detention Barrack (9 ADB) Adelaide, South Australia
- 10th Australian Detention Barrack (10 ADB) Portsea, Victoria
- 11th Australian Detention Barrack (11 ADB Fremantle, Western Australia
- 12th Australian Detention Barrack (12 ADB) Conara, Tasmania
- 13th Australian Detention Barrack (13 ADB) Brocks Creek, Northern Territory
- 14th Australian Detention Barrack (14 ADB) West Tamworth, New South Wales
- 15th Australian Detention Barrack (15 ADB) North Tamworth, New South Wales
- 16th Australian Detention Barrack (16 ADB Port Moresby and Lae, New Guinea
- 17th Australian Detention Barrack (17 ADB Albury, New South Wales
- 18th Australian Detention Barrack (18 ADB Malabar, New South Wales
- 19th Australian Detention Barrack (19 ADB Miranda, New South Wales

The 20th Australian Detention Barrack (20 ADB) existed on the island of Morotai in the Netherlands East Indies for a short period in 1945-1946.

Readers should note that the correct name usage for a detention barrack is ‘barrack’, singular, rather than ‘barracks’, plural.

In addition to the detention barracks, six guard compounds were raised to hold servicemen who had been placed under arrest and awaiting collection by their unit, who were awaiting trial by court-martial, who were awaiting confirmation of court-martial sentence or who were awaiting transfer to a detention barrack or civil prison. 15 Soldiers detained in guard compounds were referred to as ‘soldiers under arrest’ or ‘SUA’.

Detention barracks were commanded for local administrative purposes by the support element in their geographic region. 16 This was originally the relevant Command, that is, Northern Command for Queensland and the territories of Papua and New Guinea; Eastern Command for New South Wales; Southern Command for Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania (with staff in South Australia having administrative responsibility for troops and units in the Northern Territory at that time); and Western Command for Western Australia.

In January 1941 the commands were divided into an operational and an administrative element. The administrative burden, including management of detention barracks, was assumed by the new Base HQ. Later that year the base system was replaced by Line of Communications (L of C) areas as listed below and which assumed responsibility for detention facilities:

- Northern Command Line of Communications Area (Queensland)
- Eastern Command Line of Communications Area (New South Wales)
- Southern Command Line of Communications Area (Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania)
- Western Command Line of Communications Area (Western Australia)
- 7th Military District (7 MD) Line of Communications Area (Northern Territory)
- 8th Military District (8 MD) Line of Communications Area (Papua and New Guinea).

On 9 April 1942 the system of commands and bases was abolished and replaced by the field army and the lines of communication areas were reorganised to align with the pre-war military districts, with L of C Areas established in
each of the six States on the mainland plus the Northern Territory and New Guinea. Field formations were formed as follows:

- First Australian Army – from Northern and Eastern Command
- Second Australian Army – from Southern Command
- 3rd Australian Corps – from Western Command
- Northern Territory (NT) Force – from 7 MD
- New Guinea (NG) Force – from 8 MD.

L of C now consisted of:
- Queensland L of C Area
- New South Wales L of C Area
- Victoria Lines of L of C Area
- South Australia L of C Area
- Western Australia L of C Area
- Tasmania L of C Area
- Northern Territory Force L of C Area (later NT L of C Area)
- New Guinea Force L of C Area (later NG L of C Area).

At the same time L of C Sub-Areas were raised as a means of further centralising the administrative burden. The number of sub-areas largely depended on the size of the parent L of C Area and the actual administrative need and some sub-areas existed for only a very short time. For example, in Western Australia, besides 12 (Perth) L of C Sub-Area, 13 (Northam) L of C Sub-Area existed for a very short time (March to August 1942) apparently raised in order to manage the distribution and security of fuel and ammunition supplies in the Northam area north-east of Perth; the sub-area was disbanded in the first week of August 1942 when the 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions had reached a level of organisation and manning where they could take over the tasks previously carried out by the sub-area.

Most of the sub-areas were disbanded by the end of 1943 and their roles and tasks subsumed by the parent L of C Area; 11 (Central Australia) and 17 (North Queensland) Sub-Areas remained in operation until July 1945, largely for geographic reasons. During their existence the sub-areas had local responsibility for detention barracks and guard compounds in their areas. For example, 6 Australian Detention Barrack came under 5 (Western NSW) L of C Sub-Area for local command and administration until the sub-area ceased to exist in September 1943; and 13 Australian Detention Barrack came under 14 (Adelaide River) L of C Sub-Area.

Military Detention Facilities

Prior to May 1943 fixed detention facilities were managed and run by the military police, the Australian Army Provost Corps (AAPC). However, by early 1943 it had become obvious that the job had become so big and the system in place so complex that a new and independent service was required to administer and manage the army’s higher level detention facilities. As a consequence on 1 May 1943 the Military Prisons and Detention Barracks Service (MP&DDBS) was raised and fully assumed the higher detention role.

A war establishment (WE) had been drafted for detention barracks in 1938 (WE V/1938/133/1). However, it is not known if this establishment was used, except possibly at Holsworthy in New South Wales for a short time in 1940. The 1938 establishment was quickly superseded by a new standard establishment – WE IV/1940/702 “A Detention Barrack (to accommodate up to 100 prisoners inclusive)” – which was issued on 30 June 1940. This establishment allowed for one officer and 16 other rank staff, with allowance for additional staff if required.

In 1941 the establishments were amended to allow for two types of detention barrack, specified as Type ‘A’ or ‘B’, and each establishment allowing for a different number of staff. In 1943 WE IV/119C/1 “A Detention Barrack Type ‘C’” was issued, which allowed for a strength of two officers and 44 other ranks and was designed for a barrack to hold up to 150 SUS, with allowance for expansion to 300.

Military Detention in the Northern Territory

With the military presence in Darwin expanding the 7th Military District Detention Barrack, was formed at Larrakeyah Barracks in July 1941. The exact location of this establishment is not known. Plans exist for the Guard Room at Larrakeyah Barracks, which show that the building included six purpose-built cells with adjoining prisoner toilet and showers and an internal exercise yard. However, it is highly unlikely that this would have been used for the detention barrack. It is much more likely that the detention barrack, which at this time would almost certainly have consisted simply of a group of tents surrounded by a security fence, was constructed adjacent to or in the near vicinity of the guard room. This would make sense, as the cells in the guard room could be used for solitary confinement or as punishment cells.

On 7 December 1941, the date of Japan’s entry into the war and the opening of the war in the Pacific, there were approximately 7300 members of the Australian Military Forces (AMF) in the Northern Territory, mostly located in Darwin, with smaller concentrations at Katherine, Adelaide River and Alice Springs. In February 1942, 7 MD Detention Barrack is noted as located at Adelaide River, a small town about 115 kilometers south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway. The date of the move of the barrack from Larrakeyah Barracks to Adelaide River is not known. The reason for the move is also unknown, although it could have been to free up space at Larrakeyah Barracks or alternatively to remove an administrative headache from an area now directly threatened by the enemy. While pure speculation; both are a reasonable possibility. It is worth noting, for instance, that during the Malayan Campaign in 1942 the AIF Detention Barrack Malaya was first removed from Port Swettenham to Johore Bahru due to the enemy threat and then, when the situation was seen to be desperate, disbanded and the staff and prisoners returned to their units.

On 25 April 1942, Northern Territory Force (NT Force) was raised from the headquarters of the 6th Division, elements of which had been deployed to the NT on their return from the Middle East, and HQ 7 MD. Army units were rotated through northern Australia throughout
the rest of the war, and six infantry brigades (2nd, 3rd, 12th, 13th, 19th and 23rd) served as part of NT Force at different times between 1942 and 1945. NT Force was re-designated 12th Australian Division on 31 December 1942, but resumed its original designation on 15 January 1943. This makes research on NT Force difficult as, confusingly, many of the war diaries held by the AWM for 1943. This makes research on NT Force difficult as, 1942, but resumed its original designation on 15 January 1943. This makes research on NT Force difficult as, confusingly, many of the war diaries held by the AWM for NT Force are labeled 12 Australian Division, which requires a considerable amount of cross-checking.

With the establishment of NT Force in April 1942, 7 MD Detention Barrack, at this stage still located at Adelaide River, became NT Force Detention Barrack. The next month, however, the barrack relocated from Adelaide River to Brocks Creek, a rail siding and mining settlement about 130km southeast of Darwin. It was first reported at this new location on 30 May, 1942. At that time the only Allied unit in the vicinity was a company of the US Army’s 808th Engineer (Aviation) Battalion, which was engaged on road works and departed the area in May.

Brocks Creek is located on the Northern Australia Railway line, which bisects the site of the settlement. The new detention barrack at Brocks Creek, which was established around the existing Brocks Creek Police Station, was located to the north of the railway line and until October 1944 would be the only AMF unit permanently located at Brocks Creek. This is not to suggest that the detention barrack at Brocks Creek was totally isolated. The Northern Territory, from Darwin to the South Australian border was home to an enormous number of army units throughout the war years and military units were located close to Brocks Creek in surrounding areas including Adelaide River, Daly River, Fenton, Grove Hill and Hays Creek.

The township at Brocks Creek, now abandoned and derelict, was established in the 1870s and was at one time a thriving mining community. A police reserve was designated north of Brocks Creek township and the railway line in October 1897. The original Brocks Creek Police Station is believed to have been constructed during June and July 1898 and the station was officially opened in August 1898. It is believed the Brocks Creek station was constructed from material removed from the site of the decommissioned Adelaide River Police Station.

The isolated station was originally staffed by one European constable and one ‘Native’ constable. The station was closed during the First World War years but was re-opened in 1920 with the same staffing levels. It is believed that the old station was dismantled in 1937 and re-erected about 70m northwest of the original site in the same year. The European police officer stationed at Brocks Creek from the mid-1930s was Constable Abbott.

The police station and surrounding land were taken over by the army in February 1942 and the civilian police, including Constable Abbott, moved out. The need for a detention barrack in the era can be seen by information published in Routine Orders of 14 L of C Sub-Area (Adelaide River) which advises that in the previous month the following examples of sentences of detention had been passed:

- Seven months detention for theft of cigarettes and tobacco from the Australian Comforts Fund
- Seven months detention for theft of cigarettes and tobacco from the Australian Comforts Fund
- Three months detention for AWL
- 54 days detention for striking a superior officer.

A new facility for the detention barrack was constructed at Brocks Creek, using the police station as the administration building and orderly room. An inspection by a staff officer from 14 (Adelaide River) L of C Sub-Area in May 1942 noted that at that point in time the detention barrack was the only military unit at Brocks Creek. The report stated that the site was ‘ideal’ and that ‘all prisoners and staff were busily engaged on erections and cleaning up existing buildings.’ The report also notes that the area was served by three bores, which provided ample water for the site.

A barbed wire enclosure divided into three compounds was erected, concrete slabs for floors were laid and a number of Sidney Williams type prefabricated, steel framed, corrugated iron huts erected. A disposal schedule from January 1946 reveals that the barrack included:

- the original police station building
- four Sidney Williams type sleeping huts, 60 feet x 20 feet, steel framed with concrete floor (SUS accommodation)
- one Sidney Williams Type sleeping hut, 60 feet x 20 feet with 10 feet wide verandah on one side, steel framed with concrete floor (SUS mess)
- four solitary confinement cells, 10 feet x 8 feet x 10 feet, concrete floor, timber frame, corrugated iron walls and pitched roof
- one kitchen hut, 18 feet x 18 feet, timber framed, corrugated iron roof and corrugated iron and fly wire sides.

SUS bathing and washing facilities were constructed of bush timber and corrugated iron while SUS latrines consisted of 200l drums set in the ground with bush pole and hessian screens for privacy. The area was harsh, far less salubrious than the coastal region at Darwin, and training and discipline were hard. One former inmate later recalled:

“When I went into Brocks Creek I got some good advice from one of the staff-sergeants, He said: ‘Do everything that they tell you – doesn’t matter how much it annoys you, just do it. That way you won’t get into any trouble!’ I came out of there the fittest I’ve ever been in my life, because you had to run everywhere! You started at daybreak with all your gear on. Can you imagine? In the tropics, with 60 pounds (27kg) on you – even your water bottle was full. You went right through the day, doing fifteen pack drills in the heat.’

This quote highlights an important fact about the army’s detention barracks – they did not exist primarily to punish but rather to rehabilitate. From the very outset the stated aim of the detention barrack was to turn a bad soldier into a good one. To that end, much of the time of an SUS was taken up with normal military training – everything from basic foot drill to the use of machine guns. A SUS carried out a 22-day training syllabus designed to bring him up to the standard of a basically trained soldier at the time of his release.
Soldiers committed to periods of detention up to 28 days only had to go through this syllabus once. However, soldiers committed to longer sentences often found themselves going through the training cycle several times, which inevitably led to boredom. In many detention barracks the training syllabus could be broken up with useful war related manual work. However, this was not the case at Brocks Creek and boredom at the repetitive training must have been a serious burden to the SUS.

All new arrivals at Brocks Creek were committed to Number One Compound, subject to rigid discipline, strict training and the barest of privileges. Good behaviour and diligence were rewarded by promotion to Number Two Compound and then Number Three Compound, where discipline was still strict and training still hard, but where additional small privileges and a slightly less restrictive daily routine were enjoyed. The same inmate recalled: "You could send and receive one letter a week in Number One Compound. In Number Two you could write two letters a week and in Number Three you could write as many as you liked and you got all your mail, except the parcels. You could only collect your parcels when you were released." The regime outlined by the young soldier above was common to all detention barracks. Mail, both outgoing and incoming, was strictly controlled and as the young SUS noted, while inmates could receive parcels, these were held for them unopened until time of release.

As with every other detention barrack in Australia, the facility at Brocks Creek was run in accordance with Australian Military (Places of Detention) Regulations and Standing Orders, published on 30 June 1942. This document had finally codified the administration and management of the army’s places of detention. Instructions applicable to all establishments required the commandant of a detention facility to visit, as far as practicable, the whole detention barrack and see every SUS and soldier in safe custody at least once in every 24 hours (Standing Order [SO] No.9).

SO.28 to 30 dealt with complaints by SUS and included a direction that a SUS had a right to make complaints, was to be provided with opportunity to do so and was to have complaints forwarded to higher authority without delay. Other directions included:

- Staff members were specifically ordered not to strike SUS or soldiers in safe custody except in self defence (SO.58).
- Staff members were not to use tobacco or partake of liquor within the walls of a detention barrack (SO.62).
- Letters written by SUS or soldiers in safe custody were forbidden to contain any reference to detention barrack matters (SO.99).
- The MO was to see, in the course of any given week, every SUS or soldier in safe custody in the barrack (SO.105).
- SUS were not required to work on Christmas Day, Good Friday or on Sundays, except on duties that were absolutely necessary for the running of the barrack, with Jewish soldiers exempted from this ban but not required to work on the Sabbath (Regulation No.13 [R.13]).
- SUS were not required to work unless certified fit to do so by the MO (R.15).

While regulations and orders proscribed the duties and responsibilities of staff and the rights of SUS and soldiers in safe custody, they also closely proscribed the duties, responsibilities and restrictions of these men.

- SUS were forbidden the use or possession of tobacco and alcohol (R.17).
- SUS were not permitted any books or newspapers, except those supplied to the barrack library (SO.150).
- SUS were subject to award of punishment diets for offences committed in the barrack (R.22, 25, 28 and 29).
- SUS and soldiers in safe custody could be placed in mechanical restraints, although only for the safety of the man himself or the staff (R.30).
- SUS and soldiers in safe custody who destroyed their own clothing could be clothed in a suit made of canvas sail cloth (R.34).
- Visit privileges (not really applicable to Brocks Creek) could be withdrawn as result of misconduct on the part of the SUS or of visitors (SO.213-215).
- All mail received by SUS or soldiers in safe custody was to be opened and read by the Commandant and could, if the Commandant so decided, be withheld (SO.221).

Mention was made above of punishments for infractions against the detention barrack regulations, orders and rules. R.21 listed the particular offences as follows:

- Disobeying any lawful order given by the Commandant or any member of the staff.
- Treating with disrespect any member of the staff, visiting officer or any person employed in connection with detention barrack, prison or works.
- Being idle, careless or negligent at work, or refusing to work.
- Being absent without leave from educational training or any parade.
- Behaving irreverently at Divine Service.
- Swearing, cursing or using any abusive, insolent, threatening or other improper language.
- Being indecent in language, act or gesture.
- Conversing without authority or otherwise holding intercourse with another SUS.
- Singing, whistling, or creating any unnecessary noise or disturbance or giving any unnecessary trouble.
- Leaving his room or other appointed place, or his place of work, without permission.
- Willfully damaging or disfiguring any part of the detention barrack or prison, or any Departmental property to which he has access.
- Committing any nuisance.
- Having in his room or possession any article which he is not lawfully entitled to have.
• Giving to or receiving from any other SUS or soldier in
  safe custody, without permission, any article whatever.
• Being inattentive at drill, useful instruction or
  educational training.
• Using or offering violence to a member of the staff or
  to another SUS or soldier in safe custody.
• Escaping or attempting to escape.
• Offending in any way against good order and discipline.

It would have been very hard for a man not to transgress
at some stage or other against at least one of these listed
offences. Vaguely-worded offences such as ‘committing
any nuisance’ and ‘offending in any way against good order
and discipline’ in particular would have been something of
a minefield for the SUS, given that they are very subjective
and open to interpretation by the staff.

On the other hand, examination of various diaries
indicates that punishment for offences against barrack
rules, regulations and orders were the exception, rather
than the rule, suggesting firstly that most men committed
to detention tried to be on their best behaviour in
order to avoid punishment and secondly that most staff
carried out their duties with a sense of fairness and even
understanding.

The new regulations and orders also specified a standard
timetable for every detention barrack, including the NT
Force DB at Brocks Creek, which is shown in Table 1.

This was the routine to be followed by all detention
barracks. Amendments to timings were permitted in order
to meet local circumstances, with the proviso that no
such modification would see a SUS in his cell more than
12 hours out of 24 (SO.222). In addition no alterations
or amendments could be made without the written
permission of the proper authority.

In January 1943 the AMF’s detention facilities were
reorganised and re-titled, the former regional titles giving
way to unit numbers and NT Force Detention Barrack was
now titled 13th Australian Detention Barrack (13 ADB). This
would remain the title of the unit for the rest of its
existence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>SUS</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0600</td>
<td>0630</td>
<td>Dress, fold bedding, sweep and tidy cell.</td>
<td>Day staff parade for duty. Night staff dismiss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0630</td>
<td>0635</td>
<td>Necessary billetmen go to work, remainder prepare for ablutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0635</td>
<td>0700</td>
<td>Night tub parade to yards for sanitary purposes, ablutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0700</td>
<td>0715</td>
<td>Muster, roll call.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0715</td>
<td>0745</td>
<td>Drill and fatigues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0745</td>
<td>0815</td>
<td>Parade for breakfast</td>
<td>Staff except those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0815</td>
<td>0830</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0830</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parade</td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 0745 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour duty parade and dismiss for breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0915</td>
<td></td>
<td>Training ceases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1215</td>
<td>Parade to dinner</td>
<td>Staff except for those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for midday meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>1310</td>
<td>Parade</td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 1215 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour duty dismiss for midday meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cease work</td>
<td>Day duty staff dismiss. Relief staff parade for duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720</td>
<td></td>
<td>Muster, roll call.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Evening meal</td>
<td>Staff except those on meal hour parade dismiss for evening meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff on meal hour parade dismiss for evening meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Reading, writing and general clean up</td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 1730 resume duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lock up</td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 1830 resume duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2045</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lights out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2045</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cell lights switched on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundays and Holidays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0630</td>
<td>0745</td>
<td>Same routine as week days</td>
<td>Staff except those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0830</td>
<td></td>
<td>General unlock; exercise in yards; Divine Service; choir practice, etc Staff on meal hour parade dismiss for breakfast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commandant’s inspection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0915</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 0745 resume duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warning bell, roll call</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td></td>
<td>March to dinner</td>
<td>Staff except those on meal hour duty dismiss for midday meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1310</td>
<td></td>
<td>General unlock; exercise in yards; Divine Service; choir practice, etc Staff dismissed at 1215 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour parade and dismiss for midday meal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff dismissed at 1310 resume duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1715</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warning bell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720</td>
<td>2045</td>
<td>Same routine as weekdays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the most important things to a soldier is food or ‘rations’. This was particularly the case for SUS as their daily food intake was restricted entirely to issued rations, with no chance to supplement the ration in any way. There were constant complaints made during the war by SUS and former-SUS about the quantity and quality of food received. However, the 1943 detention ration scale, outlined below, compared favourably with the standard ration scale, although it was restricted in terms of what might be called ‘luxuries’.

This, with minor alterations at various times, was the ration scale applicable to a SUS at Brocks Creek. While the scale was adequate – barely, bearing in mind the amount of work and training undergone by SUS – the quality of the finished product is unknown. However, as the AMF had begun training cooks properly in 1940 and as the barrack establishment included a Corporal Cook and a Private Cook, both of who were required to be trade qualified and who were responsible for feeding the staff as well as the SUS from the same kitchen, the food was probably at least edible.37

Unlike many of the other detention barracks around Australia, the barrack at Brocks Creek never seems to have established its own vegetable gardens. Elsewhere in Australia such gardens provided a useful and welcome supplement to barrack rations, with excess produce sold and the profits credited to unit funds.38 The SUS and staff at Brocks Creek, however, had to rely solely on what was issued to them from the army’s supply depots and ration stores.

By early 1943, the number of military detention facilities and SUS had become so large that the management of the system had become beyond the capacity of the Provost Corps to manage. As a consequence, in May 1943 the Directorate of Military Prisons and Detention Barracks (DMP&DB) was raised in Army Headquarters, totally separate from the office of the Provost Marshal, and assumed responsibility for the management of all detention barracks and guard compounds from the Australian Army Provost Corps.39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Standard Ration Scale</th>
<th>Detention Ration Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ounces per man per day</td>
<td>Ounces per man per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>¼</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa</td>
<td></td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheatmeal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curry powder</td>
<td>1/56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard</td>
<td>1/100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>1/100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>1 ¾</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suet</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>¼</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit, dried</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh meat</td>
<td>13 5/7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baking powder</td>
<td>1/28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam</td>
<td>1 ¼</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden syrup</td>
<td>½</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables, fresh</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried blue peas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit, fresh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2/7 pieces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Comparison of Standard and Detention Rations Scales 1943. Source: Reed Report

Serving personnel who were considered suitable for continued service with detention facilities were retained and the balance were returned to the Provost Corps for re-assignment and replaced by volunteers. At this point, 13 ADB, which had been under command of HQ 14A L of C Sub-Area (Katherine), which had been raised in May 1942 to control 14 L of C Sub-Area units from Adelaide River south to Larrimah-Birdum, passed under command of HQ 14 L of C Sub-Area (Adelaide River).

In October 1944 the 77th Bulk Issue Petrol and Oil Depot (BIPOD) Platoon was established on the southern side of the railway line, directly opposite the detention barrack.40 There is some suggestion that the staff quarters erected for the BIPOD personnel were shared by the detention barrack staff.41 By the time that the BIPOD was established, however, 13 ADB had been operating at Brocks Creek for over two years and was a fully established facility, so it is unlikely that staff would have moved into shared quarters with the BIPOD personnel.
Medical support for the barrack was provided by an Australian Army Medical Corps medical orderly on attachment, who was supplemented by the medical officer from the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) at the ‘DMR Camp’ at Hayes Creek; this officer visited Brocks Creek on a regular basis.\footnote{42}

Although originally established to hold 75 men in detention, a report of 14 L of C Sub-Area dated 15 April 1943 notes that on that date 13 ADB had a staff of 18 and held 101 SUS and SUA.\footnote{43} While SUA were not normally supposed to be held in detention barracks, regulations allowed for this if the situation required it, with the strict provisos that SUA were not, under any circumstances, to mix with SUS, SUA were not to drill with SUS and SUA were not to be employed on prison labour.

Very little is actually known about 13 ADB as no diary has been located for the unit. Entries in various other records, however, confirm that men did escape from the barrack despite its isolation and the rugged and inhospitable nature of the surrounding terrain. On the night of 13 August 1943 Gunner HJ Donovan, SUS, escaped from the barrack “during enemy air activity in vicinity of Barracks”.\footnote{44} Two further escapes occurred on the night of 16–17 August, this time an airman and a sailor. Aircraftsman Yelland of the RAAF and Ordinary Seaman McKenzie of the RAN escaped sometime during the night, their absence not being noted until am on the morning of 17 August 1943.\footnote{45}

That was a bad day for 13 ADB. Following on from the discovery of the escape, staff members Sergeant Starr and Acting Sergeant Lawry were suspended from duty for supplying tobacco to SUS.\footnote{46}

Despite the escapes, on 20 August, HQ NT Force approved the employment of SUS from 13 ADB outside the barrack on loading and unloading of stores.\footnote{47} Also, despite the escapes and the suspension of two staff members, on 20 September 1943 the CO of 14 L of C Sub-Area, in his capacity as Visiting Officer for 13 ADB, stated that the conduct of the barrack was ‘satisfactory’.\footnote{48}

On 14 August 1944 the Officer Commanding 13 ADB, Lieutenant Black, faced a General Court Martial (GCM) at Adelaide River. The charges were AWL from 22 July to 1 August 1944 and “conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline” (unauthorised air travel from RAAF Fenton to Adelaide). Found guilty of both charges, Black was fined 10 pounds, awarded six months’ loss of seniority and was immediately transferred to New South Wales for service with 15 ADB at North Tamworth.\footnote{49}

Black faced a second GCM in Sydney in March 1945 on one charge of forgery and six charges of conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. He was found not guilty and continued to serve at 15 ADB and then 2nd Australian Guard Compound (2 AGC) in Sydney. However, he once again faced a GCM in May 1945, this time for fraud. Although he was found not guilty of all charges, the Army had had enough of him and his commission was cancelled on 4 June 1945.\footnote{50}

The war diary of the 2/10th Port Operation Company records that while the unit was en route by train from Adelaide River to Queensland in October 1944, the train was stopped and searched at Pine Creek by military police who were looking, unsuccessfully, for escapees from Brocks Creek.\footnote{51}

Orders for the disbanding of 13 ADB were issued by LHQ on 17 September 1945 in LHQ DORG SM8047. Personnel of the unit were to be either discharged if eligible or transferred to South Australia L of C Area for reposting to other detention barracks in Australia.\footnote{52} SUS who had still to serve out their sentences were ordered to be transferred to 9 ADB in Adelaide.\footnote{53} The disbandment of 13 ADB had been completed by 25 October 1945.\footnote{54}

A barrack detention room at Larrakeyah Barracks was ordered to be raised in place of the disbanded detention barrack. Instructions for the raising of this unit, with an establishment of one warrant officer class two, one staff-sergeant (CQMS), two sergeants, three corporals and three privates (one cook, one general dutyman and one driver) were issued on 6 October 1945.\footnote{55} Examination of war diaries of NT Force for the period September 1945 to February 1946, however, indicates that the unit was never actually raised.

As a footnote, the Brocks Creek Police Station re-opened in 1946 and remained in service until 1953, when the station finally closed.\footnote{56} The police station building, and possibly other buildings on the site, was purchased by the Byrne family, who controlled the pastoral lease encompassing Brocks Creek. The old police station was dismantled and removed to Tipperary Station.\footnote{57}

Conclusion

It needs to be noted that most men committed to undergo sentences of military detention during World War II were not desperate or hardened criminals. Indeed, the main crime for which men were sentenced was absence without leave (AWL). However, it needs also to be noted that many SUS at their time of their committal were either recidivists with many prior convictions for AWL on their record, or were men who had been absent for considerable periods of times, in some cases several years.

Having said this, some might consider the recording of the doings of a military detention facility as improper, possibly casting aspersions on the ‘good name’ of the Australian Army. However, the tendency to ignore the ‘seamier’ side of Australian military history forces upon us a sanitised and totally unbalanced account. Secondly, while it is tempting to suggest that the simple solution to military crime is to just discharge offenders and figuratively wipe the army’s hands of them, during a time of total war when every soldier is needed, this is not in any way a really viable solution. Finally, each man enlisted into the Australian forces during World War II, whether voluntarily or compulsorily, swore an oath to faithfully serve Australia and by committing a military offence broke this oath.

On balance, the army’s network of detention barracks was a necessary part of the war effort. The fact that a detention barrack was maintained in the Northern Territory from July 1941 to October 1945 probably comes as something of a surprise to most readers. Even more obscure is probably the existence of crumbling ruins at Brocks Creek, the remnants of the 13th Australian Detention Barrack, which had existed there from February 1942 until October 1945.
Afterword – 13 ADB Today

The remnants of 13 ADB, in the form of concrete floor surfaces in various locations within the rusted remnants of a barbed wire fence, 155m x 175m square, still remain at the site. In 1982 a rusted iron ring was discovered set into one of the small concrete surfaces, suggesting that this was the site of a punishment cell. It is something of a tragedy that the remnants of 13 ADB are located in such a remote part of such a harsh environment, as they represent the only extant remnants of a purpose built World War II Australian Army detention barracks.

During the war the army used all or part of civil prisons at Tamworth and Albury in New South Wales; Bendigo, Geelong and Melbourne in Victoria; Gladstone and Adelaide in South Australia; and Fremantle in Western Australia as detention barracks, and 10 ADB was located in Franklin Barracks at Portsea. The remaining detention barracks, at Grovely, Warwick and Charters Towers in Queensland; Holsworthy, Orange, West Tamworth, Malabar and Miranda in New South Wales; Puckapunyal in Victoria; Conara in Tasmania; and Brocks Creek in the Northern Territory were all purpose built ‘cages’. Of those ‘cages’, the only one of which any remnant is known to remain is at Brocks Creek.

While the Brocks Creek military precinct is included on the NT Heritage Register, nothing has been done to preserve the site and inevitably it will finally decay away to nothing unless something is done to preserve it.

All too often here in Australia, ‘military history’ concentrates exclusively on the ‘good’, such as the brave Anzacs fearlessly storming the beaches at Gallipoli, while totally ignoring the ‘bad’. For example, an average of 325 members of the AIF listed as deserters in any given month in the UK between 1916 and 1919. This gives a very lopsided view of Australian military history and really should be corrected.

In an attempt to address this ‘lopsidedness’, this chapter discusses a little-known and obscure aspect of the Northern Territory’s World War II military history – the Army’s military detention facility at Brocks Creek.

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AWM52 1/1/3/1 War Diary, Adjutant General Branch, December 1941, Part 1
AWM52 1/5/27/1 War Diary, 12 Australian Division General Staff Branch Northern Territory Force, April – May 1942
AWM52 1/5/27/30 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, November 1944
AWM52 1/7/46/5 War Diary, 7 Military District, February 1942
AWM52 1/8/46/1 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Lines of Communications Sub-Area, March – June 1942
AWM52 1/8/46/9 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Line of Communications Sub-Area, July – August 1943
AWM52 1/8/46/10 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Line of Communications Sub-Area, September 1943
AWM52 1/8/47/5 War Diary, 14a Line of Communications Sub-Area, April – June 1943
AWM52 1/5/28/7 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, September – October 1945
AWM52 1/5/28/8 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, November – December 1945
AWM52 5/52/4 War Diary, 2/10 Port Operation Company, Jun 1944 – Dec 1945

Notes

1. ‘Servicemen’ includes members of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) who were committed to army detention barracks under an inter-service agreement; inmates from the RAN and RAAF were referred to as SUS and treated

Graham Wilson served 26 years in the Australian Regular Army, followed by five years as a civilian intelligence officer in the Department of Defence, then 10 years with the Defence Department’s Directorate of Honours and Awards. He retired from the Public Service in February 2011 and now works as a full-time military historian.

Graham is active in a number of historical and militaria societies and is a prolific author of historical articles; he has been published in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA and has received a number of awards for military history writing.

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in all respects the same as soldiers, with the single exception that the parent service had the right to order a man’s without reference to army authority. Foreign service personnel—Dutch, British, Canadian, American—as well as Allied merchant seamen and enemy POW (who committed offences against Australian military law) were also committed to AMF detention facilities. Interestingly, no Australian servicewoman was ever committed to undergo a sentence of detention during the war—members of the female services who transgressed (a surprising number) were quietly discharged for administrative reasons rather than being punished.

2. At lower command levels, i.e. Army (e.g. First Australian Army), Corps and Division, organic detention facilities were also operated and these remained under the control of the military police.

3. As an example, in the 12 month period June 1944 – June 1945, SUS at 7 ADB, Bendigo, carried out the following work:
   - 53,930 pairs of boots reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD for re-issue
   - 24,110 pairs of irreparable boots stripped, cleaned and sent to Salvage
   - 90,470 haversacks repaired or reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD for re-issue
   - 8700 irreparable haversacks stripped, cleaned and sent to Salvage
   - 2950 paillasses repaired and reconditioned
   - 136 protective aprons manufactured for use of SUS and staff in 7 ADB
   - 869 hurricane lamps repaired and reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD
   - 285 coils of rope sorted and rewound
   - 3199 American kit-bag ropes sorted and returned to 4 BOD
   - 50 finger-stall manufactured for the 7 ADB RAP.

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. ‘Case Study: Arthur Kennedy 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery’.
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15. 1st Australian Guard Compound (1 AGC), Royal Park, Victoria; 2 AGC, Randwick, New South Wales; 3 AGC, Warwick, Queensland; 4 AGC, Old Melbourne Gaol, Victoria; 5 AGC, Kissing Point, Townsville, Queensland; 6 AGC, Paddington, New South Wales (Cell Block, Victoria Barracks).
17. NAA E1008 DEF23236 Larrakeyah Barracks, Darwin – AHQ 111/38-39A.
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21. Ibid.
23. AWMS 1/8/46/1 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Lines of Communications Sub-Area, March – June 1942.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. NAA E325 NL67 Brocks Creek Detention Barracks.
29. Ibid.
31. Alford, Pilot Study.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
37. War Establishment WE IV/119A/1 ‘A Detention Barrack Type “A”’. Such money was used to purchase books, magazines and newspapers for barrack libraries and for the procurement of luxury food items for holiday meals, e.g. Christmas Dinner.
38. GRO Administration A.384.
39. AWMS 1/5/27/30 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, November 1944.
40. NAA E325 NL67 Brocks Creek Detention Barracks.
41. AWMS 1/8/46/1 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Line of Communications Sub-Area, March – June 1942.
42. AWMS 1/8/47/5 War Diary, 14a Line of Communications Sub-Area, April – June 1943.
43. AWMS 1/8/46/9 War Diary, 14 (Adelaide River) Line of Communications Sub-Area, July – August 1943.
44. Ibid.
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47. Ibid.
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50. Ibid.
52. AWMS 1/5/28/7 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, September – October 1945.
53. Ibid.
54. AWMS 1/5/28/8 War Diary, 12 Australian Division Adjutant General Branch Northern Territory Force, November – December 1945.
55. Alford, Pilot Study.
58. Ibid.
The Territory Remembers

Life in a Burnett House

By Wendy James

Clive James said in a recent interview that "children always exaggerate" referring to his first book Unreliable Memoirs. This could be true, but I believe that early memories can be an accurate recollection of childhood events. Some people have short memories, in my case I am plagued or blessed by memories from my childhood that my mother assured me only she and I knew. Whether or not they are exaggerated I leave to you.

My recollections are based on a remarkable period of our family's life, embellished by a few historical facts and social changes in post-war Darwin.

First a little about the Burnett houses in Darwin. Beni Burnett was an acclaimed architect who designed gracious, functional tropical homes in Darwin and Alice Springs in the 1930s and 1940s.

My father, a building Supervisor with Works and Housing in 1937, worked on a number of Burnett designed houses prior to the outbreak of war. Dad admired his work and they became friends.

The house we lived in was built in 1940. It was a Type Q Residence, a variation of the Type K design which is now the well-known Heritage building of Burnett House. It was situated on Lot 1292 number 124 McKay Street, now Mitchell Street, and I thank François Barr and the NT Archives for finding these details for me. Unfortunately the house simply disappeared after Cyclone Tracy and a block of flats stands in its place.

To put the post war years into perspective I need to tell you a little about my family and where we lived before 1945.

I was born in Armidale in WA in 1935. My brother John was 14 months older than me, so close in age we grew up like twins.

It was the end of the 1930s great depression. We moved constantly to find work, and lived for several months on the Mundaring Dam site in a timber hut.

My parents then optimistically opened a pie shop in Pemberton in the forest area. My Dad was no cook and one of my earliest memories is of him with a tea towel wrapped around his skinny waist, covered in flour trying to make pastry. Fortunately my mother made great pies.

In 1937 he was offered a job in Darwin with the NT Government Works and Housing. He travelled by flying boat and sent for the family to join him. This was the first of many sea voyages for us up and down the WA coast.

We had no permanent home for quite a while and lived in three temporary houses. The first was in Smith Street, two doors from the Victoria Hotel. It was a sprawling ground level place with slatted bamboo walls.

We moved from there to one of three cottages in Smith Street where Spillet House now stands. The third was a house on piers with a lovely garden.

The big attraction to John and me was Frank the Aboriginal gardener, who wore a naga, a stick through his nose and
spoke pidgin English. John tried to push a stick through his own nose once much to Frank’s delight.

We finally moved into a house that became our home for the next three years. A small white building with slatted timber walls, a wood stove, an icebox, a well and a backyard lavatory. It was next door to my father’s office, not far from the railway station and the wharf, tucked under the hill where the Marina View office building now stands. At night we could hear clap sticks, didgeridoos and singing that lasted for hours.

These were peaceful settled years. A baby sister, Lorilee, was born in the hospital overlooking Doctor’s Gully, and John and I started school. My parents loved Darwin and decided never to leave.

Evacuation from Darwin

These plans came to an abrupt end when the war became a reality and an attack on Darwin was imminent. In December 1941 the Australian War Cabinet ordered that all women and children be evacuated south. Protests were useless so our angry and stressed mother hurried us down the wharf to the waiting ship with a string bag each and the baby in the pusher. Approximately 1000 women and 900 children were sent south by sea, road, rail and air, some to unknown destinations. Some never returned.

My father was co-opted into the Civil Construction Corp by the army. In 1942 the northern part of the Territory was placed under military control. He worked with them for four exhausting years supervising the construction of Army camps, infrastructure for airfields and camps for the work forces building the Stuart Highway.

On 19 February he was near the wharf and saw waves of Japanese aircraft fly in and drop their bombs on the harbour and town. He narrowly missed being killed that day and on a number of other occasions.

My mother Poppy with three young children found life as a refugee in West Australia unbearable. With little money and few possessions we moved from backrooms, verandahs, even an empty butcher shop. Every move meant a different school for John and me.

Eventually we were offered rooms in Bunbury and it was there that my mother made her audacious plan to return to Darwin. How she did it I never knew but John and I were bundled into boarding schools and she flew to Alice Springs with Lorilee.

Dad managed to smuggle them through Army Security posts to as far as Dunmara Station where they were stopped. The Station owner signed Mum on as a housekeeper and Dad was able to call in on his work trips. A year later we were sent for and arrived in Alice Springs to discover we had twin baby brothers, Robert and Peter, born in the Army Base Hospital.

Post War Darwin

On 15 August 1945 peace was declared. Everyone in Alice Springs went crazy with excitement. My father arrived in a ute in early October and drove John and me to Darwin. It was a fairly silent journey as he didn’t know how to talk to us.

He took us to a two-storied house and told us this was where we were all going to live. John and I rushed around investigating. It was a mess; the staircase was dangerous as most of the steps had been eaten by white ants. We managed to climb upstairs by edging up the side holding onto the balustrade. Upstairs the heavy push-out shutter windows were closed but between us we managed to prop one up and looked out at the bush and spear grass growing beside the house.

I was six when we were evacuated from Darwin and ten years old when we returned. My mother arrived by plane with the younger children. Dad had managed to get Army iron-framed beds and coconut coir mattresses along with the essential mosquito nets. He also arranged for a double sized flywired cot for the twins.

This was our introduction to the house that became our first real home since we left Darwin so abruptly four years earlier.

Beni Burnett must have designed this house with a family like ours in mind. I have no proof but I suspect that my father, knowing this house, would have asked the authorities to let him have it as soon as peace was declared. Fortunately they did.

The Secrett family was among the first six families to return to post war Darwin. My mother’s determination to return had been an unstoppable driving force.

Many families would have returned to Darwin sooner but civilians were not officially allowed back until 1946 when full civil Administration was resumed.

The two storied house was designed with a spacious spread of rooms with cross ventilation and high ceilings. Downstairs a wide front verandah with square patterned pillars opened into the lounge room. The doors and windows had their original glass with asbestos louvers under them. The kitchen was situated at the back of the building behind the staircase. There was also a pantry, a dining alcove and an open air laundry.

The bathroom was upstairs. The main bedroom was at the back corner of the building. It had outstanding ventilation; the outside walls were simple timber frames covered in flywire with canvas drop blinds to keep out the rain, and the room had an adjacent sitting room. Two bedrooms were off each side of the passageway which led to a verandah with windows and louvers across the front.

The laundry was underneath the main bedroom and open to the elements. It consisted of a wood-fired copper, a wood box, and two concrete sinks. As the oldest girl this was my introduction to the two-day process of washing the family laundry for many years. My Dad strung wires between the shed and two stringy bark trees, and cut two props from the bush to push up the clothes lines.

I was delighted when I saw the original house plans recently and discovered that my memory of the layout of the house was as I remembered. In the backyard there was a long shed. A jagged hole had been blown out of the side wall and two messages scrawled on the inside said “Tojo’s near miss” and “Foo was here”. John and I knew a lot about Tojo, but who was Foo? In fact in the coming months we found that Foo had been all over Darwin.
The lavatory was a “Flaming Fury” bequeathed to us by the army. The other unusual feature about our backyard was the huge, grey, town water supply tank in the corner. It still stands there and is a constant reminder to me about the years we lived underneath its shadow, played in the overflow tank, and caught small fishes as they gushed out. John and I used to climb the ladder to the top and peer in until a locked cover defeated us.

Our first job was to make the house livable. Like all civilian houses it had been appropriated by the army for the duration of the war. We were lucky: no serious damage had been inflicted on it as was the case for many home owners who, on their return, were shattered to find their homes wrecked or burnt to the ground by careless servicemen.

The kitchen was large with a wood stove, work bench and dresser and something new to us, a kerosene refrigerator. The walk-in pantry was near the dining alcove that had a fixed table and long seats that opened up for storage. The seats, like the dark pantry and cupboards were crawling with huge brown cockroaches that when disturbed, rushed out and ran over us as we scattered and yelled with fright.

The small quantity of household goods we owned arrived from Alice Springs by truck but made little difference to the empty spaces. Dad’s contribution was an old ceramic electric jug, an enamel teapot and six pannikins. He always rose early, and our daily family ritual was a hot cup of tea shared around the kitchen table as the sun came up.

A few weeks after we arrived a letter sent from the Government stating that civilians who had lost property due to the war could go to the Railway Bond Store near the wharf and purchase furniture and goods with the enclosed Compensation cheque. The furniture for sale had been salvaged from homes when the Army left town. Apart from being outraged that she had to buy back furniture, my mother made sure she was one of the first there when the doors of the Bond Store swung open.

She selected four lounge chairs, a rose-coloured carpet, a double bed, a cane lounge and a tall glass fronted cabinet. It was as if they were made for the house and as it turned out this was true. A few days later a woman came to the door and asked if she could see what Mum had bought, and said, “I used to live here and this was all mine before we were evacuated.” She did not want it back just wanted to see it again.

Darwin was still under military control. Thousands of servicemen and women were waiting to join the great convoys of trucks travelling south to be demobilised. They wanted to leave the heat and the corrugated iron Sydney Williams Huts.

Slowly camp after camp began to empty and John and I jumped on our bikes to explore the deserted buildings. It was strange to ride through the empty huts, looking for treasures but apart from the odd rude poster and empty toothpaste tubes, they had been stripped bare.

We rode on and explored what was left of Darwin: bomb wrecked buildings and the remains of sunken ships in the harbour. We looked for China Town in the street we used to walk to from our house before the war but it had disappeared.

One of the last army officers to leave was the Town Major who banged on our door in the middle of the night and gave Dad a hessian bag that held a porthole. It had been blasted off the SS Neptuna when the ship, moored beside the wharf, exploded when it was bombed. He entrusted it to us to ensure it remained in Darwin. It eventually became our coffee table.

In those early days there were no shops and my mother and I walked to the Army Stores in Larrakeyah to buy food using our ration books. We then had to stagger home with our bags, often accompanied by wolf whistles from men in trucks and once by some Japanese prisoners.

Our parents began to enjoy a very social life, and were invited to various Officers’ Messes and to many parties and functions. In return they hosted dinners and parties for the people they met. In fact for them it was a time to enjoy life together. The era of cocktail parties had begun.

One morning a truck pulled up at the front door loaded with pianos. Two young soldiers asked if we wanted one so my mother, who could play, selected one and was then told that the rest would be dumped and graded in at East Point.

The weeks went by and food supplies became easier to buy although still with our ration books. Quong’s Bakery opened in Smith Street. Cashman’s opened a shop underneath their house, Burnett’s Newsagent opened in town. Haritos and Harry Chan’s grocery shops soon followed, and Lorna Lim and Sons’ cafe and tailor shop opened in Smith Street.
It was the beginning of a civilian way of life and the people who returned to Darwin renewed their friendships and made many more. It was like a close knit family where everyone knew each other and were overjoyed to be back. Many families who returned moved into the vacated Sydney Williams huts that became thriving communities, which in turn became the backbone of the population that stabilised the regrowth of our wonderful, tropical town.

Repairs to our house were slow. The stairs were in a dangerous state for months. We all learnt to jump the white ant-damaged steps to arrive safely on the landing then negotiate the rest to the top floor. Coming down was easier as we jumped most of them. This was especially difficult when carrying one of the twins. The telephone was on a table on the landing and often ended up on the floor. The telephone (number 213) was especially loved by our mother who spent hours chatting with friends.

One night we were woken by a deep unearthly rumbling sound, the house was shaking, plates fell, curtains crashed to the floor, the red lights on the water tower were swaying. When a wave of water splashed into our parents’ room we grabbed the smaller children and ran outside. It was our first experience of an earth tremor.

My mother decided she needed some help in the house so Dad applied for a Licence to Employ an Aboriginal in a Country District. The pay was ten bob a week, three meals a day. Aboriginal in a Country

District. The pay was ten bob a week, three meals a day.

At play on the wreck of a Catalina Flying Boat (James family)

The leader and I was his mate. Finally the Catholic Church opened a classroom in one of the army huts behind the church and a motley bunch of children of all ages and shades fell under the strict and watchful eyes of the Nuns. Our freedom had ended. The Darwin Primary School opened in August 1946. Like John and I, many of the children had years of broken schooling. By then we had been to eight schools. Lorilee started school when she turned six.

We three Secretts walked the long trek through the bush and up Smith Street into Cavanagh Street to school with our lunches. Every morning we would salute the flag; swear loyalty to the King, do PE exercises and march into the classroom. After school we walked home again, whatever the weather.

The government turned some cattle trucks into school buses. They were covered in arc mesh and had wooden seats down each side. A policeman balanced on the back step to stop us falling out. In the Wet the trucks were covered with tarps which kept us dry but we nearly fainted with the heat.

The benevolent Carnegie Library sent a box of books to our school along with a borrowing list. I chose Tutenkamen’s Tomb. My life changed with access to these books and reading has been my education and passion ever since.

Food not available locally came by ship from WA and Eastern States. Sometimes the wharves would go on strike. If it went on too long, the ship’s captains would pull up anchor and leave with the precious cargo on board. We built a chook yard for food and eggs, and kept ducks for Easter and money, every thing was gambled including false teeth, crutches and trousers. Lucy turned out to be a gem in the house and fortunately for them the staircase was repaired.

No schools opened for many months, so John and I continued our forays on our bikes. I could straighten a buckled wheel in the fork of a tree in the back yard and mended countless punctures. We found an ammunition dump and learnt how to tap 303 bullets to remove the cordite. We climbed the rusty ladder of the huge concrete water tank at Vestey’s Meatworks and swam in the dark green water. We swam in the damaged harbour salt water swimming pool, played Tarzan on vines on the cliffs above Mindil Beach, and had many adventures that would have turned our parents grey if they had known. John was
Christmas dinners. We had a big vegetable garden, a dozen paw paw trees and bananas. An aggressive Rhode Island Red rooster ruled the chook house and us and was the only thing I think my brother John was afraid of.

On Saturday mornings Mr Verberg would drive into town with his truck filled with fresh vegetables from his gardens in Adelaide River. You had to be early to get the best. Saturday mornings meant housecleaning chores for all the family. Everyone had a job even the twins. Clothes were soaked in the copper overnight to wash next morning. When these chores were done, we would sometimes be allowed to go to the semi-open air Star Picture Theatre in the evening. Boys and girls up to the age of 12 were segregated and had to sit on hard benches in two so-called boxes at the back of the theatre, and were strictly monitored by a stern-looking lady with a torch.

When it was our turn to light the Flaming Fury in the back yard, a runner would be sent to the neighbours to let them know we would have to use their lavatory until ours cooled down. This was a reciprocal arrangement which suited everyone. Our father would set the half 24 gallon drum on fire hot enough to incinerate the contents to smoldering ash. It would burn for two days giving off an unmistakable smell then it would take a day or so to cool down enough to replace the seat and be in action again.

One day a miracle happened.

A shiny white porcelain lavatory was installed in the small room that had been designed for it and was connected to the new sewerage system. The Flaming Fury became a tool shed, but that faint familiar smell lingered for years.

The aftermath of war was continually with us. I was home the day my Dad arrived shaken and grey with shock. He along with other men had welcomed the first ship carrying Australian ex-prisoners of war from Singapore who had been held in Japanese prisoner of war camps, and he wept as he told us they were like walking skeletons and barely alive.

Our family and friends used to go bush to look for war relics, particularly crashed aircraft which had a strange fascination for us. Camouflage was everywhere covering hundreds of miles of abandoned defense installations. The Anti Submarine Boom net that stretched across the harbour was removed and we all went to the foreshore see the mass of tangled steel rope and bouys that had kept it in place.

The house was not flywired except for our parents’ bedroom. Bush and long grass was everywhere and on hot steamy nights the flying ants and lavender bugs would invade in clouds. The lights would be turned off but next morning great piles of wings would float about as we swept up them crunching the potent smelling black lavender bugs under our feet.

Medical services were basic and accessed by our family only if a temperature lasted more than three days. My Dad suffered recurring bouts of Denghue Fever and would regularly turn yellow with the fever that would send his temperature soaring for a few days.

My mother had a simplistic approach to the good health of her family. Once a month on Saturday mornings the entire family was made to drink warm Epsom Salts with a slice of lemon afterwards. Every cut, scratch or graze was treated with Zambuk and sticking plaster, a miracle cure for infections. Boil poultices were made with soap and sugar. Diarrhea was a common problem and treated with drops of Chlorodyne which contained Opium and was later banned.

The source of our good health was mother’s wonderful cooking. She could work miracles with tough scraggy beef, and an occasional wild goose or fish that would be dropped in by well wishers. The main evening meal was meat or fish always with vegetables, and on special occasions tinned fruit and custard for dessert. It was a time when the family talked and shared the day’s events with each other around the table.

I was in hospital with bronchitis when a young boy was brought in with severe burns to his back. He had hitched a ride in the wheel housing of a DC3 and survived the flight from Kupang in Timor to Darwin where he was found. His name was Bas Wei.

Our home welcomed many people including a group of Dutch women refugees escaping the post-war conflict in Indonesia. My mother was always bringing someone home for a drink or meal who seemed lost and lonely in this amazing tropical town. Dr Clyde Fenton often dropped in for lunch. Our doors were never locked which was usual for Darwin in those days.

The croc and buffalo shooters left town, the market for skins was over, more shops opened, the hotels were back in business, banks were repaired and the nine-hole Fannie Bay Golf Course was opened by volunteers led by Tom
It seemed everyone joined, the Club House was the place for socialising, almost eclipsing the Darwin Club in town with its segregated ladies' lounge and men-only bar. Our parents surprised us when they bought the first family car: a splendid 1937 Kreisler Tourer they called Florence, with a canvas hood. It was temperamental and had to be cranked furiously to start the motor. We thought it was wonderful.

My happiest year at school was grade seven. The girls in the class became friends. Some are still here. Some were temporary friends who left after two years when their parents two-year term in the public service ended. I was no scholar and I envied the Chinese students who were always dux of the class.

Those who could afford it sent their children to boarding school. Others like us started work or training. When I was 15 my mother arranged for me to start work at the Government Dental Clinic which was attached to the hospital. My long black plaits were cut off with the kitchen scissors. I walked to work and was issued a white uniform. My pay was the handsome sum of two pounds, four and sixpence a week. I loved the work, and was the only one available to travel outside Darwin to work with the Mobile Dental Clinic in remote towns and the Channel Island Leper colony.

When John finished school he went to work with the Weather Bureau at the RAAF Base. He was keen to progress and meteorology became his career. He and I were sent off to dancing lessons. Our teachers, Keith and Eileen Kemp, lived on the second floor of the abandoned Vestey's Meat works. Thankfully they persevered with us and did a good job. The only time they shouted at us was when we waltzed too close to the old meat works carcass chute, a slope that would have shot us down to the ground floor.

John got his driver’s license at 16 and I have never understood how we survived the near misses and breakdowns in that old car. We took Lorilee and the twins with us over the dirt tracks to Howard Springs and Berry Springs. We had picnics at Nightcliff Beach and changed in the gun emplacements. The beaches still had metal stakes and barbed wire in the sand. We went mud crabbing in the tidal creeks and once almost drowned when the tide came in.

Ours was a large close knit family. I grew up happily caring for my brothers and sisters and never felt the need to find a best friend: my family was my life, reading was a passion. My little sister Lorilee was a quiet, self contained little girl five years younger than me who, for a while had been like an only child. We at last began to know each other. The twins, Robert and Peter, were five years younger than Lorilee, and were a handful, a cheeky pair of lovable little boys who always backed each other up.

When they turned five a new addition to the family arrived two days before Christmas day 1949: a beautiful baby girl named Holly, who was loved and spoiled by us all from the moment we saw her.

My brother often included me in outings with his mates playing tennis, and fishing for moonfish over the sunken wrecks in the harbour. He was my chaperone when we went to the Hotel Darwin and danced to Norm Yeend’s band. I learnt to play billiards with the boys at the Uniting Church recreation room until I was told by the Minister that nice girls did not play the game and was sent home. I was 16 when I made my debut in my first long dress. It was a wonderful night.

Our parents took us to parties with them. Tom and Heather Harris’s parties were the best. I met Darwin’s Devil Doone, the legendary Carl Atkinson, a giant of a man, a magnet for women, an adventurer and deep sea diver who salvaged jeeps from the sunken ships. The same night, under my mother’s watchful eye, I chatted with a handsome young man with sparkling eyes and black hair called Ted Egan.

My father had worked in the Northern Territory for 15 years, 11 with the Government and four during the war with the Civil Construction Corps. After the war Darwin fell into a state of financial shambles for about five years. The Federal Government went through an ambitious stage of planning a dream city of the North but the money was not forthcoming to make it a reality. The New Town Plans became a joke and the final straw was when they decided Elliot should become the capital of the Territory. There was a lot of uncertainty about lease tenure, local businesses were not confident enough to invest in the future and banks were reluctant to give credit.

Our father made the decision to resign from the Government and accepted a position with a private contracting company. The family moved out of the Beni Burnett house in McKay Street. This is one of the few events that I cannot remember. Looking back over the seven years our family had lived in this wonderful
accommodating house I realise what a positive role it had played in our lives.

Our parents were in their early thirties when our fractured family was reunited in 1945. They had a deep and loving bond with each other that had survived the trauma of war and separation.

Our beautiful and vivacious mother had been strong and resourceful during those years and shielded us from many harsh realities. Our father had been consumed by his responsibilities during the war and isolated from family life and his children.

As a family we all had to learn how to live with each other and grow together as a unit. The house that became our much loved home was the perfect environment for this to happen. Between them our parents nurtured and loved us and imbued us with their combined imprint of values which gave us strong guidelines to live by even if we were not aware of it.

Resilience, kindness, tolerance, honesty, a strong work ethic, loyalty, courage, respect for others and above all the importance of family love. A booklet written in the 60s called Darwin is a way of Life aptly describes the free and easy lifestyle of those days and I quote:

“This is probably the friendliest city in the Commonwealth. The people are tolerant of almost any human foible. Tolerance, in fact, is an unconscious tradition with them. It has been a habit of mind for so long that only visitors find it unusual.”

Thank you for coming on this journey with me. My main problem when writing this was what to leave out.

Notes

1. Ed: a naga is a loincloth worn by many Territory aboriginals before they adopted modern clothing post-WWII.
2. Ed: raids and other incursions continued until mid-1944. The final attack was on areas south of Darwin in November 1943.
3. Ed: “Foo” was a popular cartoon graffiti of WWII, showing a face peering over a wall.
4. Ed: Chinatown was located inbetween the town and harbour on the hill sloping down towards the town wharves. It consisted of “shanties” in the main – haphazard accommodation built out of all sorts of materials, and some tented areas. In the air raids which devastated Darwin, beginning on 19 February 1942 and lasting until the end of 1943, Chinatown suffered badly, with wrecked areas being eventually bulldozed.
5. Ed: that is, a billy can full of dry tea leaves, and as Wendy advises, a ration of nikki nikki, a hard stick tobacco used and enjoyed by aboriginal people. Origins unsure but a strong mixture. Standard issue for aboriginal people then when employed by Europeans in town and cattle stations.
6. Ed: The Royal Flying Doctor Service was founded by the Reverend John Flynn, but had a policy of doctors not flying themselves. Fenton was their first doctor who had his own pilot’s licence. He served in the RAAF in WWII. One of the planes he flew, a Gipsy Moth, is on display at the Fenton Hangar at the Katherine Historical Society Precinct.
7. Ed: later to become a well-known singer, teller of Territory tales, and an Administrator of the Northern Territory.
8. Ed: Elliot is many hundreds of kilometres south of Darwin. The settled areas of the NT were linked by the embryonic Stuart Highway, but the only area which contained lengthy airstrips, fuel depots, and the infrastructure of government were in those days Alice Springs – 1400 kilometres from the capital – and Darwin itself.
In April 1941 the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) identified a requirement for light versatile vessels that could be built locally and operate in coastal waters of Australia, New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies and their surrounding islands. On 5 January 1942 the War Cabinet gave approval to construct craft known as Fairmiles in Australia and between November 1942 and April 1944 35-five vessels were commissioned into RAN service. Fairmile motor launches were small, fast, highly manoeuvrable, lightly-armed ships designed in the United Kingdom. They were originally intended to be used for coastal anti-submarine and convoy protection duties but soon proved to be vessels capable of much broader operational tasking.

Many of those vessels saw service in Northern Australian waters and this is the story of one of the secret war of one of them – Motor Launch (ML) 814.

ML 814 Commanding Officers
Lieutenant G.R. Kennedy, RANVR
Lieutenant C.C. Skarratt, RANVR
Lieutenant R.R. Lewis, RANVR
Lieutenant A.C. Mc Allister, RANVR
Lieutenant B.O. Wallace, RANVR
Lieutenant A.G. Fry, RANVR
Lieutenant B.R. Bayly, RANVR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Fairmile 'B' Type Motor Launch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displacement:</td>
<td>75 tons (standard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length:</td>
<td>112 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beam:</td>
<td>17 feet 10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draught: (as designed)</td>
<td>4 feet 9 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder:</td>
<td>Lars Halvorsen Sons, Pty, Ltd, Ryde, NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost:</td>
<td>£18,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laid Down:</td>
<td>15 April 1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned:</td>
<td>1 January 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery:</td>
<td>Twin Hall Scott Defender petrol engines, 650 HP each, twin screws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed:</td>
<td>20 knots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td>840 miles at 12 knots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armament:</td>
<td>1 x Rolls Royce 2-pounder Mark XIV gun mounted forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x 20mm Oerlikon mounted aft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x Twin Vickers .303 machine guns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x ‘Y’ gun depth charge thrower holding 2 depth charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 x Depth Charges in chutes with release gears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small arms including Thompson machine guns, .303 rifles, hand grenades and explosive charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement:</td>
<td>17-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio:</td>
<td>AWA, AT5/AR8 wireless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennant No:</td>
<td>ML 814</td>
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ML 814 was the second of the Fairmiles to be constructed in Australia. She was commissioned on 1 January 1943 under the command of Lieutenant Gilbert R Kennedy, RANVR, a veteran of small ship actions fought against German E-boats in the English Channel while serving with the Royal Navy.

The launching of 814 at Halvorsen’s yard in Sydney is said to have caused Kennedy some disquiet, for he noticed a woman on board his new command as it took to the water. Kennedy was apparently reminded of the then superstition among sailors that it was considered a bad omen to have females onboard. Much has changed since then.

Appointed as Kennedy’s First Lieutenant was Lieutenant Bernard Page Western (Chips) Wood, RANVR, while Sub-Lieutenant Marsden (Tony) Hordern, who joined the ship in February 1943 from the minesweeper Abraham Crijnssen, completed the wardroom complement.

Unlike other Fairmiles that were being brought into service, 814 was painted in a distinctive zig-zag disruptive camouflage pattern with hues of white, light blue and green being used to break up her appearance. This colour scheme was eventually determined to be impractical to maintain and she later reverted to the normal plain grey livery found on most other RAN vessels.

Living conditions in Fairmiles were spartan. There was a small wardroom which the three commissioned officers shared, a cabin for two petty officers (normally a coxswain and petty officer motor mechanic) and a small mess deck which accommodated 12 ratings. There were no showers and just two small hand-pumped toilets. As the complement sometimes varied between 17 and 20, additional crew were faced with either sleeping on deck or adopting what was known as a ‘hot bunking’ routine in which they took turns sharing a bunk with a shipmate who was on watch. For the ratings, all activities such as sleeping, eating, relaxing, letter-writing or studying took place in the mess deck.

Generally there was no trained cook assigned to the Fairmiles and these duties were shared among the crew, who took turns preparing meals on a small kerosene stove in the galley. Some Fairmile crews were fortunate in having a sailor who was both a good cook and was willing to take on the job permanently. ML 814 was one such ship.

Following 814’s commissioning, Kennedy immediately turned his attention to working the ship up. This involved a period at sea off the east coast of Australia, during which time the crew conducted drills and got to know their ship’s strengths and weaknesses. It also coincided with a period of increased Japanese submarine activity along the eastern seaboard. Twenty-one attacks were made on merchant ships in the first six months of 1943 resulting in 11 sinkings including the Australian hospital ship Centaur.

On 18 February 1943, 814 sailed from Sydney for Brisbane, where she arrived two days later. She remained in Brisbane waters conducting engine trials until early May, at one point losing her hull mounted ASDIC dome while taking avoiding action to pass clear of SS Buranda in the Brisbane Channel. A new dome was subsequently fitted and a formal inquiry was held into the loss of this expensive and highly secretive piece of equipment.

Not long after the inquiry into the loss, Kennedy was posted as the First Lieutenant of the corvette HMAS Inverell. He was replaced by Lieutenant Charles C. Skarratt, RANVR; however, within a week of his arrival, he too was posted. Lieutenant RR (Reg) Lewis, RANVR – who, like Skarratt and Kennedy, had seen action with the Royal Navy in the English Channel, was subsequently appointed in command. In mid May 1943 ML 814 received orders to sail for Darwin via Townsville, Cairns and Thursday Island.

Joining a north-bound convoy assembling near Cape Moreton, 814 was taken in tow by a United States (US) Liberty ship for the passage to Townsville. This was to save wear and tear on her engines, which required a substantial service every 500 hours. After a two-day
passage punctuated by rough weather and several parting hawser, the tow was abandoned and 814 made her way independently through the Whitsunday Passage to Townsville. On 14 May she continued her voyage north, again under tow, astern of the SS Cardross. This time the passage was incident free and the two vessels parted company at Thursday Island. ML 814 then proceeded to Darwin independently, arriving on Sunday 23 May. Although new to the area, 814 was immediately put to work. On 1 June she left Darwin to escort a convoy carrying supplies and aviation gasoline to Milingimbi, a RAAF advanced operational base on the north-east coast of Arnhem Land. The outport was home to Spitfire fighter aircraft, 350 RAAF personnel and around 600 Aborigines. It was also within easy striking distance of the Japanese and had previously been bombed by enemy medium-range bombers.

The trip to Milingimbi was memorable for some of the worst weather yet experienced by the Fairmile crew. For 12 hours 814 pounded into heavy seas and many of her men succumbed to seasickness. To add to their misery, the deck planking on the forward upper deck opened up and water poured through, soaking those trying to get some sleep below.

This eventuality had been foreseen by the boat builder Harold Halvorsen during the ship’s construction. He had urged the Navy to use oregon for planking on the Fairmiles but his advice was ignored and hoop pine was used instead. It was a problem that many other Fairmile crews were to endure in similar conditions.

The small convoy took 34 hours to make its way through the heavy weather and poorly chartered waters to their destination. On arrival 814 refuelled then began the return voyage to Darwin. In contrast to the outward leg, it took only 22.5 hours.

ML 814’s next task was to assist the night passage of a convoy through the Clarence Strait. During peacetime, this stretch of water was illuminated by navigational buoys. However, as a wartime security measure, they were now lit only when considered absolutely necessary. Lewis and his crew were required to find and light one of these marker buoys with the assistance of a reef Pilot. The night was particularly dark with mist rising from the sea and, in spite of their best efforts, the buoy could not be located. It was then that one of 814’s lookouts reported a flashing light on an unexpected bearing. The Pilot checked his charts and determined that the light was originating from a particularly rocky section of Melville Island. Concerns over the origin of this light led to naval authorities in Darwin ordering the convoy to anchor overnight. It completed its passage in daylight the following day.

In late June, 814 was given an air-sea rescue task off the Japanese occupied Island of Selaru in the Tanimbar Group, some 560km north of Darwin. A flight of Vultee Vengeance and Beaufighter aircraft had been ordered to attack an airstrip under construction on the island and 814 was pre-positioned nearby to recover any Allied airmen who might be downed during the operation. Deep in Japanese controlled waters, the crew waited anxiously while the raid took place before receiving orders to return to Darwin. During the return voyage a submarine periscope was sighted astern of the Fairmile and was seen to be closing on a steady bearing. The alarm was sounded and the crew raced to action stations, not knowing whether the submarine was friend or foe. Moments later the submarine surfaced and a visual challenge was made by 814 using flashing light. To their great relief the submarine identified itself as an American. Japanese submarines had been detected in those waters and if the Australians encountered one of these fast and well-armed vessels the outcome could have been disastrous.

While in Darwin between missions the crew of 814 experienced first hand the Japanese air raids which had caused so much damage since February 1942. When the air raid warning was given, 814 would proceed to sea and take up a predetermined station, standing by to go to the assistance of any downed Allied airmen. It was during one such raid on 28 June that a near miss slightly wounded the First Lieutenant, ‘Chips’ Wood.

On 9 July, ML 814 left Darwin to escort the steamer Alagna, to the Drysdale Mission at Napier Broome Bay in Western Australia. Arriving there two days later they were faced with the problem of unloading Alagna’s cargo of heavy equipment, motor vehicles and thousands of gallons of aviation gasoline stored in drums. There were no wharves or port facilities at the mission and 814’s crew set about improvising a ferry service using an old lugger and Alagna’s lifeboats. Two days later, after much hard work, the cargo was safely ashore and 814 returned to Darwin.
Operation Lagarto/Mosquito

On the morning of 26 July 1943, Lieutenant Lewis and Lieutenant Charles A.J. Inman, RANVR, the Commanding Officer of ML 815, were ordered to report to the Operations Office ashore. There they were briefed to prepare their ships to proceed to Japanese occupied Timor in support of Operation Lagarto. The Naval component of the mission was named Operation Mosquito and required the two Fairmiles to slip deep into enemy controlled waters and re-supply the Portolizard guerrilla group. They were also to insert an Australian Army signaller (Sergeant A.J. 'Jim' Ellwood) and evacuate approximately 70 civilian refugees who had attached themselves to the group, and who were now imperiling its effectiveness.

The Mosquito operation was among the first of a number of clandestine activities in which the RAN Fairmiles and Harbour Defence Motor Launches (HDML) were involved supporting the secretive Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) and Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD).

There was little time to prepare for the impending operation, which called for a landing on Timor within three days. The Fairmile's depth charges were unloaded to provide extra deck space and a special launching ramp was constructed over the stern of each of the two MLs to enable the rapid deployment of a large wooden and canvas landing craft. These craft were to be pushed into the water to seaward of Timor's surf and rowed inshore to affect the landing of stores and provisions. They would then return to the Fairmiles with the civilian evacuees and be taken in tow for the return voyage to Darwin.

It was also suggested that the two MLs should fly Japanese naval ensigns to improve their chances should they be detected by enemy air or sea patrols. This idea was immediately rejected by the ship's officers in spite of specially made flags being delivered to them by an intelligence officer prior to sailing. Remarkably the flag issued to 814, which was unceremoniously stuffed in the ship's potato locker by her signalman, D'Arcy Kelly, was retrieved by Hordern months later. Kept by him, it was then presented to the Australian War Memorial by Hordern, Wood, Kelly and several other veterans from the Mosquito operation in 1994.

Two Beaufighters from No 31 Squadron, RAAF, were also assigned in support of the mission, providing a relay of cover in air space dangerously close to Japanese fighter bases in Timor.

Final preparations were made at the secret AIB base located about 29km from Darwin on the east arm of the harbour. There the landing craft was loaded in 814 and members of the SRD, the army's 'cloak-and-dagger' men, embarked along with a specialist navigator, Lieutenant W.B. Hill, RANVR, and a Portuguese navigational Pilot named Baltazar.

At 10pm on 27 July, the two Fairmiles got underway and set course for Melville Island. The following morning they arrived in Kings Cove, St Asaph Bay, where they rendezvoused with the tender HMAS Terka to take on additional fuel and water. Later that afternoon they continued their passage bound for a reference point on the southern coast of Timor close to the mouth of the Dilor River. In the early hours of 29 July, radio silence was broken when a signal was received recalling both vessels to their staging position. No reason was given and by 7 o'clock that evening they were again in St Asaph Bay refuelling. The ships remained there for two days awaiting further orders before they were eventually recalled to Darwin. The mission had been postponed at the request of an operative in Timor who was concerned about the presence of Japanese forces in the landing area. The operation was soon rescheduled to take place on 3 August.

The two MLs re-embarked their cargo of equipment and personnel and at 10.31pm on Monday 2 August set out again, this time refuelling at Snake Bay, Melville Island. At 5.30pm the following day they proceeded on a north-westerly course for the position on the south coast of Timor. The night passed without incident and early the next morning they were joined by their RAAF Beaufighter escort, which maintained a presence until late that afternoon.

Just after nightfall the two Fairmiles closed the rendezvous position where they observed three small fires on the beach. This was followed by the reception of a faint blue recognition signal from the shore. Baltazar confirmed that they had arrived at the correct location on the chart and the Australians quickly set about lowering their landing craft.

With their vessels loaded with provisions, the crews of 814 and 815 headed through the surf towards the shore where they were eagerly met by the guerrilla force. 'Chips' Wood commanded the first landing party from 814 and was soon busily overseeing the insertion of Sergeant Ellwood, the unloading of stores and the embarkation of the first load of refugees who had begun to emerge from the tree line beyond the beach. After about 15 minutes he returned to 814 where Hordern relieved him to oversee the subsequent landing parties.

Met by wild looking figures on the beach, Hordern immediately began embarking the next load of refugees. However, the small landing craft quickly filled and for safety's sake further embarkation was halted. As the crew of 814 were about to leave, Hordern glanced along the beach and noticed an elderly man dressed in a white suit and Panama hat standing in the shallows. He made no attempt to seek refuge for himself and appeared content to attempt to seek refuge for himself and appeared content to see his fellow countrymen and women carried to safety. Hordern immediately waded toward the lone figure and dragged him back through the surf and into the landing craft before jumping in himself. As the boat made its way back to the relative safety of 814 the elderly man took something from his hand and gave it to Hordern in gratitude, instructing him that should he "ever go to Portugal, show this". The gift that Hordern received was an ancestral silver and jade ring inlaid with the armorial bearings of the man's family – a rampant gold lion on a field of green. As with the Japanese ensign, this too survived the war.

After several further boat trips the two Fairmiles took their landing craft in tow at 2250 and shaped course for Darwin. The return voyage was made at a brisk 17 knots with the aim of putting as much distance as possible between the
Australian ships and any Japanese patrols before daybreak. Dawn the following day revealed the desperate state of the refugees embarked in 814. Many were suffering from malnutrition, wounds and tropical ulcers, and nearly all of them were seasick. The crew provided what assistance they could but it was a great relief to all on board when they finally secured alongside Darwin at 11.30am on 5 August. There, ambulances and medical attendants transferred 814’s human cargo to hospital for treatment and observation.

For this operation, MLs 814 and 815 received the following congratulatory message from the acting Portuguese governor in Timor:

“Profoundly grateful to Sea Land and Air Forces Darwin for Gallant and splendidly successful rescue my Nationals under extremely trying circumstances. We are yours to command for the duration to help against common enemy. Viva Australia. Viva os Aliados.”

In contrast, the Lagarto operatives ashore did not fare well. They were relentlessly hunted by Japanese patrols that exacted severe retribution on any Timorese found helping them. The group was finally ambushed and captured on 29 September along with their codes, ciphers, signal plans and other papers.

Following their capture, the men, including Ellwood, endured a sustained period of interrogation including torture. Ellwood, who was weak with hunger, pain and disease, later succumbed to his brutal mistreatment and was forced, under duress, to transmit bogus messages to the SRD in Australia purporting that the group was still at large and operational. Those signals were accepted on face value by SRD Headquarters in Melbourne despite obvious indications that the group had been compromised. Consequently, further operations to Timor were planned by the SRD and ML 814 was again to be involved in them.

In the meantime, following the excitement of Mosquito, 814 settled down to the comparatively dull but essential routine of convoy duties, anti-submarine sweeps, exercising and escorting Allied submarines into Darwin. Allied submarines were not permitted to approach Australian harbours without an appropriate escort, which normally rendezvoused with them well out of sight of land where a challenge was made by visual signal. On receipt of the correct reply the Port War Signal Station would be advised of the impending arrival and the submarine would be escorted into harbour. This duty was one well suited to the Fairmiles as they had sufficient speed to match US submarines on the surface.

On 6 August 1943 the steam ship Macumba was attacked off the Arnhem Land coast by Japanese float-planes. Her escort, the corvette HMAS Cootamundra, scored a hit on one of the attacking aircraft, shooting off a float, but a well-aimed bomb struck Macumba’s engine room killing and wounding many of her crew. The ship soon foundered, leaving Cootamundra to rescue survivors. ML814 was ordered to proceed at top speed to rendezvous with Cootamundra where she transferred a doctor onboard.
to provide further assistance. The ML then escorted the corvette back to Darwin where the dazed survivors were landed and taken to hospital.

At the end of August, 814 entered Darwin’s floating dock for a brief maintenance period before resuming patrol and escort duties. Shortly afterwards, Lieutenant Wood was posted ashore and Hordern was appointed as First Lieutenant. Joining as 814’s new third officer was 19-year-old Midshipman John Dowey, RANR.

The onset of Darwin’s wet season in late October presented new challenges for 814’s crew. Each day it rained heavily and, when it cleared, steam rose from her wooden decks, making living conditions inside the ship almost unbearable. Mildew formed throughout the vessel, which soon became a haven for cockroaches and bugs. This became the catalyst for an increase in tropical maladies such as tinea and other skin complaints. The retro-fitting of upper-deck awnings to the Fairmiles deployed to Darwin helped to improve conditions a little, but for both 814 and her sister 815 they enjoyed no such respite from Darwin’s unrelenting tropical weather.

In mid January 1944 Hordern was diagnosed with a more serious complaint, which affected both his vision and balance and ultimately resulted in him being posted to Sydney where he spent time in hospital recovering. Consequently, the young Dowey soon found himself appointed as 814’s new First Lieutenant.

**Operation Cobra/Bulldozer**

Towards the end of January, Lewis received orders that 814 was to again make the dangerous passage to enemy-occupied Timor in support of another SRD operation, known as Cobra. The naval component of that operation was subsequently designated Bulldozer and was scheduled for 27 January. As with the Lagarto/Mosquito operation, it involved carrying and inserting SRD and ‘Z’ Special Unit operatives into Timor. This time, however, 814 would sail alone. There was little time to prepare for the mission, which again called for the carriage of special landing craft and the construction of a temporary cradle and launching ramp over the stern. Confidential books were landed prior to sailing as a safeguard against capture, as were several depth charges to make room for additional fuel drums.

To assist with the passage Lieutenant E Butler, RANR (S), joined 814 as a specialist navigator along with Telegraphist BE Wales, who assisted in maintaining the necessary 24-hour radio watch throughout the mission.

The Cobra landing party was embarked at Shell Island at 8pm on the evening of 27 January. Captain JL Chipper, (2nd AIF), was in overall charge of the insertion of the party which comprised Captain J.R. Cashman, (2nd AIF, ‘Z’ Special Unit), Lieutenant EJ Liversidge, (2nd AIF, ‘Z’ Special Unit) and three Portuguese nationals, Sergeant Paulo da Silva, Sergeant Cosme Soares and Sergeant Sancho da Silva. With the operatives on board, 814 sailed from Darwin at 2300 for St Asaph’s Bay, Melville Island, where she refuelled from the tender HMAS Coolebar the following afternoon. At 7.20pm on 28 January, 814 cleared St Asaph’s Bay and set course for her destination, a point near the western entrance of the Dara Bai River on Timor.

From the outset, the voyage was hampered by rough weather and poor visibility and, at one point, consideration was given to aborting the mission. Electing to press on, the difficult passage continued until gradually the weather abated sufficiently for accurate navigational sun sightings to be taken. In spite of the weather, the RAAF managed to provide air cover for the lone Fairmile throughout the following day. Meanwhile, below decks many of the crew were struggling with seasickness while again dealing with the problem of seawater pouring through 814’s inadequate decking.

Notwithstanding the difficult voyage Lewis, ably assisted by Butler, made an accurate landfall on Timor and 814 was soon quickly proceeding to her rendezvous position. As she made her approach, numerous shore lights were observed and the ML issued challenges by flashing light. However, no reply was forthcoming. Cautiously, Lewis continued on a southerly course and at 11.40pm, when it seemed likely that the party would have to be landed without assistance from the shore, the designated signal of three fires on the beach was observed. The Fairmile quickly anchored and, due to the confusion over identification signals, Sub-Lieutenant Dowey was ordered to take Captain Chipper and a small landing party ashore to investigate. After landing some 180m to the south of the fires, Chipper was met by Timorese natives and, after questioning them, was satisfied that everything appeared to be in order. Dowey and his sailors then returned to 814 to begin ferrying the guerrilla’s stores and equipment ashore.

While the stores transfer was taking place, 900l of fuel which had been carried in drums on the Fairmile’s deck was transferred into her depleted fuel tanks in readiness for the return voyage. At 1.30pm on 30 January Dowey returned...
with his crew and Chipper to 814 where the landing boat was recovered and a course set for the return voyage to Darwin. Unbeknown to the Fairmilers as they sped for home at 15 knots, the Cobra party that had landed, less than an hour before, as with the Lagarto group before them, would be captured by the Japanese.

The Cobra operation was doomed from the outset when details were communicated by SRD HQ in Melbourne to the already compromised Lagarto group. This enabled the Japanese to make elaborate arrangements to apprehend them shortly after their insertion. Ellwood, who had been taken by the Japanese to the site of the ambush, made a valiant attempt to warn the Cobra party of their impending capture when he overpowered his guard and escaped. The guard, however, raised the alarm and Ellwood, weak with beri beri, was soon recaptured then beaten, bound and left without food or drink in the open for 48 hours. He was then returned to Dili where he was put on a starvation diet, which brought on a return bout of malaria and dysentery. It was there that he learned that the Cobra party had been captured.

ML 814 arrived safely back at Shell Island at 10.35am on 31 January where they disembarked Chipper, who had returned with them, before securing alongside the main jetty in Darwin Harbour. Both Butler and Dowey were singled out for special mention by 814’s commanding officer in his post operation report for their part in the execution of Bulldozer.

Shortly after Bulldozer, many of 814’s crew proceeded on leave and posting. Among those who earned a well-earned relief was Lieutenant Lewis who handed over his command to Lieutenant AC McAllister, RANVR.

Following 12 months in tropical conditions, 814 was in urgent need of a refit. Her Hall Scott engines required overhauling as did her gearboxes. Major maintenance of Fairmiles in northern waters was largely untried and, with a growing list of defects and alterations recommended by Fairmile commanding officers, 814’s refit became somewhat of test case. The Naval Board decreed that Darwin, with a base staff consisting of engineers, shipwrights and other technical specialists, would carry out the task on the slipway at Frances Bay in Darwin Harbour. If successful it would pave the way for New Guinea-based motor launches to use the facilities and avoid the long haul to Brisbane or Sydney for major refits.

On 28 March, 814 went onto the slipway. Unfortunately, due to limited wartime facilities and inadequate numbers of skilled maintenance personnel, the refit proved to be beyond Darwin’s base staff’s capability and it was not until 11 June that 814 re-entered the water. Conditions for those working on the vessel while on the slip were extreme. Again, the absence of awnings meant that the men were completely exposed to Darwin’s harsh tropical climate while working on the upper decks, while those between decks and in her engine room had to endure temperatures well in excess of 38 degrees.
This prompted the commanding officer of 815, Lieutenant JDC Wood, RANVR, which was the next vessel scheduled to take to the slip, to forward a strong recommendation that her refit be carried out in a well-equipped yard, preferably in a port with a more temperate climate. The reason for the exchange is unclear but on 7 September 815, then under the command of McAllister, sailed for Fremantle and refit via Onslow and Geraldton. Command of 814 passed briefly to Lieutenant B Wallis, RANVR, and then to Lieutenant AG Fry, RANVR.

During the period that 814 was undergoing refit, SRD HQ continued to plan and execute further clandestine operations around Timor. ML 429 (Lieutenant HF Wadds, DSC and Bar, RANVR), another Fairmile, was directed to operate in support of Operation Adder in May. However, following a close encounter with a Japanese encampment and after running into difficulties off Timor and losing her landing craft, the mission was aborted.

A further attempt to insert the SRD’s Adder party was again aborted when 429 was spotted by an enemy aircraft. In mid-August, the operation was ordered to proceed in spite of protests by the three senior officers involved, who believed that to continue with the same operational plan would be reckless and put lives at risk. Finally, after two further attempts, the Adder party was successfully landed on the northern tip of Timor on 21 August.

Three weeks later SRD HQ had received no contact from the Adder party, raising concerns for their safety. Consequently another operation to Timor was ordered in an attempt to locate them. ML’s 814 and 807 (Lieutenant EHC Couchman, RANVR), were selected for that mission.

Unlike previous missions, which had been routed via Melville Island, it was decided that a direct passage would be made on this occasion with additional fuel taken on in Darwin. After embarking their landing craft, fuel and stores and, having practiced several mock landings with the awkward landing craft near Talc Head, the two ships were ready to proceed. At the request of Fry, Sub-Lieutenant TWJ Vear, RANR, 429’s First Lieutenant, rejoined 814 because of his previous experience in the Adder operations.

The two Fairmiles sailed from Darwin on 18 September. Both vessels were initially operating on only one engine to conserve fuel, but consumption was still high at 75l per hour. By the following day they had transferred all the fuel from the eleven 44-gallon drums carried on their upper decks into their main tanks and jettisoned the empty ones, filled with seawater over the side. Once again a Beaufighter escort was provided by the RAAF, which maintained a low-level patrol around the two vessels as they continued their passage. Land was sighted at 5.30pm on 19 September and by 2130 both vessels were patrolling approximately 180m to 270m offshore where they investigated several small lights which were later identified as camp fires.

At 9.45pm when leaving the vicinity in a south-westerly direction, a large and very bright fire was observed to be lit on the beach about 365m away. As there was no sign of enemy activity, 814 closed to investigate further. It was clear that the fire had been deliberately lit and, as if to support this, a man was observed to be standing near the fire looking at the Fairmile as it passed by. He made no attempt to do anything and Fry, conscious of the risk of an ambush, cleared the area and resumed the south-westerly patrol.

Disturbingly, visual contact with 807 was lost shortly afterwards in spite of the clear skies and good visibility, leaving 814 to continue her patrol alone. Two more large fires were later observed. However, there was no sign of deliberate signalling from operatives ashore. The sweep concluded at 11.45pm when a course was set for a pre-determined rendezvous with 807, some 130km off the Timor coast. 807 failed to make the daylight rendezvous, leaving 814 no alternative but to continue the return passage to Snake Bay independently. Two Beaufighters joined 814 at 6.50am on 20 September and one of these was detached to search for the missing 807.

814 entered Snake Bay that evening where she remained at anchor overnight refuelling during the forenoon of 21 September. At 12noon the crew of 814 were relieved to see 807 arrive safely and she too took on fuel for the last leg of the voyage to Darwin. Both vessels completed the passage without further incident the following day. There was no immediate explanation for the various fires that the Fairmiles had observed on the beaches of Timor and on 10 November 1944 the members of the Adder party were officially posted as ‘Missing in Action’.

Epilogue to SRD operations in Timor

It would be years before the Fairmile crews who took part in the Mosquito, Bulldozer and Adder operations learned of the fate of the SRD men they had come to know and support in operations. By November 1944 the AIB’s advanced operating base in Darwin, known as the Lugger Maintenance Section (LMS), had become suspicious that both the Lagarto and Cobra parties in Timor had been compromised. Without informing SRD HQ, or the suspect Timor parties, it was arranged for Captain AD Stevenson and Sergeant RG Dawson, both of ‘Z’ Special Unit, and Celestino dos Anjos, a Timorese guide, to be parachuted into Timor two days ahead of a proposed supply drop to Lagarto. No resupply was ever intended, but on the night of 29-30 June 1945 Stevenson’s party, operating under the codename Sunlag, landed safely in an area close to the signalled drop zone and made preparations to observe any Japanese intervention. It was there that Stevenson saw Ellwood of the Lagarto party approach under armed guard carrying a signalling lamp. The AIB now had proof that Lagarto was in enemy hands and that Ellwood was being forced to make the bogus transmissions. Due to problems with their radio set, Dawson was unable to inform Darwin of the compromise until 3 July. In the meantime, yet another party had been inserted by parachute.

That party known as Suncob comprised Captain P Wynne and Corporal JB Lawrence, both 2nd AIF and ‘Z’ Special Unit men. Both were captured and tortured by the Japanese who soon learned of the existence of the Sunlag party and immediately committed a large force to hunt it down. The rescue of Sunlag was now paramount and although Stevenson and Dawson were competent
bushmen, the LMS considered it only a matter of time before they too would be captured.

On 15 July arrangements were made to extract them using the captured Japanese trawler, *Krait*, which was to meet them close to the mouth of the Dilor River. Strong winds, poor visibility and other contributing factors resulted in this attempt being aborted and a further extraction, code-named Brim, was arranged. This time *Harbour Defence Motor Launch* (HDM) 1324 under the command of Lieutenant RG Evans, RANR, was the rescue vessel and the operatives, who were now in a very poor physical state, were finally extracted on 5 August. *ML 1324* arrived back in Darwin on the evening of 6 August. Stevenson and Celestino survived the ordeal but Dawson, who was rushed to hospital on arrival in Darwin, died from kidney failure two days later.

A subsequent report concerning the SRD’s operations in Timor stated inter alia:

“The Lagarto Operation has no redeeming feature. It is a story of hardship, death, torture, humiliation and degradation meted out by a ruthless enemy. It is a story of colossal waste, since all subsequent operations in the area for a period of two years depended on the assumption of Lagarto’s freedom. It produced nothing of value and neither did the subsequent operations. To this failure can be ascribed the wretched deaths of 9 Australians, some Portuguese and scores of loyal natives. Even the Japanese must have despised the gross inefficiency and criminal negligence with which it was conducted.”

This final statement is supported by a final signal received by the SRD on the Lagarto and Cobra frequencies in which the Japanese openly mocked them.

Ellwood and several other SRD operatives survived captivity and were repatriated to Australia following the cessation of hostilities with Japan. The final indignity for them came at the hastily arranged War Crimes Trials at Darwin in March 1946. They were not called upon to testify as witnesses against their captors, nor were their written statements admitted as evidence, as they were determined to be unauthenticated copies. Consequently the two main perpetrators of their mistreatment escaped with an acquittal and three months imprisonment respectively.

*ML 814* continued to operate from Darwin performing anti-submarine patrols, boom defence patrols and escort duties until 19 May 1945 when she sailed for Brisbane calling at Cairns, Townsville and Gladstone en route. She paid off at the small craft base in Brisbane on 12 October 1945 having covered an impressive 30,154 nautical miles during her wartime career. Her hull was sold for disposal in Brisbane on 30 August 1947 for £200.30154.

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to LCDR Marsden Hordern, VRD, RANR, (Retd) and Sub-Lieutenant John Dowey, RANR, (Retd) for permission to use images from their personal collections and draw on their memoirs and memories.

Notes

1. The wardroom on a naval vessel is the officers’ personal space, used for meals and relaxing. The petty officers – the equivalent of sergeants – also have their own mess, as do the junior ratings. The scheme also gives each of the three divisions the opportunity to vent their feelings about the other sets of personnel.

2. Ed: this was located on East Point, where its remains can still be seen along the cliff from the Dudley Point Boom net anchorage.

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The Territory Remembers
Japanese war widow finds peace off Darwin
By Dr Tom Lewis

A Japanese war widow finally found peace in a simple ceremony off the coast of Darwin 72 years after her husband was shot down offshore of the city.

Flight Chief Petty Officer Shinji Kawahara was lost at sea with his fellow officer Tomihiko Tanaka in 1943 but it took another 72 years for his wife Miyoko to join him.

Shinji's story begins in August 1943 off Darwin when his reconnaissance aircraft meet up with an ace of the Royal Australian Air Force, Wing Commander Clive Caldwell.

A Dinah twin-engine aircraft from Koepang had been sent to carry out the mission. The aircraft was intercepted west of Bathurst Island north of Darwin at around 4.30pm. Caldwell and his wingman Flight Sergeant PR Padula spotted the Dinah at considerable height ahead of anti-aircraft fire over Charles Point.

An initial attack by Caldwell hit the Japanese machine while Padula's attack was made at too great a range. The Dinah had its own machine-gun defence but this was no match for the agile Spitfires and their formidable guns and cannon. Caldwell made two further attacks. The Australian pilot reported the enemy aircraft began to lose height: "First gradually and then steeply until I was obliged to dive in order to retain my position abreast."

The Japanese aircraft continued a steep descent until it appeared to attempt to level out momentarily, but then it hit the water at high speed. Neither of the crew members were recovered.

Kawahara's widow Miyoko lived on through the rest of the war in Japan, bringing up the couple's two children. She led a long and happy life, but before she died in 2004 expressed a wish for her ashes to join her husband's body off the Northern Territory coast.

In 2015, with the aid of the Northern Territory and Australian Governments along with the City of Darwin, the Kawahara family was able to carry out the request.

In a simple ceremony led by naval chaplain Richard Quadrio and Dr Tom Lewis, Miyoko's ashes were given to the sea by five family members led by Noriyo, the daughter of Shinji and Miyoko.
The Territory Remembers
The Little Ships
By Ian Pfennigwerth

The series of Japanese air raids on Darwin which commenced on 19 February 1942, and the decision made by General MacArthur’s General Headquarters on advancing towards the Philippines up the Papua and New Guinea coasts, made the use of Darwin port as a major naval base unlikely. That proved to be the case but, for the remainder of the war against the Japanese, Darwin became a key element in the work of smaller ships. These had a variety of tasks, including search and rescue of downed Allied airman, escorting Allied submarines in and out of the port to avoid their being attacked by over-zealous (and poorly briefed) Allied aircraft, and the resupply of outlying posts along the north coast of the continent. More particularly, the little ships also found themselves involved in clandestine operations into enemy held waters and territory in support of Allied objectives.

Forces Available
Even before the Japanese attack of 19 February 1942 the very limited facilities of Darwin as a port and a military and naval base precluded its use by major naval vessels, except as a refuelling stop. Thus the forces available to the naval commander headquartered in Darwin, the Naval Officer-In-Charge, Darwin (NOIC D) were severely restricted. Given that Allied warships of any kind were in short supply everywhere in Southeast Asia and the northern approaches to Australia throughout that year, NOIC D was often reduced to using requisitioned vessels as small as the tiny Kuru, a timber patrol vessel of 55 tonnes with a maximum speed of nine knots. Her big sister, Vigilant, a former Customs vessel, was a steel ship of 106 tonnes. He did receive 850 tonne Bathurst Class corvettes during 1941 and, in January 1942, three of them sank the Japanese submarine I-124 off Darwin.1 Very occasionally for a special task, a destroyer would be added to his command, but his principal force was that associated with the boom protecting Darwin Harbour, an assorted collection of purpose-designed ships and a motley collection of other vessels supporting them. This was to remain the case throughout the war.

In April 1943 the first of the ‘Fairmile’ motor launches (ML) arrived in Darwin and the strength of this element grew to six by mid-1944. Of timber construction, these tough little ships were 36 metres in length, displaced up to 90 tonnes and a top speed of around 22 knots. Importantly, the ML had a range of 1500 miles at economical speed, making it most suitable for longer-range employment. Fitted with sonar and radar and armed with depth charges, and a variety of weaponry up to the 40 mm Bofors gun and lighter anti-aircraft guns. They were as useful operating out of Darwin as they proved elsewhere.

Resupply
In 1941 and 1942 the Australian Defence Force established a number of outstations along the northern Australian coastline, including RAN Coast Watcher stations, to support its naval and air operations. Allied forces were...
also placed in parts of the Netherlands New Guinea, including Merauke on the southern coast and, briefly, on Tanimbar Island and the Aru Islands in the Arafura Sea directly north of the Northern Territory. These were withdrawn later in the year in the face of a Japanese advance in force. Sea was the only practicable means of establishing and resupplying these remote sites, and both naval and merchant vessels were assigned to this vital task. The prevalent threat to the ships involved in resupply missions was from Japanese air attack, either conventional bombers and fighters or float planes, a particular scourge for the small ships operating to outlying stations on the Australian coast in the Cape Wessel area. The auxiliary minesweeper, converted trawler Patricia Cam, was bombed and sunk in that vicinity on 22 January 1943 with the loss of eight men. A missionary taking passage, the Reverend LN Kentish, was captured by the float plane crew and later executed.

Milingimbi in Arnhem Land was an outpost established by the RAAF in 1941 to provide a base for aircraft protecting Allied convoys in the Arafura Sea against air attacks and as a forward airfield from which Allied aircraft could raid Japanese positions in Netherlands New Guinea. It was difficult to reach from the sea up a complex channel but the MLs and other ships were employed on the task of resupplying that station with provisions, spares and fuel. Navigational hazards aside, this was not an easy task. In a series of raids in May 1943, Japanese bombers and fighters sank the requisitioned ferry HMAS Moroubra and damaged another merchant vessel, as well as inflicting casualties on the station and its personnel.

Another RAAF advanced operational base was in Napier Broome Bay in Western Australia, developed as an advanced base for transports, fighters and bombers and later named Truscott. The Japanese in Timor paid this station particular attention and the RAAF returned the favour. The MLs provided escorts for the supply ships involved in supporting the base and through improvisation solved the problems of getting the stores, fuel, equipment and men ashore in the absence of port facilities of any kind.

Escorts were also provided for ships carrying stores, personnel and equipment to bases as far from Darwin as Derby in Western Australia and for convoys sailing between Thursday Island and Darwin, and for the movement of Australian Army detachments north west of Merauke at the end of the war. The recovery of prisoners of war from Ambon and Timor was also conducted by Darwin-based ships in September 1945.

**Search and Rescue**

In the air battles over Darwin it was reassuring for the pilots to know that the RAN had stationed small craft across the approaches to Darwin to go to the rescue of airmen forced down. Several owed their lives to these vessels after being forced to bail out over the ocean. As one wrote after the war of being rescued after eight hours afloat in his dinghy: "...the sound of the engines and the sight of the approaching Fairmile created an indescribable feeling of joy and relief that could never be repeated."

These operations were not only conducted in the vicinity of Darwin. When RAAF aircraft raided Japanese positions, similar arrangements were made, with ships sent well into the range of Japanese aircraft to attempt to rescue downed Allied aircrew. This was a lonely and dangerous mission, exposed to the full force of Japanese air attack if detected.

**Escorting Allied Submarines**

Another task involving bobbing about on an open ocean, watching for a roving Japanese aircraft waiting to rendezvous with and escort into harbour a submarine, usually American but sometimes Dutch. If the boat was American, the vessel making the rendezvous would carry US Navy officers who, alone, were authorised to use American codes to establish communications. Following an exchange of recognition signals, the submarine would follow the escort into harbour. They were usually visiting only to refuel en route to or returning from a war patrol in Southeast Asian waters. MLs were favoured for this role because they had the speed to stay ahead of the submarine.

There was, still, the odd chance that a Japanese submarine might be prowling off Darwin and the ML skippers took the challenge and reply procedure seriously. One took it so seriously that after an offending submarine’s failure to respond to a repeated challenge he ordered the unmistakable challenge of a shot from the Bofors gun across its bows. The correct reply was instantly forthcoming!

**Support of Forces in Timor**

In December 1941 the RAN landed a 1400-strong Australian Army unit known as Sparrow Force at Koepang in Netherlands (West) Timor to stiffen Dutch defences. However, when the island was invaded by the Japanese in February 1942, the majority of the Allied forces were surrendered. Out of radio contact with Australia until April, remnants of Sparrow Force, some Dutch soldiers and the 2/2nd Independent Company of the Australian Army - about 700 in total – reported that they were maintaining a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese. General Headquarters agreed that the campaign should be supported and, after initial air drops of food and supplies, the RAN was tasked with providing 40 tonnes of supplies per month across the beaches on the south coast of East (Portuguese) Timor and with being prepared to evacuate the entire force at one week’s notice. Kuru initiated the resupply service in May and was joined by Vigilant in July. The corvette Kalgoorlie joined the program in September. All these voyages escaped Japanese interception.

In June it was decided that a second Independent Company – 2/4th – would take over from the force in Timor in September. The exchange involved the transportation of 400 men and their supplies and equipment into Timor and the recovery of 600 men from the island. This called for bigger ships and a speedier passage and the destroyer Voyager, veteran of the Tobruk Ferry Run in the Mediterranean, was assigned to the task. During the landing of the 2/4th on the night of 23 September she ran aground in Betano Bay and was destroyed by her crew – assisted by a concentrated attack by Japanese bombers – to avoid her falling into Japanese hands. All were recovered by the corvettes Warumbool and Kalgoorlie. In mitigation of this setback, the charts
being used by RAN ships to access Timor had been compiled by Lieutenant John Septimus Roe RN, later a senior figure in the West Australian colony, in 1824. This left NOIC D with the problem of how to get the Sparrow Force and 2/2nd survivors off the island. In the absence of larger ships he attempted this in December with the corvettes Castlemaine, Armidale (on her first Timor operation) and Kuru, with two sequential recoveries of the troops. The result was a disaster. Kuru and Castlemaine escaped the fury of repeated Japanese air attacks but Armidale was sunk by torpedo bombers and most of her crew and the Dutch soldiers she was carrying to be landed in Timor were lost. The task was finally accomplished in mid-December by the Dutch destroyer Tjerk Hiddes loaned to NOIC D from Fremantle. Then in January the 2/4th Independent Company was taken off Timor by the Australian destroyer Arunta, leaving one small party (S Force) to observe and report on Japanese activities.

Clandestine Operations
The lodgement of Allied troops in placed like Timor, Merauke and the Aru Islands had been of regular forces. Thereafter, it became an increasing task of the small ships in Northern Australian waters to land and recover parties of irregular soldiers and agents. This can be somewhat confusing, so a simple explanation of the ‘irregulars’ is attempted here. World War II generated an array of ‘special’ or ‘irregular’ parties intended to carry the war to the enemy by infiltration into occupied territories. This was a special talent apparently possessed by the British, and these ‘private armies’ quickly proliferated and were exported to the war in the Indian and Pacific Theatres. They were not favoured by the Americans who, however, also maintained contact with guerrilla groups in the Philippines. The Dutch, similarly, maintained or hoped to develop contact with sympathetic groups in the Netherlands East Indies after their ejection by the Japanese. All required organisation, funding, communications, recruits, training facilities and, above all, transport to enter and leave Japanese held-territory. ‘Messy’ is probably the most appropriate description of the situation until the RAN Director of Intelligence, Commander Rupert Long, proposed the establishment of an umbrella organisation within General Headquarters to organise and coordinate, or at least stop separate groups from going after the same target. This was the genesis of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), formed in June 1942.

The new Bureau had four sections. Section A was ‘Special Operations’ known by various titles but the one used in this account is Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD). Its job was to infiltrate parties into enemy held territory to patrol and to collect intelligence to assist Allied war aims. Section B was the Secret Intelligence Service (SIA) with the aims of spying and subversion. Section C went by several names but the principal unit it controlled was the Coast Watchers. Later, a separate Philippines Regional Section was set up under US control and the Dutch established the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Section (NEFIS) set on collecting intelligence from its former colony. Section D was the oddly-named Far East Liaison Office, whose task was propaganda. Nominally funded through General Headquarters from a common fund, each had its own separate sources as well.

Headquartered in Melbourne, SRD established a forward base for clandestine operations base at the old Quarantine Station on the east arm of Darwin Harbour, known as the Lugger Maintenance Section (LMS). ‘Lugger’ was a generic term for a variety of local and Netherlands East Indies sailing vessels whose ordinaries provided a element of protection from Japanese investigation. In due course, the RAN would construct and commission seven of these vessels for clandestine operations, named the Snake Class. Thus ‘lugger maintenance’ provided a useful cover for the SRD activities in Darwin.

However, the issue of control over the means of transportation of ‘irregulars’ continued to be a sore point between the clandestine organisations and the Navy, which was also concerned about the irregulars operating vessels independently in enemy held waters – a recipe for disaster through ‘friendly fire’ incidents. The situation was resolved in June 1944 when small, 9m ‘workboats’ were assigned to SRD control, although crewed by RAN personnel. Two larger vessels previously used by SRD were commissioned into the RAN. All other shipping remained under the operational control of Naval Officers-in-Charge. This edict was also applied to two vessels operated by SIA, Lady.
Emma and Bintang Siang. These operated into the Sulawesi area of the Netherlands East Indies and to the islands of the Banda Sea, but were skippered by RANVR officers, both of whom were appointed Members of the British Empire for their courage after the war ended.

Even as the problem of exchanging the Allied forces in Timor was being resolved, the SRD had requested and obtained RAN help in inserting a small reconnaissance party near Bacau on the south coast. Supported by airdrops by the RAAF, the SRD party and S Force came under increasing pressure from the Japanese through betrayal by unfriendly Timorese, and in January 1943 both were recovered by a US submarine. However, resistance to the Japanese in Timor continued by a mixed group of Portuguese and Chinese and a second US submarine landed a SRD-trained leadership group in July 1943 to take charge of them. This force then became ‘Legarto’.

One of the new leader’s first tasks was to separate out the non-combatants of this group for evacuation to Australia, and two of NOIC D’s MLs were detailed to effect this recovery. After one false start, the rescue was completed in early August with 87 Portuguese and Chinese nationals evacuated to Darwin.

A return voyage to Timor was only just within range of an ML, and a refuelling stop was frequently made on Melville Island, either from facilities established at Snake Bay, which had become the advanced base for SIA, or from stocks of petrol loaded in a cargo ship detached for this purpose. When the MLs began their trips into enemy-held New Guinea it often became necessary to have another boat standing by at a night rendezvous position in the Arafura Sea with drums of fuel embarked to top them up on the return voyage.

A second SRD party, ‘Cobra’ was inserted into Timor at the end of January 1944 by ML and in May a third, codenamed ‘Adder’, was also landed by ML. However, this had to be recovered quickly as it had landed in the vicinity of a Japanese camp. The landing boat was accidentally destroyed during the recovery and the mission aborted. Although rescheduled in June, the ‘Adder’ operation was cancelled shortly afterwards. The Navy then became involved in a SIA mission, ‘Bazooka’, to land Indonesian agents on the island of Selaru in the Aru Islands, a task made hazardous by the very poor navigational information available and the onset of a tropical cyclone. Two of the agents were successfully landed in June.

In August, ‘Adder’ was rescheduled, over the protests of the Navy. It seemed madness to land brave men in an area where the wreckage of their landing boat made clear that an earlier attempt had been made, not to mention the potentially heightened risk to the vessel landing them. The party was nevertheless inserted near the north-eastern tip of Timor on 21 August. When nothing had been heard from the men after three weeks, the RAN was again tasked to send a vessel to recover them at an arranged rendezvous. Two MLs were dispatched to accomplish this on 19 September, but no contact was made in the absence of the correct recognition signals. It transpired that there was a very good reason for this, as Adder had been compromised and its personnel captured and killed within three hours of landing.

Growing unease over the state of the Legato and Cobra groups prompted the SRD to arrange the parachute drop of two parties into Timor in July 1945 to rendezvous with them. The first, ‘Sunlag’, established unequivocally that Legarto had been compromised by the Japanese. The second fell into enemy hands and made no report. With 1000 Japanese hot on their trail, the men of Sunlag needed to be extracted. The first attempt was aborted by bad weather and navigational difficulties, but the second, on 5 August by a Harbour Defence Motor Launch (a smaller version of the ML) succeeded. A planned recovery of the second party of parachutists was called off, fortunately. The Japanese had arranged a ‘welcoming party’ of anti-tank guns and infantry at the scheduled rendezvous point.

Legato had been captured in September 1943 and the Japanese took over communications with Australia. Alerted by SRD of the arrival of Cobra, they captured that party on its arrival and its communications operator was forced to establish and to remain in contact with SRD. The Japanese
gained all the information they needed on SRD activities and intentions in Timor via these sources, despite the personal bravery of the Cobra operator in trying to alert Melbourne to the fact. On 12 August, three days before the Japanese surrender, SRD received two messages from the Japanese in Timor thanking them for their stores and information.

**Conclusion**

Even before the Japanese attacked Darwin in February 1942, the little ships of the RAN based there had been engaged in essential war tasks and they continued to provide this service throughout and war and beyond the Japanese surrender. Much of their work was mundane and repetitious but, until the air threat from Japanese bases in Timor and the Netherlands East Indies had been neutralised, even these tasks involved an element of danger. Other Darwin-based vessels were engaged in the highly-risky procedure of landing and recovering reconnaissance parties and secret agents in occupied territories, frequently encountering or risking danger from the sea and the poor quality of the hydrographic information they had at their disposal. That more vessels were not lost or damaged is a tribute to the capabilities and professionalism of the ship’s companies, most frequently Reservists. They also showed remarkable resilience and determination in climactic and onboard conditions that can only be described as difficult.

After the conclusion of hostilities in 1945 there were many awards of honours to RAN officers and men who had served in the New Guinea theatre and onwards to Borneo and the Philippines for their long and dedicated service under arduous conditions over a prolonged period. Personnel serving in Darwin-based ships missed out, perhaps because their service was not considered significantly worthy by higher authority. It is to be hoped that this short chapter has dispelled that view for posterity.

**Notes**

1. Although the primary attack on I-124 was carried out by the corvette HMAS Deloraine, two other HMA vessels, Lithgow and Katoomba, were also involved in depth-charging, as was the destroyer USS Edsall and some other small vessels.
The Territory Remembers

The Coastwatcher and the Aborigines: World War II comes to Groote Eylandt

By John Harris

The surveillance and management of Australia’s long and remote northern coastline has always been problematic. From the British settlements in the early 1800s to modern Border Protection, successive governments have struggled to maintain an effective presence along this difficult border. Never was this a greater challenge than during World War II when, around Australia’s northern coast and islands, a small band of civilians in isolated locations were asked to serve as official Coastwatchers. They became part of a larger coastwatching network which included New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. As the war progressed, the whole coastwatching operation became Most Secret, particularly to protect the identity of Coastwatchers in New Guinea, who found themselves behind enemy lines. Identifying information was not placed on record and eventually, in an attempt to protect the identity of the Coastwatchers, the term Coastwatcher was dropped altogether and replaced with code words.

Prior to World War II, Len Harris (the author’s father) was a missionary on Groote Eylandt in North Australia. One of an informal network of unofficial observers, he had a pedal radio, reporting any unusual activity as part of a daily radio schedule. After Japan entered the war by attacking American and British bases in the Pacific, this previously loosely-organised band of observers was placed directly under the command of the Royal Australian Navy. Harris was one of those formally sworn in as a Coastwatcher. It is hoped that by telling his story, a little of the unrecognised service of these few dedicated Australian volunteers and their Aboriginal friends will be better understood.

The first Australian coast watchers

After World War I, the Royal Australian Navy faced the problem of monitoring Australia’s long, undefended northern coast where an enemy could operate without hindrance, even without detection. Acting on the advice of Captain JG Clare, but working with very limited peacetime resources, the Department of Defence established a network of unpaid civilians to observe and report on activities on the coasts of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. In times of war, these Coastwatchers would become Australia’s frontline. Australia’s own northern coast was still vulnerable and so the Navy soon recommended that the scheme be extended to include the Australia’s own northern coast. The Department of Defence agreed and issued a directive in March 1927:

“I am directed to inform you that the Department of Defence has devised an organisation, known as the Coast Watching Organisation, whereby selected civilian residents in coastal regions will report voluntarily to the proper authority unusual movements, activities, etc. coming under their notice in time of war. An outline of this scheme together with Coast-Watching Guide, showing method of reporting, is attached.”

Although the comparative absence of communication precludes an extensive application of the scheme there, it is now desired...
to include North Australia in the scope of the Organisation...
(and)...supply the Government Resident, Darwin, with copies of
the Coast-Watching Guide for distribution to such officials or
trustworthy civilians whose location renders them particularly
suitable for inclusion in the scheme.”

On the remote north Australian coast, the Northern
Territory authorities sought out the relatively few suitable
recruits, mostly Christian missionaries who had local
knowledge and good contacts with Aboriginal people.
They were advised of the creation of the Coast-Watching
organisation and asked if they were “prepared to act under
this scheme and make any reports from time to time which
may become necessary and where opportunity offers.”

Twelve people were finally appointed as Coastwatchers.
Six of these were already Government officials so only six
were true volunteers. Five of the six were missionaries at
the Bathurst Island, Goulburn Island, Roper River, Groote
Eylandt and Milingimbi (Crocodile Island) Mission Stations.
Each of these responded formally in writing expressing
their willingness to serve as Coastwatchers as an act of
duty. The missionaries all sought permission from their
organisations before accepting. Rev Hubert Warren of
Groote Eylandt Mission wrote:

“[I] will gladly undertake to act as you suggest under this
scheme. The Church Missionary Society at the instigation
of the Bishop of Carpentaria has requested me also to do
what I can to fall in with your plans.”

The only question raised was the implication of names
appearing on official lists and whether these would be
made public. Father (later Bishop) Francis Gsell of the
Bathurst Island Mission wrote:

“In reply to your circular re Coast-Watching Organisation, I
have the honour to state that I do not like to have my name
enrolled in the official list. At the same time I consider it to
be a strict duty of conscience of every loyal citizen to help
his country to the utmost of his power in case of necessity;
and should this necessity arise, I shall not be wanting to
my duty. Meanwhile I am always at the disposal of the
Government for any information required.”

It may have been at that point that the decision was made
not to record missionaries’ names but to refer to them
by their positions, such as ‘Missioner’ or ‘Missionary-in-
Charge’, at a particular place. This in turn may account
for the fact that when the missionaries changed, their
position and title in official Coastwatching correspondence
remained constant.

These volunteer Coastwatchers were issued with the
official Coastwatching Guide, a very serious and strongly-
worded document, referring in bold capital to their duties
“in time of war or proclaimed imminent of war”. It went on
to detail the reporting of warships, submarines, aeroplanes
and the landing of enemy troops. Fortunately in those first
years, there was virtually no recognisable enemy activity on
which to report. Nevertheless, these first Coastwatchers
understood that although this was not wartime, they were
still expected to report unusual or suspicious happenings.
Their means of communication, however, were at first far
more limited than the Guide presumed, with no access to
the telephones or post offices mentioned in the guide.

Leslie Perriman, the Missionary-in-Charge on Groote
Eylandt in 1933, felt it necessary to explain that his
apparent failure to reply to official correspondence was
due, not to neglect of duty, but to the impossibility of
prompt communication. The letters to which he was
expected to have replied were dated 19 September
and 29 November 1932 but arrived together at Groote
Eylandt on 1 March 1933. A specific example of these
Coastwatcher communication problems occurred on 15
January 1933 when Aborigines from the east coast of
Groote Eylandt came to the mission and reported that a
month previously they had seen a steam ship with one
funnel travelling north.

Perriman immediately wrote a report on this sighting but,
as it transpired, the irregular shipping to Groote was further
delayed and the letter did not leave Groote Eylandt until
28 February when Perriman himself was able to board a
vessel en route to Roper River. He delivered the letter to
Roper Bar Police Station. It finally reached Darwin on 20
March, just over three months from the original sighting.
Communication to and from Groote Eylandt, however, was
about to be revolutionised.

In the 1920s, Rev John Flynn (‘Flynn of the Inland’) of
the Presbyterian Church’s Australian Inland Mission, was
planning his Aerial Medical Service, the precursor of the
Royal Flying Doctor Service. Conscious of the problems of
communication over vast distances, he employed talented
young engineer Alfred Traeger to work on the design
of a small, easily-operated radio transceiver. Traeger
developed his legendary pedal-operated radio, based on
German World War I equipment.

The invention of the pedal radio suddenly gave isolated
outposts the possibility of a link with the outside world.
The Australian Inland Mission distributed 150 pedal radios
freely to remote settlements such as missions and cattle
stations. Almost all were equipped with them by the mid-
1930s. The initial intention was to give these isolated
communities access to medical aid but this new instant
method of communication proved to have many more uses.

The Northern Territory Administration quickly saw the
advantage of the new radio communication for policing
and other official purposes. The Naval Intelligence
Division also recognised the value of the new technology
to their volunteer Coastwatchers and, by the mid-1930s,
ensured that all mission stations on the northern coast
and islands accepted and understood their responsibility
to report any enemy activity. The agreement was that
the Coastwatchers would make daily radio contact,
whether there was an important reason or not, via the
Australian Aerial Medical Service radio station in Cloncurry,
from where messages were relayed to the appropriate
authorities and through which, in return, they could receive
instructions. This was to become the legendary daily radio
schedule – ‘the sked’.

As the potential value of the Coastwatchers became
evident, attempts were made to provide some more
specific support than the previous “biennial letter”.

Those on the Northern Territory coast were visited from
time to time by the Northern Territory Administration’s
patrol boats as part of their police and customs duties,
although the Coastwatchers furthest from Darwin may only have been visited annually.

One of the tasks of the patrol officers was to check up on Japanese fishing luggers. The Japanese were permitted to come ashore to take on fresh water. The Northern Territory authorities were anxious about preventing loss of revenue if the Japanese failed to pay duties on pearl shell and other dutiable catches. There was an agent in Darwin through whom Japanese luggers were supposed to be registered, but there were also many unregistered luggers and the trade was difficult to control.

The abuse of Aboriginal women was a particular concern. Theoretically, all luggers were required to seek specific permission to enter waters adjacent to Aboriginal Reserves. Father John McGrath of Bathurst Island Mission, for example, reported many luggers in March 1938 and was able to provide registration numbers for most of them. The Officer in Charge of the Coastal Patrol reported that only three of them had permission to enter prohibited waters. Such infringements were very difficult to police. An added security issue arose when it was realised that some Japanese luggers had radios and that they could intercept messages from the Coastwatchers. On 8 October the Rev. Chaseling at Yirrkala Mission Station sent a telegram in the following terms to the Administrator in Darwin:

“Foreign luggers continually anchoring Bremer Island Melville Bay Area (Stop) Repeated attempts to molest native women. The Administrator has advised that the contents of this telegram were known to the Japanese pearl agents in Darwin at the same time as, if not earlier than, he received the telegram. It will be appreciated that the sending of messages which can be picked up and read by the Japanese vessels would only tend to act as a warning...”

Following discussions between the Administrator and the Navy, it was determined that, from this time on, sensitive radio messages should be transmitted in code. Enquiries revealed that some missionaries already possessed a copy of “Bentley’s Code”. This was not necessarily used for ensuring secrecy. This kind of codebook was commercially available, mainly for the purpose of brevity as telegraphic messages were costly and charged by the character. The final decision, however, rested with the character. The final decision, however, rested with Naval Intelligence, and they decided on an alternative cipher system, “Everybody’s Pocket Code” which was distributed in sealed packages to seven mission stations. Although it was also a commercially available code, the rationale was that Japanese crews were unlikely to be able to decipher the code or, if they did, it would take them too long for the message to be of any advantage to them. With the distribution of the code, the Navy assumed full control of the Coast-Watching organisation:

“While this is primarily a war time organisation, they have been instructed to communicate direct to this Office, and if possible, Navy Office, Melbourne, any movements of foreign craft etc. in their area during peace time, which may be of interest.”

The mission pedal radio transmissions could not reach Melbourne and so what happened in practice was that the missionary Coastwatchers continued to radio Cloncurry as they had always done and the radio operator there relayed any messages concerning foreign vessels to the Navy. In 1938, in order to improve the policing, customs and Coastwatching network, a purpose-built Patrol Vessel, Kuru, was constructed in Sydney and commissioned to regularly patrol the Northern Territory coast and islands and visit the Coastwatchers. Captain John Bell was at the time Chief Officer of the Coastal Patrol. He automatically became Master of the Kuru on its arrival in Darwin.

The new patrol vessel was effective along the coast adjacent to Darwin and nearby islands but the acknowledged reality was that it was still impractical to patrol as far away as the Gulf of Carpentaria with any degree of regularity. The missionary at Guroo Eylandt was told that he need not continue daily reporting of Japanese vessels in the Gulf unless they were committing a serious offence, as no immediate action could be taken from as far away as Darwin merely to check on the registration of a Japanese lugger. In retrospect, it is a pity that the Japanese vessels were not perceived as a security threat and that they were not more closely monitored but the Navy’s resources were simply insufficient to patrol the Gulf and the threat was not sufficiently recognised until too late.

Len Harris becomes a Coastwatcher

Church Missionary Society missionary, Rev Leonard John ‘Len’ Harris, arrived on Guroo Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria early in 1939. On the island were several hundred local ‘Warnindilyakwa’ Aboriginal people, about 20 Aboriginal mission residents with two or three mission staff and, at Umbakumba in the north of the island, a recently-arrived trader and beachcomber, Fred Gray. Not long before Harris arrived, Qantas Airways had pioneered their ultimately short-lived Sydney-London mail and passenger flight using C-class Empire flying boats. Not long before Harris arrived, Qantas Airways had pioneered their ultimately short-lived Sydney-London mail and passenger flight using C-class Empire flying boats. With very short flight ranges compared to modern aircraft, the flying boats had to stop to refuel 39 times en route to London. Between Townsville and Darwin, one of these refuelling stops had recently been set up with a small staff at the lagoon at Umbakumba.

One of Harris’s many duties was to maintain the daily radio schedule. He thereby assumed the task of Coastwatcher – the person referred to in official documents as the ‘Missioner’. CMS simply told him that the radio schedule was one of his responsibilities. As for operating the pedal radio, he taught himself with the help of a few notes. There was no formal induction to the role but merely advice telegraphed by the radio operator at Cloncurry. It was a year before there was a visit by Kuru. Fortunately, one of Traeger’s main aims had been to develop an easily-operated radio which required no previous training or experience:

“I was at the Emerald River Mission on Guroo Eylandt. My contact with the outside world was with the famous pedal radio set. Mine had a large dry battery for receiving but for transmission depended on the pedal dynamo underneath the wireless table. In those early days, wireless contact was with
Cloncurry, I was 8XK Groote Eylandt and every day I made a call to Cloncurry to send or receive telegrams. Besides the missions, cattle stations had a pedal radio and Mr Traeger at Cloncurry was the ‘life-line’ for many people in the outback.”

If the radio operators did not know each other already, they found themselves daily overhearing each other’s messages and very rapidly became a network of friends, often called upon to help each other:

“Not long after I arrived, Roper River Mission was in trouble and needed urgent help but there was something wrong with their pedal radio and they could only manage a very weak Morse Code signal. I could pick it up on Groote but Cloncurry was too far away. I wasn’t yet trained in Morse Code but there was a Morse Code alphabet pinned to the wall in front of me, so I just got on with it.”

As for detecting any enemy activity, Harris and his colleagues were given little if any instruction and so, with the benefit of hindsight, they were probably not as vigilant as they might have been. But they did not know that war was looming, nor had they been told to be suspicious of the Japanese fishing boats, which had been visiting the Gulf waters for decades, unless the crew were obviously acting illegally. That mistake was not the Coastwatchers’ fault but due to official short-sightedness regarding Japanese intentions in Australian waters:

“Japanese fishing boats were common in the Gulf although I personally never communicated with any of them. They did sometimes contact Aboriginal people. I saw cloth and tins of tobacco that Aboriginal men had got from the Japanese, trading them for pearl and trochus shell, but their relationship with the Japanese was not always amicable. I heard about the abuse of Aboriginal women but the luggers kept well clear of the missions. I could only presume they were legally fishing our waters. In fact Aboriginal men on the mainland at Caledon Bay just north of us had been arrested for aggression towards Japanese fishermen – surely an indication that the authorities were aware of the Japanese and permitted them to be there with the full protection of the law.”

“But the crews were certainly not just fishermen. They included Japanese Navy personnel. Sometimes when I was with fishing with the Aboriginal men, I saw them in uniform myself on the decks of the luggers when they came in close to drag their fishing nets in the shallow water. They watched us through binoculars but I had binoculars myself and I managed to observe them unobtrusively too. After I had reported this a few times, I was told it was not necessary to keep reporting it every day and that the Japanese luggers were permitted to come on shore to take on water. Even back then before the war, it was a bit of a surprise to me that no-one seemed to be officially interested in what the Japanese boats were actually up to. It didn’t take much to work out that the Naval men did not travel all the way from Japan on the fishing luggers. They must have met up with the luggers on a ship north of us somewhere. Of course, later on we found out that they had been mapping the coast in preparation for a possible future invasion. But even back then before the war, rumour had it that if you wanted a good map of the Gulf you could buy one in Japan.”

Len Harris continued conscientiously performing his Coastwatching duties as best he knew how while carrying out his many other tasks. The few mission staff members under his charge worked in very demanding circumstances to provide education and particularly health care to the Aboriginal people. One important function of the pedal radio had always been medical advice. Harris himself carried out emergency surgical procedures while connected by pedal radio to the Flying Doctor, Clyde Fenton.

Although Harris was a missionary, much of his time and energy was at first taken up by the construction of an airfield. Longer-haul aeroplanes were being developed but it was still a long way from Townsville across the Gulf to Darwin. Only the Flying Doctor, Clyde Fenton, had ever landed an aeroplane on the island. Famed for his aeronautical exploits, Fenton used to land on beaches, get Aboriginal people to assist him to turn the plane and then clear any awkward trees and scrub for take-off.

The aviation authorities needed an intermediate airfield somewhere in between, particularly for emergency RAAF use. Negotiations with the Church Missionary Society to accept a contract for the construction of the facility on Groote Eylandt had commenced before Harris arrived but the responsibility of supervising the task fell to him, someone quite untrained for the job. It was a large task for the isolated little mission and the local Aboriginal men, constructing an airfield of two runways at right angles to each other, 183m wide and each 1.6km long:

“The Aboriginal men were willing enough to work for a bit of pay. No one was forced to – how could I force anybody to do anything, even if I wanted to? Actually, they were all eager to be part of it, part of the strange activities of the whites, I think, a welcome change from their everyday lives. I was never sure how many of them could really envisage what it was all about until a plane actually landed but they were strong workers. Fortunately there was an old tractor at the Mission but I couldn’t have done the job without the half-caste Mission men especially Gerry and Fred Blitner. They were so skilled, so hard working. They were the foremen and they got on so well with the local Aboriginal men – after all, they had been hunting and fishing with them for years.

“It took us a month or so to grub out all the trees and clear the two long strips and then a few months to flatten it all. Gerry and Fred devised really ingenious ways of digging up the big boulders with the tractor and a chain. It was hard work but we did it and we were all proud of the job. It was a great day when I could get on the pedal radio and say it was finished. A few days later they sent an Air Force plane from Darwin to try out the airstrip. I think every Aboriginal man woman and child came to see a plane land for the first time. What a day that was! It was a Hudson Bomber. We heard it coming for about five minutes but when it appeared it was coming in at about 45°. It hit the ground at too steep an angle and bounced off. The pilot controlled the plane and then came in at a better angle, just skimming the trees. I was worried that this proved that our airstrip wasn’t up to standard. But the pilot laughed and said that the Hudsons were a bit front heavy and that he had sent the crew down to the tail end before the second landing.
but he was hampered by a peacetime lack of resources. He enlisted the services of his former colleague, Lieutenant Commander Eric Feldt, who was working in New Guinea at the time but had remained on the Naval Reserve list. Feldt’s naval experience coupled with his knowledge of New Guinea made him ideally suited for assuming responsibility for the intelligence organisation in the north:

“...War comes to Australia’s north ...

Well before World War II began, Australian authorities, especially Naval Intelligence, were concerned about Japan’s Imperial intentions in the Pacific region, although it does not appear that they ever connected that with the activities of the Japanese fishing luggers. As early as 1935, Director of Naval Intelligence, Commander RBM Long, had tried to close the gaps in the Coastwatcher network, especially to Australia’s north in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, but he was hampered by a peacetime lack of resources.

Japanese aggressive territorial policies were clearly demonstrated in Japan’s invasion of China in 1937. The long, bloodthirsty and finally unresolved war with China was reaching a stalemate by 1940. Japan’s attention shifted southwards in what they called “Nashin-ron”, the policy of southern expansion. Japan invaded Indochina (Vietnam), from where they could pose a threat to European possessions in Southeast Asia, including British Singapore and Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), although the threat was not taken seriously soon enough in Australia. In 1939, at the outbreak of the War in Europe, Commander Long found himself with emergency powers and more resources. He approved of our work. They were worried that planes like the Hudson Bomber might not make it from Townsville to Darwin in adverse weather, so they decided to make our airstrip an emergency refuelling base. They contracted us to mill timber to construct some huts. They sent some tradesmen from Brisbane to erect them and sink fuel tanks. The Aboriginal men helped them dig. They sent two men to manage the little emergency base, Wallace and Beer were their names, good blokes.”

As a Coastwatcher, Harris logged in daily, ignoring ordinary Japanese activity as instructed but reporting incidents he thought worth noting. He encouraged Aboriginal people to tell him about anything new or unusual. But there was very little of significance, or so they thought, and the radio schedule was dominated by medical matters and private communications.

This false sense of security continued for nearly two years. Even when war broke out in Europe in September 1939, real danger still seemed far away to Harris and his Coastwatcher colleagues on the other remote islands around Australia’s northern coast. That was to change suddenly and decisively for the Coastwatchers in December 1941.

“...It would be my duty, firstly, to ensure the proper functioning of the organisation as it was; and, secondly, to expand it so that it would cover all our needs, using civilians as Coastwatchers...From the point of view of defence, the islands in the North-East Area form a chain screening Australia from the north and east. It was, in fact, a fence, but with several gates, the straits between the islands. My job was to make the fence effective as soon as possible. There were some Coastwatchers in the area but not enough to cover it.”

Feldt and the Naval Intelligence Division determined at the time that New Guinea and the Solomon Islands formed the first line of defence, and so Feldt concentrated his efforts on setting up an effective Coastwatching network on those coasts. Australia’s own northern coasts were considered less strategically important at the time and so little changed there. Harris and the other missionary Coastwatchers continued to do what they had always done as carefully and faithfully as they were able.

On 7 December 1941, Japan entered the War, attacking the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour and, almost simultaneously, US bases in the Philippines, Guam and Wake, and British bases in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. The once-distant War was now in Australia’s own region and Australian forces were under attack in Singapore. If Singapore fell, there was no doubt that the Japanese would rapidly extend their aggressive southern advance.

The Naval Intelligence Division took immediate steps to improve the effectiveness and communication capability of the Coastwatchers – and, with such increased risk of attack, this now included the previously unofficial volunteers on Australia’s own northern approaches. Immediately following the Japanese attacks, the Navy requisitioned the Northern Territory coastal patrol vessel Kuru, attaching her as HMAS Kuru as a tender to HMAS Platypus. John Bell had by then joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve. His previous experience as Master of Kuru made him highly suited to command
the newly-commissioned vessel. He formally assumed his responsibilities on 8 December with the rank of Probationary Lieutenant. One of his major initial tasks was to revitalise the old voluntary observer network and place it on an official footing.

**Coastwatching on wartime Groote Eylandt**

On 12 December 1941, galvanised into action by the Japanese attacks, Kuru was despatched around the north coast and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Bell’s task was to visit the north Australian network of unofficial Coastwatchers, formalise their role, brief them on what and how to report and provide them with Teleh radios. He visited all the mission station staff involved in the old arrangement, including Father John McGrath at the Sacred Heart Mission on Bathurst Island, and Rev Leonard Kentish at the Methodist Mission on Elcho Island. About a week later he reached Groote Eylandt. HMAS Kuru anchored near the mouth of the Emerald River. Bell took the ship’s launch up river to the CMS mission station, the now-abandoned site which is still locally called “Old Mission”:

“Late in 1941, around the middle of December, Captain Bell on the Kuru called at the Emerald River Mission. He told me that the sudden expansion of the War into the Pacific meant that the whole Coastwatching operation had now been formally taken over by the Navy and that it was to be extended and put on an official footing. He asked me if I was willing to be part of this new organisation and serve as an official Coastwatcher. The Navy had already contacted CMS in Sydney, he told me, and they had agreed that the decision was up to me. I had not the slightest hesitation. It was after all simply a question of duty. Captain Bell administered the oath and I was sworn in as an official Naval Coastwatcher.

“Captain Bell told me that the reorganised group included the existing Mission Coastwatchers, all the ones I knew from before like Father John on Bathurst Island and Len Kentish on Elcho Island. They needed us because we were the only ones always in touch with the Aborigines. He told me that they would fill in the gaps between the missions with Naval officers. I eventually got to know some of them too, like Petty Officer Jack Jensen on Marchinbar Island. They lived a pretty isolated life with supplies dropped off by the Kuru every now and then. We all knew there had to be a reason why the Navy suddenly was being nervous, it was a kind of unspoken truth between us. None of us would admit to it, but we knew what was going to happen and although people did not admit to being nervous, it was a kind of unspoken truth between us. We all knew there had to be a reason why the Navy suddenly thought us Coastwatchers were important.”

Naval Intelligence Division's fears of the possibility of Japanese aggression proved more than justified. The Pacific war escalated with frightening rapidity. Bell had not long completed setting up the new Coastwatcher network when, on 19 February 1942, four Japanese aircraft carriers, Akagi, Kaga, Soryu and Hiryu, 400 kms north-west of Darwin, turned towards the wind and began launching 188 planes - 71 dive bombers, 81 medium bombers and 36 Zero fighters. At 9.30am, Coastwatcher Father John McGrath at the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island heard the huge flight pass overhead. Using his newly-issued Teleh radio, he contacted VID Darwin Coast Radio. Radio Operator Lou Cornock passed the message immediately to RAAF Operations who received it by 9.37am. But the Coastwatcher’s warning was not heeded.

Twenty minutes later the first bombs fell on the town. A dismal mix of inexperience, poor inter-service communications, personal antagonisms and plain inertia left the town and the massed shipping without warning. On that morning, at least 235 people were killed – Army, Navy and Air Force personnel and many civilians including waterside workers and all the Post Office staff. Hundreds more were wounded. Twenty aircraft and eight ships including both US and Australian Naval vessels were destroyed. Almost all civil and military facilities were rendered inoperable.

“I had been instructed to send out a general call next morning, like I used to with the pedal radio and see how well I was received. Of course they were expecting my call at VID Darwin Coast Radio. They were to be my new radio contact so they replied almost instantly. I spoke to Lou Cornock in Darwin for a bit and then Thursday Island came on air and told me they were receiving me loud and clear. Then to my great surprise, I got a message from South Australia saying my signal was strong even down there. I had arrived in the world of radio!

“We all knew things were getting serious now. I rapidly learned how to use the Playfair Code. Some of our communications were by voice but anything we thought strategically important was coded. Listening to everybody on the radio, I sensed an apprehension. Nobody knew what was going to happen and although people did not admit to it, it was a kind of unspoken truth between us. We all knew there had to be a reason why the Navy suddenly thought us Coastwatchers were important.”

I was at the other end of the island at the flying boat base at Umbakumba on the morning of 19th February. While I was talking to them a radio message came through that Darwin was under attack and that bombs were falling on the harbour and the town. Then the radio went dead. The silence was frightening. ‘It’s taken a direct hit’, we thought. We had no idea what we should do, and imagined we could be the next target. We decided that we would see or hear any Japanese planes approaching and that if we did we would just run and hide in the jungle.

“We stayed glued to the silent radio. About two hours later we heard a plane. We ran and hid ourselves away from the buildings. When we saw the plane, it was a flying boat, very low over the trees. It came down on the lagoon. The officer in
charge of the refuelling depot said, ‘Well, padre, now we have a problem! Who is flying the plane? Them or us?’ He knew the crew couldn’t get ashore without swimming. So he got a loaded rifle and took the launch out, staying at a distance. Brave of him, nevertheless. After a while the door opened and the pilot called out. It was obviously an Australian pilot and there was a flight steward with him.

“The pilot said that he thought he couldn’t just hide and do nothing with Darwin being destroyed around him. He managed to locate another crew member and they found a rowing boat and rowed out through the burning harbour to a flying boat which somehow had not been hit. The engine had started straight away, he said, and they simply taxied through the burning ships, found clear water and managed to take off. They took the most direct overland route to Groote. They flew low almost touching the treetops all the way, he said, expecting to be shot down any moment.”

“There was still no radio contact with Darwin but I was a Coastwatcher after all so I decided I should head back to the mission in case I had to be near my radio. The next day radio communication was restored. Of course in due course I found that my colleague Father John McGrath had in fact reported the Japanese planes flying over the Bathurst Island Mission. It was all a tragic irony really. The Navy set up a Coastwatching network and then the one time they really needed it, the people in charge in Darwin ignored it. It worked perfectly but they didn’t believe their own system. Father John was a good, intelligent man and Lou Cornock was totally dedicated and efficient. They were just ignored. There could have been far fewer lives lost...”

Around Groote Eylandt there was suddenly a marked increase in Japanese activity to report. It seemed to Harris that the Japanese were exploiting the temporary disarray in Australia to venture more boldly into Australian territory. Japanese planes became a daily observation although they were mostly flying very high. Harris identified most of them as Zero fighters, no doubt from Japanese aircraft carriers to the north. There were Japanese ships in the Gulf too, not only fishing vessels, but Naval ships taking advantage to the north. There were Japanese ships in the Gulf too, as Zero fighters, no doubt from Japanese aircraft carriers that the Japanese were exploiting the temporary disarray in Japanese activity to report. It was possible that Groote could have been attacked. I actually thought it quite likely. The Japanese spies on the fishing boats must have known about the Emerald River Mission for decades and all the other isolated Missions as well of course. But now we had two mile-long landing strips right next to the mission. I thought it was like painting a target on us really. The Japanese planes flying high overhead must have regularly seen the airfield and the mission buildings nearby.

“Every now and then the Aboriginal men would get smoke signals relayed from the coastal people via Bickerton Island, telling of the sighting of Japanese ships between Groote and the mainland. That didn’t surprise me at all. Their fishing luggers had always been hanging around that area before the war. Even back then I had wondered why they were checking out the Roper River. It was navigable right up past the Mission and I know there were Naval officers on them. I felt certain that the Japanese, after destroying Darwin, were now thinking about cutting off the north at the Roper River.

“The first ship I actually saw for myself came between Groote and nearby Bickerton Island. Aboriginal people first saw it and alerted us. I went straight away and reported it and then climbed Castle Rock to see for myself. It was a small ship but through binoculars obviously a Naval vessel, an armed vessel. Next day, on the radio schedule I got to talk to a senior officer. He said the information was important and that they couldn’t do anything about it at this point. They had no planes available since so many had been destroyed.”

Groote Eylandt was now in a war zone and came within the emergency powers of the North Western Area Command. One of the most complex issues to deal with was the presence of civilians in what was now a war zone and how to ensure their safety. Many civilians in Darwin itself had already fled. CMS was officially advised by the Department of Army that the security of the northern missions could no longer be guaranteed. Shortly after the bombing of Darwin, a decision was made to evacuate women and children from the north to Adelaide, Sydney and other southern cities. The Qantas refuelling base was placed under Air Force control. Len Harris’s wife Margarita, ‘Margery’, and their young son, John, were evacuated from there in a flying boat carrying wounded servicemen which had come down for refuelling at Umbakumba.

A far more complex issue was the fate of the half-caste women and children. Harris feared for their safety in a Japanese invasion. They were all light-skinned, English-speaking people who would simply be presumed to be Europeans. It was possible that the Japanese might leave Aboriginal people alone but no such guarantee could be made about the light-skinned people. North West Area Command agreed and ordered the evacuation of the half-caste women and children from the island and coastal missions but, overstretched already, they were not able to offer a great deal of support.

The women and children, under the care of three amazingly dedicated missionary women, were taken by boat to the Roper River Mission and from there all the way to Sydney on the back of a truck. North Western Area Command eventually provided some limited material assistance but it was a long and arduous journey. They had no real idea where they were going and the evacuees mostly slept by the side of the road. One of the babies died on the way. This whole operation is now controversial and the author has provided details elsewhere. It was however the only responsible and compassionate option achievable at the time. What some modern critics fail to understand is that this was war time and that responsible people were quite rightly afraid for the safety of others. They had to make the best decisions they could under great pressure and then act on those decisions without much material support. In retrospect it is easy to look back and say that the Japanese did not invade and that the war ended in 1945. No one knew that then. No one knew that an atomic bomb existed:

“We had no idea when it would end. I thought it would go on for another ten years at least. So did all the Air Force and Army men I met. I did not think the Japanese forces could get as far as Sydney or Melbourne but I expected they could well take the north. I know there were official contingency plans
The question of Aboriginal loyalty during World War II has puzzled many, wondering what would happen to them if they chose to co-operate as a source of desirable goods. Australia and knowing nothing of the War, might simply presume what their response would be. However, this might not have been the case for many traditional Aboriginal people, living in remote parts of Australia and not wanting to fail them but also knowing that they should not simply presume what their response would be.

With Australian Defence resources stretched to the limit, the Japanese seemed to know that they could continue to risk sending small Naval vessels into the Gulf. Before the war, the closest to the mission Harris ever saw fishing luggers was when they anchored off Bickerton Island, one of their favourite watering places and less than 20km from Groote. The Japanese Naval vessels still seemed interested in Bickerton Island. Harris wondered if they had something hidden there but if they did, the Aboriginal people never found it:

“One evening an excited group of men paddled across from Bickerton to report that numbers of Japanese had landed there. I tried to send a coded message straight away but it didn't get through – I don't think VID Darwin was tuned to our frequency that night. So I had to wait until next morning.”

That evening, as a result of the Japanese landing so close to the mission, Harris felt that he should openly discuss the possibility of a Japanese invasion with the Aboriginal people. It had been worrying him for some time. He did not want to fail them but he also knew that he should not simply presume what their response would be.

The question of where Aboriginal loyalties might lie was being openly discussed at that time. There were irresponsible, scaremongering letters to newspapers but there were also serious official reports. Lutheran missionaries of German descent were incarcerated during the War and there were concerns that Aboriginal people from the Lutheran missions in Central Australia may have been sympathetic to the Germans and therefore to the Japanese. There were also concerns being voiced that those Aboriginal people who had reason to feel they had been treated unjustly could think that life might be better under the Japanese. And there were concerns that traditional Aboriginal people, living in remote parts of Australia and knowing nothing of the War, might simply see the Japanese as another intruder but perhaps one with whom to co-operate as a source of desirable goods.

This question of Aboriginal loyalty during World War II has been fully discussed in Robert Hall’s excellently researched book The Black Diggers. After canvassing all aspects of the issue, Hall draws the clear and now obvious conclusion that most of those fears were irrational and can now be seen to have had little or no real support in the hearts and minds of the vast majority of Aboriginal people. At the same time as doubts were being aired about Aboriginal loyalty, Aboriginal men were being enlisted to fight for their country. Their courage and self-sacrifice speaks for itself. Many were killed but the sad reality is that those who survived returned to a still racially-divided Australia, where they had fewer rights than they had experienced in the armed forces.

Harris had absolutely no fears for his own safety at the hands of the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal people, whom he regarded as close friends but he knew they did not really comprehend the scale of a Japanese invasion and what it would mean to them. He realised that he needed to be proactive, raise the subject and begin an informed discussion in which they could consider how they should act:

“I thought the discussion would be best in their space, not mine, so I took some flour and tea and sugar down to their campsite. I got the old men together, the decision-makers, Groote men and Bickerton men too, the ones who had come across with news of the Japanese landing. We sent the small boys for a few more sticks of wood, stoked up the fire, made damper on a hot rock and boiled the billy. Then I broached the subject. My Anindilyakwa was a bit inadequate for such a serious topic but with a bit of broken English thrown in I managed as best I could. ‘The Japanese might come with all their ships and guns and fighting men’, I said. They might come here and take this country, take Groote Eylandt. Maybe you might be better off with the Japanese than the white people. They might give you more things, more cloth, more knives, more tobacco, more tucker...”

“There was much more I had planned to say but they cut me off. They had understood everything – brilliant linguists they are, speaking multiple languages. They talked together earnestly and excitedly, using two languages among themselves, Anindilyakwa and Nunggubuyu, and I got a bit lost. They chose one spokesman and when I didn’t catch on here and there they enlisted the help of the small boys who had learned some English when the school was operating. They too argued among themselves about the correct English and the whole thing would have been quite hilarious if the subject wasn’t so serious.

Len Harris performing a baptism in a water tank (Courtesy John Harris)
“Many people came here over the years,’ they told me. ’We used to trade with the Maccassans every year – axes, buckets, cloth, tobacco, grog – but they never stayed on, just gathering trepang until the monsoon winds took them home. Some of our old men went to Maccasar as crew on the prahus when they were young and they can still speak that language. The Maccassans stopped coming but then the Japanese started coming in their fishing luggers. We could see they weren’t always fishing but snooping around and we were always suspicious of them. But yes, we did trade with them sometimes, exchanging pearl shell and trochus for cloth or tobacco.

“The Japanese interfered with our women too,’ they said. ’Some of them went willingly to them to sell themselves for tobacco, especially over on the coast, but many were taken by force and some were hurt or even killed’. They stressed to me that the killings were never here but on the coast at Blue Mud Bay and Caledon Bay. ’On Groote we always protect our women and girls’ they explained. ’We hide them we don’t let any stranger go near them’.

“Yes’, I said. ’I heard that you even used to hide the women and children from the first missionaries!’ They laughed at that. ’Yes’, they said. ’We used to hide them before, until we learned that the missionaries were good people and wouldn’t hurt them’.

”The Japanese just came to take what they wanted and went away again’, they said. ’They didn’t care about us. The only people who ever cared about us were you missionaries. You came and you brought medicine and you helped the children. And you brought tucker like this tea and damper’. They all laughed at that. ’And what’s more’, they said. ’You missionaries stayed on and lived with us on our land. You let us see your wives and children and you showed no fear and you trusted us. So if there is any fighting, we are on your side!’

This was the outcome Harris had expected but the words needed to have been spoken and he was glad that he had taken the initiative to bring the question out in the open. Unlike most Aboriginal people across the continent, the Gulf people at least had some history of contact with the Japanese, experience of the Japanese fishing boats and crew and therefore a context in which to consider their response to the War. But there was now a second, personal response to the War. But there was now a second, personal experience of the Japanese fishing boats and Gulf people at least had some history of contact with the Japanese.

Harris continued to observe and report Japanese planes and naval vessels. His informal network of Aboriginal observers and the use of smoke signals extended his observation area all the way to the coast. He heard of the crews of Japanese naval vessels trying to get information about everything and having had that discussion was all a great load off my mind. Nothing happened of course. The Japanese left Bickerton under cover of darkness but we were not to know that then. They could easily have intended to come over to Groote and it was essential that we should have had a plan. I sensed that the Aboriginal men were a bit disappointed really.

“In the morning I reported the Japanese landing on Bickerton on the radio schedule. The radio operator, Lou Cornock, got the Navy duty officer to come to the radio. He thanked me and said the information would be passed on but that there was nothing they could do about it. I said, ’Well, what if they do land on Groote one day? What if the mission is really threatened?’ ”Listen, padre,’ he said, ’No heroics now! If there’s ever any kind of imminent danger, put an axe through the radio and go bush!’

”My Aboriginal friends had worked that out already! ’You get us an empty petrol drum’, they said. ’The young men can take it and hide it near Yantarrnga and you can live in one of the caves there. We’ll keep it full of water and bring plenty tucker for you. The Japanese wouldn’t find you there and we’d never tell them either.’ I certainly didn’t need any more reassurance of their loyalty and friendship.”

Harris and his Aboriginal friends did set up his campsite in a cave and Harris slept there a few nights. They considered bringing his radio and generator but Harris decided that they did not need to go that far. With his Aboriginal friends now motivated to be on the lookout for Japanese ships, Harris decided that in the event of a landing, he would have enough warning to leave the mission for his hideout. Harris continued to observe and report Japanese planes and naval vessels. His informal network of Aboriginal observers and the use of smoke signals extended his observation area all the way to the coast. He heard of the crews of Japanese naval vessels trying to get information from Aboriginal people:

”An Aboriginal family were camped at the mouth of the Roper River, fishing by day and sleeping behind the beach at night. One morning they paddled their canoe out early to Maria Island, halfway between the Roper mouth and the Limmen mouth. Beyond the island they were surprised to see a ship. The young men paddled out to investigate. As they got closer to the ship they recognised the writing as Japanese, the kind of writing which they were accustomed to seeing on the Japanese luggers. ’This is an enemy ship!’ they said to each other. At first they didn’t want to go closer but then they were spotted by a crew member who went and got someone whom the young men took to be the Captain. He called out to them in English and began tossing things overboard for them. Intrigued they went closer and retrieved tins of tobacco and other goods in watertight containers. The Captain kept beckoning them closer so they paddled up to the ship.

” ’Where’s the Roper River Mission?’ he asked them. They kept their cool and betrayed nothing. ’We don’t know’, they
replied. 'We don't know about any mission.' The captain threw them more things and they came even closer. 'This is the Roper River, isn’t it?' he asked, pointing to the Roper River delta north of the island. They lied, 'You’re too far south', they said. 'That’s the Limmen River'. The Captain seemed to believe them because he threw them a few more things and went away and the ship sailed off to the north. We owe Aboriginal people more than we realise."67

With major Air Force bases in Darwin and Townsville, the North West Area Command began to recognise the potential strategic value of basing a small permanent Air Force unit on Groote Eylandt in the event of a Japanese attempt to take North West Area Command began to recognise the potential strategic value of basing a small permanent Air Force unit on Groote Eylandt in the event of a Japanese attempt to take North Australia. There was a need for more than a refuelling depot with a staff of two:

'The top man himself flew out to investigate, Group Captain Fred Scherger. He was later knighted, I heard, and became Chief of the Air Force.68 He was a friendly enough bloke, I thought. 'Sherg' the men used to call him. He certainly got things going. He told me that we had built an excellent airstrip and that they would not need to do much to it to establish a proper base. They built more huts and brought in a lot of equipment. There were about 30 men there at times – not just Air Force, but Army and Navy too. Planes began to fly in and out regularly, much to the interest of the locals. I don’t know why they didn’t have a proper radio but I used to have to send and receive messages for them for quite a long time.

"Funny thing was, they covered all the Air Force huts and equipment with webbing, camouflage material, while only a quarter of a mile away we had a bright white-painted roof which they never tried to disguise during the War. It was like beacon! They could use it to locate the airfield, even at night. My friend the Flying Doctor, Clyde Fenton, had been drafted into the Air Force, no doubt because of his great local knowledge. He often landed at the airfield and came over for a cuppa and he said that he could always find the Groote aerodrome because the white roof of the mission house shone in the moonlight. He said that on really dark nights he had a powerful torch and he could hold it out the window and locate the roof and land safely."69

The Japanese attacked Australia and Australian coastal shipping nearly 100 times between February 1942 and November 1943.70 But from Harris’s point of view, Japanese activity in and over the Gulf diminished rapidly due no doubt to the permanent Air Force presence on Groote Eylandt and the increased aircraft presence in the Gulf. He began to find that his role as an active Coastwatcher was becoming less necessary. His official radio work was now almost all on behalf of the Air Force and not the reporting of his own observations of Japanese activity. He was more than willing to continue as a Coastwatcher but he also wanted to carry out his missionary work. He wanted to devote more time to translating the Bible into the Nunggubuyu language. He was very conscious that he was the only priest between the three CMS missions at Groote Eylandt, Roper River (now Ngukurr) and Oenpelli (now Gunbalanya). He longed to travel between the missions in his capacity as their minister, the job he had been appointed to do, but felt loyally tied to his Coastwatcher role.

CMS shared Harris's views and certainly wanted him to resume his religious duties. As early as March 1942, when CMS became aware of the upgrading of the Groote Eylandt aerodrome by the Air Force, they approached the Navy to ask about Harris’s status and how necessary it was for him now to continue as a Coastwatcher.71 It was then agreed that the Teleradio would in due course be handed over to the Air Force and Harris would be free to leave his Coastwatcher post. As it happened, this did not physically take place until much later in 1942 but by the beginning of 1943, when CMS was able to appoint another missionary to Groote Eylandt, Harris was freed to take up the role he so much wanted to fulfil, translating the Bible and travelling between the missions:

"The strange thing is, it was in some ways just as dangerous a job. I suppose the RAAF base on Groote Eylandt may have made Groote a potential target but coastal travel was particularly dangerous. I travelled a lot by boat and in the mission lugger. In January 1943 my friend and fellow-Coastwatcher Len Kentish from the Methodist Mission on Goulburn Island was taken by the Japanese. He was travelling on a boat between missions. Near Elcho Island the boat he was in was bombed by the Japanese. He survived that, only to be taken from the sea by a Japanese float plane and never seen again. We did not find out until after the War that Len had been tortured and beheaded. I think he was the only Australian ever taken prisoner within Australia.72

"Was I ever frightened? Well of course I was, particularly when Darwin was first bombed and I felt so isolated on Groote. But never will I ever forget the loyalty and care of my Groote Eylandt Aboriginal friends. They were great people and I don’t think Groote Eylandt will ever see their like again.

"I am proud to have made some small contribution as a Coastwatcher. In retrospect I now see that the real dangers we
feared never actually eventuated but we did not know that then. From our perspective then, I accepted that there was a risk. I chose the role and I expected that I could have been killed or taken by the Japanese. But so many Australians gave their lives. It was the least I could do. I never hesitated for a moment. It was simply a question of duty.73

Recognition of Len Harris’s service

Len Harris returned to Sydney in 1946 where he spent the rest of his life in ministry in the Church of England (Anglican) Diocese of Sydney. His first appointment was as Rector of Blacktown. He took an immediate interest in the nearby Schofields Air Force Base. In 1948 he became Chaplain to the Schofields and Richmond Air Force Bases with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Some time afterwards he heard from missionary colleagues in New Guinea that missionary Coastwatchers whom they knew there had been commissioned as Navy Lieutenants and given Navy insignia. This was in the vain hope that a rank might give them better treatment if captured by the Japanese.74

“I did wonder about that! I did swear an oath of loyalty administered by the captain of a Naval vessel in time of War. I can’t quite remember what the exact words were but I have always presumed that I simply became an official Coastwatcher. But now I have the rank of Flight Lieutenant anyway so it hardly mattered what I was back then!”75

In the 1970s, Harris’s wife Margarita became unwell so he sought out a quieter life for them both by taking a part time appointment as Priest in Charge of St Georges Gerringong on the NSW south coast. His salary was hardly enough to live on so a friend suggested to him that he might be eligible for a Service Pension through the Repatriation Department (now the Department of Veterans Affairs):

“I was a little bemused at this at first. It had never really occurred to me that I would be eligible for benefits like that. But if other Coastwatchers had Navy rank, perhaps I might be eligible for something. So I thought, well, why not give it a go.”76

Harris began the process of seeking a Service Pension in March 1973. The question of his eligibility was considered at the highest levels in the Repatriation Department and Department of the Navy. It was determined that he had not actually been commissioned as a Naval Officer but that he had indeed served as a Coastwatcher. One of the problems was that in any of the Restricted or Secret documents in which his name might have been mentioned, it was suppressed and he was referred to, if at all, only as ‘the Missioner’. However after investigations which took six months, Harris was granted a pension in November 1973. Len Harris died on 28 September 1988.

The research on which this paper is based commenced in 2009. Discovering any information regarding the determination that Len Harris received a pension proved very difficult. The Department of Veterans Affairs, while acknowledging that Harris had indeed received a Veterans Affairs Pension, told the author that no file on him now existed. They did however provide what they said used to be his file number, AG489. It was the prefix which finally solved the problem. AG stands for Act of Grace. Harris’s pension was an Act of Grace, accorded to those who had in fact served as if they were in the armed forces but had not strictly been members. The National Australian Archives was initially unable to locate such a file. It was not for some years that an assiduous staff member came across a box of Act of Grace files and remembered the author’s search. Harris’s file AG48977 was among them and in due course was cleared and released.

The Department of the Navy’s advice to the Commissioner for Repatriation was as follows:

“Reverend Len Harris was not a member of the Commonwealth Naval Forces. Records held in this office indicate that the Missioner in Charge, Groote Eylandt (Church Missionary Society) acted as a Coastwatcher. He was issued with a teleradio and Playfair Code for use in carrying out these duties.”78

The Department of Repatriation contacted CMS who confirmed that the ‘Missioner’ was in fact Len Harris, that he had served as a Coastwatcher, and that Commander RBM Long had sought CMS’s consent for the installation of the teleradio at the mission. Finally, the Department of Repatriation advised the Treasury to grant the pension:

“The Commission considers that, having regard to the circumstances of the case, and to the precedent that exists for ex gratia payments to former coast watchers, Mr. Harris has a moral entitlement to consideration under the Repatriation Act as if his service on Groote Eylandat the relevant time had been as “a member of the forces”. The Commission therefore seeks approval for payment to him, as an act of grace, of any benefit by way of service pension (and supplementary assistance if appropriate) that he could be paid if he were a “member of the forces”.79

The Treasury approved the pension on 14 November 1973. He had deserved that small recognition. In his own words, “it was simply a matter of duty”.

References
1. Unless otherwise acknowledged, quotations from Len Harris are from his papers (memoirs, notes, diaries, interview notes and other private information in the possession of the author), footnoted as Len Harris Papers. An oral history interview containing another version of much of this information is available at Northern Territory Archives Service, NTRS 226. Typed transcripts of oral history interviews with ‘TS’ prefix, 1979–ct, Reverend Len Harris, TS 64.
2. www2australia.gov.au/coastwatcher/
3. Secretary Department of Defence to Secretary Department of Home and Territories, 24 March, 1927, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory
4. Circular Memorandum from Government Resident to selected individuals, 2 September 1927, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory
5. The twelve Coastwatchers appointed were four Police Officers; the Keeper of the Darwin Gaol; the Master (Engineer) of the Government ketch, Maskee; William Pruen, a cotton planter at Shaol Bay; and the senior missionaries at the Bathurst Island, Goulburn Island, Raper River, Groote Eylandt and Crocodile Island (Milingimbi) Mission Stations. (Government Resident to Secretary of the Navy, 22 November 1929, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory)

Reverend Dr John Harris was born on Groote Eylandt. Initially a teacher, later an Anglican priest, he devoted much of his life to Aboriginal people and languages. A linguist and historian, he wrote a number of books on Aboriginal subjects. Now retired in Canberra, he and Judith have three children and six grandchildren.

www.territoryremembers.nt.gov.au
6. Rev Hubert Warren b. 1885, d. 1934, was a CMS missionary in North Australia. Arriving in 1913, he served in various capacities until 1934. In that year he died when the plane Miss Hobart disappeared over Bass Strait, as a consequence of which his son David later invented the Black Box.

7. Hubert Warren to Government Resident, 1 November 1927, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

8. Father Francis Xavier Gsell, b. 1872, d. 1960, was a missionary priest on Bathurst Island from 1910 to 1938 when he was consecrated Bishop of Darwin from where he retired in 1949. He became known as ‘the Bishop with 150 wives’ because of his strategy of purchasing young Tiwi girls to rescue them from arranged marriages.


10. (Harry) Leslie Perriman, b. 1883, d. 1897, was a CMS missionary in North Australia from 1921 to 1941. He retired to Melbourne where he died at the age of 104.

11. H.L. Perriman to Secretary, Coast Watching Organization, 1 March 1933, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

12. H.L. Perriman to Coast-Watching Organisation, 15 January 1933, 1 March 1933, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

13. For full biography of Alfred Hermann Traeger (1895-1980), see traeger-alfred-hermann-8839


15. Barrier Miner, Friday 14 July 1933 p 2

16. Secretary of the Navy to Government Resident, NT, 16 January 1930, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

17. eg see news item 'Patrol Ship’s First Voyage', Courier Mail (Brisbane) 9 May 1939.

18. Father John McGrath, b. 1893 d. 1982, was a greatly loved Sacred Heart priest on Bathurst Island from 1927 to 1948. At the request of the Tiwi people of Bathurst Island, he was buried on the island.

19. J. McGrath to W. M. Henschke, 22 March 1938, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

20. T. Haultain to Administrator, 24 March 1938, NAA Series F1, Item 1939/59, Coast Watching Organisation in the Northern Territory

21. Rev Wilbur Chaseling, b.1910 d.1989, was one of the founders of the Methodist Mission at Yirrkala in 1935. He became an authority on Yolngu culture and language.

22. Dr Clyde Fenton, b. 1901, d. 1982, was the first flying doctor in the Northern Territory and his own pilot. He was called up to serve in the RAAF in 1940 and two years later, as Flight Lieutenant, he was placed in charge of No. 6 Communications Flight, taking mail and supplies to remote Coastwatchers and RAAF bases.

23. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

24. The precise number of dead may never be known. 243 was for a long time the accepted figure and there is memorial plaque in Darwin saying 291 were killed. The best and most recent research suggests a figure of 235. See Tom Lewis and Peter Ingram, 2013, Carrier Attack, Kent Town, SA: Avonmore Books.

25. Some official information is available in NAA, Groote Eylandt aerodrome, Series No E1404, Control Symbol 274/101/24.

26. 'Half-caste' is now generally regarded as a derogatory term but it was not always so. These part-Aboriginal people at the mission had been rescued from town camps and such places. Fathered and then deserted by white men, neither White Australian society nor Aboriginal society accepted them. They were brought whenever possible with their mothers to live in health and safety on the Mission. There they grew into fine, talented men and women. They were initially employed on the Mission in a range of responsible positions including teaching and nursing assistants, captain and crew of the mission lugger, stockmen etc. They later went on to make important contributions in the wider Australian community.

27. The Warnindilyakwa are theoretically one of the larger of the many Groote Eylandt clans but the term has been extended to include all Groote Eylandt clans and their Anindilyakwa language.

28. The Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt was initially set up as a kind of commune for needy Aboriginal children of mixed descent (‘half-castes’) from anywhere around the Gulf.

29. For source of this and other quotes from Len Harris, see note 2 above.

30. Leonard John Harris, b. 16.11.1911, d. 28.09.1988. Len was ordained an Anglican priest on 13.02.1938 and married Margarita Morgan on 18.02.1939 just before taking up his appointment as chaplain at the Church Missionary Society’s Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, NT, in 1939.

31. The Warnindilyakwa are theoretically one of the larger of the many Groote Eylandt clans but the term has been extended to include all Groote Eylandt clans and their Anindilyakwa language.

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36. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

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39. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

40. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

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49. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

50. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

51. The additional mission stations whose Superintendents became part of the Coast-Watching Organisation were Yirrkala and Port Keats.

54. Len Harris Papers.
55. Len Harris Papers.
56. John Harris, 1998, We Wish We’d Done More, Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, pp 405-417
57. Len Harris papers.
58. Len Harris to John Ferrier, CMS, 14 May 1943. Copy in Harris’s papers.
59. Len Harris Papers.
61. The Aboriginal elders present included Galiawa (Old Charlie), Nakwarrba (Banjo), Damirndu and Nawunawa (Old Mick).
62. Len Harris Papers.
63. Len Harris Papers.
64. Len Harris Papers.
65. Yantarrnga is a rocky hill in the middle of Groote Eylandt. It is sometimes called Central Hill and was also named Mt Ellie by Hubert Warren, one of the first missionaries, in honour of his wife’s birthday.
66. Len Harris Papers.
67. This version of the story is as Len Harris recounted it. The story was often told in later years at Roper River (Ngukurr) by Old Agnes. The two young men were named as Isaac and Joshua. A recording and full transcript of Agnes telling the story are in the possession of the author.
68. Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Rudolph William Scherger, KBE, CB, DSO, AFC (18 May 1904 – 16 January 1984) served as Chief of the Air Staff from 1957 until 1961, and as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, forerunner of the role of Australia’s Chief of the Defence Force, from 1961 until 1966. He was the first RAAF officer to hold the rank of Air Chief Marshal. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Scherger
69. Len Harris Papers.
70. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_raids_on_Australia_1942–43
71. NAA. Teleradio – Groote Island, Series No B3476, Control Symbol 133, Barcode 509101
73. Len Harris Papers.
74. After the capture, torture and murder of Percy Good, an elderly copra planter on Buka Island, off Bougainville, all civilian (Coastwatchers) were enlisted into the RAN in the probably naïve belief that their officer status would protect them if they were captured by the enemy. http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/coastwatcher/. Also http://www.battleforaustralia.org/Theyalsoserved/Coastwatchers/CoastwatcherRole.html.
75. Len Harris Papers.
76. Len Harris Papers.
77. NAA, File AG489: HARRIS, Leonard John, Series No A2806, Control Symbol, AG489, Barcode 13600061.
78. Memorandum, Dept of Navy to Deputy Commissioner of Repatriation, Sydney, 3.07.73, in file AG389.
79. Secretary, Repatriation Commission to Secretary, Department of the Treasury, 29 August 1973, in file AG489

Notes
1. Ed: Most Secret was the equivalent of Top Secret today, signifying the highest level of a security classification, although there are, and was then, “compartmented” sections beyond that.
2. One such code word was ‘Ferdinand’, taken from the children’s story The Story of Ferdinand, the tale of a bull who would not fight but preferred to sit under a tree and observe things. This was to emphasize that the role of the Coastwatchers was not to fight but to be unobtrusive and watchful. The code-word ‘Ferdinand’ was used more particularly in the Coastwatching operation in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.
3. Harris was correct. The most serious of these incidents occurred at Caledon Bay, northeast of Groote Eylandt, in 1932 when five Japanese men were speared. Aboriginal people always maintained that the Japanese were molesting the women. In a subsequent investigation, a police officer was also speared. He had ‘arrested’ a woman and the presumption was made that he was molesting her. Much has been written about this serious incident and its tragic aftermath but a useful starting point is the Wikipedia article, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caledon_Bay_crisis
4. The big depot ship Platypus was a familiar site in Darwin Harbour throughout the war, surviving many air raids. She featured many onboard workshops, but was never taken outside the harbour.
5. Ed: the latest research shows that 11 ships; 30 aircraft and 235 people were the grim statistics for the day.
6. Ed: McGrath’s warning was discounted as being a flight of 10 USAAF fighters in the area. If he had said there were over 100, and repeated the number, then there might have been a reevaluation in Darwin. However, there would have been little change to the defence of the town. The 10 Kittyhawks might have got up to height and fought more effectively but the 36 Zero pilots were far more experienced, and the Zero a better aircraft. The anti-aircraft defence would have probably had the same effect, given the gunners’ lack of experience.
7. Ed: the first raid was the only time carriers were used. All of the other raids over the next two years were from Japanese Navy and Army – they did not have a separate air force – based on the islands in what is now Indonesia, Timor and New Guinea. Current research is showing over 100 raids.
8. Ed: in fact, evacuation had taken place the previous year. By the time the Japanese initial raid occurred, there were only 2000 civilians left in the town, a marked decrease, with almost all women and children gone, while aboriginal people were taken south.
The Territory Remembers
The Neptuna Porthole’s life as a Coffee table
By Wendy James

One of the commercial ships in Darwin Harbour at the time of the first bombing raid by the Japanese on 19 February 1942 was the MV Neptuna. It was owned by the Burns Philp Company. The vessel was bombed, strafed, caught fire, exploded and sank beside Stokes Hill Wharf.

When the ship exploded, an extraordinary thing happened; one of its portholes was blasted off with such force it hurtled upwards and landed on the hill overlooking the Port. Many knew it existed. Many searched for it, but somehow it mysteriously disappeared.

Our family has strong links with Darwin. Our parents, Stan and Poppy Secrett arrived with my brother John and myself in 1937. They fell in love with the lifestyle and vowed never to leave. A baby sister was born, Lorilee. However, in December 1941 all women, children and the infirm were ordered to evacuate the town; an attack on Darwin was imminent. My mother, a strong-willed beautiful woman refused to leave but had no option. We boarded the MV Koolinda and sailed to Perth, always on the alert for mines in the sea or attack from the air. We disembarked with little money and a few clothes in a string bag then had to face the reality of life as refugees in our own country. My father was co-opted into the Civilian Construction Corp for the duration of the war. He was working near the wharf when the first bombs fell and ran for his life to find an empty slit trench.

The war ended on 15 August 1945. Six weeks later our family returned to Darwin, united at last and back in the town we loved, although there was not much of it left. Huge convoys of trucks were moving the armed forces south to be demobbed. One night we were woken by a loud banging downstairs. The Town Major was at the door holding a large hessian bag. In it was the Neptuna porthole. He was leaving the next day on the last convoy. He had kept the porthole hidden under his bed because he believed it belonged in Darwin and entrusted it to our family to make sure it stayed here. He stressed that it must remain out of sight for two years.

In 1947 the porthole was transformed into an elegant coffee table with simple brass legs to support it. The porthole became an integral part of our family life. All six children, John, Wendy, Lorilee, twins Peter and Robert and Holly remember cleaning the brass and polishing its glass window when it was their turn on the Saturday morning cleaning roster. It was not a job we all enjoyed but there was always satisfaction when the polished brass shone, which is probably why we remember it with such clarity.

Our father died in 1955 and life for our mother and the younger children became very difficult. However, she kept the porthole until 1974 when it was gifted to the Navy. Captain Eric Johnston made plans for it to be installed in a small concrete building called the Cell Bar used by naval officers as a recreation facility, situated near Stokes Hill Wharf.
Wendy James OAM came to the Northern Territory as a small child in 1937. She has been evacuated from Darwin twice, once in 1941 just prior to the bombing of Darwin and once in 1975 after Cyclone Tracy. She has lived most of her life in Darwin, is married, and has four sons and eight grandchildren. She was the first Convenor of the NT Government’s Women’s Advisory Committee; is a life member of the Penguin Club of Australia; and has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her “service to the community through the promotion of women’s issues in the Northern Territory”.

These plans were postponed when once again disaster struck Darwin. Cyclone Tracy swept through the city and its surrounds leaving behind destruction and a largely homeless population in its wake. The porthole was temporarily lost in the stone rubble of Naval Headquarters. It was eventually recovered and in 1976 was formally installed in the Cell Bar by Captain Tos Dadswell, taking its place alongside portholes salvaged from naval ships sunk in 1942. My mother and the Secrett family descendants attended the brief ceremony.

Our mother Poppy died in 1978 having lived an eventful and courageous life in the place she loved. I maintained a watchful eye on the Cell Bar, believing that small museum was not a permanent fixture. I wrote to Commander John Navin RAN in December 2014 expressing my concerns and asked if the porthole could be returned to the family to be offered to the Darwin Military Museum. My concerns were overtaken with excitement and relief when I learnt that the contents of the Cell Bar had been taken to the Museum in January 2015 to be included in the HMAS Melville display, including the Neptuna porthole.

For us it is a fitting memorial to our mother Poppy Secrett and I know she would be proud and pleased with its final resting place.

Notes


The main Darwin wharf in June 1943, with the Neptuna wreck lying nearby. (RAAF)
When Darwin was first bombed, my mother, father and sisters Camille, Elaine and Melodie, lived in Tennant Creek. When we came to Tennant Creek our Dad was employed by the Department of the Interior, in charge of the government bores in our area and Murunji track. I believe the government drilled and equipped many bores in the Northern Territory during the war.

At one time when Dad was servicing a bore, he wrote my name ‘Wendy’ on the tank with whitewash. Since then that has been its name. Wendy Bore is on the map. It is below Anthony’s Lagoon below Desert Bore and above Boundary Bore.

We had heard rumours that Japanese planes were headed our way. A slit trench was dug at the front of the house, which was behind the police station and gaols in Patterson Street. This trench became our favourite cubby house for years after.

My sister Camille remembers Sergeant Dinny Smythe who lived next door, taking us all out bush in a ute for fear of an invasion. I don’t know where we expected the planes to fuel-up along the way!!

I remember all the convoys going through Tennant Creek to Darwin. The soldiers really loved us and always threw us their little food ration tins full of goodies; concentrated blocks of meat, fruit, desserts etc. Our family lived on four-gallon tins of dehydrated cabbage and potatoes along with Camp Pie and Bully Beef. We also had a vegetable garden plus ducks and chooks. There was a good butcher shop in town too.

I remember my uncle Butt (Ernie Butler) who came through on the convoy. Camille and I were sitting on the front verandah of the police station, which was in front of our house right on Patterson Street. Camille said she can remember we were wearing bloomers as it was so hot. Uncle Butt walked up to the policeman who was there and said: “Do you know Lina Stiles”? We sang out: “Yes she is our mother”. As mum wasn’t there at that particular moment, he wrote his name on the Police station veranda, Camille said, in pencil.

I spoke to mum (alive and well at 101 years) recently, who said she spoke to Uncle Butt briefly, then she and dad drove to Elliott that night, where they saw him again and had a beer and a catch-up. There was a large platoon of soldiers in the camp set up at No 8 Bore. She said the fruit and vegetable garden there was amazing and the camp could house 1500 troops. It was named after Captain “Snow” Elliott MBE who oversaw its construction.

Uncle Butt was shot by a sniper when he went to New Guinea, never to return to Australia, his wife and three children. We were visiting my Aunty Noelle in Claremont WA years later when his personal belongings were returned
in a large trunk. Everything had been rifled through. It was so sad for them. There is a tree and plaque in his memory at Kings Park, Western Australia.

I remember standing on the wing of a Wirraway when it landed to fuel-up in Tennant Creek. Mum said Dad was fuelling the plane which had to be filtered through fine cotton to ensure it was clean.

Before we moved into our house it had been used as a government storeroom so was filthy dirty. Mum remembered when we arrived there was a rainwater tap just inside the front door with a cocky sitting on it, completely featherless, waiting for a drop of water! Mum had the house spick and span within weeks and dad put a shade house verandah along the back. They had a cyclone bed hanging upside down as a hammock.

Our main garden was oleanders, parkenzonia, Chinese creeper (with the little red pods) and the flat butter beans which grew all over the shadehouse. They were lovely to eat with salt, pepper and butter.

Mum said our toilet (lavatory pan type) was used by the soldiers and it was a full time job to keep it clean, even though it was emptied regularly by the lavatory man. She cleaned it regularly with phenyl. Of course, the usual toilet paper in those days was squares of newspaper with a hole punched in the corner and hanging from wire on the toilet wall. We were also taught to throw ashes, stored in the bucket in a corner, into the toilet if we did a number two. There were plenty of ashes in those days with wood fires around our necks, wrists and ankles and won first prize, a lovely writing compendium each printed with fairies.

When mum went into Tennant Creek Hospital to give birth to my sister Melodie, Tiger our dog joined her and lay under her bed and could not be moved by anyone. After much effort and angry growls from Tiger, they allowed him to stay. Both my sisters Elaine and Melodie were born in Tennant Creek. Mum said Elaine was the first child in the area to be raised on powdered milk. Dad got a goat to milk for Elaine but it ate poison weed and died. Dad and I often drove to the Tennant Creek Telegraph Station and got a large container of goats cream which he placed between us on the truck seat where we had turns dipping our fingers in.

My sister Camille remembers the air raid shelter at the state school, which we all raced into when the headmaster blew his whistle. We were all required to knit squares of wool which we were told would be sewn together to make hot-water-bottle covers for the troops. Not for Darwin that’s for sure, with the heat up there. The knitting was shocking.

All the houses at Tennant Creek had wood heaps along their back fences. One day I found a box of matches and, starting at one end, proceeded to strike them. As I moved along I couldn't see any flames (this was daytime) so proceeded to light more matches. When I reached the end, the whole back yard was ablaze. Parents rushed out as there was a huge dump of full 44-gallon drums of petrol behind the fire. It didn’t ‘blow’ and I don’t know why. Anyway, I got a good hiding. Petrol was rationed then of course and a very valuable commodity.

I remember breaking my arm at the elbow trying to mount a boys’ bike on my way home from school. I told mum a willy-willy tipped me over and I only told mum the truth the other day. My arm was set at Tennant Creek hospital but the doctor suspected it might have been set crooked as there was no X-ray machine there. I was flown to Alice Springs where my arm was reset by a leading army bone surgeon.

There were army tents everywhere in the Alice Springs hospital grounds as well as a post office. I had free run of the place, but spent most of my time skidding along the wide hospital verandas at top speed with my slippers on, but spent most of my time skidding along the wide hospital verandas at top speed with my slippers on and my arm in great jeopardy! I also helped the nurses by re-rolling sterilised gauze bandages.

One day my sister Elaine tipped Lysol on her leg and developed a running sore which would not heal. To mum’s horror, Tiger our dog licked the scab off Elaine’s leg and within a few days it had healed.

Mum was a great horsewoman and had a lovely little mare called Dixie-Anna. She had been out exercising her horse called Dixie-Anna. She had been out exercising her horse with the local constable, who was on a black stallion. It appears that he kept brushing the stallion against mum’s arm which ended up in mum being thrown. She was dragged for quite awhile with her foot in a stirrup and was covered in blood. All I could do was scream at the top of course and a very valuable commodity.
my voice when I saw her. I probably thought she had been shot by the Japanese! I remember they put her in a warm salty bath.

Camille and I went to Katherine to stay with Peg and Dinny Smythe and their children Brian and Jan. He was the local Sergeant of Police and great friends of mum and dad. He had been our neighbour in Tennant Creek. On one occasion they took us to one of the amazing concerts put on by the troops. Peg allowed us girls to wear her ball gowns to show off to the soldiers. We were allowed to bake little patty cakes and ice them for the men.

What a fuss they made of us all dressed up with makeup on as well. We really believed them when they said we looked like film stars. Dressed up for the soldiers, we three girls wore 'Carmen Miranda' turbans around our heads, which was the rage back then. The concert was outstanding as most of the men were professional musicians, singers and actors. I can still remember some of them dressed up as women. Hilarious!

Mum went to South Australia and worked at Parafield Airport. She took two-year-old Elaine with her. Her job was to sew old silk parachutes onto Tiger Moth frames and then give them five coats of paint. She told me they had to sew the chutes on with lock-stitch. They were training planes.

One day one of the big bosses approached the girls telling them not to go into a 'certain' hangar. Immediately the coast was clear, they all slipped in and had a look. Lo and behold there was a Messerschmitt German plane which was badly damaged. How it got there they did not know, and they were unable to enquire as they weren't supposed to know about it. We wondered later if the pilot had defected.

When we moved to Alice Springs, we all wore lovely tan leather Australian Women's Army Service boots to school after they had been cut down to our ankles.

After the war, our family went to Darwin and purchased ten acres in Nightcliff bordering onto Bagot Road. Our father Ted Stiles started a trucking business, Outback Transport. His main depot was in Peel Street Darwin until he built a home and depot in Bishop Street.

Wendy Farrell (nee Stiles) was born in the West Australian goldfields in 1935, the second of five children of Edward and Lina Stiles. The family moved to Tennant Creek in 1936. Wendy married Mervyn Farrell in 1956. They worked on cattle stations and managed the Wayside Inn at Timber Creek and Outback Transport. Wendy then worked at Ross Park School in Alice Springs for 12 years as a Library Assistant before starting Loveys Deli in Lovegrove Drive around 1988. Together they had five children and 51 years of marriage. Although Wendy now lives in West Australia close to her two daughters, she visits Darwin every year, as she is still a Territorian in her heart.
All over the world the Chinese have made their mark in business and in developing trade centres known as Chinatowns in cities, towns and settlements, they have left an enduring legacy. These Chinatowns were havens, enclaves or in some cases disease-ridden hovels for Chinese immigrants and settlers, some of dubious character, others with a strong work ethic strange to westerners but one that saw them enjoy eventual success along with those with an entrepreneurial flair – though sometimes not entirely legal.

Each Chinatown exuded its own oriental mystique that continues to attract people of all backgrounds. Australian cities and some towns with a history of Chinese settlement have retained, conserved and developed their Chinatowns, which draw tourists and locals alike – all except Darwin. Its own uniquely Territorian style and mystique lasted only 65 years, from the 1870s to World War II, when the military deliberately set about its destruction by vandalism, theft and fire where the authorities before them had all failed.

Darwin’s Chinatown

The story of Darwin’s Chinatown goes back to April 1874 when Captain Bloomfield Douglas, an inept former Royal Navy man, public servant, ‘entrepreneur’ and Government Resident in the Northern Territory of South Australia was commissioned by the South Australian government to bring in 200 Singaporean Chinese for work on the Territory’s goldfields and the Overland Telegraph Line. Acclimatised to the tropics, these Chinese ‘Coolies’ were considered a source of cheap labour and the answer to the Territory’s inability to attract European workers. The arrival of the 186 Chinese at Port Darwin was noted by the local newspaper, The NT Times and Gazette, which, reported that:

“The coolies were landed here in a poor state of health, and if they had been so many cattle, instead of human beings, their low condition would have caused their employers to feed them and to strengthen them before putting them to work.”

Following their arrival in the Territory most Chinese went to the goldfields where they established small shanty towns, always with a temple, at Yam Creek, Brocks Creek, Pine Creek, Burrundie, at the Twelve Mile and at other diggings. Other Chinese remained in Palmerston (Darwin), where they established a small enclave of shacks, narrow lanes and outbuildings on Cavenagh Street, despite the best efforts of the authorities. By 1886 the Chinese population in the Territory was 6421, three times that of Europeans. Two years later they were the largest non-Aboriginal group according to the Government Resident’s Report on Northern Territory for the Year 1908, which stated that there were 6122 Chinese in the Territory. Their numbers told against them.

In Palmerston, as elsewhere in Australia, the Chinese faced racial discrimination and the most visible aspect of their presence became the target. In his Government Resident’s report for 1887, JL Parsons wrote under the Town Health report that, of nine cases of small-pox, eight were Chinese who had recently arrived and a European “...from examining
the clothing of Chinese arriving here." In addressing the health aspects of Chinatown he continued: "A good deal has been done to improve the sanitary conditions...by destroying old wooden sheds used as dwelling-places by the Chinese. All structures built of bark should be destroyed. Over-crowding is still very bad.” 2

Darwin’s Chinatown continued to draw criticism and was described as: "...an unsightly slum, where cramped unhygienic (sic) living conditions endangered public health”. In 1912 Administrator John Gilruth’s secretary HE Carey was moved to write that Gilruth found: “…Darwin a slovenly township with a 'Chinatown' in which conditions were appalling from a public health point of view, with rubbish lying everywhere and malaria far more prevalent than was desirable".3 Such reports were further used: "... to order the demolition of several dwellings in Chinatown in 1913." 4

Restrictions
By 1881, the anti-Chinese feeling in South Australia was enough for the government to define a boundary between the Northern Territory and South Australia extending north almost to Palmerston itself. Chinese could pass south of this imaginary border only if they paid a ten-pound entry tax. However the need for cheap labour and the entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese kept them in the Territory. By 1888, and with the Chinese population outnumbering the Europeans by three to one, racism, a fear of competition and under pressure from the other colonies, South Australia agreed to extend the operation of a Chinese Restriction Act to the Northern Territory.5

The 1890s saw an economic depression and a national campaign aimed at a White Australia that forced many Chinese from the Territory. However, those who stayed on settled permanently in the Territory and set up businesses in Palmerston, Southport, Pine Creek and on the goldfields. Palmerston boasted Chinese bootmakers, tailors, bakers, laundries, hairdressers, providores and general stores, while any vacant land that could be acquired was tilled. Market gardens flourished under the Chinese, who were soon providing the town with fresh vegetables and produce, including pork and poultry. All but very few of these enterprises were run from Chinatown, which continued to grow, along with European businesses extending over Cavenagh Street from the Kwong Hai Laundry and general merchant, Fang Cheong Loong on Bennett Street overlooking the harbour to the 1880s Stone Houses of Kwong Sue Duk.

Despite these restrictions, the Chinese continued to increase and extend their commercial base, due in no small part to their willingness to work under adverse conditions, while incurring the wrath of Europeans in doing so. The "...Chinese, who are ready and willing to work night or day and seven days a week, have ousted Europeans from many branches of trade," one 1897 description read. "...Hairdressing, tailoring and bootmaking are all done by them.... the chefs are invariably Chinamen; this applies to most of the Northern Territory," it went on. 6

Australian bush poet, journalist and author ‘Banjo’ Paterson was a vocal critic of the Chinese, writing in the 31 December 1898 issue of The Bulletin that: "...the Territory itself is now clamouring for the introduction of the cheap and nasty Chow, notwithstanding that it is breeding its own Chinky fast enough... The hordes of aliens that have accumulated are a menace to the rest of Australia.”

Three years later Paterson continued:

"...our Northern Territory, practically uninhabited by whites, is just the place to suit these people...If they once get a good footing there, they will out-breed and out-multiply any European race...Whatever danger there may be from the kanaka is as nothing compared to the danger of the Oriental invasion... The fact that a few thousands of these people have settled on our coasts does not trouble us much. They can do little harm in our time. But the same was said of the first rabbits let loose in Australia...”

Unfortunately Paterson’s vitriol was a reflection of the times and further restrictions on the Chinese were enacted in 1901 when an Act to further restrict Chinese immigration was passed by the Commonwealth. Ten years later a ministerial direction removed Chinese people from their positions as wharf labourers and as cooks on the Overland Telegraph Line. Further restrictions excluded them from government employment, and by 1911 their numbers had dwindled to roughly that of the 1182 Europeans. By 1939 the Chinese population in the Northern Territory had fallen to 659.

By the mid-1930s, Darwin, which had been renamed from Palmerston in 1911, was described as:

"...an odd place...the best of the houses, louvred, verandahed and built high on stilts to catch every zephyr, had charm; the worst were shacks of rusty iron and rotting timbers. At the seaward end of Cavenagh Street lay Chinatown, [a] packed mass of stores and homes, laundries and gambling dens, targeted by two generations of health officials for destruction and dispersion, triumphantly surviving them all." 8

But an essential part of Chinatown was its people and by the early 1930s they were second and third generation Australians; the so-called ABCs – Australian Born Chinese. Alan Powell continues, writing that:

“...they owned all but one (Jolly's) of the town's nine general stores and dominated the service industries. Both white prejudice and their own exclusivism were slowly breaking down. European and Chinese children attended the same schools, their names appeared together in sporting results and prize lists. The first recorded marriage between a European man and a Chinese woman occurred in 1936 and five more followed by 1942. In 1938 George and Lorna Lim brought their family from Katherine and boldly set up shop in Smith Street, in the centre of the European quarter. They prospered. A generation later their son, Alec Fong Lim [became] Lord Mayor of Darwin.”

World War II

With Japan’s expansionist moves in China, Manchuria and the Pacific in the late 1930s, its Tripartite pact as part of the Axis with Germany and Italy and Hitler’s rapid rise to power, Darwin saw a dramatic increase in military activity. From the mid-1920s a series of oil tanks was constructed for the Navy at Stokes Hill, while fortifications were constructed and guns installed at East and Emery Points. Larrakeyah Barracks and a RAAF Station were constructed while a town reliant on wells from its founding saw water...
flow from the newly constructed Manton Dam in March 1941. Banks, offices, a new Hotel Darwin, paved streets and Burnett houses at Myilly Point erected for senior public servants overlooked the Aboriginal compound at Khali.

By 1938 defence planners had the redevelopment of Darwin, and Chinatown in particular, firmly in their sights. With it the demise of Chinatown was mooted; “The days of Darwin’s Chinatown are numbered,” the Northern Standard of 15 April reported:

“Its straggling lines of sun-scorched wood and iron buildings occupy an area needed for defence purposes, and already the more progressive Chinese business houses are making arrangements for new premises in different parts of the town. Replanned Darwin makes no pro-vision for the ramshackle buildings which comprise the greater part of Cavenagh Street, behind whose corrugated iron walls a closely knit community of more than 300 Chinese maintain their entity…”

But, Chinatown had survived numerous attempts by successive administrations to rid Darwin of its shanty town appearance, and wisely and more probably accidentally, the writer, Southwell-Keely, added a rider:

“...its purpose has been served. Modern town planning demands its demolition, and within the next ten or more years – if the proposed defence resumption program is carried into effect - it will cease to be a familiar landmark and the Mecca of curious visitors.” Chinatown survived that brief sentence, but the military ensured its demise during the war years 1942-45.”

With the build-up of Darwin’s defences came the troops, sailors and airmen from all parts of Australia. To them Darwin was a strange, hot and dusty town with a population reflecting many nationalities and all seemingly with an unquenchable thirst. The pubs overflowed during business hours and when they closed the drinking and fighting continued on the streets, notably at the Don Hotel – the ‘Bloodhouse’ – on Chinatown’s edge. One young naval officer, Lieutenant Owen Griffiths, arrived in 1941 and described:

“The asphalt road climbed up and entered the town at a point where a large Chinese joss house was to be seen on the right and the main street of squalid Chinatown on the left… although named Cavenagh (sic) Street, (it) was often referred to as ‘Lavender’ Street. In 1879 the District Council of Darwin (sic) allotted the Chinese a camp to the northeast of the town, as the wind never blew from that direction. A huge banyan tree to be seen growing in Cavenagh Street, (sic) had been a landmark for many years. It was known as the ‘Tree of Knowledge’, and stood in front of what was originally the Terminus Hotel...”

“As wild as any of the Darwin hotels] was the Hotel Don, on the fringe of Chinatown, where men of all creeds and colours drank and argued...Gambling houses were booming...[and] one particular school flourished in the heart of Chinatown. One had to negotiate a narrow, squalid lane, push through a hole in a tin fence, and cross two small odorous back yards, to reach the murky room. A poker-faced Chinaman sat at the gambling table and handled the money. He threw single cigarettes to customers sitting around the table to keep them interested. This house did a big trade and officers rubbed shoulders with troops around the table which was seldom anything but crowded. All the atmosphere of a back room gambling den in Shanghai was there...The betting shops in Darwin, mostly Chinese, were the product of a highly organised business. The Chinese would bet up to any amount...Advance news of anything that was going to happen in Darwin – troop movements, arrivals of ships, anything of importance or unimportance – always came from Cavanagh (sic) Street...At the opening ceremony of a soldiers’ recreational hut by an army general, he said in the course of his speech, that he had it ‘on good Authority form (sic) Cavanagh St. that there would shortly be a big influx of troops into Darwin’. There was.”

On 8 December 1941 the long expected attacks by the Japanese were mounted at Kota Bharu and Singora (Songkhla) in Malaya and Thailand, at Pearl Harbor, the Philippines and at points throughout the Pacific. Australia, and the Northern Territory was in no doubt that their turn would be next. On 16 December The Northern Standard featured an Evacuation Order advising citizens that: “The Federal War Cabinet has decided that women and children must be compulsorily evacuated from Darwin as soon as possible...Darwin citizens will greatly assist the war effort by cheerfully carrying out all requests.”

Over the next few weeks to 15 February 1942, 1414 people, mostly women and children including 206 Chinese, were evacuated by sea. The Koolinda took 225 on 19 December, 530 went on the Zealndia the following day and the President Grant took 222 on the 23rd. The Montoro took 187 on 10 January, followed on the 26th by 173 persons aboard the Koolama. The Koolinda took the last 77 on 15 February, the day Singapore surrendered. Others went by road, rail and air. The last flew out aboard a Guinea Airways Lockheed 10 on the evening of 18 February, leaving just over 2000 civilians in Darwin, 63 of these women in essential services.

Despite the government expecting citizens to assist the process by “...cheerfully carrying out all requests”, the voyages were anything but cheerful, particularly for the Chinese. While some had friends and relatives elsewhere in Australia, Alan Powell writes that:

“Others were not so lucky and suffered cold, isolation and poverty...Ninety-three of Zealndia’s passengers were Chinese women and children [and the] ...welfare officer [on the Zealndia], AF Xuereb...did not find it a matter for concern that the Chinese were excluded from the cabins, crowded together on the starboard deck where some slept and others had hammocks...some Europeans resented the loss of the deck space occupied by the Chinese...One hundred and ten Chinese women and children were amongst the 187 passengers who boarded Montoro on 10 January 1942 and sailed in her to the east coast – a ‘luxury cruise’ according to one Chinese passenger...Few Chinese left by air; but over sixty women, children and elderly men took the train to Pine Creek and Katherine before the end of 1941.”

**Duty bound**

Many of the younger Chinese men remained in Darwin. It was their home and many assisted in defence and other works, while maintaining the family businesses in Chinatown and in the town itself. Most wanted to join the military,
despite
discrimination,
and from 1939
when Australia
went to war
some did.
However, the
restrictions
were such
that in 1940
the enlistment
of British
subjects of
non-European
descent and
Aliens was
referred to a
Committee for
consideration.
In both the
army and
navy the enlistment of persons so classified was arrogantly
declared as being “neither necessary nor desirable”. The
RAAF was more relaxed and could admit non-Europeans
at its discretion, but only as ground crew and confined to
service in Australia. By mid-1941, however, these regulations
were increasingly ignored, as “the threat to Australia had
become too great”. 15

Tom Cheong, the son of Darwin businessman Chin Cheong,
was one who enlisted, recalling that during: “…1939 a lot of
the Darwin boys, school friends, joined the AIF…They used
to march along the streets, the bands playing…and you'd
get all excited, and you'd feel that you should be part of it.
You didn’t care what nationality or colour you were – you
were just friends – all Australians. And I'd always wanted to
fly.” 16

And fly he did. Joining the RAAF on 22 July 1942, Thomas
Cheong went on to fly with No. 43 Squadron in Catalina
flying boats from Karumba and later Darwin on missions
against the Japanese in the Netherlands East Indies. Others
also joined the military during the period 1941 to war’s
end: Kum Tim Yuen; the Chan brothers, Albert, Alfred and
Harry; the Lees – Albert, Harry, Isabel, Jack, Mitchell, Philip,
Wellington and William; the Fongs – Charlie, Ernest, Harry
and Harry; the Moos – Arthur, Clarence, Harry, Frank,
Mavis and Peter; and the Chins – Aubrey, Ronald, Sydney and Raymond. Some, including
the Yuen brothers, joined elsewhere and all joined either
the RAAF or the army. Many served in the Territory and
overseas. 17

Another, Roy Goon, was born in Darwin on 22 September
1913 and later moved to Ballarat in Victoria before
becoming the Chief Flying Instructor at the Victorian Aero
Club in the 1930s. Despite a 1940 RAAF publication
decreeing that “…all candidates [for the Empire Air Training
Scheme] must be British subjects of pure European
descent and also sons of parents both of whom are…
British subjects”, Roy overcame the obstacles with a little
help from a fellow club member and then Minister for Air
Hon. James Fairbairn, and became a highly respected pilot
in single-engined aircraft in all weathers.” As squadron
CO he was responsible for 24 aircraft and 350 squadron
personnel along with the Gove Fighter Sector, the chain
of radar stations on the north coast and a communications
and control centre, the construction of which he
supervised. In between these duties he also managed to
fly. 18

Others served with distinction and many went on to
become successful in business and civic affairs following
the war. Harry Chan, born Hen Fook on 14 June 1918,
enlisted in the army on 28 July 1941 and served in the
Darwin area. He went on to become a successful
businessman and accountant, a member of the Northern
Territory Legislative Assembly and was twice elected as
Darwin's Lord Mayor.

Chinatown’s demise

On 19 February 1942 the wait was over. Many of those
who had remained after the earlier evacuations chose
to leave Darwin and went south, some of them never
to return. Many, including Chinese men, went as far as
Adelaide River and enlisted there. Others, mostly women,
weren't so fortunate. Lee Ying lost her husband, a casual
waterside worker, in the first raid and moved to Mossman
with seven children, three with her name and four with her
husband's name, Cardona. She had only the £5 her
husband had given her and no means of support.

As noted by Alan Powell in The Shadow’s Edge:

“She heard no more of Cardona. His name was not on the
list of dead...compiled by the Commonwealth Railways –
but they knew only the names of the permanent men...not
those of the 'casuals'. In June 1942 the NT Administration
abandoned the search for information. The later fate of Mrs
Lee Ying and her seven children is unknown.” 19

The town was abandoned except for the military and a
handful of essential personnel and while some buildings
were used for accommodation others, including Chinatown,
weren't so fortunate. Materials for use in building defences,
camps and airstrips along the north-south road were
desperately needed and, with no one to claim ownership,
the destruction began. Syd James, a Leading Aircraftsman with the RAAF’s 1 Mobile Works Squadron, was engaged on construction work at the roadside airstrips and recalled: “...one of our jobs...was to erect protection bays for the fighters. To make one of these bays, lots of sheets of galvanized iron were required.” Whenever time permitted they went into Darwin where: “Along with other crews we went collecting the iron off buildings that had been bombed...Any timber we could collect, was very useful for the frame to nail the iron onto... We also dug up an underground petrol tank along with the pipe need to make an oil spray unit...[to] oil the strip and keep the dust down. Many a night I’ve stood on the running board of the old truck (no idea where the truck came from) as it idled along [and] the oil sprayed out.”

Long-time Territorian Reg Weston recalled similar foraging trips into Darwin: “My job was to build inserts for dispersal bays [at the airfields]...We got galvanized iron from abandoned buildings in Darwin, especially in the Chinatown area.”

Darwin also provided some comforts for those units at the remote camps and airstrips, where recreational material, furniture and the essentials to maintain squadron operations were in short supply. Most items were acquired via a ‘Looting Chi’ available from the Town Major stationed initially at Parap and later in the town. As a young Private with the USAF, Ralph Boyce found out on his only trip to the town: “...after lengthy red tape [we] are given a slip permitting us to enter the city and to loot a certain abandoned furniture store of two desks...” Others merely walked in and stole what they wanted before vandalising the buildings.

Boyce later walked through the town expressing dismay at the destruction, not all of which was the handiwork of the Japanese. Of all the attacks mounted by the Japanese against Darwin town only one, that of 26 October 1942, details damage to the Don Hotel and nearby buildings, although near misses with 60kg incendiary bombs were recorded, one narrowly missing the Tree of Knowledge. In May 1942 Administrator Abbott, then based in Alice Springs, reported: “the citizens who...had to leave Darwin have lost everything, not through enemy action, but through the acts of Australian soldiers and civilians...” The Government Secretary, LHA Giles, added: “…the greater part of damage to buildings in Darwin has been caused by Army Units taking the iron off the roofs.”

Fire caused most of the damage. On 11 March 1942 it was reported: “Down in the town a portion of Chinatown was ablaze but fortunately only one store was lost. The fire crews worked hard to prevent the fire from spreading to other tinder-dry shops...”

A month later on 15 April, the Darwin Provost’s War Diary reported that “Fire destroys Chinese Tailor’s shop” and on 9 May the Yam Yan Co. premises were burnt out. In June the Fortress Commander reported a number of fires that may have been lit to cover up looting, and the vandalism and destruction of the remainder of Chinatown and parts of the European commercial area followed.

“Long before the end of the war,” Alan Powell writes, “it became apparent that the army and the vandals vied for first place in the destruction of Darwin town; the Japanese came a distant third...in October 1945 there were only 171 habitable private homes [in Darwin]. The rest, including the whole of Chinatown, was gone.”

Picking up the pieces

Following war’s end many of the evacuees returned to pick up where they had left off – except for the Chinese. In the immediate postwar years, only some 75 per cent of those Chinese evacuated returned to Darwin, while most of the remainder had returned by the mid-1950s. But even when they returned they found the Commonwealth had resumed the town in 1946. There was nothing left of their previous lives, of Chinatown or their business premises and “…their old lifestyle was never resumed...” Chinatown was not rebuilt and only its ruins and the Don Hotel remained.

The returning Europeans and Chinese pressed claims for compensation and many settlements went well into the 1950s, although many of the claims for lots in the former Chinatown appear to have been settled earlier. Lee Bing Kin on Lot 303 settled for £752.19.10 on 5 May 1947, while Chin Gong on Lot 304 accepted £2183.18.3 of his £3,500 claim on 13 August 1948. The estate of Lee Lim claimed £31,000 but settled for a quarter of that, £7,664.13.7. Chin Nam, Chin Ack Han and Wing Cheong Sing & Co. settled for £3,680.13.8 over Lot 307, Albert Fong Goon accepted 6,557.3.0 plus £650.0.0 insurance over Lot 401 on 30 November 1949, while a later settlement was recorded on 12 April 1951 when Chin Toy settled for £3,503.17.7 over Lot 402. Others dragged on, delayed by bureaucracy and the Commonwealth’s plans for a modern Darwin.

In 2016, 75 years following the first attack on Darwin and the start of Chinatown’s destruction, all that remains of the old Chinatown are the 1880s stone houses constructed for Kwong Sue Duk, the Tree of Knowledge – now a part of the forecourt to the Darwin City Council Chambers – and the foundations to the original Sue Wah Chin building on the corner of Bennett and Cavenagh Streets. Scant remains of a once thriving enclave of Chinese who made Darwin their home and who contributed so much over generations.
Notes

1. Northern Territory Times and Gazette. 10 October 1874.
7. Paterson, A. B. In the Sydney Morning Herald, 31 August 1901.
9. Ibid. (p. 10)
12. Ibid. (pp. 32-33)
17. Australian War Memorial. Find a Person. WWII Nominal Roll.
25. Ibid. Powell. (p. 241)

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Raised in rural Victoria Bob Alford’s interest in aviation stems from his father’s involvement in early aviation and membership of the Victorian Aero Club in the 1930s, and the proximity of an active aerodrome near the family property, where Bob took gliding lessons and cadged flights in various aircraft types.

Bob served in the army briefly before joining the RAAF as an Armourer, serving 20 years in a variety of postings, including SE Asia. Following his retirement in 1986 Bob and his family settled in Darwin where he undertook the location and documentation of aircraft crash sites and military sites throughout the Northern Territory. He wrote Darwin’s Air War in 1991, followed it with an expanded version in 2010 and wrote Japanese Air Forces in the NWA 1942-1945 in 2011. He has also written many papers and has provided detailed historical information to a range of authors and organisations.
The Territory Remembers
Darwin 1942: the missing year

By Anthony Cooper

The infamous 19 February 1942 raid on Darwin by the Imperial Japanese Navy has been the subject of so much publishing output since Douglas Lockwood’s first account back in 1956 that the story of what happened afterwards has been shrouded in relative obscurity. However, the Japanese bombing offensive that continued through 1942-43 is no minor story. The air defence of Darwin featured large air raids, big combats, spectacular losses, some leading wartime personalities and moments of great triumph.

From before the great raid of 19 February, and continuously and increasingly thereafter, the Allied air forces fought a bombing campaign against any Japanese strongholds that lay within the operating radius of their strike aircraft, and Darwin’s airfields therefore played host to a considerable roll call of Allied strike units through 1942. These ranged from the RAAF’s pioneering Hudson units, Nos 2 and 13 Squadrons, to temporary detachments of USAAF bombers: B-17s from the 19th Bomb Group in May-July 1942; B-17s of the 64th Bomb Squadron from August 1942; and B-26s from the 22nd Bomb Group in November.

In addition to these temporary deployments there also came permanent additions to Darwin’s Allied air striking force, starting with the RAAF’s No. 31 Squadron, which flew Beaufighters into action over Timor from November 1942. These units spent their time crossing the Timor Sea and raiding targets in Japanese held-territory to the limit of their aircraft’s range. In 1942 this extended as far as Sulawesi and Ambon.

The Allies provided the resources to build Darwin up into a base that would become too hard for the Japanese to crack. The process of airfield building had commenced even before the great raid of 19 February. The Aerodrome Development Program was established on 29 December 1941, with the RAAF commencing site surveys to establish five new airfields running south from Darwin along the highway to Birdum, Daly Waters and beyond. From February 1942, work commenced on three new sites at Hughes, 28-Mile and 34-Mile. By the end of April, construction had advanced so rapidly that newly-arrived flying units were already moving into these three new airfields, the latter soon to be known by the names of Strauss and Livingstone. Whereas Darwin’s war had started with two airfields suitable for operational basing of frontline flying units – RAAF Darwin itself, and Batchelor, about 40 miles out of town – by the end of 1942 there were about a dozen airfields ready for use as far south as Katherine.

All this was achievable because the Allied authorities in Australia had agreed to commit significant engineering resources to the Darwin front, in the process prioritising Darwin over Port Moresby. The 808th Engineer (Aviation) Battalion arrived in February, and commenced the upgrade to military standards of the old civil airport at Katherine. It was the only specialised US airfield construction unit in the South West Pacific Area. The fact that it was deployed to the Territory, rather than to North Queensland or Port
Moresby is testimony to the priority placed upon securing the Darwin front in early 1942. In March 1942 arrived the US 43rd Engineer General Service Regiment, which likewise threw itself into airfield construction. These large American units were joined by the RAAF’s No. 1 and 14 Mobile Works Squadrons and Nos 1, 8, and 9 Airfield Construction Squadrons, as well as the civilian workers of the Australian Government’s Allied Works Council. More active defence measures were also evident. Two anti-aircraft artillery units of the Australian Army had been deployed to Darwin prior to 19 February (the 2nd and 14th Batteries), and by 28 March these had deployed a total of twenty 3.7-inch anti-aircraft (AA) guns. To counter the threat posed by night bombers, as early as 1940 the army deployed to Darwin the 1/54th Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company of the Royal Australian Engineers, with 21 sets of searchlight equipment. By 28 March 1942, there was a ring of 18 heavy AA guns and 14 searchlights defending Darwin itself.

As 19 February had shown, Darwin was also vulnerable to fighters and dive-bombers, which came down low to strafe and bomb, and by the start of April help had arrived to counter this threat, in the form of the 2nd Battery of the AIF’s No. 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, equipped with the highly effective 40-mm Bofors automatic gun. In addition there came B and C Companies of the 102nd Coastal Artillery Battalion (a US National Guard outfit from New York), armed with .5-inch heavy machine guns. Immediately after the big raid of 19 February the Japanese Navy redeployed its air-striking forces away from the Darwin front, moving its land-based air forces to support the conquest of the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines, and moving its mobile strike fleet firstly against the British East Indies Fleet based on Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and then against the US Pacific Fleet in the Central Pacific. The Imperial Navy’s air operations throughout the eastern half of the now-occupied Indonesian archipelago were henceforth run by the 23rd Air Flotilla, the headquarters organisation controlling operations against Darwin.

Using rearward bases on Sulawesi and Ambon, and with forward bases on Timor, the units that operated against Darwin included the 3rd Air Group, a fighter unit operating Mitsubishi A6M ‘Zero’ fighters, and the Takao Air Group, a bomber unit with Mitsubishi G4M twin-engine bombers. In April 1942 these two units had respectively 96 fighters and 48 bombers on strength, but it is highly unlikely that anything like these numbers were serviceable, manned and available for operations. Throughout the 1942 air campaign, the maximum number of aircraft made available for operations over Darwin was about 30 from each unit. In practice even this number was rarely available. Instead these units had to spread themselves broadly to cover all the patrol and defensive tasks required by Southwest Area Fleet HQ at Surabaya on Java.

The air units committed to Darwin operations formed only part of the air forces available to the Japanese navy throughout the Indonesian archipelago. For example, in April there were 96 bombers with the 21st Air Flotilla in the western half of the Indonesian archipelago, supporting Japanese operations against the Andaman Islands. Thus, only a part of a part of the total Japanese operational effort in the Netherlands East Indies could ever be devoted to raids upon Darwin.

The Japanese G4M bomber was a modern machine with two highly-relevant characteristics that made things difficult for the defence: it had a long range, and excellent performance at high altitude. Their Zero fighters had highly compatible and complementary characteristics, its most tactically-significant feature being its innovative combination of high performance and long range. The most significant difference between the two sides in the air war across the Timor Sea was that the Japanese could send their bombers to strike Darwin accompanied by a formidable fighter escort, whereas the RAAF and USAAF had to send their bombers out unescorted. Darwin’s large force of P-40 fighters was thus purely a defensive weapon. After February 1942, the focus of Japanese combat operations shifted in succession to Java, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, leaving the Japanese forces garrisoning the Netherlands East Indies on the strategic defensive. They now occupied and defended an outpost line that ran roughly east-west from Sumatra, through Java and Timor to Dutch New Guinea and then along the northern coast of Papua and New Guinea to the Solomons. Facing Australia, the Timor Sea became the Western flank of this contested line of occupation, with the Eastern flank resting upon the Coral Sea, around which lay the now-strategic territories of the Solomon Islands and Papua. Because this Eastern flank became the focus for both sides’ major offensives – it was there that most of the decisive battles of 1942 were fought (the Battles of the Coral Sea, Milne Bay, Kokoda and Guadalcanal), the Darwin front was relegated to the status of a flank guard, with both sides content to raid and counter raid across the Timor Sea. Both sides sought to suppress enemy air activity and to pin down as many enemy air forces as possible, in order to stop them being committed to the decisive Eastern flank.

The Allied command chain responsible for Darwin operations extended all the way from General Douglas MacArthur, the Commanding General of South West Pacific Area Command (SWPA), headquartered at first in Melbourne and then in Brisbane. His air commander was General George Brett. Running Allied Air Forces (AAF) from the same places, Brett oversaw two frontline headquarters – North East Area HQ (NEA) at Townsville, controlling operations over New Guinea, and North West Area HQ (NWA) at Darwin. This was commanded by Air Commodore Frank Bladin, who was responsible for directing all air operations across a broad front extending from Drysdale Mission in the west to Mililingimbi in the east.

The 1942 bombing season

In line with their limited objectives, the Japanese radically scaled-down their forces attacking Darwin after 19 February. March 1942 provides a clear picture of this ‘normal’ raiding activity. As well as two reconnaissance missions and one night bombing raid, there were six daylight bombing raids, but these were in squadron strength only – an average of only eight enemy bombers per raid. Significantly, in three of these raids the bombers were unaccompanied by escorting fighters. The
Japanese commanders’ willingness to send unescorted bombers over Darwin was indicative of their contempt for the air defences. This was perhaps understandable, given the experience of 19 February, but it nonetheless points to Japanese over-confidence.

Things were not standing still on the Allied side of the Timor Sea. US forces had been arriving in Australia’s east coast ports since December, including the three US fighter units which came to be based in Australia by March 1942, the 8th, 35th and 49th Pursuit Groups. These units were incomplete, were suffering greatly from the logistical disruption and organisational confusion of their unplanned redeployment and the junior pilots were poorly trained. Nonetheless, they represented a sizeable force of nine fighter squadrons.

With Java gone, the only two frontline fighter deployments that were now possible were Darwin and Port Moresby, respectively situated on the Western and Eastern flanks of the SWPA zone of operations. Both of these frontline bases would now getting a fighter force – the RAAF’s No. 75 Squadron was despatched to Port Moresby at the end of March, while the most-complete and best-trained of the three US units, the 49th Pursuit Group, was readied for deployment to Darwin. Both of these pioneering Allied fighter units were equipped with Curtiss P-40E fighters – modern, fast, well-armed machines able to hold their own against the Japanese Zeroes as long as they were able to commence combat from an altitude advantage.

The fact that three fighter units were to be deployed to Darwin but only one squadron to Moresby shows the relative degree of concern for the Darwin front. The build-up of forces at Darwin was given some urgency by evidence of a Japanese concentration in the eastern Indonesian archipelago in March 1942. In reality, the Japanese carrier fleet was preparing for its raid upon Ceylon in April, but these movements, monitored by Allied signals intelligence, aroused enough doubt about Japanese intentions as to make an invasion of Darwin plausible, as did the Japanese assembly of assault shipping at Ambon from 15 March for the invasion of Dutch New Guinea. The latter small-scale invasion operations took place from 31 March to 20 April against dispersed objectives on both the north and south coasts of Dutch New Guinea, further confusing the tactical picture. As a result of such threat perceptions, the Allied commanders in Melbourne prioritised the Darwin front in the allocation of resources in March and April 1942. The intelligence summaries, passed on to the Darwin garrison, understandably triggered the ‘invasion scare’ of this time.

Unbeknown to each other, both sides were building up their air forces on either side of the Timor Sea – there was a race to reinforce. Having so far run the bombing campaign from Timor with a single squadron of about nine bombers, the Japanese force upgrade began on 14 March, when 18 bombers of the Takao Air Group flew into Koepang, having been released from operations over the Philippines and Netherlands East Indies. Meanwhile, the first of the 49th’s three fighter squadrons, the 9th Pursuit Squadron, flew into the bomb-scarred RAAF Darwin on 17 March, led by Lieutenant James Selman, the squadron commanding officer (CO).

On only the previous day there had been a large 14-bomber raid. This 16 March raid had sparked a fresh invasion scare among the officers and men of the garrison. The 20-aircraft raiding force had seemed redolent of the second raid on 19 February, in that in both cases a formation of high-flying twin-engine bombers had bombed the RAAF base without airborne opposition. Up until now most Japanese raids had got in and out not only without interception, but undetected. Generally, the first anyone knew of the raid was when the bombs started coming down.
This was because the RAAF’s pioneering radar station at Dripstone Caves, on the coast north of RAAF Darwin, had yet to be made operable. Once the radar started functioning, things would change. The radar station would not work alone, but would be part of an integrated system of ground-controlled fighter interception. The radar station would relay the coordinates of the intruding enemy aircraft to No. 5 Fighter Sector, a newly-created fighter control organisation which set up its operations room at Berrimah, not far from the RAAF station. From there the controller could pass on the enemy position to the airborne fighter leader via radio. During March the Fighter Sector was filled up with newly-posted personnel, including a half dozen senior pilots who were hurriedly retrained as fighter controllers.

The pilots of the 9th Squadron received a foretaste of the new capability on 22 March, because on that day the RAAF radar achieved operational status after a long process of ‘de-bugging’ the equipment. The radar successfully plotted an incoming raid when it was still 80 miles out from Darwin, allowing the controller to radio Batchelor airfield to order eight P-40s to ‘scramble’. The ‘raid’ was in fact a photo-reconnaissance mission. Using the radioed reports to position themselves, one pair of pilots succeeded in spotting the ‘recco’ and both were able to deliver attacks without attracting the unwanted attentions of the fighter escort. The Japanese photo-reconnaissance machine, a Mitsubishi C5M, was shot down into the sea west of Bathurst Island, symbolically providing both the 9th Squadron and its parent unit with their symbolic first blood. This was the first ever radar-directed air interception over Australia.

A repeat Japanese recco mission on the 28 March overflew Darwin without interception, despite one flight of the 9th Squadron being scrambled after it. Even with radar control, the successful interception of a high-flying ‘recco’ required everything to work almost perfectly. After 22 March 1942, it would be 1943 before the next Japanese recco was shot down.

The destruction of the first recco should have announced to the Japanese the presence of an Allied fighter force at Darwin but, despite this, 23rd Air Flotilla headquarters despatched an unescorted bombing raid on 28 March. At Darwin, the 9th Squadron received only 10 minutes’ warning of the incoming raid. Fortunately Captain Selman had instituted a system of standing patrols in the middle of the day – covering the raiding envelope determined by flight times in daylight from Kendari or Timor. As a result, 2nd Lieutenant Mitch Zawisza’s flight of four P-40s was already airborne, orbiting at 20,000 feet over the Beagle Gulf, in a position to intercept the bombers after they came off their bomb run. Another flight of five P-40s, led by 2nd Lieutenant Bob Vaught, was able to catch up with the bombers when they were 80 miles out to sea. With no enemy fighters present to spoil things, five pilots made gunnery attacks on the vulnerable force of seven bombers, claiming three shot down. Pilots’ over-claiming (on both sides) would become a fixture of the campaign throughout 1942 and 1943 and, in fact, only one Japanese bomber went down. This was a less spectacular result than claimed, but can nonetheless be written up as another symbolic achievement for the new US fighter unit, namely the first Japanese bomber shot down by fighters over Darwin.

For the Japanese, the days of unescorted daylight raids were now over. The bombers would have to be accompanied by a fighter escort, and this represented a real threat to the defending American pilots, as the veterans of the Japanese 3rd Air Group were quite willing and able to go hunting over Darwin. The next raid, on 30 March, was not intercepted, but on the 31st Lieutenant Andy Reynolds’ flight was bumped by the fighter escort while climbing through 7000 feet in pursuit of the bombers. Four of the eight P-40s were shot up, with 2nd Lieutenant Bob McCorney bailing out over Darwin harbour, while 2nd Lieutenant Jim Porter wrecked his damaged aircraft crash-landing at Batchelor. Luckily all pilots survived. Reynolds claimed to have shot down a Zero, but no enemy aircraft were lost.

So far the pilots of the 9th Squadron had been unsupported by squadron ground-crew, reliant instead upon RAAF Darwin for refuelling and rearming. However, on 31 March the squadron’s ground echelon drove in at the end of an arduous two-week overland journey, having driven from Townsville in their trucks. The convoy arrived only five minutes before the bombs came down on RAAF Darwin’s runway, giving the men a graphic introduction to the war. A second great road convoy arrived on 9 April, comprised of the bulk of the ground echelon for the whole group – the 7th Pursuit Squadron’s ground echelon, as well as the group’s HQ Squadron and Interceptor Control Squadron.

With RAAF Darwin bombed four times in four days at the end of March, the 9th Squadron was dispersed away from this vulnerable and much-bombed forward airfield; for now only a quick-reaction flight of fighters was held at Darwin, as well as one flight at Batchelor airfield and one even further south at Adelaide River. A similar pattern of dispersal was applied to Darwin’s bomber force. No. 12 Squadron moved to Batchelor while No. 2 and 13 Squadrons moved to Daly Waters. Dispersal was by now solidly established as the surest way of preserving one’s air assets from destruction to air attack – a fact reflected in the orgy of airfield building then underway along the highway south of Darwin. After 19 February, only three Allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground in all the 1942 raids.

After the success on 28 March, during the following six days four raids came and went without interception. At this stage, the radar ground control system was delivering more misses than hits and, as a result, was so little trusted that the US fighter squadron relied instead upon its own system of standing patrols. This routine was exhausting for the pilots and imposed much wear and tear upon the aircraft, which was why it was only used when there was no better alternative. On 2 April, yet another raid came and went without interception. The raid alert again came too late for the fighters to get airborne in time to climb to height before the raid had departed.

So far, since the 9th Squadron’s arrival on 17 March there had been eight daylight raids, of which only two had been successfully intercepted. The reason was the short warning times provided by ground control. On 4 April, however, the
radar delivered a quantum leap in performance, delivering 40 minutes warning of an incoming raid. Lieutenant Andy Reynolds’ flight of seven aircraft was already airborne on a standing patrol and the warning provided the time needed to climb to 26,000 feet, close to the P-40’s operational ceiling. From there, Reynolds could follow the controller’s running commentary on the incoming raid’s position and position his flight accordingly. In another display of over-confidence, half the Japanese fighter escort descended to strafe the now-empty RAAF Darwin, perilously leaving only three Zeros with the bombers.

This tactical error allowed Reynolds’ flight to make repeated passes at the bombers, claiming eight enemy aircraft shot down. In reality only three bombers were destroyed – less than claimed but devastating losses nonetheless.33 Moreover, each victim had dropped burning out of the formation in full view of the much-abused and hitherto largely-protected garrison.34

However, the repeated re-attacks had given the fighter escort opportunity to intervene, and three P-40s were destroyed as well. Lieutenant John Livingstone tried to land at 34-Mile strip in a wounded condition and crashed fatally into the trees off the end of the runway. Lieutenant Grover Gardner’s aircraft was shot up by an unseen assailant as he set up to re-attack the remnant bomber formation as it retreated offshore. With his aircraft on fire, he bailed out into the sea to be rescued by the RAN.35 The loss of Livingstone’s and Garner’s aircraft was attributed by the Americans to Australian AA fire,36 but Gardner’s aircraft crashed on the Cox Peninsula, consistent with a loss in the course of the running engagement with the retreating bombers.37 Despite the 9th Squadron’s losses, the fighter defence had hit the bombers hard in a big victory.

Stung by their bomber losses, the Japanese followed up the very next day with a repeat raid in very similar strength, but this time the RAAF radar delivered only 20 minutes warning. Despite 12 P-40s getting airborne, no interception was made and the Japanese again succeeded in cratering the runway at RAAF Darwin and flying home unmolested. After this there was a raiding pause of more than two weeks,38 broken only by a few reconnaissance missions, which likewise got in and out without being intercepted.39 This raiding hiatus came as a big surprise to the Darwin defenders – an anti-climax after the preceding ‘invasion scare’.40

During this pause the remaining two fighter squadrons of the 49th Pursuit Group moved into their airfields and took their place on the flight roster. Soon all three squadrons would be settled in at their new bases along the highway south of Darwin: the 9th Squadron at Livingstone, the 8th at Strauss, and the 7th at Batchelor.41 With 60 P-40s available, this was the largest force of land-based fighters yet available on either side of the Timor Sea. The 9th Squadron’s lone stand was over.

The USAAF had deployed a remarkably sizeable and capable integrated force to Darwin to secure its air defence: the 808th Engineer Battalion and the 43rd Engineer Regiment to build the airfields, the 102nd Coastal Artillery Battalion to defend those airfields against strafing attacks, the 49th Fighter Group to provide fighter defence, the 49th’s Fighter Interception Squadron to provide ground-based fighter control, and the 43rd Material Squadron to maintain the P-40s and top up the 49th’s aircraft inventory. Nowhere else in the South West Pacific Area – particularly in Port Moresby – was there such a deeply-resourced and vertically-integrated fighter deployment.

The failed Allied campaigns in the Philippines, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, Burma and New Guinea vividly emphasised the preconditions for successful air defence – an effective air force needed a network of airfields, and those airfields had to be made resilient (to some extent ‘bomb-proof’); there had to be a network of radar stations to provide reliable early warning, and the radar plotting data had to be filtered through an air defence operations room, with a controller able to ‘scramble’ the fighters and to use radio to provide in-flight directions; and the fighter force needed to be made resilient by the provision of a deep maintenance and supply organisation able to maintain the aircraft inventory despite losses. The American deployment around Darwin showed clear recognition of all these essential elements and stood in stark contrast to their humiliating debacle in the Philippines and to their improvised deployment to Java.

The 49th established a take-off procedure that got the greatest number of fighters into the air in the shortest space of time – successive formation take-offs from opposite ends of the runway. The dusty state of the Top End’s dirt runways ensured a plume of dust from every churning propeller so, to minimise this, half the pilots were obliged to accept downwind take-offs (contravening a basic tenet of their training), with one 4-ship flight taking off...
from each end in turn, until the whole 16-aircraft squadron was airborne and climbing away. After take-off each flight set course and climbed as rapidly as possible, the leader listening into the controller’s running commentary on the raid’s movements over the radio and positioning his flight accordingly. Sometimes two or more flights joined up en route, but no one seems to have wasted any time by slowing down to do so.

Until mid-April the Takao Air Group had been busy dropping bombs on the beleaguered US-Filipino garrisons of Bataan and Corregidor. With the surrender of Bataan on 9 April, this bomber unit was able to move forward to Koepang to add its full strength to the offensive against Darwin. This was because the RAAF’s Nos 2 and 13 Squadrons had been raiding Timor so aggressively that a counter-blow was called for. For example, on 30 March four Hudsons had raided Penfui airfield and Dili harbour, reportedly destroying six aircraft on the ground and damaging moored flying boats. Another raid on Penfui on 1 April reportedly destroyed another six parked aircraft. On 13 April two Hudsons raided shipping in Koepang harbour, although losing one crew shot down by intercepting Zeros. The Hudsons had made Koepang too dangerous a place for permanent bomber basing, and so the Japanese bomber reinforcements were forward-deployed only temporarily to conduct a strike against the source of their trouble, after which they would be withdrawn to Kendari for their own security.

Therefore, on 25 April, instead of the usual seven bombers, this time 27 set out across the Timor Sea. This would be the biggest Japanese raid on Darwin since 19 February, but was unrelated to the reinforcement of the defending US fighter force since 5 April. The intervening Japanese reccos had failed to identify the dispersed fighter bases and thus failed to discover the two extra fighter squadrons, for a Japanese staff paper admitted that they only discovered the ‘concentration’ of fighters ‘at the end of April’. As a result of this intelligence failure, only 14 Zeros escorted the bombers. Thus the Americans ambushed the Japanese by hitting them unexpectedly with a full three-squadron fighter group. By the time the raid crossed the coast, the Japanese numbers were down to 24 bombers and only 12 fighters due to aircraft aborting from technical failures. Another mistake the enemy made was the lapse in radio discipline, which alerted 5 Fighter Sector to unusual traffic offshore half an hour before the incoming raid could be detected by radar – consistent with the Japanese force experiencing difficulty in effecting its airborne rendezvous, with the separate formations trying to find each other en route and resorting to radio transmissions to do so.

Every serviceable aircraft available from all three squadrons had meanwhile been ordered into the air, and thus 30 minutes before the raid was confirmed by radar there were fifty P-40s airborne. Frank Bladin had assured the newly-arrived Paul Wurtsmith that, on the basis of experience of the earlier Japanese raids, there was little likelihood of the Japanese splitting their force between two simultaneous or near-simultaneous raids - in effect arguing that, tactically-speaking, the Japanese could be relied upon to put all their eggs in one basket. Accordingly, Bladin and Wurtsmith adopted the tactical norm of scrambling every available fighter upon the first radar ‘plot’ of an incoming raid, giving the defenders the chance of overwhelming the fighter escort with numbers. This proved to be good advice, for this was precisely what happened on this day, with disastrous consequences for the Takao Air Group.

The Japanese penetrated Australian airspace at 26,000 feet, an impressive height for a tight defensive formation of bombers, and awkwardly close to the P-40s’ operational ceiling of 27-28,000. As the raid approached the coast Lieutenant George Manning’s 7-ship flight from the 9th Squadron was already airborne on a standing patrol, flying at 25,000 feet and in a potentially good position to engage. However, his flight was bounced by the escorting fighters and scattered.

Lieutenant Jim Morehead led an 8-ship formation from the 8th Squadron after the retiring raiders, and was able to catch up with them over Melville Island. His task of obtaining a position of altitude superiority had been eased by the fact that after bombing the bombers had put their noses down to gain extra speed with which to exit the defended area. By the time Morehead’s flight caught up the bombers were down to 14,000 feet, allowing the P-40 pilots to make repeated attacks. Lieutenant Mitchell Sims’ 4-ship flight also caught up and made further attacks upon an already disordered bomber formation.

Both the 7th and 8th Squadron formations made attacks. With a total of 43 P-40s in contact with 36 Japanese aircraft, the Darwin defenders enjoyed numerical superiority. Each flight of American fighters made its own separate approach to the bombers, and as a result the P-40s attacked in successive waves from different directions. The badly outnumbered escorting fighters seem to have performed...
poorly in blocking all these attacks, and as a result the bomber formations had to withstand repeated firing runs from the well-armed American fighters. In a triumphant day the exuberant US fighter pilots claimed 12 enemy aircraft shot down. Although the pilots had over-claimed, the real Japanese losses – four bombers and one fighter – represented a severe reverse for the enemy, particularly as not one P-40 was shot down in return.

Moreover, 13 further bombers had been damaged, two of them so badly that they were lost returning to base. One ditched in the sea and one was written off in a crash landing. With six bombers lost and 33 crewmen dead, it had been a devastating day for the Takao Air Group. The Japanese fighter leader, Lieutenant Aoi, was duly reprimanded by the commander of the 23rd Air Flotilla as being fully responsible for the bomber losses, having negligently allowed the fighters to leave the bomber formation unattended after it left the target, descending to strafe the airfield on the lookout for easy kills.

In the random manner of an air campaign, however, the Japanese follow-up raid on 27 April was a setback for the defenders. After the savage losses and damage from two days before, this time the attackers could provide only 16 bombers, but the fighter escort was beefed up to 21 Zeros. In addition, the Japanese did not make the same mistake of signalling their arrival in advance of the radar coverage, and as the radar detected the raid only 80 miles out there was not enough warning time for the P-40s to obtain advantageous attacking positions. Two flights from the 8th Squadron tried to fight their way through to the bombers, but the escorting fighters dived upon the P-40 formations from above. Captain Al Strauss, the Green Flight leader and 8th Squadron CO, was shot down into Darwin harbour in the resultant dogfight, while Lieutenant C Johnson's White Flight was similarly roughly-handled, losing Lieutenant Owen Fish to the pouncing Zeros.

The bombers went back to their safe base at Kendari on 15 May came a rather half-hearted attempt to continue the bombing offensive, with a nine-bomber raid setting out for Darwin, but bad weather forced the mission to be aborted. The balance of the Japanese bomber unit seems to have been committed to patrol duties in support of the air offensive upon Port Moresby following the Coral Sea battle. The 49th had started its tour of duty in Australia as a very inexperienced unit filled with very green pilots. Out of the group's initial complement of 102 pilots, 95 had never flown a P-40 before. It was fortunate that the Japanese rearward redeployments provided such a long pause in combat operations, giving the opportunity for the junior pilots to be drilled in scrambles, airborne rendezvous, fighter formation and gunnery. The group CO, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Wurtsmith, was a professional fighter leader with 14 years experience in 'pursuit' and 4800 flying hours, while his executive officer, Major Donald Hutchinson, was another 'pursuit' specialist, with 2500 hours. The professional officers at the head of the 49th were supported by 15 war-experienced pilots from the campaigns in the Philippines and Java. These men taught their inexperienced charges the distilled lessons of war experience so far: flying in 'two-ship' formations for mutual protection and always attacking from above.

With fighter specialists like this at his service, Air Commodore Bladin did the sensible thing and delegated control of his fighter operations to Wurtsmith. As part of this deal, American personnel from the 49th's Fighter Interception Squadron were attached to No. 5 Fighter Sector and would come to take over the responsibility for controlling the 49th's interceptions. This pragmatic arrangement made sense as Wurtsmith had trained personnel with fighter expertise but no radar, while the RAAF had the radar and an established fighter control infrastructure.

The combat results so far had shown that the limiting factor in fighter combat over Darwin was effective early warning – if the P-40s were given enough time to attain superior attacking positions, they punished the Japanese with effective gunnery runs. There can be no doubt that this gunnery effectiveness was attributable to the unit's levelling of pre-war fighter professionals and fighter combat veterans from the Philippines and Java.

The 49th's build-up to renewed combat readiness was supported by the unit's maintenance and repair unit, the 43rd Material Squadron, stationed at 65-Mile airfield.
In its first seven months of operation in the NWA, this unit salvaged 44 crashed or damaged P-40s. Along with replacement aircraft flown in from Brisbane, the 43rd maintained the fighter group’s aircraft strength at about 60 fighters throughout, replacing losses through the provision of new or rebuilt aircraft.

Fighter combat does not win the war in a day. Rather, it is cumulative in its effect, and the 49th Fighter Group had had its greatest effect not in shooting down enemy bombers – on most raids the Japanese lost none – but rather by sharply limiting the effectiveness of the Japanese bombing, by forcing the bombers to bomb from ever higher altitudes. This preventing the bombing from interfering with the steady build-up of the Darwin base. As Air Commodore Bladin related: “I had to be content to observe that enemy bombers flew higher as time went on … we could tell our ground forces of enemy losses and it became clear to them that enemy bombers increasingly failed to inflict great damage. The hopelessness of February 1942 disappeared as the months went by.”

Adding further solidity to the defences was a new RAAF radar station, No. 105, set up at Point Charles to extend the radar coverage out to the west. By June, both the original radar unit (No. 31) at Dripstone Caves and the new unit at Point Charles were through the troublesome and frustrating earlier period of trial and error. In that month both units were reliably delivering enhanced detection ranges of between 100 and 140 miles.

After the six-week raiding pause, the stop-start Japanese air offensive against Darwin resumed on 13 June. The Japanese despatched a very similar force to that employed in the big Anzac Day raid – 27 bombers and 12 fighters. The radar detected the raids at 118 miles, giving 28 minutes warning before the bombs came down on RAAF Darwin. The 49th scrambled 38 P-40s, but as on 27 April the warning time was insufficient to get a height advantage before contacting the raid because the bombers were up at 27,000 feet.

The standing patrol from the 8th Squadron, led by Lieutenant Earl Kingsley, was hit by Zeros as it approached the bombers, as was another flight from the 7th Squadron, caught climbing. Second Lieutenant Pierre Alford was shot down, but survived unscathed to parachute into Shoal Bay. Major Robert Van Auken, the 49th’s Operations Officer, also bailed out after being hit by an unseen Zero. He bailed out of his burning P-40 and came ashore badly burned on Melville Island. Both Alford and Van Auken had been shot at by the Zeros as they hung underneath their parachutes but luckily the Japanese missed. Three further P-40s from the 8th Squadron were ‘heavily damaged’ and two of these made crash landings. All intercepting American formations had been disrupted by Zeros before they could attack the bombers, and in the resultant fighter versus fighter engagements, the 49th lost three P-40s destroyed for one Zero shot down in return. The Japanese fighter unit suffered two pilots killed, but the second was reportedly a victim of AA fire.

This action had been only the first of a series of daily raids sent against Darwin. Having diverted their full force of fighters and bombers from their defensive duties throughout the Netherlands East Indies in order to concentrate for a big strike on Darwin, the Japanese commanders sought to take full use of the opportunity while it lasted, sending big raids on 13, 14, 15 and 16 June. Faced with an obviously-strengthened defence, and having been surprised by heavy bomber losses on 25 April, in this series of raids the Japanese commanders beefed up the fighter escort, sending up to 27 Zeros every day from the 14th to the 16th. On the 14th, the Japanese split their force for the first time, sending a large fighter sweep in first, followed by a smaller bomber force taking a circuitous route from the west, flying in over the Cox Peninsula. The intercepting American fighters failed to find the separately-routed bombers. As a result of this positional confusion, only two US flights seem to have become engaged, those led by Captain Nate Blanton and Lieutenant Andy Reynolds, and both were roughly handled by the Zeros before they could attain favourable attacking positions. One P-40 was shot down, with ‘rookie’ pilot Lieutenant Keith Brown bailing out with burns to his face and hands, as well as breaking his leg on landing.

The Americans claimed four Zeros, but there is no evidence of any enemy aircraft having failed to return. On 15 June the Japanese repeated the successful tactical innovation of sending the fighters in ahead of the bombers,
for all three squadrons of P-40s were engaged in turn by the strong fighter escort as they tried to get into position to attack the bombers, with two P-40s shot down out of the 28 that engaged. The American pilots claimed six Zeros destroyed in reply, but once again there is no evidence to support these losses – showing just how effective the new Japanese escorting tactics were.

The final raid in the series, on 16 June, saw the Japanese repeat the high altitude penetration used with success in the preceding raids. With the bombers at 26,000 feet, it was all the P-40s could do to match their height. Captain George Kiser’s flight from the 8th Squadron attained that height in an effort to get into an attacking position, but the escorting Zeros were higher still and pounced on the P-40s. Lieutenant Andy Reynolds, leading a flight of the 9th Squadron, managed to attack the bombers as they dived for home across the Cox Peninsula. Despite American claims for two enemy aircraft shot down, all Japanese aircraft appear to have returned home safely, although nine claims for two enemy aircraft shot down, all Japanese for home across the Cox Peninsula. Despite American claims for two enemy aircraft shot down, all Japanese aircraft appear to have returned home safely, although nine bomber slightly damaged, some fuel drums destroyed, two harbour-side fuel tanks burned out, four men killed and 12 wounded. This damage was inconvenient for the authorities. While the deaths were as tragic and wasteful as deaths in war are, the damage was militarily insignificant. The Japanese bombing campaign was marred by its unfocussed reactivity. Rather than pursuing a settled strategy and shaping their means to that end, the Japanese responded in ad hoc fashion to Allied initiatives. For example, the resumption of the raids on 13 June was not unrelated to the detachment of B-17s from the USAF’s 19th Bomb Group, which staged out of Darwin to bomb Koepang on 18 May and Penfui airfield in Portuguese Timor on 20 May. It was not only B-17s that triggered this reaction, for on 13 May eight RAAF Hudsons made a low-level strike upon shipping in Ambon harbour. Intercepting Zeros shot down two Hudsons, but the fact that the audacious RAAF bombers had struck at a target so deep inside the Japanese defensive perimeter demanded a counter-response from the 23rd Air Flotilla. Indeed, in explanation for the June offensive, a Japanese staff paper specifically points to Allied bomber raids on Ambon and Koepang after 22 May.

After the June offensive, the Japanese staff admitted failure – the ‘reinforced Allied air power was quite active’, again pointing to Allied bomber raids on Ambon, Timor and Kendari at the end of June. Indeed on 30 June the B-17s mounted a raid on the main Japanese bomber base at Kendari – hitherto safely beyond bomb range due to the limitations of Hudson performance. On 3 July came another raid on Penfui, reportedly destroying several Japanese aircraft on the ground. Because the P-40s at Darwin lacked the range to operate to Timor, the Allied bomber crews had to take the fight to the enemy alone and, from the Japanese perspective, it was the appearances over their bases of Allied bombers that showed the resurgence of Allied air power and required counter-blows against Darwin to eliminate the threat. Because the June offensive had clearly failed to knock out Darwin’s airpower, a new blitz was called for in July. Moreover, renewed strikes on Darwin were required in order to suppress potential Allied bombing activity against Southwest Area Fleet’s landing operations to seize the islands in the Arafura Sea. The July blitz started on 23 July, when a large raid involving 23 bombers was launched against Darwin, but bad weather forced the mission to be aborted. After that the July bombing offensive resumed in the most prevaricating way possible – night raids. Torn
two ways by the need to support a bombing blitz on Port Moresby in preparation for the landings at Gona-Buna,\textsuperscript{92} the 23rd Air Flotilla was reduced to sending paltry three-bomber raids on six consecutive nights starting on 25 July. The measurable bombing results proved negligible: Darwin’s water and electricity mains were cut, some buildings and powerlines damaged and four men injured.\textsuperscript{93} The weak July blitz ended with a traditional daylight raid on 30 July, timed to coincide with the landing of their 2nd Southern Expeditionary Fleet on Dobo and on Tanimbar Island.\textsuperscript{94} This was another full strength raid, involving 29 bombers escorted by 27 fighters. As the raid approached, three separate flights from the 7th Squadron were climbing for position, but none of them gained tactical height superiority over the enemy. Captain Nate Blanton’s 4-ship White Flight attained 27,000 feet before the Zeros came down from higher still and scattered them, with gunfire damage to two P-40s. However, this combat seems to have distracted the Zeros, for although Lieutenant Ray Melikian’s 4-ship ‘X’ Flight got to only 25,000 feet, which was ‘barely’ above the height of the bombers, he was able to lead his men in a firing run through the bomber formation. However, the Zeros’ response came surely, if belatedly, and X Flight’s Lieutenant Gene Drake was clobbered by a Zero and bailed out over West Point. Around this time Lieutenant John Posten led the 3-ship ‘Sterling White’ Flight to 25,000 feet and then dived upon a large gaggle of Zeros as these regrouped over the bomber formation as it retired in a steady descent across the Cox Peninsula. However, Posten had bitten off more than he could chew and his men were soon diving away steeply at full throttle to save their lives. As well as these flights from the 7th Squadron, Lieutenant Andy Reynolds led the 9th Squadron’s 4-ship Blue Flight into action, attacking the same gaggle of Zeros as Posten had attacked at about the same time. While this fighter-versus-fighter engagement was going on, the same squadron’s Yellow Flight under Lieutenant Clyde Harvey was able to get in and make a single pass through the bombers.\textsuperscript{95} The American pilots returned to their bases exultantly to make their claims, being awarded the stunning total of nine confirmed victories – three bombers and six fighters. With only a single US loss, it looked like a brilliant victory.\textsuperscript{96} Given that effective ‘hit and run’ tactics only worked if the P-40s could start the engagement from a position of tactical superiority, and that this had not generally been achieved in the combat of 30 July, the unconvincing result can hardly be considered surprising. Heights between 25,000 and 28,000 feet can be considered indicative of the practical top-of-the-climb of a P-40 flying under tactical conditions, matching the maximum ingress height of the bombers. However, these heights were barely adequate for tactical purposes, because the escorting Zeros flew higher still. The height obtained was dictated by the warning time provided by the early warning system, and this in turn was the direct product of the technical performance of radar. Because the RAAF possessed the radars and the Americans did not, the personnel of the 49th Fighter INTERCEPTION Squadron had been steadily infiltrating the RAAF’s ground control organisation, No. 5 Fighter Sector. By August, the unit had become so Americanised through attached personnel from the 49th that RAAF officers appear to have been almost frozen out of their own unit. Indeed, the RAAF’s by-now titular CO of 5 Fighter Sector, Squadron Leader Tony Primrose, felt obliged to go cap-in-hand to NWA HQ, trying to secure American agreement to the posting of RAAF officers into his own unit. He also sought a ruling from Air Commodore Bladin on the demarcation of responsibilities within the unit between RAAF and USAAF officers.\textsuperscript{97} Bladin had, of course, four months before delegated responsibility for fighter control to Colonel Wurtsmith, so Primrose was merely dealing with the logical consequences of that pragmatic decision. The de facto arrangement was moreover politically expedient, preventing the Americans from blaming airborne reverses on the Australians. Bladin knew that Wurtsmith was competent, and that the 49th was the largest and most capable combat organisation under his command, so was hardly likely to go back on the deal and attempt a reverse RAAF takeover of fighter operations. To underline the fact that no one was perfect, the 30 July raid had left Darwin’s sky marked with a great column of smoke redolent of that on 19 February, RAAF Darwin’s fuel dump having been caught under the beaten path of the pattern bombing and set ablaze, a conspicuous beacon advertising the limited effectiveness of the fighter defence.\textsuperscript{98} However, this proved to be the last raid of any kind over Darwin for more than three weeks, so once the fires went out the mess could be cleared up in peace. It was not until 23 August that the Japanese came again. In another iteration of the tactical formula that had worked so well since the debacle on 25 April, 27 bombers escorted by 27 fighters approached the coast at high altitude. This raid was mounted in support of the operations against Guadalcanal.\textsuperscript{100} The Japanese staff explained it as being intended ‘to check’ Allied air operations against Guadalcanal – which presumably means it was intended to pin down Allied air units at Darwin preventing them being used to reinforce Guadalcanal. This idea was misconceived, given that the US operation upon Guadalcanal was a naval operation, without direct USAAF or RAAF participation and that the Allied Air Forces had a large enough force of bombers and fighters based on Townsville to reinforce the New Guinea front without drawing down on NWA’s air force. In any case, unknown to probably anyone on either side, this latest raid on 23 August would be the last daylight raid of the 1942 campaign. After that, Guadalcanal did make its demands and exercise its attraction, and both the Tokao and the 3rd Air Groups were obliged to go east to make their contribution. This raid featured two Japanese tactical innovations to wrong-foot the defence. Firstly, the Japanese sent a feint raid one hour before the real raid, and when the feint was detected by radar out to the northwest, the controller scrambled 35 fighters. When the radar contact faded these
fighters were left orbiting without any 'trade'. Aware of the danger of having his whole force of fighters caught on the ground refuelling during a follow-up raid, the controller began the difficult and risky procedure of ordering flights of fighters back to base to refuel while ordering others into the air to take their place, in this manner maintaining a force of fighters airborne to meet the expected real raid when it came. Then came the second Japanese tactical innovation - the raid appeared on radar far to the west. It was skirting Darwin and heading south to bomb the airfields along the track. 101

No. 5 Fighter Sector had not detected the passage of any Japanese reccos during the previous three weeks, although two reccos had accompanied the big raid on 15 June. Whenever it occurred, it is clear that a Japanese recco had lately succeeded in photographing the cluster of new operationally-active airfields – Hughes, Strauss and Livingstone – for these were their targets. Having finally identified the 49th’s elusive dispersed bases in the bush, the 23rd Air Flotilla was now seeking to hit the 49th Fighter Group in its lair. Because of the earlier false warning, some elements of the 49th were airborne and already at 26,000 feet even before the Japanese crossed the coast inbound.

Captain George Kiser led a 3-ship flight from the 8th Squadron head-on into the bombers at 25,000 feet as they approached the Cox Peninsula, followed by Lieutenant Ray Melikian’s 4-ship flight from the 7th. Melikian zoomed back up to attack a group of Zeros that had come down to chase Kiser’s flight away, surprising the Zeros, firing and diving away unscathed. Next Lieutenant C Johnson led his 3-ship flight into the fight, attacking an already-burning bomber hit by the previous attacks. Lieutenant John Posten led a 4-ship flight after the raid as it headed inland to bomb the airfields, making repeated attacks upon the escorting Zeros, each time re-climbing to regain a height advantage. Such attacks were made practicable because the bombers had their noses down to gain over-targets speed, resulting in a gradual lowering of the altitude of the engagement. By the time the bombers were heading back to the coast, the P-40 pilots found that 22,000 feet was sufficient height from which to mount an attack. From there Lieutenant Les Johnson led a 3-ship flight from the 7th Squadron into the straggling rear end of the bomber formation, covered by Lieutenant Jim Morehead’s 3-ship flight, which dove on the Zeros higher up. 102

As had happened on 16 June and 30 July, the American pilots returned exultantly to make their claims after an evidently highly-successful action, this time being awarded the unprecedented total of 15 confirmed kills – almost one for every pilot engaged.103 Once again, the reality was much less, but still sufficient to constitute a very fine outing for the 49th. One bomber was shot down in flames while two others returned to Timor badly damaged, flying on one engine.104 One of these crash-landed back at Dili.105 Moreover, four Zero pilots106 had been killed – unprecedented losses. Not one P-40 had been shot down, although Lieutenant Fred O’Riley from the 7th Squadron had run out of fuel and force-landed on the beach in Finke Bay. The big attack upon the 49th at its bases had misfired in every way, for the bombing too had produced negligible results, falling close around the runway and dispersals at both Livingstone and Hughes, but without inflicting significant damage. There was one bomb crater on the runway at Strauss, one P-40 in a dispersal pen at Livingstone had been showered with dirt 107 and one RAAF Wirraway and Buffalo had been damaged, presumably at Hughes. 108

While the ineffective bombing was not unusual, the ‘strong defeat’109 of the escorting force of Zeros was. The Americans had used very similar tactics to those used from 25 April onward. The flights flew separately, led by junior officers – usually 2nd Lieutenants – who listened to the controller’s running commentary and used their initiative in manoeuvring into the most advantageous possible position before attacking. These flights attacked successively from different directions, presenting the escorting fighters with the difficulty of covering multiple attack axes. Moreover, the tiny 3 or 4-ship P-40 formations were inconspicuous in a big sky, maximising their chance of getting in unobserved and making surprise attacks. The weather had helped too, for the combat area was studded with cumulous clouds, splitting the bombers from their escorts and enabling the small American formations to approach without being seen.

If American tactics were little different on 23 August, then what explains the different result? It was the Japanese tactics that were different. Firstly, the feint raid one hour beforehand had ironically alerted the defences and given the P-40s plenty of time to obtain maximum height. While not a long-ranged aircraft like the Zero, the P-40 had sufficient endurance to remain airborne for two hours – they scrambled at 10.37am and the raid ended at 12.48pm.110 As a result, each flight was in position at maximum height when the engagement started – the essential precondition for air combat success. Secondly, the raid penetrated 30 miles inland, meaning that the bombers were available to be attacked for 20 minutes longer than in raids on Darwin. This routing presented the P-40s with more opportunity to find the enemy, more opportunity to attack and more opportunity to regain height between attacks.
American fighter pilots, losing six P-40s and shooting down the 49th’s combats had been more ambiguous in their tactical conditions. In most raids most P-40 pilots did not obtain positions of altitude advantage before combat commenced and were inevitably roughly-treated as a result. Certainly, June had been a tough month for the American fighter pilots, losing six P-40s and shooting down only one enemy fighter. The most fundamental reason for the Americans’ ultimate success was the Japanese inability to operate at a high enough tempo to sustain the campaign. April’s five bombing raids and June’s four big raids made these tough months for the defenders, but neither series was sustained. There were no raids at all in May and one daylight raid only in July and August. One raid per month was never going to amount to anything once matched up against the considerable numerical strength and deep logistical back-up of the American defenders.

Just as the Japanese were abandoning the daylight raiding campaign over Darwin, the 49th was beginning a parallel process of withdrawing from Darwin bound for New Guinea. The RAAF’s No. 77 Squadron flew in to Batchelor airfield on 19 August, to begin the process of relieving the Americans of their air defence duties. The second RAAF unit was No. 76, fresh from its pivotal involvement in the Battle of Milne Bay, which was settled in at Batchelor by the 30th. The 7th Squadron was the first US squadron to go in the opposite direction, moving in to 14-Mile field at Port Moresby on 14 September. The other components of the 49th would follow in turn, but by then Darwin had been relegated to a backwater.

During the 49th’s tenure, the American unit tallied the impressive total of 76 ‘confirmed aerial victories’. This was over-claiming, as evidence from Japanese records shows that the pilots of the 49th had been responsible for the destruction of one recco machine, 12 bombers, and seven fighters – a total of 19. The pilots of the 49th were very lucky to lose only four pilots killed in combat, for they had lost 19 aircraft in action – plus another eight pilots killed in flying crashes. Given that the unit had started with a total pilot cohort numbering about 100, it seems reasonable to deduce that about 200 pilots had flown with the unit during its tour of duty at Darwin and therefore, the fatality rate among the pilots was about 6 per cent. The 49th had achieved an exchange rate of one-to-one in air combat, which was a relatively-favourable result compared to New Guinea, reflecting the vastly better circumstances pertaining at Darwin - namely secure bases, functional radar early warning, and a large force of defending fighters.

In their unit history, Ferguson and Pascalis make the rhetorical statement about Darwin 1942 that ‘...the Australians would forever remember Colonel Paul Wurtsmith and his 49th Fighter Group, the unvanquished defenders of Darwin’. This claim is hyperbole, as the 49th is in fact only known amongst a small specialist or enthusiast readership. However, it is my hope that this story will become better known and forever remember Colonel Paul Wurtsmith and his 49th Fighter Group, the unvanquished defenders of Darwin. 

Anthony Cooper is a school teacher in Brisbane. He is the author of Darwin Spitfires (New South, 2011 and Pen & Sword 2013), documenting the 1943 Darwin air raids and the air combats of the RAAF’s No. 1 Fighter Wing; and Kokoda Air Strikes (New South, 2014), which documents the air raids on Port Moresby in 1942, and the air combats of No. 75 Squadron RAAF and the 8th and 35th Fighter Groups of the USAAF. He believes that a detailed, published documentation of the 49th Fighter Group’s campaign over Darwin in 1942 is long overdue.
The Territory Remembers

Devastation and Heartache as Civilian Evacuation Badly Managed

By Joy Davis

On 12 December 1941, Northern Territory Administrator Aubrey Abbott issued an order that all women not in the essential services, children and the infirm were to be evacuated from Darwin, with their luggage limited to one suitcase weighing no more than 35lb (15.9kg) per family. The order was published in the *Northern Standard* newspaper and a letter was delivered to every household in Darwin. The evacuation was to commence in 48 hours, and residents were assured that the federal government had made arrangements for the comfort and welfare of the families in the south. In a later letter to the West Australian Government and other state governments, Abbott advised that there were no cases of the Darwin evacuees needing assistance of any kind.¹

Nothing could be further from the truth.

So began the heartache and devastation to the lives of the inhabitants of the Top End of the Northern Territory. The evacuees received no help from the general public in the south, as you would normally expect, because the evacuation of Darwin was not publicised and the general public were not aware of it. There were no comforts nor accommodation as Administrator Abbott had stated. We were on our own, many of us had no money, and certainly no warm clothes or anything else needed to make a home. No utensils, no linen, no furniture. All we had was one suitcase of summer clothes for the whole family.

On reaching our destinations, we felt like aliens and were full of despair at being torn from family, neighbors and friends, and ending up in places never seen before with no help from anyone. Many southern people did not even know where Darwin was. Once when my mother said she came from Darwin, one lady asked her how she liked Australia.

However, the Top End people were made of sterner stuff, and we found accommodation, albeit a horse stable or other rough shelter, and proceeded to make a home with our one suitcase. Everyone was in limbo just waiting for the war to end so we could return to our beloved Territory. There is an old saying that “you can take the people out of the Territory, but you can’t take the Territory out of the people”.

Evacuees from Darwin that were in contact with others previously from Darwin were helped where possible, and I imagine many scoured the second-hand shops to find anything which would help. I know that is what our family did. Many items usually in shops were not available because the war effort came first, with its demands for cotton and wool for uniforms, and for food, which was needed for the troops as well as to send to England to help with their needs.

In Adelaide and other cities, the Top End people used to congregate at Coles cafeteria every two weeks to meet friends and to catch up on any news coming from the Territory. The papers were not telling it as it really was so we depended on anyone who had just arrived from the Top End.²
People were evacuated by sea or air, or by road and train. My Mum and I were lucky in that we were evacuated by air south to Adelaide. When my mother was given notice that she and I were to go, she refused and didn’t turn up at the appointed place until Mr Arthur Miller the ARP (air raid precaution) warden, spoke to Dad saying they would have to arrest her and evacuate her by force. Dad persuaded Mum to go, and arranged for us to fly out the next day to Adelaide on the Guinea Airways plane. He convinced her to go for my welfare. After farewells and me instructing my father that, if Father Christmas called, he (Dad) was to tell him I was in Adelaide, we left the Darwin airport (where Ross Smith Avenue is now) on 24 December 1941.

The plane held 10 passengers, I think, among them Mrs Maisie Young and her two sons, Our first stop for fuel was Pine Creek where we were given breakfast. That was the only food provided on the whole trip. The journey was bumpy, noisy and arduous, with frequent refueling stops until we finally landed that night at Parafield Airfield. Taken by bus it was 9pm when we reached Guinea Airways office in Adelaide.

As we were strangers to the city, we asked the receptionist to ring around for accommodation. We looked dirty and destitute, and she informed us: You won’t get any accommodation; Adelaide is booked out; it’s Christmas. Don’t you know there is a war on?”

With this remark, my tiny red-headed mother drew herself up to her full height and replied: “Lady, how dare you look down your nose at us like you have been doing. Most of our husbands could buy and sell this establishment. We only look raggedy because we have been on a plane all day with nothing to eat, and most of the children are airsick. We have just been sent away by force out of our homes to a strange place with nothing because there is a war on. Now you will ring every place in Adelaide to get some accommodation or we are going to bed down here in this office whether you like it or not.”

The receptionist said “No, you can’t do that” to which Mum replied “Can’t we? Just watch us”. The receptionist did find us accommodation and so began our lives in the south.

Soon afterwards, my mother and I travelled to Hobart to stay with Mum’s parents. Gran and Grandpa lived at 75 Davey Street, just around the corner from Murray Street, a main city street. I attended the Collegiate Church of England Girls School. I cannot remember how long we lived there but I recall we left Hobart to go back to Queenscliffe in Victoria where my eldest sister, Jean Shewring, and her three daughters lived. I think Jean was ill and we went back there so Mum could help her care for the children. I attended the Queenscliffe Public School with my three nieces and Nella Richard’s two daughters.

Later we heard that Darwin had been bombed, and I remember very clearly the consternation of wives, children and relatives trying to get information about their loved ones who were still in Darwin at that time. The government was giving out conflicting information about the casualties and damage to Darwin, as they did not want the citizens of the other states panicking because the bombing was on Australian soil. The rumours flew hard and fast and the evacuees were not informed about casualties or survivors.

Stuart Drysdale, my father, had the mail contract to pick up and deliver the mail from the Post Office, planes, ships and train. He was just leaving his premises in Cavanagh Street to go to the Post Office to pick up the mail as he was due there at 10am. On his way out he was called by someone on the footpath, so he stopped and spoke to him. It was while he was there that the first air raid began. My brother, Fred Drysdale, was working on another truck, and the Aboriginals were also at work when the raid began. After calling those in the street nearby, they all ran into the above-ground air raid shelter that my father had built under an large old mango tree. Mrs Jess Chardon was among those who sheltered there, as well as a naval rating and several other people.

We knew if Dad wanted to contact us he would send a telegram to his niece, Ivy, in Melbourne. He did not know where Jean was evacuated to or where Mum and I had gone after arriving in Adelaide. I think my parents must have conferred before our evacuation and said they would contact Ivy and we would always tell Ivy where we were.

A Unique Air Raid Shelter Built in Darwin
In December 1941 the Administrator ordered that all householders in Darwin should dig a slit trench on their property. He gave directions of the sizes these slit trenches were to be dug.

My father would not dig a slit trench because he said that in the Wet season it would be full of water and children may drown while adults would be standing or sitting in water. He did however build an air raid shelter that was above ground.

In the centre of his land there was a large very old mango tree growing, and under its branches is where he built his shelter. First he designed a rectangular room with the door facing the trunk of the tree. From the doorway was an L-shaped passage, so that strafing by the enemy could not enter the doorway into the shelter.

The structure was made of large cement blocks cemented together. Above these were curved railway lines bolted to the cement blocks each side of the top walls. On these were sheets of galvanized iron, and finally above this roof were placed filled sandbags. When the rains came, grass grew through the sandbag fibres and made a green covering over all, making it invisible from above. Inside the shelter clean white sand was spread on the floor.

Prior to the bombing there had been some air raid siren warning exercises for the people to get to know the sirens sounds and practice what to do if an air raid began. Our two dogs, one cat and pet wallaby went with the adults into the shelter when these exercises were taking place. When the bombing of Darwin actually began our animals were the first to arrive inside the shelter.

The shelter worked very well and probably felt very safe as it could not be seen from the air and was cool and dry inside when needed.
We left Queenscliffe and went to live with Ivy and her husband. After living there for a while Dad sent a telegram saying all civilian men not in essential services were to be evacuated from Darwin and he would meet us at Ivy’s place. A few weeks later my father arrived after travelling overland from Darwin to Adelaide and train to Melbourne. He didn’t have any luggage with him but carried my large golden teddy bear on his arm all the way. I was overjoyed to see him and also delighted to have my Teddy back with me, Dad. Mum and I returned to Adelaide. As he was familiar with post office processes, he got a job at the GPO in Adelaide working as a mail sorter.

We were living in a one-bedroom flat that Mum had rented across the road from the Norwood Public School, so this is where I attended school. Later my sister May sent word that she was being evacuated from Alice Springs where she still worked for the administrator.

Mr Abbott had previously arranged for the girls in his office, among the few women still in Darwin, to fly to Alice Springs and take some of the essential Government papers with them to set up offices. On 17 February 1942, Les Pennhall drove the girls, their luggage and the Government boxes in a truck to the airport and they all were evacuated to Alice Springs. Some of them I remember were Dorothy (Doe) Stretton, Vicki Ormond, Peggy Johns, Carmel Pascal, Jean McPherson, Joan Hammond and Esma Morris. The women staff were later evacuated from Alice Springs because there was a food shortage in the Territory.

Evacuation by Sea
There was no choice of destination for the evacuees by sea, who were sent wherever the ship they were allocated to was destined to go. On arrival at the wharf in Darwin, evacuees often spent many hours sitting in the sun without food or water before they were allowed to board the ship, and relatives (menfolk) remaining in Darwin were not allowed to stay with them.

There were five ships employed in the evacuation. Of the five ships, only the American-owned President Grant lived up to expectations of comfort aboard for the evacuees. Of the others, which were all merchant ships, the worst was Zealandia which became known as the “Hell Ship”. She was filthy, and had 200 Japanese prisoners on board and picked up another 200 at Thursday Island. Each ship held Japanese prisoners of war, as well as Dutch refugees taken from the islands to the north. There was gross overcrowding and the Darwin families were packed into the cabins like sardines as well as having to sleep in the passageways or sometimes in hammocks on the deck. The food was bully beef and hard tack biscuits, and no provision was made for babies or infants. Before the Zealandia reached Cairns, it had run out of food.

Here are some brief stories of the fates of others.

Rev Leonard Kentish: He was a Methodist missionary who was an army padre attached to the Port Darwin Garrison. Naval authorities installed a radio at Mr Kentish’s Goulburn Island Mission and gave him responsibility for sending news of Japanese shipping movements to Darwin. He was on the Patricia Cam when it was sunk by a Japanese floatplane in January 1943. Six of the 19 men aboard died in the water and, when the plane landed, the Japanese crew with their pistols drawn forced the clergyman to board the aircraft. He was beheaded at Dobo in Aroe Island less than two weeks later. His wife, son and daughter had been evacuated earlier by lugger, army truck and train to Brisbane. It was not until July 1947 that his wife learnt of his fate.3

Mrs O’Brien and two sons: When they were on the Darwin wharf waiting to be evacuated, the boys each had a teddy bear in their arms that they had received for Christmas. The army guard walking along the line of people stopped next to them, reached down and grabbed the bears from their arms and said “only one suitcase per family” and threw the bears into the harbour.4

Mrs Hasto and daughter Pearl aged 10 years were taken down to the wharf by truck on 20 December. Pearl had a small suitcase in addition to the one her mother had. The guards asked her what was it and she replied, her dolls. She was allowed to keep one doll and then they threw the suitcase and its contents into the harbor. Fortunately her mother had some of her clothes. She started to cry, and was so traumatised that from then on there were so many bad things that she didn’t want to recall. She stood there and saw her father watching them from behind the barrier, they couldn’t kiss or hug goodbye; only wave. Reverend Goy had arranged a shipment of oranges and fruit for them to eat, but they weren’t allowed to have them. They were thrown overboard – the explanation for doing so was said to be because the ship was overloaded. Later they put ballast bags on board to even the ship up. The women were very angry about the ballast bags because they had to leave most of their belongings behind.5

Mabel Marie (Dolly) Boath née Graham and William Boath lived in Darwin. They had five children, including Gail who was born on Sunday 7 December 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Ten days after Gail’s birth, they were evacuated from Darwin on the ship Koolinda bound for Perth, where they boarded a train and went to South Australia. This was where Dolly’s sister, Sarah, and her husband, Roy, lived. Even though they had no children and lived in a big house, the Boaths were turned away, with Roy saying they couldn’t possibly help the family. Their only alternative was to live in sheds that in earlier days had been stables. The stables had been converted to two big sheds and this is where the family lived along with many others who were also evacuees. Dolly died not long after the birth of another child in Port Pirie in 1942. Ron Boath said they were allowed 35 pounds of luggage and he remembered his mother going through the bags and throwing out things like photos to make room for nappies for the baby. The Koolinda was so crowded that boys had to sleep on the floor in the dining room. In Adelaide his mother and the baby were given a room but the older children slept in a stable.6

Dolly’s brother, Tassie Graham, and his wife June, had arrived from Darwin and were told there was no room for them in the horse stables. However, my parents were lucky enough to be renting a three-bedroom house in Maylands and, on hearing of the Graths’ predicament, asked...
them to come and live with us. My sister May had been evacuated overland and married Colin Beard in Adelaide, so she and their baby, Colin, also lived with us. Tassie and June took Dolly’s youngest children, Gal and Colin, to live with them. Our house then housed five adults and seven children until after Christmas, when Tassie found a job with the railways that included a railway house outside Adelaide.

The policeman Sandy McNab went about the town looking for people who hadn’t been evacuated and found among others the Agostini Family. Mrs Tecuala Mary Agostini and children Les, Vincent and Jack were put aboard the Koolinda that left Darwin on 16 February 1942. They went via the Western Australian coast and strict blackout conditions were enforced as everyone was conscious that the ship Sydney had been sunk off the same coast not long before. When they reached Broome the ship received cargo but had been sunk off the same coast not long before.

When they reached Broome the ship received cargo but was held up from leaving, as they had to wait for the tide to come in before there was enough water for her to sail out of the harbour. The next port of call was Canarvon to come in before there was enough water for her to sail out of the harbour. The next port of call was Canarvon where they took on a load of bananas. When they reached Perth they heard that Darwin had been bombed. They were accommodated at Armidale on a farming block at Gosnells for a week. Then moved to North Beach into a broken down beach holiday shack, but at least they had a roof over their heads. Les attended the Laidley Christian Brothers College and his younger brothers went to Cwlep Primary Convent. Their father Isadore Agostini, after the bombing of Darwin, was evacuated with Mr Abbott the Administrator down to Alice Springs.

Mrs Mary Peterson was living in Mataranka with her husband who worked for the Railways. With her children Joan, Pamela and Herbert, she was evacuated via Army Truck Convoy to Alice Springs, then boarded a train to Adelaide. Not knowing anyone in Adelaide they travelled to Melbourne where they were met by the CWA who helped look after the children and took Mary shopping.

It was very cold in Melbourne so they went to Sydney where Mary’s brother-in-law, Mr Ramsay, lived. Not finding any accommodation to rent they again boarded a train for Brisbane. They were met by Mary’s other married sister Laurencia Canning. She was able to find them a house, so they spent the rest of the war years in this house at Tape Street, Albion, in Brisbane.

My cousin Gladys Brown was evacuated on 17 February 1942 on the Koolinda, boarding on the afternoon of the 16th and sailing on the tide about 4am on the 17th. She said: “My story seems very mundane in the whole scheme of things, and you just simply got on with it, whatever comes.” When the first air raid siren went off, they were attending a demonstration of how to stop bleeding by putting pressure on the femoral artery, so the lesson didn’t finish, and they were evacuated before any further training took place.

On the trip down, the ship was crowded, there were Dutch refugees that had been picked up in Java, New Guinea and other places. They didn’t like the Darwin people and thought they were superior. They had always had servants and didn’t have to do their own washing or cooking – some of those servants were with them.

There were Japanese prisoners on the deck and, if you went up there for some fresh air, the Japanese would spit. When they arrived in Wyndham, the radio officer heard that Darwin had been bombed. Docking at Perth most of the evacuees had no money so they went to the Government to ask for some help. They were turned away but the Dutch people were given money, clothes and accommodation. When this was pointed out to the people working there, they were told it was because the Dutch were refugees from other countries, but we were evacuees in our own country, so didn’t need assistance.

Gladys’s father, Jack, was working for the railways and was in the wharf area where Darwin was bombed. Many of his mates were killed and he was worried about Edgar, his 15-year-old son, who was at home on Railway Hill. When he managed to negotiate his way there, he found him unhurt and collecting souvenirs of the bombing.

Uncle Jack and Edgar left Darwin by overland and arrived in Sydney where Jack’s sister lived. His wife, Eileen (my mother’s sister), and their other sister, Hilda, with Eileen’s two daughters Dorothy and Laurel, had gone down to Melbourne earlier for a holiday but, when they wanted to return to Darwin, they were not able to because the civilian evacuation had begun. Hilda stayed in Melbourne with her son, and Eileen and her daughters went to Sydney to meet up with Jack.

Although he had been born in Darwin, Jack, the son of E V V Brown, who had lived there all his life, had been so traumatised by the bombing of Darwin that, after peace was declared, he refused to return and stayed in Sydney for the rest of his life. My Aunty Eileen wanted to go back to her family and friends who had returned to Darwin but, because Jack refused, she did not see Darwin again. Their eldest son, Ted, after his discharge from the army, returned to Darwin and married and raised a family there till his death in 1997.

Southern Opinion

The Premier of South Australia, Mr Playford, today strongly criticised the action of Commonwealth authorities in sending a substantial number of Aborigines from the north to this State. Mr Playford contended the climatic conditions of Adelaide were unsuitable for people accustomed by race and breeding to tropical conditions. They were unused to civilised ways and there were other reasons that they should be kept in Central Australia.

The Premier made representations to the Prime Minister emphasising the serious view taken by authorities on aboriginal welfare, and asked that no further parties were sent here. The Commonwealth authorities stated that transport facilities made it difficult to keep people supplied with food in the north. The evacuees from the missions were sent to different locations according to religion. They were housed at Balaclava, Hawker, Wallaroo, Carrietton and Peterborough as well as other places.
When the evacuation began, all the Japanese families and others classified as aliens were arrested by the military police and incarcerated at Adelaide River. Later under guard they travelled in the hull of a ship with Japanese prisoners taken in the northern islands. I recall the military police coming to our school and arresting the Japanese students and taking them away, although some of them were second and third-generation Australians.

**Mrs Mary Nakashiba**, a member of a Darwin Japanese family, stated: “Before the war we never felt any anti-Japanese sentiment. No-one was thinking that there would be a war. After Pearl Harbour everyone in Darwin with Japanese blood was rounded up and taken to Adelaide River and put in a compound. Then they were taken to the Zealandia; it was an awful ship, overcrowded and filthy.”

Other Japanese families were taken under guard on the Montoro, as related by Mona Adams: “Also on the Montoro were some Japanese families who were taken away under guard. Some of the children were our friends we had grown up and gone to school with. We weren’t allowed to go and talk to them, so each morning we would just wave to them and they would wave back. It was so sad.”

The Murakami family of six boys and two girls had lived in Darwin for many years. They were among the Japanese children who were unceremoniously taken from their classes by soldiers brandishing bayonets. They were taken by truck to a camp at Adelaide River where they were kept under guard until a suitable ship was available to transport them to internment camps in New South Wales and Victoria.

A number of children were evacuated and placed in orphanages in the southern states. This would have been quite a shock after the carefree life they lived in Darwin. **Joan Presley** was born in Darwin and had three younger brothers, Laurence, Cyril and William. The family lived in the police paddock at Stuart Park. Joan took care of her brothers because her parents both drank heavily. Her mother left home and Joan became the permanent mother figure. She had few clothes and no shoes at all, but had a reasonably happy childhood in Darwin. Their neighbour, **Eileen Anthony**, took her under her wing and they had many happy hours together. She spent time selling cakes around town from a suitcase on the back of a pushbike. I believe she kept the little suitcase and never forgot those happy hours.

**Annabell Craig**, who was three-years old, was sent to Perth aboard a naval ship and was spoilt by all the sailors with two special friends giving her a little suitcase full of lollies. When they reached Perth she was taken to the Queen’s Park Orphanage and was never called for at the war’s end because her father had been a POW in Crete and died during his internment and she didn’t have any other family. I believe she kept the little suitcase and never forgot those two sailor friends of hers.

**Carol Vellacott** was evacuated to Perth with her mother. She was put into an orphanage for nine months and then lived with her godparents. Her father was attached to the American Army, and was an overseer on the building of the Larrakeyah Barracks. He was in Darwin for the bombing but wasn’t ever able to talk about his experience.

**Hazel Reid and her sister** were put in a boarding school in Toowoomba for two years, because Hazel’s mother took a job as housekeeper and nurse on a farm to make ends meet. She later joined her husband in Alice Springs.
For holidays the girls visited members of the CWA who lived nearby. They didn’t see their parents for two years. It was very sad for them, starting again. They had no clothes except the clothes they stood up in and a change. Of course, in those days they had to have coupons so that even if you had the money, you often didn’t have the coupons to buy material, so life was pretty hard for a while.19

Evacuation by Land

When the order for evacuation was given in Darwin, Tommy Fong and his wife Shu Ack Fong, left Darwin and went to Pine Creek where they thought they would be safe. When the first raid on Pine Creek and Katherine occurred, all women, children and the infirm had to evacuate to the southern States. The Fongs had four little girls at the time and another baby expected. Tommy did not evacuate as he grew vegetables and supplied the army with them.

Mrs Fong and her girls boarded the train that took them to Birdum. After arrival they were loaded into the back of canvas-covered trucks and required to sit on bare floorboards. The driver of their truck took pity on Mrs Fong and told her she could sit in front with him but she declined this as she had the other four girls with her, and they had not been away from home before. At lunch time they were given bread and a tin of bully beef or fish.

Late in the evening the convoy of trucks would pull up and the army men built a bush shower for the people to clean and refresh themselves. The men also made a big stew of bully beef and tinned vegetables with slices of bread to accompany it. Thus they fed the evacuees a welcome hot meal, albeit made from tinned ingredients that many had not had before. After dinner, Mrs Fong and her girls with the others all lay down on canvas spread on the ground and went to sleep for a much longed-for rest.

Travelling with her was her Uncle Sang, his wife and children as well as a few other Chinese people and others. The journey was long and tiring and took three days and two nights. On the afternoon of the third day, they reached Alice Springs and she, her girls, her uncle and his family were met by Mr and Mrs George Lim (earlier evacuees), and taken to their home.20 Her Uncle Sang’s wife was Mrs Lim’s sister. Their hosts welcomed them and provided beds for the night. Su Dook, Mrs Fong’s aunty did the washing.21

In the morning they were given a substantial breakfast with parcels of food to eat on the train. The families were driven to the station where they boarded the train for Adelaide. This was not the old Ghan but an earlier one, and the seats were a bit softer than the Darwin train, but they were very cramped for space. Mrs Fong sat in a corner and travelled all the way with one girl sitting on her lap and the others squashed in beside her. At night time the train stopped so the passengers could get a meal, but she and another Chinese woman with several children couldn’t get anything as by the time they got to the end of the platform with their children the train would have departed. They ate a piece of dry bread and bully beef or fish. When they became thirsty they went to the toilet and managed to get a small drink from there.

On arrival in Adelaide they were billeted in a place they called Fullerton House that used to house unmarried girls but was empty at that time. Her Uncle Sang, his wife and children had to share a room with Mrs Fong and her children. After a couple of days, the other women’s husbands arrived and, if they had money, bought a house and lived in it.

Mrs Fong was sent to the home of Mr and Mrs Lum, who shared their house with their doctor son and his wife who was a nurse. She had a small room with a kitchenette. After two weeks or so, because her confinement was imminent, she and the girls were taken to the new Fullerton Home. It was run by nuns who were very kind to her and they stayed there till her baby was born. The home was occupied by unmarried girls awaiting their confinements. They lived in a cottage and worked during the day in the laundry and at other jobs there. Mrs Fong didn’t work because she now had four toddlers and a new baby. She was visited by a lady named Mrs Hayes who was from the Tourist Bureau, who brought some clothing and other things because they didn’t have any warm clothes and it was cold. After about three months, Tommy managed to get some money sent down to her. She then asked Mr and Mrs Jimmy Ah Toy, also evacuees, if she could rent a room and use their kitchen.

Evacuees must be cared for

From the Adelaide News

The reception given to 24 men and children evacuated from Darwin after Japan entered the war does not do Adelaide credit. Quartered in an emergency at a Mount Lofty boarding house eight of these people comprising three families, were packed into one room with space for only seven stretchers.

A mother and two daughters live in a converted horse box fitted with bunks. The floor is bare bricks. another woman with a six-week-old baby shares a room with three other children.

Privacy and other comforts are lacking for both mothers and children.

The caretakers, and individual officials have shown the visitors nothing but kindness, but this does not lessen official responsibility to see that the evacuees are properly looked after.

The reception of these evacuees has been a muddle from the start. The Commonwealth, who brought the women south, delegated the job of caring for them to the State.

The State authorities claim that they were not notified when evacuees were due to arrive, so that the visitors had to wait for hours, after a long journey by ship and rail, on the railway station before anyone took charge of them. Then as no other accommodation could be found in a hurry, they were sent to Mount Lofty.

No matter who is to blame, it is clearly the responsibility now of the South Australian Government to see that people who have been sent to South Australia for their own and their country’s good should be decently cared for.
in the house they had just bought in Adelaide. Their older sister, Mrs Hee, was also living with them, but there was a large yard for the children to play in.

When her baby, Eleanor, was nine months old, Tommy was able to get permission for her to return to Pine Creek. The threat of invasion had passed and, as Tommy was working for the army, they sanctioned his family's return. She was the first evacuee to return to Pine Creek.  

The women, children and missionaries from the islands near Darwin were evacuated, and some of them went to Darwin by lugger and were there when Darwin was bombed. Others walked from Darwin to Katherine, and went to Adelaide by the same route as Mrs Fong. Some Aborigines went too.

After the first air raid, a rumor went about that martial law was in force and all civilians, principally the remaining menfolk, were to get out. The civilians, however, didn't have their vehicles as the army had seconded all vehicles that were not being used for the defence of Darwin. They had to go by train to Larrimah or Birdum, then by Army truck or walk overland to Alice Springs and then by train again to Adelaide or Brisbane.

In July 1942 the government secretary travelled in person with another group of 62 half-caste women and children evacuees to the welfare centre at Balaklava. He noted that some 120 inmates were housed there together with the matron and lay helper and were well cared for. Conditions for the Asiatic families were found to be rather primitive as building alterations were not yet complete: “These are housed in the horse stalls which are fronted with bags and hessian.”

In addition to the racecourse enclosure were three neighbouring farms (Vogts, Erambies and Cottles) and some empty farm houses in the Saints area (named after a local farmer) where other evacuees were quartered. A further 126 found private accommodation in the Adelaide area. Those able to do so were encouraged to find suitable employment in the munitions industry or fruit picking, in season, to reduce institutional and staffing costs.

Mrs Abbott, the wife of the Administrator, and a party of six nuns and 35 half-caste children from the Catholic half-caste mission at Melville Island north of Darwin experienced the Darwin bombing on 19 February. They were then evacuated to Adelaide. Mrs Olive Sweeney, a nurse and Methodist missionary, and her children, Blanche,
Grace and Gordon, with the women and children from her mission travelled by lugger to the mainland, then overland to Katherine where they boarded the train for Birdum. They were loaded onto an open cattle truck, sitting on the wooden floor in the sun. Mrs Abbott was on the same train, sitting on a deck chair with a parasol attached to the back in the middle of the carriage.

Mrs BA O'Brien lived in Darwin with her husband, Dan, for six years and during that time came to like the place and district very well. She was evacuated and went to live with her mother, Mrs Jones, in Renmark. Mrs O'Brien had four children aged from 9 to 16 years. Her husband was an inspector in the Posts and Telegraph Department.

Mrs O'Brien did not want to leave Darwin. She noted: “You have no idea of what it means to leave your home suddenly with four children. Our party comprised 80 women and 140 children. We were treated splendidly but you must imagine what it was like with those 140 children. There were expectant mothers among us, and the youngest member was a girl four days old. No man was allowed to leave Darwin with us. I cannot speak too highly of the treatment we received but for all that it was terrible to leave Darwin and our men behind.” Perhaps the difference between Mrs O'Brien’s experience and that of many others was that her party left Darwin later than the early evacuees.

Mrs Bowles from Sydney was in Darwin for a holiday when the evacuation was announced. She had paid a return fare when coming to the NT but was still only allowed to take one suitcase of 35 pounds weight back with her. She was sent by another ship than that she had paid for and left Darwin on the Koolinda for Perth. She asked the Government to pay her fare by train for her to get back to her home in Sydney but this was refused. However she was better off than the other evacuees because she was returning home to family, friends and her home full of her possessions.

The evacuees were not informed by the Government when Darwin was bombed nor if their husbands or family had survived the bombing. Lydia De Julia was out shopping one day. She went to a movie and when she came out the newspaper boys were yelling, “Extra, Extra. Darwin bombed”. It wasn’t till several weeks later that she received a note on a scrap of paper telling her that her husband had been killed on the wharf during the first raid. She said she took it calmly, and never cried for more than a week.

Mrs BA O’Brien in partnership with Mr D McKinnon, said that her premises were not damaged in the first raid on Darwin, But that it was necessary to “just close the shop and leave £600 to £700 worth of furniture there”.

Mr. Brogan, who conducted a furniture business was a former Mayor of Darwin Mr JH Brogan.

Among evacuees who arrived in Adelaide today were 60 half-castes who arrived on Saturday morning tottered some 40 aged, decrepit Chinese men. They arrived by evacuee train and had travelled from Katherine and Pine Creek. They were thinly clad and shivered in the morning sunlight. Their few belongings were pitiful and inadequate in the extreme.

The 30 half-castes who arrived on Saturday were a sad enough sight, but these people are much worse. Sending them south has got to stop.

Oft the aged whites, some are continuing their journey interstate; others are being accomodated at the Magill Home. There were about 60 half-castes in today’s train. These were taken off at Hamley Bridge, and joined a train for Balaklava where there is a Government institution in the hills.

Of the aged whites, some are continuing their journey interstate; others are being temporaly quartered in a former Government institution in the hills.

The old white men have got their pensions, and can spend the rest of their time in homes for the aged. But what’s going to happen to the old Chinese? As far as known, they have no means of support. The Government will look after them, I suppose but they are too old to work or to settle down. The Chinese who arrived today are being temporarly quartered in a former Government institution in the hills.

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Among evacuees who arrived in Adelaide today was a former Mayor of Darwin Mr JH Brogan. He said that he had been mayor for six years. Mr. Brogan, who conducted a furniture business in partnership with Mr. D McKinnon, said that his premises were not damaged in the first raid on Darwin, But that it was necessary to “just close the shop and leave £600 to £700 worth of furniture there”. 31
They travelled in open railway trucks to Birdum, and then for several days in motor trucks before transferring to other trains at Alice Springs. One man commented: “The whole of one side of me is bruised and sore from sitting or lying in those darned trucks. It got so bad that some of us stood for 100 miles.”

Seamen from one ship praised the courage and determination of their two gunners, who fired on the Japanese raiders until their gun was wrecked by a direct hit. They were CE Davis and Max Pemberton, of Sydney. Four near misses exploded alongside a nearby ship. Then a bomber, flying fairly low, came over their ship, and they opened fire with their gun. Soon afterwards the ship was hit and burst into flames. Emberton volunteered to go down a hatch to fight the fire. As the seamen went to launch a lifeboat, a burning spar fell and carried the boat away. Three times the ship was raked by machine-gun fire and all lifeboats on the starboard side were peppered with bullets.

Lifeboats on the port side had just returned to the ship from boat drill and those that had been hauled up were quickly lowered into the water again. The seamen were able to reach shore in them. One American’s recollection of Darwin was trying to make the shore in a lifeboat shot full of holes by machine-gun bullets.

Joe Fay was evacuated overland after the first bombing. By the time he arrived he had only a khaki shirt and shorts, his hair had grown long and he had a black beard that had grown on the way down. He had started out with shoes but on the way down he took off his shoes when he went to sleep one night. In the morning he found someone had stolen them. His personal possessions were in a sugar bag. When he alighted at the Adelaide Train Station he asked a taxi driver to take him to an address in the upmarket suburb in Toorak where his mother lived. He said he and two of his companions had no money but on arrival his mother would pay the fare. The taxi driver, unaware of the evacuation, looked him up and down and didn’t like what he saw so refused. This led to an argument until a policeman was called. Joe explained what he wanted to the policeman who rang Mrs Fay and she confirmed she had a son Joseph who lived in Darwin and she would pay the fare. The policeman then instructed the taxi driver to take Joe and he would be paid when they arrived.

William Harris aka Lucky was a wharfie unloading the Neptuna on the day of the first bombing attack. They were working in shifts in the hold (because it was so hot down there), unloading the cargo. William was just about to return to the hold when the foreman told him to go and have his morning smoko and sent another wharfie who had had his break to go in his place. William was walking to the shed for his smoko when he was stopped by another for a talk.

While they were talking, the first air raid began and the wharf was bombed. Both the ship and the shed received direct hits, and William was thrown into the water. He swam through water that was on fire from the spilled oil that was floating on top until he was rescued by someone in a small boat. After this incident William would never swim or go into the sea and would never talk of the bombing of Darwin.

On reflection

Suffice to say I am very proud to be a Territorian. From the above, it can be seen that a few people had an easy evacuation, but for most it was an ill-managed traumatic experience. Individual officials and members of the public usually showed nothing but kindness once they understood the nature and magnitude of this great migration. However, this did not lessen official responsibility to ensure that the evacuees were properly looked after. The reception of the evacuees was a muddle from the start. The Commonwealth Government, who ordered the women and children south, delegated the job of caring for them to the states, especially South Australia.

The state authorities claimed that they were not notified when evacuees were due to arrive, so that preparations could not be easily made. The evacuees often had to wait for hours, after a long journey by ship and rail, on railway stations or wharves before anyone took charge of them. In addition, first accommodation was often sub-standard.

I would like to thank David Tollner, June Tomlinson of the Genealogy Society of the Northern Territory and Janet Dickinson, author of Refugees in our own Country, and Les and Pamela Agistoni, for giving me permission to use pieces in their stories, articles and books in this my story.
Joy Davis was born in Darwin on 23rd November 1934, the youngest of five children of Stewart and Bessie Drysdale. Most of her primary school years were spent at the Convent School in Darwin and her high school years at St Hilda's Boarding School in Southport, Qld. After leaving school she trained as a nurse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney NSW and then at the Darwin Hospital. Joy married Edgar Davis on 19th May 1956. She and her husband had many business ventures: transport driving, crocodile shooting, prospecting, proprietors of Drysdale's Service Station Darwin, building and owning Timber Creek Wayside Inn at Timber Creek NT, and becoming speculative builders in Darwin. They have had six children and 57 years of happily married life until Edgar’s death in 2013. Although Joy now lives in Queensland she visits Darwin each year and still considers herself a Territorian.

Notes
(i) Ed: it has been popularly supposed, and is still reported widely, that the federal government repressed information about the initial Darwin raids. In fact, the southern newspapers of the days following the attacks carried numerous stories, which became more and more detailed as the fuller statistics of the action were fully revealed. While initially the death toll was under-reported, it reflects the slow lead times and reporting methods of those days. Further, those in charge of Darwin were hardly going to be concerned with reporting lists of those dead, given invasion was an immediate fear. Nor did the armed forces have large media departments as they do today. By the 24th the Canberra Times was reporting Prime Minister Curtin as saying that he “did not propose to inform the Japanese of the degree of the success or failure of their attack.” This was a rather sensible precaution to take. But by 28 February newspapers, such as the Adelaide Mail, were reporting details of the raids complete with a map showing the direction of the Japanese attack from the south-east. Scores of stories were appearing in a myriad of newspapers around Australia, in particular small anecdotes from survivors. On 3 March The West Australian carried a story about the “70 bombers” which had attacked Darwin. The following day the Townsville Daily Bulletin featured more precise detail, citing 90 planes. At the end of March the Lowe Report was released, and it advised that deaths “did not exceed 240.” (See “Appendix 11. Myth: The Raid was Concealed,” in Lewis and Ingman, Carrier Attack.)

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In February 2014, the Philippine Honorary Consul-General in Darwin hosted a significant ceremony to honour Filipino mariners who died north of Darwin during World War II. These men were killed when the cargo ships SS Florence D and SS Don Isidro were repeatedly attacked by Japanese aircraft on 18 and 19 February 1942. A commemorative plaque was jointly unveiled by Her Excellency Mrs Belen F Anota, Ambassador of the Philippines to Australia, and the Honourable Peter Styles MLA, then Northern Territory Minister of Multicultural Affairs – a long overdue commemoration of this wartime sacrifice by Filipino civilians.

These merchant mariners were Filipino nationals serving on commercial vessels which had been contracted to run the Japanese air-sea blockade of the Philippines. But how did this sacrifice well north of Darwin come to be included in the death tally for the Bombing of Darwin? Researching these Filipinos also led to the discovery that a Filipino sailor was killed in Darwin on that day, together with five civilians who were actually Filipino-Australians. Collectively, this service and sacrifice represents a significant contribution by the Filipino community to Australia’s military history.

The Filipino Diaspora1 In Northern Australia
The Filipino connection with Port Darwin dates back to the ‘Manilamen’ of the late 19th century, pearl and shell divers who became patriarchs of some notable Territorian families with a significant contribution to the two world wars. While the Philippines was under Spanish colonial rule, many chose to seek a new life elsewhere. This ad hoc migration was ongoing from the 16th century, and from the 18th century their primary destination was Mexico and the Americas. They were known as ‘Manilamen’, people from the Philippines who had travelled to foreign lands seeking adventure or simply a better life. The modern identity as ‘Filipinos’ was not adopted until the 19th century.

The first wave of Filipinos migration to Australia began in the third quarter of the 19th century after commercial quantities of pearlshell were first taken in Torres Strait in 1870. Hundreds of Filipinos came to the islands in the far north of the Colony of Queensland seeking employment as divers for pearlshell and bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber), also known by the Malay name trepang. They established a significant community on Thursday Island and the surrounding smaller islands.2 The Japanese soon came to dominate the pearlshell industry. However, many Filipinos were drawn west to join pearling operations out of Palmerston (as Darwin was then known), or further west on the remote Kimberley coast.3

Any history of migration is a complex tale comprising intertwined threads of socio-economic, political and religious motivations. The reasons why various parties migrate at different times can usually be related directly to religious, economic, political or social motives. Each of these can have differing significance at different times, and they are not mutually exclusive. Usually at least two
of these reasons would prompt a decision to migrate. Many studies discuss migration in terms of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors: the circumstances that created a desire to leave the hardships of life at home, and the developing circumstances overseas offering religious or political freedom, security and perhaps affluence, that created a strong desire to migrate to that location. The Filipinos who came to northern Australia were both ‘pushed’ by poverty and lack of employment opportunities in their home barangays and villages, particularly outside of Manila, and ‘pulled’ by anticipated economic opportunities.

Late in the 19th century, Palmerston was a ‘mestizo town’ where the few European public servants and labourers were significantly outnumbered by Japanese, Filipino and Torres Strait Island pearl divers, Chinese traders and indigenous Larrakia people. Banjo Patterson wrote of Palmerston after a visit there in 1898, “it is filled with the boilings over of the great cauldron of Oriental humanity”, listing ‘Manilamen’ among the eastern races to be found there. The Chinese had been the first to settle in the Northern Territory, and from 1878 Palmerston was basically a Chinese enclave – Chinese outnumbered the European population by more than four to one. The South Australian government brought in Indians and Singalese, who came to number 150 by 1888. Twelve Japanese pearl divers came in 1884. By 1892 there were three Japanese-owned pearl luggers working from Port Darwin and by 1898 nearly 300 Japanese lived in Palmerston, mostly pearl divers. The pearling trade also attracted Indonesians, Torres Strait Islanders, Malays and Filipinos.

The Filipinos in particular were noted as excellent divers and proved to be a bonus to the pearlshell industry. They first came to Port Darwin as adventurous individuals, while from 1895 there was a more regulated influx of divers and pearlshell processors under the Indentured Labour Scheme. One of the first to come to Port Darwin was a Manilaman named Tassatio in 1878.

Tassatio lived in the camp outside town known as the ‘Police Paddock’, and died in 1929 after having lived in Darwin for 51 years. Others who became long-term residents were Catumba who died in 1938 (his Filipino wife Procupia died in 1939) and Juan Rodella, who lived in Darwin for 51 years. Others were Carlos Ga, Tolentino Conanan, Elias Cesar, Antonio Spain, Ambrosio Pasquell, and another named ‘Charlie Hadi’ living at the 10 mile Railway Camp, who was better known as ‘Shoal Bay Charlie’. Many of the older residents, all naturalised as British subjects, were evacuated when Darwin came under threat in 1942 including Alfonso Albolero and Antonio Peris (born in 1879), Pontallion Asor and Bennazio Bargos (1882) and Estiphan Cigobia (1884).

While the migration of Japanese, Indonesian and Chinese settlers in northern Australia and their relationships with local Indigenous people have been well documented, much less has been recorded about the early Filipino settlers. Following this first phase of individual migration, the next wave of migration of Filipinos to Palmerston commenced in 1895 with a small group from the central and southern Philippines who were employed as divers and processors of pearl shells under the Indentured Labour Scheme. These Filipinos have been described as being ‘culturally isolated’ but so too was almost everyone in Palmerston. There really was no ‘mainstream community’ at that time. While their origins were disparate they maintained their customs and traditions, and initially communicated with Spanish as a common language to overcome the obstacle of different regional dialects. Gradually English overtook Spanish as the common language, particularly with the children and descendants. The men played music at social gatherings and actively participated in sporting activities such as boxing and football.

These were the first of the waves of migration by Filipinos to the Northern Territory documented by John Rivas in 2003. Three factors at the turn of the century, however, acted in concert to practically end this first wave of Filipino migration – the decline of the Australian pearling industry, the growth of the industry in the Philippines under American patronage and the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act following Federation. The Indentured Labour Scheme came to an end as the new immigration policies of the Commonwealth excluded non-Europeans from settling in Australia, and Filipino migration went into a hiatus until the 1950s.

When the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the Northern Territory on 1 January 1911 and the town of Palmerston was officially renamed Darwin, there were 31 pearling boats operating from Darwin employing 138 men. The Northern Territory’s population, excluding Chinese and Aboriginals, numbered about 2400, including some 52 Filipinos recorded as living in Darwin. The Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the various camps around Darwin town. Public servants lived in houses in town, single workers with money lived in hostels and Aboriginal people lived at Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, but the rest just made do with whatever accommodation they could manage. Those old camps on the fringes of Darwin have today become the suburbs of Stuart Park, Parap and ranging out to Nightcliff, while some of the old names are occasionally heard, such as Salonika and Police Paddock.

Life in these camps was communal living at its best, with no sewers but open drains and incinerator latrines. Conditions were tough but they were shared equally by all families, enhancing the community spirit the Filipinos were already used to from living in their barrios back home. A visitor to a small barrio or barangay in a remote province of the Philippines today can experience the lifestyle of the camps of old Darwin town. The Filipino families of that time such as the Cubillos and Conanans, mostly lived in the camp known as Police Paddock, which was where the suburb of Stuart Park is today, overlooking Frances Bay and Dinah Beach, which was known as Carl’s Beach in those days.

It is now known that some 319 men from the Northern Territory volunteered for service in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I, including eight Filipino-Australians from the Ga, Conanan and Spain families, with six seeing active service overseas. Two were killed, two were wounded and one was decorated for bravery. Notable among them are the sons of Carlos and Mary Anne Ga – all four brothers were volunteers, a significant contribution from a single Darwin family.
By the 1920s, the pearling industry was not so active and the Filipino divers sought work ashore. For example, Tolentino Conanan became a worker in the Darwin railway yards. Those who had arrived prior to 1901 were considered free men. The pearling industry soon regenerated, and by 1936 there were 27 luggers working out of Darwin, competing with 60-70 larger Japanese vessels.12 Professor Alan Powell recorded that in the 1933 census there were 69 Filipinos recorded as living in Darwin and nearly all were pearlers.13 The Conanan, Chavez, Cubillo and Spain families in Darwin were all connected through their Filipino descent, with the men being waterfront workers and footballers. At the funeral of Ernie Lee in 1932, a supporter of Wanderers Football Club, the pall-bearers included Catalino and Felix Spain, Elias Conanan, Antonio and John Cubillo and Francisco Chavez.14

From the 52 Filipinos originally known to be resident in Darwin, there have come to be over 7000 people recorded today as members of the Northern Territory Filipino community.15 Other notable Territorians with a Filipino heritage include Zelma Garr (1897-1957) who served in 1914-1916 as Governess to the family of Administrator Dr John Gilruth. She was born on Thursday Island and christened ‘Nuselma Ga’ – the seventh child of Carlos Ga (1854-1931) from the Dinagat Islands near Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, and his wife Mary Anne (nee Bunyan; 1864-1909) from Carmarthenshire, Wales. A grandson of Carlos Ga, and son of Mary Espanias Ga (1888-1947), was Charles Tsang See-Kee OAM (1913-2002).16 Charles and his brother Bennett were among the seventeen Filipino-Australians with a Northern Territory connection who volunteered for military service during World War II, among them one of the Great War veterans. In addition, there were several Filipino-Australians working on the Darwin wharf in 1941-1942, five of them being killed during the first Japanese air-raid, including one of the 1915 volunteers.

The casualty roll for the Bombing of Darwin is now known to also include one Filipino sailor from the USS Peary. However, there were a further 14 Filipino mariners also killed on 19 February 1942, and another two who later died of their wounds, who had no specific connection with Darwin. In fact, the Florence D and Don Isidro had never berthed in Darwin Harbour. But these men became inextricably linked with the Bombing of Darwin when their deaths were included in the Royal Commission tally.

**Arafura Sea, 18-19 February 1942**

On 19 January 1942, the US Army base commander in Darwin, Colonel John A Robenson, was instructed to fly to Java in the Netherlands East Indies to urgently organise ships, crews and cargo for prompt dispatch to the Philippine Islands. They were engaged for single missions – as blockade runners, to resupply the besieged troops on Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island in the Philippine Islands. These civilian cargo ships contracted by the US Army, eight in total, carried a combined cargo of 500,000 rations, 10,000 rounds of 3-inch ammunition, 250,000 rounds of .50-inch calibre ammunition and three million .30-inch calibre rounds. Only three of them were successful. These blockade runners are one of the least-known groups of heroes from World War II.

In a series of air attacks off Bathurst Island on 18 and 19 February 1942 Catalina flying boat PBY 2306 was downed, Florence D was sunk and Don Isidro was beached. Justice Lowe recorded 15 deaths from these incidents based on figures provided by the US Naval Liaison Officer, but it is now known that there were in fact 18 deaths attributable to these actions, including 16 mariners from among the 105 Filipinos crewing the two ships. They were civilians, serving under Articles of Agreement with the Master, but were drawn into the body count for the Bombing of Darwin even though they were never there.

**SS Don Isidro**

Robenson’s team identified the cargo ship SS Don Isidro which had just arrived in Batavia, Jakarta, from Brisbane. The Don Isidro had been built in 1939 for the De La Rama Steamship Company in the Philippines and was engaged in inter-island services. In some accounts she is called USAT Don Isidro (United States Army Transport), but most commonly she is referred to as SS Don Isidro because she was contracted for this one mission, not commissioned into the fleet.

A contract covering compensation, insurance and other matters was drawn up, which included generous salary provisions and insurance through the Chief Finance Officer of the US Army for each man to the sum of $US500 for the period required to accomplish their mission. In the case of those who were killed, this was paid to the nominated beneficiary.17 If the ship was lost as a result of enemy action, the owners would be compensated, and there was a stipulation that the Captain was to scuttle the ship rather than to allow it to fall into Japanese hands. The Master, Captain Rafael J Cisneros, assured Colonel Robenson that he and his men, “would do their best to deliver food and ammunition to the Philippine Islands.”18

She departed Batavia on 12 February 1942 carrying flour, dry rations and ammunition, with a total complement of 84: Captain Cisneros and his crew of 67 fellow Filipinos plus a 16-man armed guard from the 453d Ordnance (Aviation) Bombardment Company commanded by Second Lieutenant Joseph Kane, US Army. The intention was to head through the Sunda Strait and then east through the Timor Sea, then through the Arafura and Banda Seas to then make a run direct to Mindanao in the southern Philippines where the Anakan Lumber Company would handle unloading operations. By noon on 18 February the Don Isidro was about 80 miles north of Wessel Island off eastern Arnhem Land when a Japanese bomber attacked her twice, but without causing damage. Cisneros changed course, ironically to seek shelter in Darwin Harbour. She was 25 miles north of Bathurst Island on 19 February when seven fighter planes returning from the strike on Darwin suddenly strafed her. Despite the guard’s defensive fire, several crew were wounded and all lifeboats were destroyed. Later a Japanese float plane dropped two bombs which missed, but several dive bombers and fighter planes then set the Don Isidro on fire. Captain Cisneros attempted to beach her but the engines failed about three miles offshore. The crew abandoned ship and reached the beach around 2am or 3am the following morning. The survivors initially found that four crew were dead and many were missing.
The corvette HMAS Warrnambool rescued the survivors from various parts of the island at about 10.30am on 20 February, herself under attack by enemy aircraft. Captain Cisneros found there were seven missing besides the four known to be dead:

“Before we were brought in to the port of Darwin, we went and approached the ill-fated ‘Don Isidro’ in search of the Chief Engineer [Maximo Manga] and the Chief Electrician [Frederico Montralegra], as we were told they were still on board, very badly burnt and wounded. Once in there, we saw the deck was already under water and no trace of them whatsoever. In spite of this and besides the heavy explosion occurred all through the night and the following morning which we presumed that they were dead or drowned, being badly burnt and wounded, The Captain of the relief vessel gave up all hope of finding such persons due to these circumstances.”

Douglas Lockwood stated in 1984 that “eleven died and were buried there” (on Bathurst Island). His source was most likely Lieutenant Owen Griffiths RAN, a witness to the raids in Darwin from on board HMAS Platypus, who also recorded the fate of SS Don Isidro, although he was not actually a witness:

“She suffered five direct hits from dive-bombers. Eleven survivors died on the beach at Bathurst Island. Some had been in the water for ten hours. There were two parties of survivors, one on the beach and the second up a creek. Seventy-three were brought back to Darwin by Warrnambool, where two more died.”

However the report by Cisneros clearly shows that four were known to have died during the attack and the other seven noted as missing were presumed killed, so it is safe to say that all 11 Filipinos died on the ship and their bodies were never recovered. Of the 73 survivors brought in by Warrnambool, one American and two Filipinos later died of their wounds. Three weeks after the attack, the US Naval Liaison Officer Captain Marshall Collins USN listed “Dead: 11” and “US Army dead: 1.” In 1943, Collins reported to the Administrator of the Northern Territory: “It will be noted that one US Army killed is listed from the SS DON ISIDRO.”

The Royal Commission report quoted the figure of 11 killed, mistakenly believing that it included the sole Army casualty, whereas in fact there were 11 Filipinos killed plus the American (who actually died of wounds), plus a further two Filipinos who died of their wounds and were buried in a temporary cemetery. These two Filipino deaths were not recorded for the Royal Commission tally, and their names remain unknown.

The US Merchant Marine website correctly lists the casualties as 13 crew and one US Army while some other sites incorrectly list 10 dead. Many of the Filipino names in various records suffer from having their spelling anglicised: in most Filipino dialects (and modern Tagalog) ‘f’ is pronounced as ‘p’ and ‘v’ as ‘b’, and ‘o’ is often pronounced as ‘u’. So ‘Jaruvilla’ might variously be written as ‘Jarubilla’ or ‘Jarobilla’. The ‘g’ is often silent, so ‘Masangkay’ might be written as ‘Masankay’. Other names have been transcribed by English speakers not familiar with Filipino pronunciation, so ‘Jaime’ (with the Spanish-style soft ‘j’) has incorrectly been interpreted to be the English/American ‘Jamie’. Table 1 was created to support the preparation of the commemorative plaque in Darwin, and this gives the most likely spelling of the names of the seamen who were killed.

In return for his service Captain Cisneros, his wife and their children, all born in the Philippines, were granted US citizenship. Ironically, after surviving five enemy attacks in February 1942, Rafael Cisneros died in 1958 of a heart attack while he and his wife were on a cruise.

SS Florence D

The SS Florence D was originally the steamship SS Lake Farmingdale built by the Superior Shipbuilding Company of West Superior in Wisconsin, USA and launched in 1919. From 1925 she was used in the Philippines by the Cadwallader-Gibson Lumber Company, and by 1942 she was owned by Madrigal and Company of Manila and had been procured under charter by the United States Navy. One of Colonel Robenson’s team identified this small, fast cargo ship in Surabaya: after some considerable struggle, she was released to the Army on 2 February 1942. She too was to be a blockade runner, under Captain Carmelo Lopez Manzano. In 1925 she was in the Philippines by the Cadwallader-Gibson Lumber Company, and by 1942 she was owned by Madrigal and Company of Manila and had been procured under charter by the United States Navy. One of Colonel Robenson’s team identified this small, fast cargo ship in Surabaya: after some considerable struggle, she was released to the Army on 2 February 1942.

She too was to be a blockade runner, under Captain Carmelo Lopez Manzano, on a secret mission to deliver primarily 3-inch artillery shells and .30 and .50-inch calibre ammunition to the Corregidor garrison. Manzano was a former Philippine Army Major who graduated in 1924 from the Philippine Nautical School and had 14 years of service.
seagoing experience behind him. On 9 February 1942, Colonel Robenson drew up a contract with Manzano covering compensation and insurance: Manzano was to receive 20,000 guilders, the Chief Engineer 10,000 guilders and each of the remaining officers 5000 guilders each (four times their normal salaries).  

Some accounts wrongly imply that she was a US Navy ship with the designation USS Florence D. In other accounts she is called USAT Florence D (United States Army Transport), but most commonly she is correctly referred to as SS Florence D.

On the morning of 19 February 1942, the Florence D rescued the crew of Catalina flying boat PBY 2306 of Patrol Wing 10 flown by Lieutenant Thomas Moorer USN, which was shot down by a Japanese Zero (flown by Naval Air Pilot 1st Class Yoshikazu Nagahama) from the carrier-borne group heading towards Darwin. The Catalina had been conducting a morning patrol towards Ambon when it was suddenly attacked from above. The aircraft was ditched and the survivors rescued by the Florence D, which then began steaming towards Darwin.

After the Don Isidro was attacked, the Florence D responded to her SOS call and went to help. She was attacked at 2pm by a Japanese float plane approximately 60 nautical miles northwest of Bathurst Island, but the two 100-pound bombs both missed by a wide margin. She was attacked again at 3.30pm by nine dive-bombers coming down in a vertical line. These were from the aircraft carrier group's Hiryu squadron, who were returning to their carrier after attacking Darwin. The Catalina crew jumped overboard with the exception of Joe Shuler, who had gone forward. The Florence D suffered five direct hits from 500-pound bombs, including one to the forward cargo hold full of ammunition and, after a dramatic explosion, sank stern first. Former Australian Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen had been a naval volunteer reserve Sub-Lieutenant in 1941-1942, and returned to Darwin as guest speaker on 19 February 1992 during the Northern Territory's War Service Commemoration Year.

He recalled his impressions following the attack on Darwin:

“Those of us who were here on that day have our special memories. I remember early morning talk in Naval headquarters about unidentified aircraft; suddenly the warning sounded and we streamed out to the trenches ... I remember listening that night to the talk of more senior officers about the imminent prospect of attack, which was assumed as a certainty.”

A witness to the Peary’s final moments, Sir Zelman recalled:

“I have a vivid memory of the old ‘star-crossed’ American destroyer Peary, ablaze from stem to stern, going down with a gun still firing, and with appalling loss of life.”

From a total of approximately 130 crew, the US Naval Liaison Officer Captain Collins reported an estimated 40 accounted for, four in hospital and 10 on the hospital ship Manunda. He therefore estimated 80 dead for the Peary (including the Captain, Lieutenant-Commander John Bermingham USN), and this approximation was quoted as a firm figure in the Royal Commission. The following year Collins reported to the Administrator: “The estimate for the USS Peary is the best I could make at the time.”

In 1989, Peary survivors Dallas Widick and John Patterson installed a plaque on the low wall near the Darwin Cenotaph in honour of 91 ship-mates who lost their lives. However this roll was later found to contain several inaccuracies. For example: two men had been reported...
as missing-in-action in Darwin but their names were not included on the casualty roll nor on this plaque. Some of those named on the plaque were never in Darwin harbour – two had been wounded at Cavite and were held prisoners as for the duration of the war, eight had died of malaria during the escape to Darwin, and two continued serving until war’s end. One listed among the dead, Seaman 2nd Class Frank A Glover, was actually rescued by an Australian motor boat that day and remained AWOL for 18 months. It is now known that the USS Peary lost 88 officers and men in Darwin, including the Filipino Cook Second Class Joseph Tapia.

**Darwin Wharf, 19 February 1942**

The two air raids on Darwin on the morning of Thursday 19 February 1942 constituted the first occasion in which the continent of Australia was genuinely threatened by an armed enemy. However, through a combination of factors, casualty figures were not very well documented. Beyond this though, a topic which has received almost no analysis until recently is the fact that among the waterside workers that day, and among the dead, were a number of Filipino-Australians.

By 1942, Port Darwin had become a vitally-important staging point for ship convoys. From the beginning of that year there were 18 registered gangs working on the wharf, of 14 members each, all members of the waterside section of the North Australia Workers’ Union (NAWU). By February three shifts of six gangs were working around the clock. The port was especially congested on 19 February 1942, mainly due to a convoy carrying troops and supplies having just returned following an attack by Japanese aircraft and submarines. On that day, through an administrative error, just five gangs were rostered to work instead of the usual six: Gangs 1, 2, 3, 17 and 18 – 70 men in total.

These waterside workers had just commenced their shift and were starting to unload the cargo ships MV Neptuna and SS Barossa on the right-angled extension of the long pier. The large number of casualties suffered on the wharf in the air raid that morning has been directly attributed to the congestion of the port. Reporting on a commemorative service at the wharf in 1951, the Northern Standard in Darwin observed:

> “Many lives were lost that day, particularly on these death traps of wharves. It is a tragic fact that the first to die were the waterside workers for they had been the first Australians to protest and fight the sending of war materials to Japan.”

The circumstances of the Bombing of Darwin have been considered, dissected and analysed in considerable detail, from the tonnage of ships sunk in the harbour to their later recovery by a Japanese salvage firm, and the conversion to Christianity of the attack force commander Mitsuo Fuchida. A significant point of contention has always related to the number of casualties and the alleged ‘cover-up’. For a number of reasons, casualty figures were not well documented at the time. In the report of the Royal Commission concerning this first Japanese attack on Darwin, Mr Justice Lowe stated two figures which he believed to represent the number of known deaths at that time, these adding to a total of 243. Subsequent analysis however has shown that many deaths were double-counted or miscounted, and many were never counted at all.

When all of the various known errors and omissions are taken into account the amended casualty roll, published by the Historical Society of the Northern Territory in 1994, lists 252 known deaths. The list of casualties was re-published by Australian Military News in 1997, and was included by Tom Lewis as an appendix to his 1999 book A War at Home.

On the wharf in particular, the Royal Commission quoted 39 civilians killed, which has been perpetuated by subsequent authors. This figure came from a ‘Merchant Service Roll’ made available to Justice Lowe at the time of the Royal Commission, but there were many errors in this list. Mariners on ships were counted including the two mentioned above which were not even in Darwin harbour. Lowe did not count two railway employees who later died of their wounds, and neither did he count 11 waterside workers on MV Neptuna or the merchant seamen from the hospital ship Manunda, SS Mauna Loa or two others from the SS Zealandia. The figure of 39 is anomalous because those killed while physically on board a ship were listed separately with that ship’s casualty roll – and were also double-counted as ‘civilian losses on the wharf’.

A more accurate number of civilians killed on the wharf is 22, comprising 20 men from the mercantile trading firm Burns, Philp & Co Ltd and the Commonwealth Railways, plus two railway employees who died of their wounds a week later on the hospital ship Manunda. Among them were five Filipino-Australians.

Francisco Augustus Chavez was widely known in Darwin as ‘Francis’, although within the Filipino community he was known affectionately as ‘Chico’. After his father’s death, Francisco and his sister Beatrice became the step-children of Manilaman Mr Rafael Ponce, and they grew up with his children Pantaleona Mary (later Mrs Perez) and Eusebio Joseph (‘Sibio’). Ponce was noted as, “a very old resident of Darwin, having resided here for practically a lifetime”.

During World War I, Francisco Chavez and his step-brother Eusebio made donations to the Belgian Nuns’ Fund and also to the Daily Mail Tobacco Fund through the Northern Territory Times to provide gift parcels for British and Colonial soldiers at the front. By 1918, Francisco Chavez was noted as a motor car proprietor, operating his business from Railway Gully with the telephone number ‘21’. He owned a Studebaker which was available for hire, registration number ‘39’.

The Ponce family were “active members of the community”. Francisco played in the Darwin Recreation Club band, was a patron of the Catholic Club in Smiths...
Street and held social activities in his home. Francisco's step-mother, described as "an old resident of Darwin", died in their Bennett Street residence on 22 June 1922. Mr Rafael Ponce died at Francisco's residence in McMinn Street in April 1928 aged 69. Rafael left behind a sister Mary, two children (Pantaleona, Mrs Rafael Perez, and 'Sibio' or 'Joe' Ponce), two stepchildren (Francisco and Beatrice Chavez) and several grandchildren (among them, four who served during and after World War II).

In the 1920s and 1930s, Francisco Chavez was employed by the Commonwealth Railways on the town wharf. On 16 December 1941, the Administrator ordered the evacuation of all women and children, and in the ensuing eight weeks over 1000 women and some 900 children left Darwin by ship, aircraft, road and train. Francisco's sister Beatrice did not marry, and passed away on 22 November 1944 in Moore Park, NSW.

On 19 February 1942, Francisco was working as a winchman at the railway turntable at the right-angle of the wharf; Geoffrey Dangerfield was the wharf foreman, also employed by the Commonwealth Railways. One of the first sticks of bombs hit the right-angle of the wharf, throwing a locomotive and six railway trucks into the water. The explosion completely obliterated a large section of the deck and cut off access to the shore, directly killing four men. Earl 'Whitey' Shores, an American living on the beach at Fannie Bay, was working as a pinman on the turntable and was killed instantly. The explosion killed tractor driver Ernest Walter ('Ernie') Hodges, whose body was never recovered. Francisco Chavez and Geoffrey Dangerfield (wharf foreman) were also killed instantly and their bodies thrown up beneath the sea that he loved so well.  

"He was well respected and a good-living man."  

Dangerefield's mother-in-law Jessie Litchfield wrote to her daughter (young Emelia) following the attack, and her words could equally apply to the others killed that day on the wharf:  

"It seems kinder to keep silence than to try and give any words of consolation . . . He could not have suffered anything, the blow coming so suddenly; and he is now asleep beneath the sea that he loved so well."  

Ricardo Conanan, Tolentino’s father, was one of the original ‘Manilamen’ of old Darwin, part of that first wave of Filipino migration to Australia in the third quarter of the 19th century – Tolentino Garcia Conanan (1858-1921), who had initially come to Thursday Island to be a diver for pearl shell and trepang. Tolentino’s great-grandparents were Justo Conanan and Dominga Magallanes, both born in about 1797 in the village of Ybajay, in Aklan province in the north of Panay Island. Family history relates that the surname was originally spelt as ‘Cunanan’. There have long been Cunanan families in Pampanga on the main island of Luzon, and reputedly one of Tolentino’s forebears changed the spelling of their name to ‘Conanan’ to distinguish themselves from these northerners.

Tolentino’s grandfather Juan Conanan was the Gobernadorcillo (‘Provincial Governor’) of Ybajay in the 1850s. Tolentino’s father, Antonio Gellito Conanan, married Gregoria Dalsay Garcia of another large notable family from Ybajay, and they had eight children between 1855 and 1884. In about 1881, aged 23, Tolentino relocated to Thursday Island where he worked as a diver. In 1890, he sailed to Hong Kong and there on 16 May he married Emelia Constantina Da Souza (1864-1902), the daughter of Portuguese nationals Felipe Da Souza and Annie (nee Da Silva), who were probably from Macau. Emilia went to Thursday Island with Tolentino, where they had five children – all christened in the Filipino manner (drawn from the Spanish tradition, but also reflecting the Portuguese custom) with Emelia’s surname as an additional ‘middle name’: Gertrude Maria Da Souza Conanan (born in 1891), Emelia Da Souza Conanan (1893), Ricardo Warivin Da Souza Conanan (1894-1942), Elias Joseph Da Souza Conanan (1896-1945) and Salvador Modeste Da Souza Conanan (died in infancy in 1901). Meanwhile, Tolentino was naturalised as a British subject in 1892.

After his wife Emilia died in 1902, Tolentino took his children to Palmerston where he was again a diver. Tolentino Conanan’s first daughter Gertrude married Catalino Puerte Spain (1887-1942) on 9 February 1909, the son of fellow Manilaman Antonino Spain and his English wife Elizabeth, Tolentino and Emelias second daughter Emelia married Mr Henry Lee of Darwin, but they had no children. From 1928, Gertrude Conanan (Mrs Catalino Spain) and her sister Emelia (Mrs Henry Lee) were managing the ‘Canberra Café’ in Cavenagh Street. When Tolentino Conanan could no longer dive he became a pearl shell processor. He then worked in the Darwin railway yards, and in later life he enjoyed fishing with hand-lines from the wharf. In his obituary in 1921 it was noted that:  

"He was well respected and a good-living man." Another recorded: “He was a friendly and obliging man and was a scholar both in Spanish and English.”

Ricardo Conanan (1894-1942) was born on Thursday Island on 14 August 1894. Tolentino and Emelia’s third child and first son. In Darwin as a young teenager, Ricardo began working as a pearl shell diver. He attended an AIF recruiting meeting on 20 September 1915, volunteered immediately and was enlisted on 6 October, having recently turned 21. While undergoing training in Brisbane with ‘A’ Company, 8th Depot Battalion, Ricardo was discharged on 17 December 1915 as permanently medically unfit. He suffered from sciatica and diver’s palsy as a result of being a pearl shell diver for at least the past six years, a common disability found amongst former divers in the Philippines even today. Ricardo Conanan did not get to serve overseas in this war and he lost his life in the next one.

His medical condition did not suppress his adventurous nature however. In July 1924, Ricardo volunteered to join a police expedition to Arnhem Land to search for supposed survivors of the SS Douglas Mawson, a ketch-rigged wooden steamer which had been wrecked by a cyclone in the Gulf of Carpentaria on 29 March 1923, lost without a trace.  

Ricardo Conanan was described as a fisherman and bushman, who spoke the language of the district. Together with his brother Elias, Ricardo was a noted billiards and snooker player in Darwin, as well as a footballer and an accomplished accordion player – he would support the Cubillos Brothers rondalla orchestra and the Manila String Band, together with Dick Butler on the mouth organ.
Butler was the husband of Antonio and Elizabeth Spain’s granddaughter Louisa Fanny Spain.54

Like the other waterside workers whose families had been evacuated, at the beginning of 1942 Ricardo and his brother Elias were among those who continued to work on the wharf. On the morning of 19 February 1942, Elias had swapped his shift with a fellow worker and fortuitously escaped the air raid unscathed. He later joined his family in Brisbane, although he died on 5 April 1945 of a lung disorder, probably related to his wartime service. Ricardo’s wife Lucy was part-Aboriginal and they had no children. She had been recorded in 1926 as being aged 30 and working as a laundress. Lucy was also evacuated from Darwin before the raids, and died in Adelaide on 13 April 1944.55

A roll of known casualties as at 23 March 1942 confirms that Ricardo Conanan, John Cubillo and Domingo Dominic were employees of the mercantile trading firm Burns, Philp & Co Ltd, which had also established itself as a significant tourism operator. With all the women and children evacuated from Darwin, on the night of 18 February many of the wharf labourers enjoyed a social night and had a few drinks. In addition, No. 3 gang had just finished a stretch of working night shift and were due to commence day shift at 8am on 19 February. That Thursday morning, Ricardo Conanan had apparently forgotten that he was rostered on to work and his gang was undermanned. As Lockwood recalled: “one of his colleagues was sent to retrieve him. He was found asleep at home in Cavanagh Street and came to work thirty minutes late.” 57

Ricardo was a hatchman, and began to unload the cargo ship Barossa of the Adelaide Steamship Company Ltd, which ironically was loaded with timber for a new wharf in Darwin. The Barossa was moored on the inner berth, opposite Neptuna which was heavily laden with defence stores, depth charges and anti-aircraft ammunition.

As Ricardo Conanan took a break for smoko the raid commenced and the bombs started raining down. The Barossa was obstructed by a naval oil lighter moored on her seaward side, so could not escape. Three bombs from the first high level attack landed in the shallow water on the shore side of Barossa while the next three were direct hits on the wharf. These were followed by a direct hit on the Barossa from a stick of three bombs from an Aichi Type 99 carrier bomber, and soon she was immobilised and on fire. Barossa was heavily damaged and sank but was later re-floated and towed to Brisbane by a tug.59 Ricardo, aged 47, was killed immediately on his way to the recreation hut and his body was never found. His last words were reputedly “Good-bye boys, I’ll see you in the next world.” 60

This was a double tragedy for the family. Gertrude Spain (Conanan) lost her brother Ricardo that day, as well as her husband Catalino.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Darwin expected to be struck yet there were no safety precautions on the wharf, no one person was in overall control of the wharves and incomplete records were kept. The Americans posted armed guards on the wharf and used troops to unload cargo. And all this time many people in Darwin maligned the wharf labourers for their militancy, yet were among the first to flee Darwin after the raids while the wharfies remained on duty). In December, the wharf labourers had started working shifts lasting as long as 20 hours to facilitate unloading. They were still not meeting the requirements, however, so the federal Minister for Labour flew in up to 160 men to supplement the gangs in Darwin. It is likely that Domingo Dominic was one of these relief workers flown in to increase the capacity of the gangs. On 19 February 1942 he was also working with No. 3 Gang together with John Cubillo and Catalino Spain. As the first bombs started falling, No. 3 Gang had just opened the No. 1 hatch on the MV Neptuna on the outer berth to prepare to unload the ship’s cargo. While the prime target for the Japanese attack force may have been the destroyer USS Peary, the Neptuna was the most dangerous ship in port that morning. Neptuna had arrived...
in Darwin a week earlier with general cargo, defence stores, 200 depth charges and anti-aircraft ammunition, and the Chief Engineer was going to use this opportunity to replace a damaged piston in the port engine. To make her more attractive as a target, the cargo ship Barossa was moored on the inner berth directly opposite.

Neptuna came in to the outer berth at about 9am on 19 February using only the starboard engine and the wharf labourers commenced discharging the cargo onto the wharf. HMAS Swan cast off immediately. A dive-bomber then came in over the harbour and released a bomb directly through the bridge and into the saloon. Another followed immediately and its bomb struck the engine room, setting the ship on fire. As the raid sirens had commenced on shore, Swan cast off and the ship began taking in water even before the air-raid sirens had commenced on shore. Neptuna sank beside the wharf.

The first bombs, from a high level attack, fell into the harbour on the shore side of Barossa; but the second group hit the right-angle of the wharf forward of Neptuna, and the ship began taking in water even before the air-raid sirens had commenced on shore. Swan cast off immediately. A dive-bomber then came in over the harbour and released a bomb directly through the bridge and into the saloon. Another followed immediately and its bomb struck the engine room, setting the ship on fire. As the crew of the Neptuna prepared to abandon her, the depth charges began exploding. Forty-five men on board were killed – 11 European and 34 Chinese crew members. One of the bombs had landed directly on the hold where the men were working. Domingo Dominic was killed instantly when the bomb struck, trapped within No. 1 hold as the Neptuna sank beside the wharf.

Six members from No. 3 Gang died during the raid: Domingo Dominic, John Hynes, Catalino Spain and John Vernon Sundstrom (labourers), Andrew De Julia (shunter) and John Cubillo. De Julia had been born in Russia in 1905 and sought naturalisation in 1935, giving his name as ‘Andrew Ivanovich DeJulia’ – stating he had been born in Vladivostok, and that time had been resident in the Northern Territory for 10 years. John Hynes from Cooktown north Queensland on 12 May 1885, 23-year-old Antonio married a 19-year-old English girl named Elizabeth Massey (1866-1951) who had come out from London the previous year. They raised four sons on Thursday Island – Anastasio, Catalino, Hignio and Felix – each given the name ‘Puerte’ as a middle name. Antonio was naturalised as a British subject on 4 April 1889.

In Philippine tradition (drawn from the Spanish custom), a mother’s surname is typically given to a child as a middle name. Because this custom was foreign to Elizabeth, Antonio instead gave their children his father’s surname ‘Puerte’ (but for the first three children, officials incorrectly recorded the name as ‘Portia’).

In 1894, Antonio and Elizabeth moved to Palmerston (Darwin). Antonio continued as a pearl diver and, in his later life, was a popular barber in Cavenagh Street. Elizabeth was a local businesswoman and was very active in fund-raising. In 1900, Elizabeth secured a contract to provide stone for the new Christ Church. Antonio and his first four sons worked in quarrying, cutting and carting the stone: the foundation stone was laid in July 1902 and the church was consecrated later that year. While all of Darwin’s Filipino families were Roman Catholic, the Spains were Church of England through Elizabeth’s influence. Antonio himself was baptised at Christ Church on 2 June 1906.

In total Antonio and Elizabeth had 11 sons and one daughter, although five sons died in infancy. Elizabeth Spain became known as the ‘Queen of Darwin’ for her extensive work for charitable organisations. At the time of her death in Brisbane on 3 April 1951 at the age of 85, ‘Granny Spain’ was described as ‘a grand old lady’, survived by three sons and a daughter, and more than 20 grandchildren and about 35 great-grandchildren. Elizabeth had been predeceased by her husband Antonio, who had died of bowel cancer in Darwin on 21 July 1926, aged 64:

“Another well known old identity passed away on Wednesday in the person of Antonio Spain. He was a native of the Philippines [sic] but came to Australia about 50 years ago. His age is given as 64. He leaves a widow and a grown up family of five sons and one daughter.”

Antonio was buried in Garden Road Cemetery near the Botanic Gardens, in an unmarked grave in row 708. His son Harry was also buried there in 1957. In 1962, Darwin City Council registered Spain Place, off Cavenagh Street in Darwin city, in memory of the Filipino diver and hairdresser Antonio Spain.

Catalino Spain was the second son of Antonio and Elizabeth, born on Thursday Island on 25 November 1887. Catalino married Tolentino Conanan’s first daughter Gertrude Maria Da Souza Conanan (1891-1955) on 9 February 1909 in the Roman Catholic chapel. The wedding was followed by a celebration at the Spain residence on the Esplanade, as would be expected at a Filipino ceremony of this nature. “There was music, dancing, singing, and oratory, and the festivities were kept going merrily till about midnight.” Catalino Spain was an employee of the Commonwealth Railways and became a notable member of the Darwin community. He and Gertrude lived in McMinn Street and had two children: Christina Liboria Spain and Daniel...
The Cubillo family of Darwin is descended from the cargo. Scheme and came to Palmerston on the and trepang. He signed on under the Indentured Labour about the opportunities diving for pearls, pearl shell late 1894, aged 19, Antonio met fellow Filipinos who told dive for clam shell. In Singapore during his return voyage in to Europe as a cabin boy on a Spanish ship, learning to Antonio left home in 1890 as a 15 year old and travelled and his nationality as 'Spanish'. Family history records that Antonio was the son of a Filipino-Spanish sail-maker.

Restriction Act restrictions imposed by the took some considerable time to achieve it due to the divers who came to Darwin as indentured labourers from who was part of the second wave of migration – the 1895 onwards. They did not have the time to achieve returned. Catalino Spain. Catalino, aged 54, was a labourer with his body was hurled into the harbour by a bomb blast. Moments later the Neptuna exploded, raining debris and flames over a wide area, and sank beside the wharf. Catalino’s body was later recovered, washed up on the shore, and was buried in one of the collective graves on the beach. These bodies were all reinterred at East Point the following day, and on 1 July they were exhumed and taken to Adelaide River War Cemetery for burial. Catalino’s son-in-law Raymond Brooks was lucky to survive the bombing – he had just left the Post Office before it was destroyed in a direct hit. The Sydney Morning Herald noted that when Brooks was evacuated from Darwin he had the unpleasant duty of informing his wife Christina that both her father and uncle (Ricardo Conanan) had died in the raid: “Grim stories of the two attacks by Japanese aircraft on Darwin were told by 400 evacuees who arrived in Sydney by train yesterday. Most of the evacuees were men and some bore scars, as mementoes of their experience ... Mr Raymond Brooks was met by his wife carrying her six-month-old baby in her arms. He had to tell her that her father, Mr, Catalino Spain, and her uncle had been killed. Mr Spain was machine gunned, and his body was hurled into the harbour by a bomb blast.

The Cubillo family of Darwin is descended from the Filipino pearl-diver Antonio Pedro Cubillo (1875-1945) who was part of the second wave of migration – the divers who came to Darwin as indentured labourers from 1895 onwards. They did not have the time to achieve naturalisation before the coming of federation, and then took some considerable time to achieve it due to the restrictions imposed by the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act.

Antonio was the son of a Filipino-Spanish sail-maker Innocencio Cubillo from Calape on Bohol Island in the Visayas group, who gave his date of birth as 30 June 1875 and his nationality as ‘Spanish’. Family history records that Antonio left home in 1890 as a 15 year old and travelled to Europe as a cabin boy on a Spanish ship, learning to dive for clam shell. In Singapore during his return voyage in late 1894, aged 19, Antonio met fellow Filipinos who told him about the opportunities diving for pearls, pearl shell and trepang. He signed on under the Indentured Labour Scheme and came to Palmerston on the SS Darwin which arrived in Port Darwin on 19 January 1895 with 50 tons of cargo.

Antonio was indentured to a Scottish pearl lugger owner George McKeddie, who was married to Minnie (‘Annie’) Duwun (1878-1934), an Aboriginal woman of the Larrakia people whose traditional country was around Delissaville across the harbour from Darwin. George and Annie lived with their two children Jack and Magdelena (known as ‘Lily’) in a house near the intersection of Mitchell and Peel Streets in Darwin. The large banyan tree which still grows in grounds of the Transit Centre was reputedly planted by them.

In 1897 Antonio Cubillo met Lily, and from 1899 they produced five children during their long courtship. Antonio and Lily married at Saint Mary’s ‘Star of the Sea’ Catholic Church in Darwin on 8 September 1910, and had several more children – a total of ten – all essentially Larrakia but with typically Filipino names such as Christina, Alberta, Ponciano, Juan, Lorenzo, Martina, Eduardo, Delfin, Anna and Felipe. The family lived in the camp outside Darwin town known as the Police Paddock.

While the origins of the Filipino divers in Palmerston were quite disparate, they maintained their customs and traditions with a common bond established through food, music and sport. Members of the family today still recall family meals of dinaguan and pork adobo. One descendant recalled of Antonio: “He hosted visiting Filipino and Spanish ship’s crews at his house and taught his sons to play the 14-string mandolin, octavina, the 8-stringed Spanish guitar, the ukulele, concertina and the bass. Before long the Cubillo Brothers ‘orchestra’ was entertaining official guests and visiting dignitaries at Government House and at numerous other social functions.”

One of Antonio Cubillo’s lasting legacies was to bring the rondalla music tradition to Australia. Rondalla is an old Spanish form of guitar orchestra (ronda meaning ‘to serenade’), and Antonio Cubillo’s sons were all proficient with the 14-string mandolin and the 8-stringed Spanish guitar.

Antonio made a return visit to Bohol in 1921-25. He went again in 1929, intending to stay for three years. Because he was not yet naturalised, he required a certificate under the Immigration Act to allow his return entry into Australia. On this occasion however he deferred his return. Lily was well looked after by her children in Darwin until her death in 1934. Antonio was ultimately unable to return to Darwin due to the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and he died in Bohol in 1945. The Cubillo name is strongly represented in Darwin today, and is perhaps the Top End’s most numerous and best known family.

Juan Roque Cubillo (1906-1942), Antonio and Lily’s fourth child and second son, was known variously as ‘Johnny’ or ‘Rocky’. He married Louisa Agatha Lee who had been born in Darwin on 16 February 1902, the daughter of Widji Nelson, a Wadaman woman from Brock’s Creek, and a Chinese man Ah Lee, a descendant of Su Lee (from
On the morning of 19 February 1942, Cubillo was the mid-ship winchman with No 3 Gang unloading cargo from Neptuna. John Cubillo had faced death once already in his life. He was swimming in Rapid Creek on a Sunday afternoon in 1933 when he was seized with cramp; Miss Bethany (‘Betty’) Litchfield dived in to rescue him and with the help of Mr Paddy Hickey got him ashore. Mrs Bethany Dangerfield (nee Litchfield), described as a ‘modest heroine’, was presented with the Royal Humane Society’s Certificate of Merit by his Honour the Administrator, Lieutenant Colonel Weddell at Government House on 22 September 1934. Nine years later, Betty Litchfield’s husband Geoffrey Dangerfield was the wharf foreman, also employed by the Commonwealth Railways. John Cubillo was last seen running on the wharf before he was lost in a bomb blast. Soon after Captain Michie ordered the ship to be abandoned, and moments later the Neptuna exploded, raining debris and flames over a wide area and producing a smoke plume which became an iconic image of that morning.

Louisa and the children had evacuated from Darwin in February 1942, and they were camped in Katherine when they heard the news of the first bombing of Darwin and that John had been killed. Cubillo’s daughter recalled: “George [Tye] told us that he jumped into the water and called out for Dad to jump too, but Dad couldn’t swim.”

The Cubillo family ultimately went to Balaklava in South Australia where they lived until the end of the war. They returned to Darwin in 1946 and became prominent in Northern Territory affairs, particularly sport. On 7 April 1971, Cubillo Street in the suburb of Wanguri was registered by Darwin City Council in honour of Mrs Louise Cubillo who had died in Darwin on 29 August 1967.

Commemoration

The Don Isidro drifted and came ashore north of Cape Fourcroy on the west coast of Bathurst Island, still burning, on 20 February 1942. The exact location of the wreck of the Florence D however was unknown until 2008. She is now known to have sunk approximately 85 nautical miles northwest of Darwin. Both vessels are today protected historic shipwrecks, undersea war graves, under the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.

Eight soldiers from the defence detachment aboard Don Isidro were wounded and Second Lieutenant Kane was seriously wounded in the leg and foot. He died of gangrene in hospital in Darwin on 26 February 1942 and was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart was an American decoration established on 22 February 1932 to be awarded in recognition of singularly meritorious acts of extraordinary fidelity or essential service. Wounds received in action against an enemy of the United States were considered as resulting from such acts. Purple Hearts for meritorious service were also bestowed upon all 15 enlisted men of the detachment. Kane was buried at Adelaide River, but was later reburied in the US in 1949. A Bombing of Darwin plaque installed on the Esplanade near Government House, Darwin, on 19 February 2001 quotes the correct figures for the actions off Bathurst Island on 19 February 1942.

On 18 February 2013 the then Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Honourable Terry Mills MLA, and Mr Brian Winspear AM (a WWII Air Force veteran) officially opened a Memorial Wall to the Allied Fallen at the Darwin Military Museum at East Point. This wall was intended to be a focal point for all allied personnel and civilians who died as a result of combat action in northern Australia in World War II. On 18 February the following year, this memorial wall was the venue for the ceremony to honour the Filipino civilian mariners who had lost their lives.
Of particular significance, the Filipinos on board Don Isidro were actually attacked by Japanese aircraft the day before the raids on Darwin, although she suffered no damage at that time. For this reason it was considered appropriate to hold the 2014 commemoration and plaque unveiling in Darwin on 18 February – marking the day these Filipinos first came under enemy attack. The Philippine Embassy in Canberra reported: “The solemn and meaningful commemoration truly served as a testament to the significant contribution of the Filipino community to the military history of Australia.”

Joseph Tapia was also posthumously awarded the Purple Heart in recognition of meritorious service and wounds received in action resulting in his death. In Darwin, his name is recorded on the plaque honouring those from DD226 who lost their lives. In addition, his name is inscribed on the Tablets of the Missing – large rectangular limestone piers in the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in Fort Bonifacio, Manila. Although it is known that Joseph Tapia died when the Peary was bombed and sank in Darwin Harbour, his body was never recovered. His name therefore remains on a roll maintained by the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), which was established in 1993 after the US Senate called on the Department of Defense to form a single office to oversee and manage POW/MIA issues.

Ironically, the Peary and some other ships sunk in Darwin Harbour in the same raid were salvaged by a Japanese firm in 1959. The company accepted no payment apart from the value of the metals recovered as their contribution to war reparations. Local Darwin diver Carl Atkinson salvaged one of the Peary’s 4-inch guns and installed it at Doctors Gully. In November 1991 the gun was taken to Darwin Naval Base for restoration, and in 1992 was installed in Bicentennial Park overlooking the harbour – its barrel pointing towards the Peary’s resting place in the harbour. During his first visit to Australia in November 2011, American President Obama visited Darwin and laid a wreath at the USS Peary Memorial and addressed Australian and American troops on the enduring ties between Australia and the United States and their long-standing cooperation.

In the post-war years, in addition to the regular Anzac Day service, commemorative services were held at the Soldiers’ Memorial on 19 February for those killed in the bombing of Darwin. Commemorative services were held on 19 February 1947 at the wharf and at the Soldiers’ Memorial, within sight of the post office which had been singled out as a special target. In speaking at the Soldiers’ Memorial, the President of the RSSAILA (Mr Luke) paid a tribute to the civilians killed in the raids on Darwin: “They were all killed in action”. Notably, at the wharf on this morning, the tide was right out as it had been five years earlier, “making more difficult the escape tactics of the ships in port, and more difficult still the valiant attempts of men in the water to get ashore”. Wreaths were thrown into the water from the old wharf towards the wreck of the shattered Neptuna. Similar commemorative services continued to be held each year at the wharf and at the Soldiers’ Memorial as a new generation went to war in Korea.

On 19 February 1947, when acting Government Secretary Mr Reg Leydin gave the main address at the Darwin Cenotaph. He said that: “in spite of the published reports about a public holiday, the people of Darwin had decided to stop work for a few minutes only, to remember their dead and then resume”. The attitude of the Administrator Mr ‘Mick’ Driver was recorded after the 1948 service: “...the newspapers in southern states were inclined to depreciate the holding of the ceremony of February 19 in Darwin and tended to forget the sacrifices made by those who died on that day ... He deplored the lack of recognition of the significance of the date by the Government of the country for whom the dead had lost their lives.”

Similarly during the 1951 ceremony, Administrator Mr Driver directed the lowering of the flag at Government House to half-mast as a mark of honour for the dead even though “February 19 was not a Commonwealth-recognised holiday”. As the Administrator intimated, gradually the national significance of this day faded in the government and public memory ‘down south’, although it progressively grew stronger in Darwin.

Ultimately, the 50th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin was formally marked in 1992 as part of the Northern Territory’s ‘Frontline Australia’ commemoration, with high-profile guests including the Australian Prime Minster and former Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen AK GCMM GCVO QC. A large Bombing of Darwin descriptive plaque was installed on the Esplanade near Government House in Darwin on 19 February 200, correctly stating that 22 men were killed on the wharf.

This national oversight was finally rectified on 7 December 2011 – in time for the 70th anniversary of the Darwin attack the following year – when the Governor-General declared the date 19 February in each year to be a national day of observance known as ‘Bombing of Darwin Day’. Immediately preceding the annual Bombing of Darwin commemorative service, a small private service was always held at the wharf where families would cast wreaths onto the water in memory of the waterside workers, civilians from Burns, Philp & Co and the Commonwealth Railways: among them five Filipino-Australians. A report on the 1952 wharf-side service observed:

“...representatives of the Waterside Workers cast wreaths onto the water in memory of Watersiders who were killed in the blitz. As the floral tributes drifted away on the waves, those present stood silent and bare-headed in memory of their fallen comrades.”

The son of Johnny Cubillo later recalled:

“The Cubillo families and other Darwin families keep the tradition of commemorating the Bombing of Darwin Ceremony on the 19th of February every year. Our family has attended every Bombing of Darwin Ceremony since 1946 down at the Wharf and at the Cenotaph in memory of all civilians and service personnel killed. Lest we forget.”

On Stokes Hill Wharf on 19 February 2012, two special memorials were installed to mark the 70th anniversary of the raid. The Mariners’ Mural was erected by the Darwin Port Authority, while the Wharf Memorial...
commemorates the civilians from the Commonwealth Railways and Burns, Philip & Co Ltd known to have been killed on the wharf, plus the two who later died of their wounds, as well as the merchant seamen who died. Under the title, ‘United in Struggle, United in Sacrifice’, the memorial observes:

‘Annually, the families of the deceased, as well as wharfies and seafarers, meet here to pay their respects and to remember the workers who were killed when the wharf was bombed on 19 February 1942.

“We will never forget the sacrifice waterside workers and their families have made for Australia. We will never forget the hundreds of merchant seamen who lost their lives working on the ships destroyed by mines, torpedoes, shelling and bombing while carrying cargo and troops for our country.’

In 1962, St Mary’s Star of the Sea Cathedral was opened on Smith Street, as the seat of the Bishop of the Diocese of Darwin, designed and built as a War Memorial Cathedral. The original timber and iron church which dated back to the 1880s, built by the Jesuit Fathers using Chinese labour, had been a focal point for Darwin’s Filipino community in particular. The father of Francisco and Beatrice Chavez had served here at Mass around the turn of the century, and in 1919 Francisco officiated here as best man at the wedding of his step-sister Pantaleona Mary Ponce to Mr Rafael Perez. Antonio Cubillo married Lily McKeddie here in 1910, and their children were all christened here. A funeral service was held here for Carlos Ga when he died in 1931. The funeral of a Mrs Rodellas in April 1935 gives some indication of the extent of the Filipino community in Darwin at that time: those who paid their respects included the Alfonso, Angeles, Cardona, Cesar, Cigobia, Conanan, Cubillo and Perez families, as well as Beatrice and Francisco Chavez.

On 19 February 1942, Japanese aircraft had repeatedly strafed the church with machine-gun fire. The new cathedral was designed to be a War Memorial and Shrine of Thanksgiving, erected to commemorate those Australian and Allied Service personnel who lost their lives in Darwin as well as those Darwin residents killed during the air raids. At Mass on and around 19 February each year special prayers are given for those who fell or suffered bereavement in the air raids. In 2012, for the 70th anniversary of the bombing, among those remembered were:

“The 22 workers killed on Darwin Wharf, and we offer a prayer of thanks for the constancy of their work comrades and families, who have kept their memories alive over the past 70 years.”

During this 70th anniversary commemoration, it was reported that: “A bombing survivor is in intensive care after she collapsed at the Darwin Cenotaph during Sunday’s memorial service.” Mrs Mary Lee had just placed a wreath in honour of her late father, John Roque Cubillo, when she collapsed due to a heart attack. The previous November Mrs Lee had appeared in newspapers around the country being hugged by the US President during his brief visit to Darwin. She was nine years old when her father John was killed, and she later married a soldier named Herbert Lee when she was 18. In 2011, at the age of 80, she had the privilege of meeting US President Barack Obama after he laid a wreath at the USS Peary Memorial in Bicentennial Park. She recalled of the occasion: “He gave me a big hug when I told him how I lost my dad that day on the wharf. He put his arm around me like a big brother and said how sorry he was and I started to cry.”

To specifically honour the civilians killed during the first raids, Darwin City Council erected a large plaque beside the doorway to the council offices. This plaque was unveiled on 19 February 1971 by the Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck. Just 54 civilians were listed however. Some, but not all, from the merchant services are named, one man is listed twice, one name is listed but there is no mention of him in any of the official records and there are listed the names of two men who were indeed killed during a Japanese bombing raid, but on 15 June 1942. Notably, this plaque includes the names of the five Filipino-Australians killed on the wharf during that first raid on Darwin.

Small plaques were later installed beneath trees in Bicentennial Park, but these also posed a number of difficulties. There were several men who had two separate names, while not every known casualty had one. In the early 1990s, considerable numbers of the plaques had been removed from the park and several mangled remains were found at the base of their tree buried in grass cuttings, apparently the victims of a council lawnmower.

Today, based on the comprehensive roll of all people who were killed or died afterwards of wounds, an online Roll of Honour has been provided by the Northern Territory Library Service which includes the names of the five Filipino-Australians killed on the wharf during that first raid on Darwin and one Filipino who died in the harbour, as well as the names of fourteen of the 16 Filipinos who died in waters north of Australia.

Military anniversaries continue to be commemorated in Australia on particular days of significance each year, such as Anzac Day, Long Tan Day and Remembrance Day, while specific regional events have been locally commemorated including the Bombing of Darwin and the Battle of the Coral Sea. Four Filipino-Australians are listed on the national Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra as having lost their lives in the two world wars while serving in the armed forces, while a Roll of Honour in Darwin recalls the five Filipino-Australian waterside workers who were among the civilians killed by enemy action on 19 February 1942.

The Bombing of Darwin attracted only local commemoration each year, particularly on key anniversaries, until finally in 2011 it gained national recognition. Among Darwin’s casualties were civilian wharf labourers, the news of their deaths being received by their families after they had been safely evacuated to Katherine, Brisbane and Sydney.

In these commemorations, heroes both decorated and unknown have been honoured. But too easily overlooked in the past have been the Filipinos who died as a result of the first Japanese air attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942.
I am very grateful for the assistance and encouragement of Mr Januario John Rivas, Philippine Consul-General ad honorem in Darwin. I would also like to thank Mrs Leanne Wood, Mrs Isabel Conanan Silva Lagas and all of the Ga, Conanan, Cubillo and Spain family descendants for kindly providing photographs and information. Mr Bert Caloud, the Assistant Superintendent at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines, has an admirable and indefatigable commitment to honouring the fallen, and his support for this project is greatly appreciated.

The names of the fourteen Filipino merchant sailors who were killed in the Arafura Sea north of Darwin on 19 February 1942, giving the most likely spelling of their names:

**SS Don Isidro**
- Antonio Cordova (Oiler)
- Raul Delgado (Machinist)
- Loreto Jaime (2nd Engineer)
- Melchor Jaruvilla (3rd Engineer)
- Alberto Jimenea (Oiler)
- Amado Logno (Cook/Waiter)
- Maximo Mangan (Chief Engineer)
- Agapito Masangkay (Pantryman/Steward)
- Frederico Montalegra (Chief Electrician)
- Antonio Reynes (Extra Engineer)
- Quirino Sabando (Oiler)

**SS Florence D**
- Francisco Beltran (Sailor)
- Librado Briones (Carpenter)
- Mariano Reyes (Messboy)

Some were merchant sailors killed while serving on US Army supply ships on secret 'suicide missions' to deliver rations and ammunition to General MacArthur's besieged garrison on Corregidor Island. Others among them were Filipino-Australians with a connection back to the first Manilamen who had settled in Port Darwin in the late 19th century. They were not decorated, and were barely written into any official history – in fact, any reference to the two cargo ships casually implies they were in Darwin Harbour when in fact they were to the north, in the Arafura Sea.

These civilians, many without a known grave, are of the nature of the Unknown Soldier – humble men doing their duty, but whose noble service was cut unreasonably short by enemy action. The service and sacrifice of the Filipino community to Australia's military history should not be forgotten.

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The Territory Remembers
From Darwin to Darwin – Recalling Gull Force

By Sandra McComb

Gallipoli resonates strongly for many Australians as the most significant battle in our wartime history. More recently and closer to home, the Burma-Thailand Railway and the Kokoda Trail offensives have been highlighted in history books and documentaries. Another initiative less well-known, but equally poignant, began from the shores of the Northern Territory, sailing from Darwin to Ambon in Indonesia, and for those who survived, returning to Darwin. At intervals in the latter part of the 20th century historians wrote of this battle.1 It deserves continuing recognition, remaining a significant story, depicting a struggle of human endeavour, of futility, of courage and endurance, of death in wartime. It also serves to demonstrate a massive lack of judgment and duty of care on the part of the military establishment of the time. Regarding human beings as expendable should never be acceptable practice.

Individuals who survived this battle have told a number of stories of their experiences of Ambon and surrounding islands. Those who survived lived full lives. But these were few, and always the memories of their wartime experience backgrounded their existence. I met some of these men as the daughter of one member of the 2/21st Infantry Battalion, 23rd Brigade of the 8th Division, named Gull Force. Only two groups of men survived – those who battled as POWs for the length of the war in appalling conditions, and secondly those few who escaped. As the Australian War Memorial describes:

“The 2/21st Infantry Battalion, part of the 23rd Brigade of the 8th Division, began assembling at Trawool in central Victoria on 11 July 1940. Approximately half the recruits were from Melbourne and the rest from rural Victoria. Training was conducted at Trawool until 23 September when the battalion began to move to Bonegilla, near Wodonga on the New South Wales-Victoria border. It made the 235 km journey on foot, arriving on 4 October. Training soon resumed and occupied the battalion until it commenced another move on 23 March 1941 for Darwin in the Northern Territory.”

At Bonegilla preparation for war involved getting fit. There were route marches and sporting activities. These activities were accompanied by the selection of officers and officer training. If the men were frustrated by lack of purpose and inadequate training equipment here, their subsequent transfer to Darwin was even less ennobling. And what was to befall as they left the shores of Northern Australia made little use of fitness, except as a basis for survival. Hierarchical selection later served only to create a bitter dispute within the POW camp between officers and common soldiers.

Various backgrounds and reasons for joining the Army existed prior to enlistment, but mostly the men who came forward simply felt it was time to do their duty for king and country. Arthur Young enlisted as a corporal on June 13 1940, age 27, shortly after the start of World War II assuming he would see service in Europe or the Middle
As young recalls:

months, frustrated and dispirited. A disastrous fate was to

camp in 1945.

2/21st battalion. Witty and accepting, he still displays the

reason for joining as “patriotism – we were part of the

British Empire”. Born on 24 April 1921, he is at the time

of writing 94 years old, the only surviving member of the

survivors.

Max Gilbert enlisted on 10 July 1940. He was only 19

years old, a boy as he puts it, nevertheless describing his

idea of fighting England’s enemies and therefore ours.”

East: “I saw myself going off over there with some vague

idea of fighting England’s enemies and therefore ours.”

His experience at the Vacuum Oil Company was to stand

him in good stead.

Eric Kelly enlisted on 4 July 1940, age 21. As a tailor he

was also to find his skills useful in wartime. Both Kelly and

Young, decades later, considered themselves lucky to have

survived the war years. Young escaped, and was posted

to manage oil installations in Papua New Guinea. Kelly

remained a prisoner and used his talents repairing clothes

of prisoners and Japanese guards while enduring the

horrors of three years of imprisonment.

Max Gilbert enlisted on 10 July 1940. He was only 19

years old, a boy as he puts it, nevertheless describing his

reason for joining as “patriotism – we were part of the

British Empire”. Born on 24 April 1921, he is at the time

of writing 94 years old, the only surviving member of the

2/21st battalion. Witty and accepting, he still displays the

spirit and determination which saw him emerge from the

camp in 1945. They, along with others, represent the

survivors.

The members of the 2/21st were not initially sent abroad

as many hoped but dumped, as fate would have it, to

Darwin, after chugging slowly through central Australia on

the Ghan train line. As one member commented:

“A few miles south of Darwin where there is no railway

station

Our train came slowly to a halt: it was our destination!

To conclude our story, our luck is surely ‘cursed’

It’s not our fault we’re not abroad,

It’s the fate of the Twenty-First.”

Cattle trucks were used as transport when the train lines

ended. At Winnellie near Darwin they camped for eight

months, frustrated and dispirited. A disastrous fate was to

follow. As young recalls:

“It all started for us, the 2/21 Battalion, Gull Force, A.I.F.,

when after some eighteen months’ training in Australia, we

were encamped at Darwin on that fateful day of December

7 1941, the day the Japanese fleet attacked and devastated

the American Pacific base at Pearl Harbour. There had

been no declaration of war or any warning whatsoever,

but suddenly America had been brought into the Second

World War, as an ally of the British against the axis powers

-Germany, Italy and now Japan. While this sneak attack

was shocking to America…Britain (already at war in the

Asian sphere) (and therefore ourselves) and America were at

war with Japan from that day.

“We were given our orders to move out; to where, most of us

knew not… It was fairly exciting to be moving out at last. We

were bored just squatting in Darwin. Anticipating Japanese

entry into the war our generals and our politicians had long

since decided on the deployment of Australian forces to the

north of Australia…I don’t suppose this situation concerned

us rank and file soldiers as we naively believed in our own

capacity to meet anything that opposed us. After all the

Japanese would have to break through Singapore first and

they would have to deal with the 2/21 Battalion (all 1200 of

us) if they managed to struggle this far.

“We were confident they were in a no-win situation. Didn’t

the Japanese get air-sick? Weren’t they so short-sighted

they could scarcely see their target? And wasn’t their

equipment so inferior that their guns were more dangerous

to themselves than to anyone they aimed at? So our

information led us to believe - just a pushover for us.”

In fact, 12 days before Singapore fell on 15 February 1942,

the Japanese attacked Ambon.

In December 1941, Gull Force had sailed for Ambon Island

then known as the Netherlands East Indies (present-day

Indonesia). The force of 1090 was made up of the 2/21st

Battalion and C troop 18th Anti-Tank Battery, three

sections of the 2/11th Field Coy, one section Australian

Army Service Corps, 2/12th Field Ambulance Detachment,

23rd Special Dental Unit and 104 Light Aid Detachment.

Picked up by three Dutch tramp steamers at Darwin,
dverted with their contents of Javanese families, goats,
poultry and general cargo Gull Force set out. After three
days on the water, told of their destination only when it

came into view, these men were landed on the Island of

Amboina, portrayed as “an important naval base, the capital

of the South Moluccas, the Spice Islands of the Dutch East

Indies”.

The village in which the Australians were landed was Tan

Toey (later Tan Tui). The barracks comprised a number

of large thatched huts with concrete floors, upon which

blankets and boots served as sleeping quarters. Cooks from

the Army Services Corps provided plentiful meals. As Young

said: “…why not enjoy the picturesque little island we found

ourselves on - its food; its climate and its friendly people?”

Morale was high as they set about defending the island,

but no-one at infantry level yet knew of the background
to this foray to Ambon, the doubts and outright warnings
provided by officers of the 2/21st to senior army officials

in Melbourne. Neither were they concerned that Dutch

seniority and poor resourcing might affect their wellbeing.

As recorded in Fall of Ambon, Australia’s War 1939-1945:

“The Dutch commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J R L Kapitz,

was senior to the Australian commander, Lieutenant-Colonel

L N Roach, and took control of both forces, dispersing

them into two groups. One group was sent to defend the

airfield at Laha on the west side of Ambon Bay and the others

were deployed to the east of the bay, south of the town of

Ambon. Both the Australian and the Dutch forces were inadequately

prepared and under-equipped. Lieutenant-Colonel Roach,

aware of the futility of their task, made repeated requests for

reinforcements of both men and equipment from Australia,

even suggesting that Gull Force should be evacuated

from the island if it could not be reinforced. Instead, he

was recalled to Australia and Lieutenant-Colonel John

Scott, a 53-year-old Army Headquarters staff officer from

Melbourne, replaced Roach as commanding officer of Gull

Force in the middle of January.”

Scott had volunteered himself as Roach’s replacement

when he heard that the British General Wavell had

suggested to the Australian General Sturdee that Roach’s

views were unacceptable. During this period in Australia’s

wartime history Britain still held sway. Australian lives

meant little given broader British and likely Dutch

objectives.
Respect is one aspect of successful military behaviour. Roach had earned that in the time spent with his battalion at Darwin before active service began. Reading comments from survivors of Ambon indicates that Scott never won respect. Cliff Warn, an escapee who did not have to endure imprisonment for a lengthy period, was able to see immediately that communication was a problem. Scott was ‘the officer type’ who never talked to the troops. Warn was supported in his assessment of Scott by others such as Ralph Godfrey, who also suggested that Roach would have fought harder and not surrendered so quickly, within four days, potentially allowing more to escape. The dreadful consequences of Kapitz’s actions only added to the misery of an ill-planned offensive. Ignorant of these concerns, Arthur Young was allocated 20 Ambonese soldiers to ‘wire the island for sound’, running out miles of insulated steel cables mostly hooked on to trees. Young was attending to a faulty line, which in fact had been chewed by goats, when his signals section crossed to Laha. He was left behind, saved by the hillside goats of Ambon. Eric Kelly was occupied as quarter-master, managing stores when his unit transferred to Laha. Both much later recognised that fate played a part in their first reprieve from death. More than 200 Australians sent to Laha by Kapitz were massacred there on 6 February 1942 and between 15 and 20 February 1942, not that Kapitz could possibly have imagined the likelihood of such slaughter. In fact, as long-time survivor Max Gilbert recently pointed out: “We on the other side of the island had no idea what was going on across the bay...until three-and-a-half years later”.

The Australians were overwhelmed by the Japanese. Even Roach’s request for more men and equipment, had it been granted, could not have prevented eventual capitulation. Bombing was increasing from above, but the major problem was the unexpected naval attack. Warn was on the bridge in the town with one solitary machine gun when the Japanese Navy arrived. Young was stationed on the grassy hill above the town. He recalled:

“We were no match for their strength of numbers nor could we deal with their equipment. We were driven back and back until we were spread up the side of the mountain at a place called Amahoesoe.

“There we waited for another assault across a ravine about a thousand yards wide. The mountain was steep, sloping to the sea and barren except for a tree or two and grass up to six inches in height. We lay in this grass in the early morning peeping over the ridge, looking for any movement, and waited. I had a sugar bag full of grenades and my Lee Enfield rifle and bayonet. With about half a dozen young chaps I was positioned about half-way up the mountain. Presently great activity took place on the bay – a mixed flotilla of naval craft appeared fairly close in shore on our side of the bay. We could see the gun crews on deck and suddenly the leading ship opened up its guns on us. There was a puff of smoke and almost simultaneously a sound of gunfire and the screech of a shell bursting around us. Each of ten or eleven other ships followed suit; then all turned and sailed past Laha and subjected our chaps on the other side of the bay to the same treatment.

“Out of the bay they sailed only to return in half an hour to repeat the performance. We had no way of responding and became almost fatalistic about it. The Japanese land forces were standing back while their navy subdued us. To this day I cannot understand why they didn’t annihilate us ~ they could have. We simply sat up opened our tins of bully beef and hard biscuits and took a swig of water from our bottles, and watched the show.

“After several hours our C.O. ordered us down from our positions and informed us he had surrendered unconditionally to the Japanese after they had refused passage to an ambulance headed to our field hospital – which was already in Japanese hands. The C.O. explained that he could not say how the Japanese would treat us as prisoners of war, but the option was either to fight it out and be annihilated or take the chance. Had we known then of the massacre at Laha, we might have decided differently.”

There were dissenters at the time as to surrendering. Platoons out on patrol such as that led by 2 IC Major Macrae, having heard whispers of a surrender and being near the coast, aimed to seek local help to gain freedom. Lieutenant Bill Jinkins similarly rebelled against surrender but eventually had to march with his fellow officers and surrender arms.

By February 1942, Gull Force was in captivity at Tan Tui (on Ambon). In October 1942 the prisoners were divided into two groups. One group was transported to Hainan Island aboard the Taiko Maru, disembarking on 5 November 1942 and being imprisoned in Haicho Camp (Colonel W. J. R. Scott’s Force). The other group remained on Ambon. 11

The men who remained at Tan Toey comprised those who stayed until release and those who managed to escape. The barracks had become the prison camp, with wire perimeters added. They found food where they could. As has been described over the years, conditions became appalling. Publications which relate the treatment by Japanese soldiers, including those based on interviews and war records, tell of starvation, beatings, disease and war crimes. The fact that Japanese soldiers also suffered does not eliminate responsibility for the cruelty, not to say murder, that some committed.

Most survivors would say that in the very early days of capture ‘ike Ouchi’ as interpreter was not harsh in his treatment of prisoners, rather niggling internees with...
commentary: “See aeroplanes? They are going to bomb Darwin. Australia finish. Melbourne, Sydney, Darwin all finish!” There was no information available to challenge that. But it still seemed that there was hope since the Japanese failed to keep count of those who went out under the wire and returned with food from the locals. But when ‘Ike Ouchi’ became Camp Commandant things changed. He was hanged as a war criminal for his actions. It is not necessary to describe the horrors again. Nor is it possible to assign particular reasons for survival to the end, but some attempts have been made, allowing for massive doses of fate to be taken into account.

Eric Kelly, assigned the role of tailor living in the Q store, traded Japanese uniform repair for cigarettes, which he would then barter for miserable amounts of food. He was also able to avoid work parties which destroyed the health of so many of his fellow internees. Many of the officers survived because they refused to join work parties. Kelly, Young and Godfrey all pointed to the collapse of discipline immediately upon internment. Some of the officers hid in their huts. There was no leadership. They were not really regarded as officers any more but simply fellow POWs. And since everyone believed the war would end shortly, hardship did not create a need to pull together – until later when survival became the sole objective.

Then, as Max Gilbert put it, mateship for him became a moral and practical support through the years, even though he lost his best mates one by one. He also put his survival down to being skinny: “I say that because from my recollection it was the big men who died first. They were needing more nutrition than I.” Corporal Arthur Young, in the camp for almost two months, saw disease starting to take its toll very early on, so that “some simply gave in the camp for almost two months, saw disease starting needing more nutrition than I”.

Max Gilbert explains why – they stayed in camp while rank and file went out on work parties. Officers were able to establish a vegetable garden but did not share food. And was finally told “Evening 17 March. Go”. Private Cliff Warn was also included, without prior knowledge of how events were to proceed. Lieutenant Rod Rudder, Private Alex Chew and Private Harry Coe completed the group, all chosen for a variety of skills such as seamanship, experience with fuel and boats and fitness of mind and body. Duty to escape played a part for some individuals in agreeing to join the official party, despite keen feelings of remorse at leaving mates behind. Young had to leave Swanton, a pre-war family friend, without telling him of the escape. Many years later he still regretted this action.

The escape was supported within the camp. The officers were replaced at roll call and as Gilbert says all were pleased when no-one returned. Macrae sent the party off under Major Macrae’s orders to get to Darwin and advise military personnel of the situation on Ambon. As senior officer, Scott was told of the escape and wanted to join but health issues, falling ill, he seized the opportunity to leave. Approached by Lieutenant Gordon Jack under Major Macrae’s request, he joined six members of the official escape party. Lieutenant Jinkins was in charge. Without knowing who else was involved, Young was given tasks to assist Jack in planning and was finally told “Evening 17 March. Go”. Private Cliff Warn was also included, without prior knowledge of how events were to proceed. Lieutenant Rod Rudder, Private Alex Chew and Private Harry Coe completed the group, all chosen for a variety of skills such as seamanship, experience with fuel and boats and fitness of mind and body. Duty to escape played a part for some individuals in agreeing to join the official party, despite keen feelings of remorse at leaving mates behind. Young had to leave Swanton, a pre-war family friend, without telling him of the escape. Many years later he still regretted this action. Deciding to escape was a duty and a risk – if caught it meant certain death on recapture. But the possibility of freedom outweighed many doubts and furthermore there was a role to play.

The escape was supported within the camp. The officers were replaced at roll call and as Gilbert says all were pleased when no-one returned. Macrae sent the party off with orders to get to Darwin and advise military personnel of the situation on Ambon. As senior officer, Scott was told of the escape and wanted to join but health issues, viewed as a risk to progress, prevented this. Later that year in October 1942, Macrae and Scott were transferred to Hainan and survived.

Officers remaining long-term at Tan Toey also survived. Gilbert explains why – they stayed in camp while rank and file went out on work parties. Officers were able to establish a vegetable garden but did not share food. Officers’ quarters on Hainan were clearly more comfortable than for ordinary infantry men but perhaps their ability to grow food, unlike in Tan Toey, saw a lower death rate.

Survival for the seven escapees from Tan Toey was not dependent on defeating devastating hunger, disease or mental and physical deprivation and ill-treatment. It rested...
first and foremost on the cooperation of local Indonesians. It depended upon physical skill, on holding one’s nerve and on group support under Jinkins’ leadership.

After clearing the prison camp – all out under the wire in 70 seconds – they disappeared into the trees to be welcomed by the family and friends of Barbara and Bill Gasparesz. Jinkins had been out several times and arranged through them to have a boat ready on the other side of the island. The story of the escape is captivating but too long to include here.

Extraordinary risks were taken by the Gasparesz and others. Whatever world news was available to Macrae before the escape was gathered via a hidden radio, which Bill monitored and passed on. Macrae also crawled out of the camp on various nights. Bill and his younger family members had already suffered beatings at the hands of the Japanese. Worse was to befall the young Ambonese boy, Peter, who was beheaded on his return from escorting the escape party on the first leg of its journey. After the escape the radio was buried.

At every island stopover after leaving Ambon, there was the danger of the occupying Japanese capturing the escapees and the various vessels begged, borrowed and purchased from local people. The Dutch assisted on occasion but without support in kind from Indonesian people – coconut oil for engines, a certain amount of food for the men, local knowledge of Japanese positions – the journey would have faltered. It seems that Bill Jinkins, undisputed leader, had a strong negotiating capacity.

And, as Warn pointed out, despite losing several craft to the sea and winds, they had significant luck on their side. The Japanese fighters overhead ignored them. The sands on the northern coast of Australia did not swallow them up. No-one was ill and they remained a focused team to the end. Reach Darwin they did, on 4 May 1942, not knowing that the pub they were dreaming of had been bombed. As Young pointed out ‘ike Ouchi’ was partly correct.

A slight disappointment can be detected in the writings of both Warn and Young as to their reception in Darwin. An element of disbelief by the interrogating officers of three services – how could such a journey have been possible? – delayed their going ashore. Then placed under security, they were forbidden to discuss their adventure. Jinkins was interviewed separately. His main aim was to alert the powers that existed to the Ambonese situation. Jinkins’ plan to rescue the POWs on Ambon came after he recovered from the shock of the greeting he received in Melbourne from General Sturdee. Chief of General Staff: “I never expected to see you again.” It was now clear that the Ambonese mission had been suicidal. Nevertheless, Sturdee managed to convince the Navy to go ahead with Jinkins’ plan. He at least had recognised the mistakes made. But as he moved off to the United States, replaced by Generals Blamey and MacArthur, seemingly politics intervened and the mission was cancelled. POWs were to stay imprisoned to the end of the war. Had the military powers known of the Laha massacre, the decision may have been different. As it was Ambon was not a priority.

The futile expedition to Ambon was beleaguered from the start, not as extensive as Gallipoli, but at least as horrific, created and upheld by those safely ensconced in locations far away from the fields of battle. Problems of planning and leadership saw the return of just on 300 of those 1190 men who set out from Darwin to hold Ambon in the face of Japanese invasion.

The friendships which later evolved were all there was to cheer. Fraught with ugly memories, tinged for some with a guilt which they were not meant to shoulder, survivors simply got on with being alive. Somehow they pushed the memories aside. For many years Macrae, and Jinkins were intermittent visitors to our home. As a family we visited Cliff (Pitt) Warn at his home in Merimbula. Most rewarding was the relationship which developed between Barbara and Bill Gasparesz with several members of the 2/21st Battalion. Many visited Ambon in official groups to recognize their contribution. Arthur and Shirley Young visited Ambon in 1972, 30 years after the seven escaped along the steep track. None of Jinkins’ escape party had seen in it in daylight.

On 30 April 1996 Arthur Young noted in his diary: “Bill Jinkins (my co-escapee from Ambon POW camp) died yesterday… I think only Harry Coe, now in his 90s, and I, are the only two survivors of that escape party of seven.” All have now gone, but their stories remain. It took 40 years for many on Ambon to speak out – to set aside the horrors of the camps, but they succeeded. The war changed them. Both Gilbert and Young lost their faith in the forms of religion they held to before the war. For Max Gilbert, freedom was the ultimate prize. He ‘went in a boy and came out a man.’ After anger dissipated he recognised that he had a life and needed to live it. He continues to do so, with his family.

Arthur Young, my father, also married Shirley and set about enabling rich lives for me, my brother David, and our children. Our parents travelled to Japan viewing the Japanese people in a favourable light, wondering how such terrible events should have occurred, only decades earlier.
Notes
(i) This was the reason for holding troops near Darwin for such a long time. The Australian 8th Division of which we, the 2/21 Battalion, the 2/22 Battalion and the 2/40 Battalion formed the 23rd Brigade, was ordered to take up prearranged strategic positions. The two other brigades of the division with attached troops went to Singapore and Malaya, while the 2/21 Battalion went to Ambon in the South Moluccas, the 2/22 Battalion to Rabaul, and the 2/40 to Timor. As a result of the wide deployment of the three battalions of the 23rd Brigade, the Brigade Headquarters was disbanded and our headquarters then became Land Headquarters at Victoria Barracks, St Kilda Road, Melbourne, at least three thousand miles away from us, so that you couldn’t just drop in for a chat and a coffee with the Brigadier if you needed to get your daily routine orders. Young, Arthur, Post-war Diary, Private papers.

(ii) General Sturdee’s signed paper of 15 February 1942 stated: ‘So far in this war against Japan we have violated the principle of concentration of forces in our efforts to hold numerous small localities with totally inadequate forces which are progressively overwhelmed by vastly superior numbers. These small garrisons alone without adequate reinforcement or support never appeared to have any prospect of withstanding even a moderate scale of attack. In my opinion, the present policy of trying to hold isolated islands with inadequate resources needs review.’ www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG1070592.

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4. Interview with Max Gilbert, 8 November 2015 by Sandra McComb.
6. Fall of Ambon, Australia’s War 1939-1945. (Australian Government, Department of Veterans’ Affairs)
10. Young, Arthur, Post-war Diary, Private papers.
11. Of the 263 prisoners of war sent to Hainan Island, 182 were still alive at the end of the war. They returned to Australia on HMS Vindex and the hospital ship Jerusalem. Those who remained on Ambon returned, via Morotai, on HMAS Glenelg, Junee, Cootamundra and Latrobe, or were sent directly to Sydney on the hospital ship Wanganella. Amboina, Australian War Memorial Records.
12. Roberts Billett, Janet. Interview with Eric Kelly.
14. Interview with Max Gilbert, 8 November, 2015 by Sandra McComb.
15. ibid.
16. Research and compilation is continuing and this story will be part of a forthcoming publication. Sandra McComb.

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Books

Dr Sandra McComb is the daughter of a member of the 2/21st Battalion, Arthur Young, who escaped Japanese internment and returned to Australia from the island of Ambon in early 1942. Sandra’s professional career has been as a publisher, beginning in the editorial field and culminating in management roles firstly as Managing Director of Oxford University Press Australia, and more recently Executive Director, Cambridge University Press, active across the Australian and Asian businesses. Sandra is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University. Her doctoral thesis, completed in 2014, was a biographical study of the emergence of late 19th century Australian art and anthropology.

© Sandra McComb
I am a Japanese woman who moved to Darwin from Nagasaki city, Japan, in 2006. It’s been nearly 75 years since Japan attacked Darwin. As a younger generation who did not experience the war I do not hold a grudge against anyone, but some people cannot forgive the former enemy, Japan. I want to write why Japanese started the war from their own perspective. I also would like to write how the contemporary Japanese people are feeling about the war. I hope that knowing the Japanese side of the story will help people ease their anger and bring peace of mind to people who read it.

The pilots and submariners who attacked Darwin from January 1942 to 1943 did not do so because they had a personal hostility toward Australia or a desire to occupy Darwin. They attacked only because Australia and Japan were fighting in the war. Japanese military men gave their lives to protect Japan the same as Australian soldiers and airmen did.

Today, Australia and Japan have a good relationship through business, cultural exchange, tourist and other interests. Trust is also developed through joint exercises between the military servicemen of the two countries. I was pleased to witness the evidence of that trust when Japanese self-defence force’s destroyer Hatakaze visited Darwin to participate in the joint exercise Kakadu 14 in 2014. Hatakaze held a commemoration for all the maritime victims from both sides of the Japanese attack on Darwin. It was held at Darwin Harbour and it carried a significant meaning.

However, during WWII the relationship between the two countries was different. Needless to say we were enemies, but also the surrounding circumstances were different.

Before WWII, Australia had a stronger connection with the United Kingdom. I heard that many people still regarded the UK as the Mother Country and Australia as a colony of the UK. A good example is the Brisbane line, a line on the map from Brisbane to Adelaide which was considered a last line of defense if the country was invaded from the north. Darwin and the north west was almost treated as a different country because it was so remote.

On the other hand, Japan saw the war in a completely different way, as a war between the East and the West. Japan allied with Germany and Italy, so the true motivation of their war was lost, but please put yourself in Japan’s position as a small Far East archipelago of islands while the rest of the Asian countries around were colonised by Western countries. The only independent countries were Thailand and Japan. It was natural for Japanese to be in a great fear thinking “we are the next target”.

Furthermore, the United States, British, Dutch and China established an encirclement which cut off the supply of oil to Japan. This had a great impact on the economy of Japan, which was trying to develop the nation to keep its sovereignty as the only independent Asian country or coloured people’s nation. Japan was poor in natural resources and if the supply was cut it saw only two choices – war or surrender. Japan tried to negotiate a compromise.
with the United States but all the proposals were rejected. Therefore Japan chose to fight. It was a war of self-defence from the Japanese perspective. Later it was revealed by Herbert Hoover, the former president of the United States, that Franklin Roosevelt's intention was to force Japan to attack first so that he could gain the support from American citizens from the Japanese perspective. Later it was revealed by Herbert Hoover, the former president of the United States, that Franklin Roosevelt's intention was to force Japan to attack first so that he could gain the support from American citizens to participate in the war against Nazi Germany to aid the UK. Japan was used as a backdoor.

The two countries had different a mindset regarding national defence. Therefore, there was a big difference between their military equipment. Japan came to Darwin with almost the same formation that was used to attack Pearl Harbor with most experienced pilots. This was too large a scale for the size of Darwin city. On the other hand, Darwin's defence was not well prepared. Most of the soldiers had never fired a gun and they were surprised by the sound of the gunfire. Air commander Mitsuo Fuchida reviewed Darwin attack as a gun and they were surprised by the sound of the gunfire. They were not well prepared. Most of the soldiers had never fired a gun and they were surprised by the sound of the gunfire. Air commander Mitsuo Fuchida reviewed Darwin attack as follows: "If ever a sledgehammer was used to crack an egg, it was then." The difference of military power was huge.

I knew that Darwin was bombed before I migrated to Darwin but I did not know that the scale of bombing was so large. It continued 64 times over two years. Then I started to think about why Japan attacked such a small city where I live now. I subsequently learned a lot about the history thanks to Darwin people who were willing to talk with me about the sensitive matter in a frank manner. I also have to thank all the people who tried to overcome the sad history from both sides. All Japanese who used to live in Darwin as pearl divers and others were arrested when the war broke out and kept in civilian internment camps. After the war, most of them were sent back to Japan and only the Murakami family came back to Darwin. It must have been a big decision for the family, but they were welcomed in the community. It may be because of the multiculturalism of Darwin city. From 1959 to 1961 Japanese company Fujita Salvage conducted the operation to clear the shipwrecks from Darwin Harbour. There was criticism for letting the Japanese salvage the ships that were sunk by Japanese. However, after the two year operation their work was acknowledged and greatly contributed to changing the image of Japanese to that of hard-working people.

I didn't have any formal research, but as far as I hear from young Japanese backpackers (they are called working holiday makers), Darwin is the most pro-Japan city to my surprise. War is always terrible. However, there are many heart-warming stories between Australia and Japan. In Sydney the Japanese midget submariners received a formal military funeral in the middle of the war. During the war, Japanese POWs broke out of Cowra internment camp. After the Cowra breakout, the Japanese POWs' cemetery was abandoned. However, local people looked after the cemetery and now there is a beautiful garden which has become a symbol of reconciliation between Australia and Japan. These stories are well known in Australia but, unfortunately, not many Japanese know. I believe telling all stories, including the sad history and sequels, will strengthen the tie between the two countries.

In 2015 family members of Japanese pilot Shinji Kawahara visited Darwin to hold a special event. Their purpose was to scatter the ashes of his wife Miyoko in the sea to be with her late husband, whose airplane was shot down near Bathurst Island. This family ceremony was supported by the Australian Navy, Northern Territory Government and the City of Darwin. There are not enough words to thank this warm attitude of Australian people. Unfortunately, only a few relatives came to Darwin because of the guilt that Japan attacked Australia. Living in Darwin for the past 10 years, I have witnessed so much of the good nature of Australian people but I am most impressed by the fact that people did not try to pass the hatred to the next generation. It is natural for the people who experienced the real war to hold anger over generations but it did not happen at least in Darwin. Furthermore, I was told by many people that "you should respect the people who died for your country" (in this context, it means Japanese.) I was very surprised, because nobody told me so in Japan and I never expected to be told these words in the place which suffered most during WWII. Every time I hear such comments I feel I am glad to be in Darwin. I hope other Japanese people experience the same and that is why I speak up. I consider it my mission.

Places such as Darwin or Nagasaki, which is my hometown in Japan, have to pass the experience on to the next generation to avoid another war and maintain peace. It is not very easy to separate the historical facts from emotional wounds. However, when I see "Darwinians" relaxed and easy-going attitude, I have confidence that we can do it. Darwin is a great city where everyone can look back at the past and learn from history in the most forward-looking manner.

Notes
The Territory Remembers

The Discovery of RAAF Spitfire A58-92 in Darwin Harbour’s West Arm

By Dr Silvano Jung

The 53rd Japanese air raid on Darwin on 15 March 1943 comprised 22 Betty bombers and an escort of 27 Zero fighters. To intercept them, the Royal Air Force and Royal Australian Air Force scrambled 27 Spitfires from Nos. 54, 452, 457 Squadrons. It was the largest aerial battle over Darwin and the first over Darwin Harbour since the devastating 19 February 1942 air raids. The Allies suffered the loss of four Spitfires and the Japanese lost one Zero in aerial combat. One of the Spitfires was reported to have crashed in Darwin Harbour’s West Arm.

A Spitfire was seen to have crashed in the vicinity of West Arm on the day of the battle and aircraft were dispatched to search the area, but no trace of it, or its pilot was found.1 It was not until the 1960s that the first report of a wreck having been found in West Arm was made. The Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory subsequently identified the wreck in the 1980s. The pilot, however, was missing, adding speculation to one of Darwin Harbour’s great mysteries. The site first drew archaeological attention when, in 2002 aboard a Robinson R44 (VH-ZLG), an aerial survey was undertaken by the author to record all exposed wreck sites in Darwin Harbour during the lowest tide of the year.

Darwin Harbour’s tidal variations are immense, with tides varying as much as 7.8 metres.2 During king low-tide events, shallow water shipwrecks and World War II aircraft wrecks are exposed. The target site in Darwin Harbour’s West Arm, the Spitfire, was not found. In the intervening years, subsequent research found site location data by previous site visitors and it was decided that another attempt would be made to locate the wreck during the king low tide on 10 October 2014. This time, the wreck was found. This article brings the wreck into mainstream archaeological research by providing a verifiable site location with GPS coordinates and recording a basic site description to see how much the site had changed from it was last recorded to have been visited in 1987 – a 27 year interval. The results of this survey are a contribution to understanding the Northern Territory’s rich maritime and aviation archaeology.3

Historical background

The Australian National Shipwreck and Aircraft Wreck database lists more than 100 aircraft wrecks in the Northern Territory, most of which occur in the sea.4 Of those submerged sites, only six Catalina flying boat wrecks, a B-25 Mitchell bomber and that of a C47 Dakota have been located. The West Arm Spitfire is the only fighter aircraft that has been found in Darwin Harbour.

There is at least one other Spitfire said to be exposed at a king low tide near Charles Point, which is thought to be that of Spitfire A58-26 flown by Sgt Cavanagh, but no accurate site location has yet been recorded and it is not known if...
it is still there. No. 7 Repair and Salvage Unit (No. 7 RSU) inspected the site by boat and minor salvage work was carried out. They identified the wreck as that of BS293, but this may be in error. Further attempts were made to reach the site by land when it was practicable, but there is no further mention in the RAAF Unit History Sheets that they returned to salvage the aircraft entirely.\(^5\)

**Pilot biography**

Squadron Leader Raymond Edward Thorold-Smith (Service number 402144) was born in Manly, Sydney, on 30 June 1918, but it is recorded that the family had lived in the country town of Young, NSW, for a period of time. He was the only child of Mr and Mrs Joseph P. Thorold-Smith. He was educated at Christian Brothers in Manly and Waverly where, in his final year, he won a scholarship to enroll at St Johns College, University of Sydney. Just prior to the war, he was in his final year of medicine and excelled at many sports such as cricket, swimming, and athletics. He rowed in the college eight (a competition between the eight colleges of the University of Sydney) and played water polo. A keen Surf Life Saving member, his main sports interest was Rugby Union, where he was awarded University and Australian Universities Blues for outstanding sporting achievements. While in the University Regiment he transferred to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Ordnance Transport Corps and was quickly promoted. He enlisted in the RAAF on 27 May 1940 and was chosen as one of the first entrants in the Empire Air Training Scheme. In NSW he trained at RAAF Base Richmond and RAAF Bradfield Park.

He was posted to the United Kingdom and arrived via Canada on 7 February 1941. Six days later, he was attached to Number 57 Operational Training Unit. Within his training period and operations service, Thorold-Smith flew a diversity of aircraft type including Tiger Moth, Anson, Harvard, Wirraway, Ryan, Master (Miles) Magister, Hurricane and Spitfire. On 18 April 1941 he joined No. 452 Sqn. RAAF, the first Australian Spitfire Squadron, and flew combat missions against the Luftwaffe for a couple of months, and in that time claimed five and a half kills.

Promoted to Flight Lieutenant on 15 October 1941, he was awarded the DFC on 22 November 1941 for gallantry in air operations. Quickly rising through the ranks, he was made Squadron Leader of ‘A’ Fight of No. 452 Sqn. on 17 March 1942. The squadron embarked for Australia on 18 June 1942 and arrived 13 August 1942. They were posted to Batchelor Airfield and finally to Strauss Airfield from 2 February 1943.

At the time of his death he was regarded as a popular figure in the squadron. He was described as: “tall, rangy and loose jointed, very calm and collected”. As Gavin McEwin, the duty controller at Batchelor, remembered he “always looked as though he had fallen into his clothes rather than dressed”. (Alford, 2001:99)

His assessment of his flying abilities, however, records that he was an exceptional pilot when he served in No. 452 Sqn. His loss was greatly felt by all in No. 1 Fighter Wing and a blow to morale. He was seen as “…an inspiring Commanding Officer who endeared himself to every member. He was a man of enthusiasm and burst of great energy. He had an acute intellect, which enabled him not only to grasp the essentials of fighter aviation, but also subjects as remote as swing music or modern poetry.” (Thomas, 2009:13).

**Aircraft history and description**

The Spitfire is one of the best-known aircraft ever produced, made famous by its role in the Battle of Britain. It was an outstanding single-seat fighter of its time, a masterpiece of aerodynamic engineering. The Spitfire was the British Air Ministry’s response to Germany’s Messerschmitt 109 fighter dominance of the sky. Produced by Supermarine Aviation Works, there were 20,334 Spitfires of all variants built, of which there were 2,447 Mk. Vc, the marque that mainly constituted those which served in Northern Australia. The main differences between the earlier Mk. IV and the Mk. Vc were that the latter had a strengthened fuselage, revised canopy, a more powerful Rolls-Royce Merlin 45 (XLV1) engine, a drop tank and provisions for carrying bombs. The ‘C’ variant saw the first use of the universal wing that could be configured for different weapon arrangements, either four 20-mm Hispano cannons or two cannons and two 12.7-mm (0.5-in) machine guns. Most ‘C’ variants only had the two cannon configuration as the four cannons provided too heavy a loading for the wing. The ‘C’ variant also had more armour for the pilot seat and ammunition boxes.

The RAF and RAAF sent its Vc Spitfires to North Africa and Malta and these were fitted with a distinct Vokes tropical air intake. Three Spitfire squadrons were sent to bolster the defence of Darwin – No. 54, No. 452 and No. 457. The latter two were RAAF flown by Australian pilots who were sent to North Australia as part of a contingent of aircraft known...
as the ‘Churchill Wing’, or No. 1 Fighter Wing. The wing was formed at Richmond in NSW on 7 October 1942 to coordinate the three squadrons. ‘Capstan’ BS231 arrived in Australia on board SS Teak (or Timoelea) on 29 October 1942. ‘Capstan’ was a code name for Spitfires, as the RAAF did not want the Japanese to know that they had them in Australia. It was recorded as serviceable after assembly shortly after. The aircraft was coded ‘QY-D’ and was stationed at Strauss Airfield with 452 Sqn. An engine number for BS231 is recorded to have been 91465, which is significant in helping to identify its wreck. Apparently BS231 was never painted with its RAAF designation, ASB-92, which was retroactively recorded on paper in November 1943.

Account of loss

‘The combat raged so close over Darwin that the A-A [anti-aircraft] unit summary for the raid recorded ‘NOT allowed to engage’. Cliff Taylor: a gunner with the 19th HAA Bty [Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery] at Fannie Bay wrote that ‘They clashed right overhead. Dogfights ranged from about 25,000 ft down to almost ground level with some of the Spits going straight at the bombers. Planes wheeling, milling, machine guns, cannon fire (the haze remained for nearly an hour), planes on fire, pilots bailing out, men dying – it’s hard to image that this happened in Australia. I shall never forget the air battles.’

Japanese air raid Number 53 began on the morning of 15 March 1943 with Nos. 109 and 132 Radar Stations at RAAF Darwin picking up a contact at 10.39am. The contact was initially believed to be a reconnaissance flight, but was soon confirmed by coast watchers on Bathurst Island that it was an air raid. At 10.30am Thorold-Smith was airborne with four other Spitfires heading back to Strauss from Darwin after night-flying practice and was ordered to incept the raiders after rendezvousing with other aircraft from 54 Sqn., which had just been scrambled from Strauss. Prior to the rendezvous, however, two of his Spitfires dropped out of formation due to lack of oxygen, leaving only F/Lt Hall and F/O Goldsmith DFC, Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) in the section.

Thorold-Smith did not wait for the rendezvous. Other Spitfires from 452 and 457 Sqsns were scrambled and on their way for the planned attack en-mass (or RAAF’s ‘big formation’ doctrine), but out-numbered and out-gunned he attacked the bomber formation anyway. He led his section and elements of 54 Sqn., 19 Spitfires, in a badly staggered formation towards the bombers, which were encountered at 20,000 feet when at about:

“500 feet above the bombers S/LDR. THOROLD-SMITH gave the order to attack the bombers, the section made for the bombers, but were intercepted by the enemy fighters. Neither F/LT. HALL nor F/O. GOLDSMITH actually saw what happened to S/LDR. THOROLD-SMITH in the attack, as they themselves were jumped by the enemy fighters and had to take evasive action. About 30 seconds after the initial attack F/LT. HALL saw a Capstan, smoking, in a vertical dive: this is presumed to have been S/LDR. THOROLD-SMITH’s aircraft. The action took place approximately over POINT CHARLES.”

Three other Spitfires were shot down that day and these are recorded in Table 1, together with all other Spitfires recorded to have been lost. There were many more accidents at airfields, but Table 1 only records the Spitfires that may still be in the archaeological record. Of the 24 Spitfires lost in the Northern Territory, 19 resulted in pilot death and of those pilots, 12 are still missing. Focusing on the casualties for 15 March 1943, Spitfire ASB-9 flown by F/Sgt Cooper, 54 Sqn. crashed near Shell Island in East Arm. The wreck and Cooper’s body was recovered. The third was Spitfire ASB-8 (ex-AR619) flown by F/Sgt Varney, also of 54 Sqn. He crashed near Kahlin Hospital, between two houses at Myilly Point, Varney died of his injuries the next day. Both pilots were buried at the Adelaide River War Cemetery on 16 March 1943. A photograph of a crashed Spitfire appears to be of that Varney’s aircraft, crashed between two houses at Myilly Point, though it is captioned as that of Spitfire ASB-101, flown by F/O Lloyd at Picnic Point, crashed at Cox Peninsula.

Lloyd managed to bail out and parachute to safety. The action that day continued after the bombers successfully delivered their bombs. Once the other Spitfire squadrons came over Darwin, the Japanese were by this time heading back to Timor and were intercepted at sea off Charles Point and Port Patterson. The Japanese lost one Zero in the ensuing contact: Japanese records detail two Zekes lost with one, PO2c Seiji Tajiri, listed as missing; the pilot of A6M2 Zeke No. 6540, Tajiri was downed by 54 Sqn. pilot, FlgOff A. Mawer. Only one Japanese pilot was actually lost. Mawer gives an account of the Zero’s loss over Darwin Harbour, but greatly exaggerates the losses:

“One got on my tail and sent tracer past my left wing but followed it past in an overshoot. I kicked the rudder to follow and when I had closed to 50 yards opened fire, allowing one ring’s worth of deflection on the sight. He began to roll and I continued firing until the range had opened out to 200 yards. Intense flames then flickered from his underside. It was his belly tank, which he must have forgotten to jettison when the action began. He rolled onto his back and went straight down. I followed, giving him squirt after squirt. I was also keen to get away from the assorted jobs still on my own tail. He burnt like fury and was doing about 450 mph when the wings tore away. As he went into Darwin Harbour, near the boom, three other Zeros were going in too. It was a great sight. I pulled out at 1000 feet, going like the clappers, and headed back for the ‘drome.”

Tajiri and his Zero have never been found, but the three other Spitfires lost that day were recovered on land. Observers from 65 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery site on Flagstaff Hill at the end of Myilly Point recorded seeing an aircraft go down. The following day 5 Fighter Sector reported to 452 Sqn. the observation of the crash. This, in hindsight, was a crucial clue in later identification of the wreck:

“… a Capstan aircraft had been seen to crash on a bearing of 230 degrees from FLAGSTAFF HILL at approximately 8 miles from it. Four aircraft were immediately sent out to search this area, but no crash was found.

A map giving the exact position of the crash seen from FLAGSTAFF HILL was sent up to No. 452 Squadron from Fighter Sector. An aircraft was sent up to this point, but nothing was seen.”

Wing Commander Clive Caldwell had lost a comrade and a friend. He searched the area with other pilots, but no trace of wreckage, oil slick, debris, rubber boot or parachute could be found. Thorold-Smith and his Spitfire had simply
disappeared without trace for 23 years, until one day someone spotted an unknown aircraft wreck in West Arm, exposed at a king low tide. It took another 21 years before it was identified as that of Spitfire A58-92.

**Previous site visitors**
Lugger skipper Cedric Hawkes, who ran a coastal shipping business, found the wreck of an aircraft in the early 1960s. He was returning from the West Arm landing when his boat became trapped by the ebbing tide. He saw wreckage on the opposite bank to where his boat was and notified police upon his return to Darwin. It was not until 1966 that a Shark Cat was sent out to investigate. Police found the wreck and recovered a Perspex cockpit canopy, but found no human remains. They recovered other artefacts too that included the aircraft’s weapons, but lost a cannon on the return trip to Darwin, in a manner reminiscent of the ‘Keystone Cops’. As reported in *The Northern Territory News* at the time:

> "RAAF security police and CIB detectives yesterday recovered two machine guns and a cannon off a wrecked warplane in West Arm. But choppy seas forced police to abandon the heavy cannon in mid-harbor as they feared its movement would plunge it through the bottom of the boat. The single engine, four gunned aircraft, riddled with cannon and machine gun fire, is deeply embedded in mangrove mud up West Arm and is only visible at very low tide. Although the wreck has not yet been positively identified, RAAF authorities believe it was a Spitfire fighter, piloted by an Australian airman. Darwin CIB chief, Detective Sergeant Len Cousins and Mr Vern Jenkins, of the RAAF security, found the plane’s magazines loaded with ammunition, and live rounds in the breaches of the guns. Indicating the plane was shot down during a dog fight with Japanese Zeroes.

Squadron Leader Fosdike of the Darwin RAAF said today he had known of the wreck for some time.

> "The position of most planes shot down during battles over Darwin are known to the RAAF although these wrecks are now just coming to public attention through publicity given to other wrecks found earlier in the year ‘he said. He said he had no details on the plane as yet but if given its registration number could probably ascertain during which engagement it was lost." 30

The next recorded visit was on 6 November 1983 when Glenn R Smith produced a report titled *West Arm Spitfire*, but this report has not been cited in this research. Photographs, however, were taken during the expedition and one of these shows the scoured zone the wreck lies in. Of note are the bent propeller blades. Only two of the three remain on site, but they clearly show damage consistent with a power-on impact.

Darwin aviation historian Bob Alford was on another trip out to the site on 4 December that same year with Peter Dermoudy, who was undertaking a survey of World War II sites for the Museum and Art Galleries Board of the NT. The tide state was recorded as 0.6 metres at 12.04pm. Alford states that his role in the expedition was to “safely remove any remaining armament including weapons and report derelict ammunition, and to recover the aircraft identification plate, which hopefully would remain in the cockpit area.”

Some mention is made of Smith’s report in Alford’s work, which provides a glimpse of what the wreck would have looked like in December 1983. The wreck was found at approximately Latitude 12º 36’ 15”S and Longitude 130º 47’E in the upper reaches of West Arm on the eastern bank with the wreck’s orientation as almost north-south. The propeller was attached to the gearbox, which had broken off from the engine. The propeller, as discovered later, was stored up and wired back up to the engine by previous unofficial site visitors. The engine was described as relatively intact, but that the rocker cover and exhaust assembly had fallen off the port cylinder bank. The firewall was relatively complete and most of the airframe was there, but heavily corroded and collapsed, albeit in articulated positions. The site was strewn with ammunition in very good condition.

Alford elaborates on the site description and records an inventory of artefacts recovered by the December 1983 expedition. The wreck lies on a bearing of 350° with its
undercarriage in the retracted position. The starboard wing was covered in mud and the whole site lies in a scour depression. Currents had dug out the mud around the wreck, leaving it exposed at low tide in a pool of murky water. The propeller was recorded to have been in coarse pitch, not the configuration it should have been if a pilot was about to ditch. The aircraft was found to be in a straight and level attitude. The wreck’s condition gave rise to a theory that Thorold-Smith had ditched his aircraft, but this would seem to have been quite an achievement:

“The Spitfire was a very dangerous aircraft to ditch, as it did not so much land on the water as dive into it upon first impact. This is reflected in the advice given to ‘Bluey’ Truscott by his flight commander, ‘Paddy’ Finucane, upon his joining 452 early in 1941: ‘Don’t ditch her, Truscott. If you are over water and in trouble, bail out … get out of her fast. She doesn’t take to water like a duck; she takes to it like a fish and goes straight down.’

A wreck site plan was also produced during the December 1983 expedition, but this has not been cited. Whether the wreck site’s morphology can give archaeologists an indication as to how the aircraft crashed is yet to be determined, given that previous site visits had no regard for archaeological considerations and were, if unknowingly, contributors to the site’s contamination. Aviation archaeology was characterised in the 1980s as an antiquarian pursuit and the study had yet to formulate its own theoretical framework to answer research questions, as in historical archaeology. Previous site visitors, despite their best intentions, have often been described colloquially as an old fashioned ‘Boys’ Own Adventure’ and have done more damage to the site than 72 years of immersion in salt water. Alford’s work in particular, however, was a beginning to not just recovering objects from aircraft wrecks, but also recording the context of their finds, which archaeologist can study.

A list of the artefacts recovered in a subsequent visit on 14 February 1987 was made and all finds were left with the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory’s museum, some 12 objects including rounds of ammunition. These are listed below:

1. Engine Identification Plate [Merlin 46 No. 91405/A339973
2. Hispano 20mm Cannon, serial No C6117
3. Browning .303” machine gun, serial No BS190577
4. 20mm ammunition, including HE and SAPI
5. .303” ammunition including tracer rounds
6. Gunsight
7. Compass
8. Undercarriage control quadrant
9. Armour plate
11. Medicine bottle
12. Smaller items including instruments, fuse assemblies, priming pump, trim tab wheel, and rudder pedal.

A search of the museum was made in 2015, but only two objects could be found – an exhaust said to be from the wreck, probably recovered in the November 1983 expedition but not confirmed, and the aircraft’s undercarriage control quadrant, which Alford, with the assistance from the RAAF, had restored. Of particular interest is an engine identification plate. One such plate was recovered in the November 1983 expedition, but no data was recorded. It is important to note the discrepancy with the engine number recorded by the Pacific Wrecks website and that of the plate discovered in the December 1983 expedition. That plate’s number was Merlin 46 No. 91405/A339973. Going by the first number’s prefix only, it is clear that the two do not correlate. How then was the wreck identified?

Identification of the wreck site

“When the investigation to identify the wreckage commenced in 1986, we are told only the details taken from the engine name plate and the location of the wreckage. From the engine name plate, it was established that the aircraft had been one of the Mk VC tropicalised Spifires, the type flown in the area all through 1943 and well into 1944. In a letter, Ted Hall – the commander of A Flight in No. 452 Squadron at the time of Darwin Raid No. 53 – focused attention on about one hour out of the thousands we spent in the North-western Area. What was more important, Ted gave some very sound reason for his belief – he told us ‘I’m 97% certain’ – the aircraft was that of his Commanding Officer, Sqn Ldr Ray Thorold-Smith.’

It would be better of course to be 100 per cent certain that Spitfire A58-92 had been found. The positive identification of a wreck site is one of the fundamental aims of aviation archaeology. In the absence of serial makings on an aircraft’s flight surfaces or fuselage, wreck identification would usually involve locating contractor’s plates or any other serial numbers that may be found on the engine and other components. Another method is to study wreck site morphology, which can be unique to particular aircraft types lost in the harbour. This is how six Catalina wrecks were identified in Darwin Harbour’s East Arm as a result of archaeological research in the late 1990s. A PBY-5A Catalina had a rounded bug-eye gun turret on its bow and there was only one aircraft of this type lost in Darwin Harbour. Another example is the use of propeller spinner and engine diagnostics that were unique to particular aircraft. This lead to the positive identification of four of the six flying boats. Two others could only be identified as United States Navy. Their specific aircraft identity will only be determined after one of them has been excavated to find diagnostic artefacts. The process of elimination is a valid tool in identifying wrecks and this is how the West Arm Spitfire was ultimately identified as that of A58-92.

Engine identification numbers can be a problem in identification of an individual aircraft because engines were changed on a regular basis. Similarly, machine gun serial numbers recorded by the December 1983 expedition were not recorded in the historical record by the RAAF. Only the US military recorded gun serial numbers as those belonging to particular aircraft. Alford’s correspondence with Ray S Sturtivant, an RAF historian in England, in 1987 concluded that the historical record itself was incomplete and was of little use in identifying archaeological material: ‘RAAF Spitfire records were returned to the U.K. postwar, but this too is no help, as they are only retained for ten years, due to shortage of space.’ In the end it was 65 AASL Battery’s observations that proved to be mostly correct. The other Spitfire losses that day were accounted for and there was only ever one Spitfire reported to have been lost near West Arm.
Aerial survey results
A Robinson R44 (VH-MGQ) helicopter was chartered for survey work on 10 October 2014. The tide state on that day was 0.37 metres at 1.22pm. The wreck was found at 1.28pm and was awash with the flood tide. The tide needed to be lower still to reveal more of the wreck but, from previous accounts of visitors, it lies in a scour zone of murky water, which would make it impossible to see certain elements of its structure. Alford describes the dilemma: “Visibility in the water was nil during the November and December 1983 visits, however the possibility exists that such damage was visible to the police in their initial investigation. In physically assessing the wreck internally by feel I felt no part that would indicate such damage. In other words my fingers and hands remained intact!” 42

Outside of the scour zone, debris must surely exist. The wings, for instance, were said to have sheared off outboard of the main wing root and that these were lying in close proximity to the fuselage.43

The wreck was found at Latitude 12° 36.182’S, Longitude 130° 47.049’E, on the eastern bank of West Arm, which was only about 135m from where its location was reported in 1983.

Both banks of West Arm are lined with low-lying mangroves, which slope gently to the water’s edge. A wide mudbank lines the mangroves and this is the zone the wreck lies in, approximately 200m from the edge of the mangroves. Salt-water crocodiles (Crocodylus porosus) inhabit Darwin Harbour, but none were seen.

The site is nearly 17.7km on a bearing of 197° from Flagstaff Hill. The aerial survey verified its location, but what could be seen? Apart from the obvious features of the engine and propeller are the oleo legs for the landing gear in a stowed position. The protruding stubs out of the water are where the wheel hubs and tyres would have been. The entire top skin of the wing roots have corroded away, but the underside of the fuselage may still be perfectly preserved under the mud in an aerobic condition, perhaps with RAAF roundels. No trace of the outer wings or the tail could be seen, but they may have been underwater at the time of the survey.

Discussion
From an archaeological perspective, the wreck is a contaminated site as almost every site visit in the past has resulted in the removal of artefacts. It is still possible that the body of Thorold-Smith lies in or near the wreck, albeit in a disarticulated state, buried in mud. It is likely highly that he put the aircraft down in an amazing feat of flying, but did not survive the crash. The propeller pitch mechanism may have been damaged in combat. He came down fast, but made a semi-controlled ditching in the sea close to land. The wreck is a testament to the pilot’s skill in ditching such a dangerous aircraft. Another scenario could be that he bailed out, as he was trained to do, but that his parachute did not open. The wreck, therefore, would have evidence of an uncontrolled landing. The archaeological evidence, however, suggests the contrary that it did not simply plunge into the sea. An archaeological excavation may reveal disarticulated skeletal material or dental tissue, small fragments missed by visitors who only searched for machine guns and other objects, almost all of which were lost or kept in private collections. For instance, what did the police and the AHSNT do with the weapons and other artefacts they brought ashore? In what state did the police find the aircraft’s canopy? Was it in the open position, suggesting Thorold-Smith might have bailed out, or closed indicating that he drowned. The tide state at the time of the crash was 4.9m at 11.30am.44 The water was deep enough for the aircraft to disappear beneath the waves.

A plot of the 65 AASL Battery’s sighting puts the crash in Woods Inlet, approximately 10km away, well away from where it was actually found. Maybe Caldwell and other pilots searching that day were just simply looking in the wrong area? The sighting at least put the wreck to the southwest of Darwin, roughly where the crash occurred.

An archaeological survey by boat is planned for the next tide window. There is still much to do; West Arm is uncharted waters and archaeologists have very little understanding of the site’s environment. A search around the wreck site may find a debris field. The tide will reveal the site on 16 November 2016. The tide state will be 0.12m, much lower than the time of the aerial survey in 2014. The aim for this forthcoming survey will be to map the site and study how site formation processes have affected the wreck’s fabric to help explain what we see today and to understand better the circumstances of the site’s deposition. It probably will not be easy, as the scour zone around the wreck will conceal structure and artefacts. Probing may be the only method to find the extent of the airframe. It should not have any armaments as Alford indicated that a machine gun and a cannon were removed in 1987. The police are said to have remove two machine guns and a cannon. The cannon, as mentioned before, was jettisoned on the return trip to Darwin, but they must have only raised one, not two machine guns. This Spitfire probably only had the two cannon, two machine gun configuration in its universal wing. They Mk. Vc never had five guns.

Conclusions
The disappearance of Spitfire A58-92 after being shot down during aerial combat with Japanese Zero fighters on the morning of 15 March 1943 was a complete mystery, despite searches by other aircraft on the day and the next day. The war moved on and the Spitfire was forgotten. The wreck was found by accident in the 1960s, which has only added to its mystery. The pilot, S/Ldr Raymond Thorold-Smith, is still missing without trace. The aerial survey conducted in 2014 to find the wreck has now firmly established the wreck’s location, enabling it to be brought into mainstream archaeological research. No longer is it the mysterious missing Spitfire somewhere in West Arm. The next stage in managing the wreck would be to nominate it for Northern Territory Heritage Register. The wreck site’s significance not only lies in the fact that it is the only Spitfire wreck found in the Northern Territory in situ, but that it is highly likely a war grave.
<table>
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<th>No</th>
<th>Aircraft Serial Number</th>
<th>Date Lost</th>
<th>Location lost</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Pilot's Name</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-69 (ex-BS175)</td>
<td>27/02/43</td>
<td>Tabletop Range, near boundary of Litchfield National Park</td>
<td>FgOff</td>
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<td>West Arm</td>
<td>S/Ldr</td>
<td>Ray Thorold-Smith</td>
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<td>Albert Edward Cooper</td>
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<td>Picnic Point (Cove/Grove), Charles Point</td>
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<td>C P Lloyd</td>
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<td>Sgt</td>
<td>J F H Cavanagh</td>
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<td>F/O</td>
<td>Alfred &quot;Harry&quot; Henry Blake</td>
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<td>Spitfire A58-30 (ex-EE673)</td>
<td>29/05/43</td>
<td>In sea near Milingimbi Is.</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>Francis Bruce Beale</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-107 (ex-EE607)</td>
<td>12/06/44</td>
<td>5 ml. south of Port Blaze</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>C H O’Loughlin</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-68 (ex-BS174)</td>
<td>20/06/43</td>
<td>In sea off Adam Bay</td>
<td>FltSgt</td>
<td>W E Nichterlein</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-2 (ex-AR523)</td>
<td>30/06/43</td>
<td>East of South Perron Island</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>Colin R Duncan</td>
<td>0 1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-2 (ex-AR523)</td>
<td>30/06/43</td>
<td>East of South Perron Island</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>Colin R Duncan</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-32 (ex-BS174)</td>
<td>06/07/43</td>
<td>South of Perron Is.</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>C P Lloyd</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-32 (ex-BS174)</td>
<td>06/07/43</td>
<td>South of Perron Is.</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>C P Lloyd</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-33 (ex-BR497)</td>
<td>06/07/43</td>
<td>35 ml. east of Anson Bay (on land?)</td>
<td>P/O</td>
<td>F R J McDowell</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-61 (ex-BR499)</td>
<td>06/07/43</td>
<td>35 ml. East of Anson Bay</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>F D Hamilton</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-80 (ex-BS197)</td>
<td>06/07/43</td>
<td>35 ml. East of Anson Bay</td>
<td>P/O</td>
<td>N F Robinson</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Aircraft Number</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Pilot Names</td>
<td>Casualty</td>
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<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-121 (ex-EE677)</td>
<td>26/09/43</td>
<td>Collision with a/c below - 3 miles S E of Manton Dam</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>Granville Allen Mawer</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-201 (ex-JL314)</td>
<td>26/09/43</td>
<td>Collision with a/c above - 3 miles S E of Manton Dam</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>John Philip Adam</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-232 (ex-MA685)</td>
<td>24/04/44</td>
<td>On land near Port Patterson</td>
<td>Sgt</td>
<td>Colin William Dunning</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-302 (ex-JF820)</td>
<td>07/05/44</td>
<td>200 yards from main jetty, Darwin</td>
<td>W/O</td>
<td>Sidney Charles John Laundy</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-435 (ex-JG622)</td>
<td>18/09/44</td>
<td>1 ml. east of Cape Van Dieman</td>
<td>F/O</td>
<td>A K Kelly</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-310 (ex-JF847)</td>
<td>05/10/44</td>
<td>Darwin Harbour</td>
<td>W/O</td>
<td>Peter Cox [Fox?]</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-377 (ex-JG267)</td>
<td>02/11/44</td>
<td>Off Blaze Point</td>
<td>F/Sgt</td>
<td>B O'Connor</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Spitfire A58-372 (ex-JG106)</td>
<td>31/07/45</td>
<td>16 ml. north of Cape Hotham</td>
<td>W/O</td>
<td>B Clinton</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
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**Totals** | **19** | **13** | **13**

K = Killed, S = Survived, NR = Not recovered
Notes

1. National Archives of Australia. Series: A9845. Control Symbol: 273. Title: Spitfire [Capstan] [RAF serial numbers] [Accidents Part 3] [Note: for table of accidents see item note]. National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A.C.T.


19. Ibid.


21. National Archives of Australia. Series: A705. Control Symbol: 163/58/35. Title: THOROLD-SMITH Raymond Edward - (Squadron Leader); Service Number - 402144; File type - Casualty - Repatriation; Aircraft - Spitfire BS 231; Place - Darwin, Northern Territory; Date - 15 March 1943. National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A.C.T.


34. Cooper, op. cit., p. 94.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.
The Territory Remembers
Interview with Kaname Harada, Zero pilot

By Dr Tom Lewis

The Territory Remembers interviewed the last Zero pilot known to be alive for the project. Kaname Harada flew a Zero in the aircraft carrier raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942. He spoke from his home in Nagano, north of Tokyo.

Harada first explained that in WWII he understood the geography of northern Australia only a little. He knew there was an island called Celebes in a Dutch colony. There, he said, we established a base, and from there we attacked Port Darwin in Australia, and Port Moresby. But the first attack, in which he participated, came from aircraft carriers, and that was from where he launched his Zero on 19 February 1942.

The interview took place in Nagano, north of Tokyo, in June 2015, on camera, with questions written by Dr Tom Lewis, TTR Historian, and presented in Japanese by Hiromi Loveday. Harada has no English, and so the questions and answers were then translated back into this account.

**How did you join the Navy?**

I entered Nagano Junior High School in 1929. I found I was lacking the ability to compete with all the other classmates soon after entering the school. When I was thinking of choosing the right path for myself and what I could do for Japan in the future, I heard that with the Navy you could sail around the world by ship. It sounded really attractive to me and I wanted to join the Navy. So I applied for it and became a member at Yokosuka in 1933.

**What was it like with the social and political concerns at the time you joined the Navy?**

When I joined the Navy, the population was very sparse in the northern part of China, and there were few means of transportation. Also agricultural technology was a bit backward, whereas the population was growing rapidly in Japan resulting in people migrating to places like Brazil. Japan helped to build a railroad to improve traffic, and young people working together with local people in the northern part of China so that they were able to produce more crops with our agricultural techniques.

It was all ok until then, but I think it went a bit overboard, as the military became involved in this. It was misleading behaviour and other countries took this as an invasion. It led to the ABCD (America, Britain, China and the Dutch) line – the term ABDC line was a Japanese name for a series of embargoes against Japan by foreign nations. I think not only ABDC nations, but also all the other nations started to think that Japan became a loose cannon and they wanted to stop it before it was too late.

I was only 17 years old at that time, and I was not fully aware of what Japan had done to other people, but all the other nations didn’t seem happy with what Japan had been doing. Then the country came to the point where they couldn’t go back to where things were. So I was only a child but I wanted to be useful and sacrifice my youth and my life for Japan under the circumstances. When I look back, I was so innocent.

**Did you think the naval airplane you flew, the Zero, was**
better than the Army's fighter?
It seems that the Navy airplanes were developed under UK leadership whereas the Army's were developed by France. There was not much difference between the two, but the throttle levers were completely opposite to rev up the engine. Both the Navy and Army were confident, sometimes overconfident of their techniques, so it is competitive in a good sense, but we look down to each other in a bad sense. What I think was disadvantageous for the Navy was that their military policemen consisted of selected Army, and when both Army and Navy got in trouble, the Navy were always considered the bad men.

What advice did your flight instructor give?
Mr Ejima who was my instructor was the person who worked his way up to the top from the ranks. He was my first venerable teacher, and was one of the top instructors. In the exercise, he yelled out to me "no, no, idiot, what are you doing?" from the back of the plane during taking off and landing. I felt terrible. Even after all the efforts I had made to convince my parents to become a pilot, my path that I chose, and how hard I worked to enter the school, I thought maybe I am not meant to be a pilot after all if I get scolded by him like that all the time.

That night I went to see Mr. Ejima and said “Thank you for teaching me many things but I know what my limit is, and I don’t think I am a gifted pilot. Please send me back to the team where I was. I am fine and I am ready to give up on this.” And he said, “You misunderstand it. I scold students who have potential. The more I yell out, the more the person has potential. I try to maximise their abilities, not that I hate the person. I think you have a talent for this and I will keep yelling out to you. Please take this as my encouragement.” I thought this could be the way to grow up. He is the person who I look up to giving me attention. I decided to keep going. Next day, he was as strict as yesterday. I was puzzled. He just convinced me to stay. I got confused if what he said yesterday was true... I was like, “Oh well... whatever” then I took my hands off the plane controls... he then surprisingly said, "Oh you are doing good, that's it! Keep going!" Before that, I was so nervous because he was telling me off. But all of a sudden, everything was changed from the moment I stopped pushing my plane around too much. Wow, this is it, I can fly!

Right from there, I realised that I was wrong... subconsciously I was arrogant towards my plane. I was always trying to manoeuvre my plane. Each plane has its own character depending on who made it. Also each pilot has a different personality influencing the same aircraft. I was too immature to know this.

I never forgot when I did fly by myself the first time, for so long this was what I had dreamed of. It was my happiest moment flying alone. I said to Mr. Ejima "I am back" when I got back, and he said "Yep, well done". Even one of our top teachers said, "You are the best student amongst all of them." Thanks to them, I received a silver watch from his Majesty the Emperor.

The human being should not be arrogant.
saw] the first spark and then the next moment the vessel disappeared.

I have never seen a ship blown up, and sunk in the sea like that. I did not have much oppressive feeling about war at that time. I understood that the Japanese were advancing southwards rapidly, and it was a fear for the world.6

Did the plane fly from the ground or an aircraft carrier at the Port Darwin?

Carriers. During the Southern strategy, our aircraft carriers went to the Celebes, and the base was built there. We used it for our Southern strategy and Indian Ocean strategy, so that aircraft carriers could undergo maintenance and supply.

The battleship HMS Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser HMS Repulse got sunk by Japanese aircraft off the coast of the Malay Peninsula. Also [General] Percival’s troops were coming up [from Singapore] to the north. The Lieutenant-General Yamashita was in China so he and his troops were sent to the Malay Peninsula. The Japanese advanced rapidly at that time.

**How did you handle the Zero in attack?**

I think it depended upon our commanders. First of all, Zero had a drop tank with 300 litres capacity. This was ditched when we got closer to their territory. It was heavy and slowed the speed. We switched to the body tank for air combat. However, combat needs power and uses fuel four times as much as normal due to the full revolution of the engine.

Even so, we did fly to Guadalcanal from Rabaul and had a battle and then came back. The Zero can fly long distances, whereas the Spitfire is faster than the Zero. The Hurricane came to attack and then they quickly ran away. Our strategies were how to chase them to attack them. Both sides had to study for offences and defence. That’s war.

Let me give you an example. The Zero aircraft has an ability to shoot 7mm machine gun, but this doesn’t work anymore against the US and UK fighters as they investigated and studied our bullets and they created the bullet-proofing against the US and UK fighters as they investigated and to shoot 7mm machine gun, but this doesn’t work anymore.

Let me give you an example. The Zero aircraft has an ability to shoot 7mm machine gun, but this doesn’t work anymore against the US and UK fighters as they investigated and studied our bullets and they created the bullet-proofing against the US and UK fighters as they investigated and to shoot 7mm machine gun, but this doesn’t work anymore.

How did you handle the Zero in attack?

I did not have much oppressive feeling about war at that time. I understood that the Japanese were advancing southwards rapidly, and it was a fear for the world.6

**What were the air combat actions like between the fighter aircraft?**

We sunk battleships at the Ceylon base, or captured the Malay Peninsula. United Kingdom brought hundreds of the Hawker Hurricane fighters to wipe out the Zero. They waited for the Zero to come into the sky in Colombo, Ceylon.

As for Japan, six aircraft carriers were sent there: Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, Shokaku, and Zuikaku. Each of them carried twelve or thirteen fighters and total of 67-8 aircraft.

It was between the 2nd and the 6th of April 1942, when we were flying into Ceylon from the carrier in the Indian Ocean. They were waiting for us and coming towards us for attack. They made an attack and then left quickly. We chased them and almost destroyed everything of theirs. They looked like they were saying “Please stop. Don’t shoot me” and they looked in pain.

But if I don’t, I would be the one who got shot down and killed in a battle. I got carried away by the fact that if I don’t find them to shoot down first I would get killed, otherwise I wouldn’t have done it. Ultimately one or the other will die, such an extreme fate.

People were talking about the ABCD encirclement but I didn’t feel that affected us much yet. To take control of the Southern quarter (South Pacific), in the meantime, both Army and Navy continued to advance rapidly to the South. Predominantly the Taiwanese fleet aimed at the Rabaul fleet, and all the other Japanese fleet and their air stations were trying to reach the southern quarter. Easy battles; triumph continued until the battle of Midway, that was a turning point in the Pacific War.

It is war, to make normal people who have their own families in their country like everyone else does, to kill each other without any personal reason to fight for. It had come to my realization when I was in Ceylon Island as a soldier. When our twin engine heavy aircraft took off from the aircraft carrier, our captain assured us that we had to fight there and return in one hour and then he would take us home. When we realised that one hour had already passed, we were in hurry to fly back to the aircraft carrier. On the way to back, we encountered an unknown bogey which was bigger than Hawker Hurricane (I had checked it later and known it was Fairy Fulmar) so we started firing at the aircraft. The enemy was good at manoeuvring and initially eluded us, but we finally shot him down and it crashed into the rice field yet we saw the pilot was still alive. We were going to kill him but we decided to leave him and return back to our troops quickly as we were afraid of being late for the departure of the aircraft carrier. Yet it was too late and found that our ship had already gone. So we flew back to the enemy’s aircraft to crash into it as we thought we would be dying anyway and did not want to die for nothing. Unfortunately, the pilot had already escaped from the aircraft and it would be just a waste of our lives to crash into the empty aircraft so we attempted to find other target to attack.
In the meantime, a young pilot from Akagi, who was also late for the departure, came and smiled at us and reported that he managed to shoot three fighter planes down. He seemed not to be worried about himself as he may have believed that we could handle the situation and find the way to back to the ship. Because we were more experienced than him, with a markings of squad leader recognisable on our aircraft, I was thinking that we should not commit suicide there which would have resulted in leaving this young pilot alone and maybe we might have better chance of survival if we worked together. We were flying side by side and searching any signs of the aircraft carrier on the ocean yet we did not find anything but a rag of cloud. I felt hopeless and about to give up but, strange to say, a formation of cloud became to look like my mother and she called me to come over. Although we were unsure if we could find the aircraft carrier in our direction, and as the fuel tank of our aircraft was almost empty, we steered our aircraft to the cloud wishing to see my mother and thinking I would not regret it even it was a wrong decision. It was the first moment to realise how much I loved her and cared about her. All of a sudden, we saw the young pilot’s aircraft descending so we followed him, feeling sorry for him as he might have run out of fuel. But he managed to spot the aircraft carrier and landed on it successfully. After we landed on our aircraft carrier, I found that there was no fuel left in the tank, and I thought that my mother had saved us. A similar experience has happened to me twice since. We were told that all Japanese soldiers never mentioned their parents but said “Long live the Emperor” when they were killed in the battle. However I have never heard any soldiers actually saying that when they were dying.

What did you think of Australia back then?
I thought Australia was a most southern, green country which possessed rich natural environment. Also Australia was the most reliable, allied country for USA. So we thought that all Australian prisoners of war were very loyal to USA and attempted to escape from the camp to join the US army. Nowadays, since a long time has passed after World War II, the complexity associated with international relationships and issues is beyond my understanding. All I can say is that I feel extremely sorry for what happened in the past although I am proud of the fact that I dedicated myself to defend my country during the period. I have been languishing, having mixed emotions of pride and shame, which includes that I have done a great job and even my nation called me a champion at one stage, yet the reality is I carelessly took away the people’s lives.

That is the reflection of my life what I had done for the sake of war. My senior soldier consoled me as I was uncontrollably suffering about the past. He said “Don’t be so harsh on you. You didn’t do it for your own benefit. It couldn’t be helped. What you need to do is to admit the fact that you killed the opponents, but at the same time you keep on serving as much as you can. It will become atonement.”
So, the early childhood education that I have been doing tells people to pass down the history to generation to generation; not to experience the ordeal ever again will lead up to atonement. Also my wife said “Darling, what I want you to do is to continue just focusing on your charity work.”

I have no idea how far my intention of the early childhood education will spread out to the public, but at first, I am going to attempt communicating and tell my story to the teenage girls who are over middle school age and will be a mother in the future, and also to the young generation who are going to enjoy their youth. We all should educate the young people as our obligation from bottom of our heart and appreciate and try to take care of peace.

I reflect upon myself everyday. Just up to recently, I was forcing myself to attend the gatherings for people who lost their loved ones at wars. But once leaving home for the Anniversary Meetings, what happens to me is.... the times when I meet people, I get too overwhelmed by their emotions. So, for me to not only get there, but also receiving their agony of what they were going through on those days, I have fainted and was taken by the ambulance to the hospital twice. I still have the strong commitment and would like to visit when am invited, but I might mess up their special memorial days, so I explain the reason of my absence due to my health condition, but I tell them my heartfelt feelings towards the gatherings. On other days, the groups consisting of the bereaved family members of my fellow soldiers visited me. I knew some of the people, who were my late fellow comrades’ loved ones who were left behind. Being in this particular situation, I got a terrible flashback and it really shocked my system. This is my biggest problem. By the same token, I am supposed to feel this way because I am a human being who feels the other’s pain and I want to make atonement for it.

I say to them "I really would like to attend the Anniversary Meeting, but as I have just explained what had happened to me. Please send my sincere message to the attendants for me." I know I should go and tell them my thoughts with my voice but if I do, I might ruin the special day and possibly upset or worry them. Therefore, I am ask them to find someone who can represent what’s in my mind instead.

My advice to the young people is that they should make the most of their youth. That’s theirs and that time never comes back again. Their young days and mine could be a bit different, but I deeply hope the young people spend wonderful and memorable youthful days.

Because as the time goes by, you’ll realise that there is no guarantee you live a short time. I have lived 99 years and have learnt what is the most painful thing in life. When I became over 80, I have felt unbearable loneliness. I can’t find any more depressing state than that. When youth, you will have willpower, vitality and capability to overcome obstacles or hardship. But when you get older, you cannot help but get caught up with loneliness. This is the fate of how you feel when coming into old age. That is what I would like to tell young people from my very own experience that the loneliness in late life is the most harsh
Now, what we need to do to create the foundation of life is to get married in the early age, have a family and get along nicely with the neighbours. Also bring up children well and pass down the truth of their history to emphasise the peaceful life they live in didn’t come naturally. Even it gives you a bit of hardship, you may avoid what I have been going through. There have been countless innocent victims in the world, but each life is a gift.

If your living may get better, you’ll look after the home town more. It is said that “The country is destroyed; yet mountains and rivers remain and spring comes to the castle; the grass is green again.” My hope is that as each hometown gets better, the county of Japan would become a happier place to live and this influence spreads the rest of the world. Once Syogo Yamashita said the future of our country rests on Mother’s shoulders. At the end of the day, I believe the deep trust between mother and children, the warmth of mother’s lap, the true affection with children, those things may be the root of maintaining the peace.

**Credit:** Translated by Ms Kayoko Watanabe-Skillas and Ms Asako Kobayashi, with assistance from Ms Kathleen Bresnehan, all from the Australian-Japanese Association of the Northern Territory.

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**Notes**

1. Ed: Japan invaded northern China – Manchuria – in 1931, and turned it into a puppet state. Gradually further incursions were made into China, and open war broke out in 1937.

2. Ed: Japan, like the USA, had not embraced by the time WWII started the concept of a separate air force. They both had air components of their land and naval forces instead. The Imperial Japanese Navy operated their aircraft in the main from aircraft carriers at the beginning of the war, but as their conquest spread, began to operate in a major way from land as well. The Imperial Japanese operated a slightly different range of aircraft from bases around Asia.

3. Ed: So-called because in the Japanese calendar it was 1940 when the machine was produced, and that year ended in a double-zero, so the aircraft was known as the “Zero-sen” fighter. It was named “Zeke” by the Allies, following the convention of using male Western names for fighters, and girls’ names for bombers, but the Allies generally adopted the Zero name too.

4. Ed: It is unclear what Harada means here. There were no B-17s in Darwin then. It may be that he has confused the place and time of the incident.

5. Ed: Harada said later off camera (from which this interview is transcribed) that he was not in the foremost fighters in the 188-strong aircraft armada. Nine of the 10 defending P-40 Kittyhawk USAAF aircraft were shot down very quickly by the first Zeroes.

6. Ed: This may well have been the destroyer USS Peary. Lieutenant Herb Kriloff, who was nearby on the speeding USS William B Preston, describes (see this book’s relevant chapter) how Peary was hit and momentarily disappeared. There are several photos in existence which show her severely down by the stern and on fire. The raid started at 0956 at the boom net and 0958 at the town wharves. Peary is thought to have sunk by 1010.

7. Ed: here Harada is talking about the “back armour” that many Allied pilots demanded in the early stages of the war. It was not fitted behind the seats of fighters to save weight, but the best and classic way to attack a fighter was from above and behind and out of the sun, to give the element of surprise. The “20mm bullets” are cannon ammunition, much heavier, thicker, and more deadly than machinegun bullets.

8. Ed: in his later years Harada paid for and saw opened a kindergarten in his local area of Nagano, north of Tokyo.
The Territory Remembers

No.18 NEI Squadron and its Australian roots

By Elmer Mesman

The Dutch held many colonial possessions in what is now Indonesia before WWII. When the Japanese forces began to push south after Pearl Harbour, they drove out many thousands of people whose entire lives had been bound up with Holland’s far-flung possessions. Some of this ended disastrously. The attack on Broome in early March 1942 was the second-biggest air raid in terms of fatalities in Australia’s history. But the Dutch forces regrouped and came back. One important operation was mounted from the Northern Territory with a squadron of bombers.

Archerfield, RAAF Canberra

After the Dutch colony of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) capitulated to the Japanese on March 8 1942, thousands of Dutch and Indonesians working for the Dutch fled to Australia. They included many military formerly working for KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlands Indie Leger – Royal Netherlands East Indies Army). Already on 4 April 1942, not even a month after the capitulation, No.18 NEI Squadron was formed at RAAF Station Canberra known as Archerfield.

Major General van Hoyen, Operating Commander NEI Forces in Australia and Air Chief Marshall Sir Charles Burrett, RAAF Chief of Air Staff, agreed to form a Dutch Squadron of 18 B-25 Mitchell twin-engine bombers. This Squadron would be under the operational control of the RAAF but its personnel and aircraft would be provided by the NEI authorities. In case of insufficient NEI staff, the RAAF would provide further personnel to complement the Squadron to full operational levels. When formed in April 1942, No.18 Squadron consisted of 80 NEI staff in Canberra and 50 at the NEI Commission for Australia in Melbourne.

An agreed 18 B-25 Mitchell bombers were originally assigned to 18 Squadron mid-March 1942. But due to immediate need by the US 5th Air Force for use in New Guinea, it would take another month before the first five B-25s arrived at Archerfield, RAAF Canberra. The Dutch NEI base at Canberra primarily had a training role. NEI Rear Admiral Coster made it clear that as soon as No.18 Squadron was ready for action both tactically and operationally, it would be placed under the control of the USA supreme commander General Douglas MacArthur in the same way as all the other forces. When establishing and setting up the squadron’s base in Canberra, it would remain under Dutch command until the NEI headquarters in Melbourne would declare it operationally fit to hand over to RAAF control.

Although the time 18 Squadron spent in Canberra was intended to be for training only to get acquainted with the their bomber, it did not take long before it was deployed to good use in anti-submarine and patrol operations, with its first operational success on 5 June 1942 sinking a small Japanese submarine off the East Australia Coast. On July 6 1942, 18 Squadron was declared a Netherlands unit and no longer a RAAF command, although the Australian RAAF personnel assigned to keep it at its
strength would be available as long as necessary. In fact, this would remain the case throughout the entire period on Australian soil during World War II.

Meanwhile, 18 new B-25 Mitchell bombers arrived from the US and brought 18 NEI Squadron to its full operational standard. Modification to the new factory aircraft had to be made but with the lack of proper spare parts and additional equipment being universal to all squadrons, priority was given to units in combat rather than training units. The need for larger fuel tanks would later result in dangerous and even catastrophic situations.

The need to move away from the cold climate during the winter in Canberra became imperative. Most NEI personnel had come from warmer and more tropical climates and had a rough time getting used to local conditions, not to mention the primitive tent housing provided.

Finally in October 1942, 18 Squadron was declared ready for operational services. As moving a Squadron that grew to 40 NEI officers, 210 NEI airmen with eight RAAF officers and 300 RAAF airmen would take quite some time and effort, Admiral Coster requested the unit be put under RAAF control from 1 December. This gave the time to set up base at the allocated aerodrome at MacDonald south of Darwin to become the first wartime operational Dutch base in the Northern Territory.

**McDonald Field**

McDonald Airstrip was constructed in the second half of 1942 as a basic sole airstrip, with taxiways in two loops at one side for positioning aircraft. It was first known as Burkholder Field and was situated some 16km northwest of Pine Creek. It was not up to standard to accommodate NEI 18 Squadron with its medium range B-25 bombers. The airstrip was made out of gravel and too short for fully-loaded and heavily-armed bombers. Formation landing was impossible, as the airstrip was also too narrow and the shoulders of the airstrip too soft with the risk of getting bogged upon landing. The airstrip was basically the only part of the aerodrome and a campsite to house its personnel was non-existent.

Everything from extending the strip and setting up a camp to include kitchens, waterholes, tents, toilet facilities, operation huts, etc. had to be erected by the Advance Party arriving on 11 December 1942. Upon arrival disappointment amongst the officers and airmen was all too obvious. Some quotes from the officers clearly show their feelings:

"A bigger mess than here in MacDonald is almost unthinkable."
"MacDonald Airbase was nothing. The crews had to make everything on their own. Initially it didn’t even have a proper airstrip."
"At start we didn’t even have tents, no officer’s mess and hardly any food. We went out hunting to shoot Caribou’s to get meat for food. Morale was not as good as we hoped."

Needless to say 18th Squadron first Commanding Officer Major Fiedeldij had a hard time getting his airbase of ground allowing his Squadron to get up and running in the shortest possible time. Hence no operational sorties other than familiarisation flights over surrounding areas would be carried out in December 1942. Finally on 18 January 1943 18th NEI Squadron’s move to MacDonald was officially completed, more than a month after the first advance party arrived. It needs to be mentioned though that these harsh conditions and circumstances weren’t isolated to 18 NEI Squadron alone. RAAF and US squadrons and units arriving to the Northern Territory around the same time between July 1942 and early 1943 experienced similar difficulties.

No.18 NEI Squadron had a diverse role in activities being assigned to it when operating from the North Western Area, as it was called during wartime operations:

1. Sea reconnaissance, flights between six and seven hours over occupied territory mainly the former NEI islands. These operations were primarily to scout for potential Japanese attacks and enemy shipping between the islands.
2. Day and night bombing of Japanese targets.
3. Low level ‘mast heads height’ attacks on Japanese shipping.
4. Reconnaissance and photography of special targets.
5. Special assignments like leaflet dropping with war propaganda over enemy territory.
6. Friendly shipping protection between Torres Strait and Melville Island all the way up to Darwin.
7. Dusk to dawn stand-by patrol.
8. Target practise and training together with other (fighter) squadrons in the same area.

The operational range of the Mitchell B-25 Medium Range bomber would be the centre of a bitter debate and negotiations between 18th NEI Commanding Officer Fiedeldij, with his NEI headquarters in Melbourne and RAAF Headquarters NW Area. RAAF command pushed
the operational range to the maximum limit as indicated by the B-25’s designer’s specification, ignoring a maximum bombload, extra ammunition for protection and enough fuel for evasive action. It took Major Fiedeldij until April 27 1943 to convince RAAF, NW Area Command and the NEI headquarters to limit operational range requirement from 1700 to 1200 statute miles. This came only after yet another loss of one of his aircraft due to fuel shortage. The B-25 made a forced landing on the beach of Melville Island (B-25 N5-133 recovered and salvaged in 1982) after a raid of 1250 miles, attacked by three Japanese fighter aircraft, and damaged. The NEI headquarters was convinced only after a trial mission with a B-25 on reconnaissance to New Guinea of 1375 miles returned with only 120 US gallons of fuel left in its tanks, well below its safety limit.

The 18 NEI Squadron operated in the NW Area focussing on East Timor, Tanimbar, Kei and Aroe Islands. The Japanese Navy Marine Base in Ambon and South West coast of New Guinea was a major target for the bomb loads of No 18 NEI Squadron from Batchelor. Most missions could only be accomplished by refuelling and loading of bomb ordnance in Darwin to the north on the way to and from the target area, making it time consuming, inefficient and exhausting for the crew. Coinciding with this were other difficulties. Darwin was insufficiently equipped with only British bombloads not fitting in the American B-25 bomb racks and fuel bowers were made to accommodate much older and British aircraft types like Hudson, Beaufort and Beaufighters. Such aspects made the position of MacDonald airfield less and less desirable for No.18 NEI squadron. The only and needed solution was improved aircraft with better armament for defence while in flight, and relocation of the entire NEI 18 Squadron to a base closer to the coastline.

**Batchelor Airfield**

On 12 and 13 April 1943 the Squadron finally made the move to the newly assigned airfield based in Batchelor. This airfield was closer to Darwin and much better equipped as it housed both USAAF and RAAF squadrons operating both small and large British and American aircraft, including B17 long-range bombers. MacDonald. They included electricity in every tent, telecom between internal sites, an open air cinema, sporting facilities and swimming areas, local camp broadcasting with music, bus services, hospital and church services, and last but not least hot and cold water. No wonder that Batchelor would remain the base for No.18 NEI Squadron until almost the end of the war.

During September 1943 replacement crews from the Dutch Flying School at Jackson, Mississippi, arrived at Batchelor and brought their own better-equipped B-25’s, replacing the older ones with heavier nose armament and longer range fuel tanks. The arrival of the new recruits and aircraft, better facilities and joint operations on Batchelor Airfield with the USAAF and RAAF gave the well needed boost to the NEI personnel which, by now, had grown to an average of 82 officers and 492 other ranks by the end of 1944.

In 1944 the Squadron had a total of 1240 operational sorties ranging from leaflet dropping, low-level strafing and bombing of strategic targets well into enemy territory. The end of 1944 also meant an end of No.18 NEI Squadron at Batchelor Airfield as 79 Wing (including No 2 RAAF and No 18 NEI Squadrons) being assigned to Jacquinot Bay in the New Britain Area (Papoea New Guinea).

No.18 NEI Squadron operations from Batchelor ended from 1 May 1945 and all staff and equipment relocated. Already in June the same year, No. 79 Wing had moved further out to Morotai, one of the eastern Indonesian larger islands strategically positioned closer to Japan. Movement of 79 Wing was so rapid that some personnel, including both RAAF and NEI staff, did not even have the chance to get ashore in Jacquinot Bay but had to stay for a total of eight weeks pending a decision to move on to Balikpapan, Borneo. Finally when the decision was made, 79 Wing including No.18 NEI Squadron arrived at Balikpapan on 17
Elmer Mesman is the Commercial Manager Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) for Qantas Airways, based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Besides his professional career within Qantas he is a freelance journalist travelling the world for several local magazines ranging from sports to historical publications. His fascination with aviation, WWII and Australia brought him to the Northern Territory in September 2015 to explore all the sites and traces of Dutch wartime influences, with No.18 NEI Squadron being one of them as main topic. With emphasis on 70 years of liberation in Europe he thinks it is time to put the forgotten role and sacrifices of fellow countrymen on the other side of the world in the spotlight.

Notes
1. Ed: Dutch records may be mistaken here. There was no Japanese submarine lost around that time off the east coast, although there were plenty of attacks made on possible contacts.
2. Ed: the author notes three different spellings for this strip: McDonald, McDonnell, and MacDonald. (The strip was indeed originally called Burkeholder.) According to aviation historian Bob Alford the correct spelling is McDonald.
3. Ed: it is unclear what is meant by this, but presumably a Dutch officer's perception of a buffalo, then present in the NT in large numbers before being shot out half a century later, might have been confused with a Canadian caribou.

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July 1945. This base would be the last where 18 Squadron was a combined RAAF and NEI operation, as from 25 November 1945, the RAAF component to the 18th NEI Squadron was disbanded ending a four year association. On 15 January 1946, No 18 NEI Squadron became a total Dutch squadron but, following pressure from the US and UNO, the Netherlands began cooperating with the Indonesian Nationalists who fought for independence from the Dutch. All occupied airfields were returned to the Indonesians and the Dutch squadrons disbanded or transferred to the now free Republic of Indonesia. No.18 Squadron was the last Dutch squadron to be transferred to the Indonesians and finally disbanded on 25 June 1950. Most personnel returned to the Netherlands or took their discharge in America or Australia.

In total 4000 men of 38 nationalities served in No.18 NEI Squadron during the eight years of its operational life. While fighting the Japanese No.18 NEI Squadron lost 19 Mitchell B-25 bombers and 102 of its crew, with 21 of them being RAAF personnel assigned to No.18 Squadron. Lest we forget.
At the end of summer in 1941, the 2/40th Infantry Regiment, Tasmanians with some Victorian elements and reinforcements, moved from Bonegilla camp in northern Victoria to the 7th Military District in the Northern Territory. The nearly 900-strong unit travelled by train to Alice Springs and then on Darwin Overland Maintenance Force trucks to Birdum outside Larrimah, where they clambered aboard Vestey Meatworks cattle wagons and continued on to Katherine by train.

Many other units travelled the same route, by rail from the southern and eastern states to Adelaide, changing at Terowie to the narrow-gauge line on The Ghan to Alice Springs. Units camped out under canvas near Anzac Hill, overlooking the town of Alice, after which DOMF trucks took them on to Birdum with three or four overnight camps en route.

The Sparrow Force units travelled north independently between April and August of 1941. Some of the first arrivals included a Queensland unit from Redbank, Brisbane, the 2/11th Field Company of engineers. Then the 18th Anti-Tank Battery arrived from Sydney and 2/12th Field Ambulance from Cowra in New South Wales. From North Head at Sydney Harbour came the 2/1st Heavy Battery with Fortress Engineers and Signals sub-units but they did not reach Darwin until August. After arriving at the rapidly expanding Darwin metropolis these units, along with 75 Light Aid Detachment, 22nd Dental, Australian Service Corps transport and the 2nd Independent Company (Commando), were nominated as Sparrow Force. They were destined for the island of Timor, nearly 500 miles northwest of Darwin across the Timor Sea.

As Australia’s prime northern outpost in 1941 when the Japanese threat materialised, Darwin became a garrison city and the huge influx of service personnel saw camps established at Katherine, Adelaide River, Larrimah, Noonamah and Winnellie. Few of the bases were named, rather referred to by the mile-markers from Darwin’s wharves – the seventeen-and-a-half mile, the twenty-eight mile, the thirty-nine mile, et cetera. Not only army engineers worked on upgrading the roads and bridges around Darwin, but most of the infantry units were tasked with road building too. In fact, many complained that they had joined the army to fight, not to work on road crews “like blood navvies”. Some even went AWOL, returning home. The battalions were also involved in camp construction, mapping, training and military exercises in the Top End.

Darwin was transformed as road, rail and communications links were constructed. New bases were built for army and air force personnel and support groups were required for medical, transport and provisioning. Air strips and the port were upgraded with a number of new airfields gradually established farther down the track, especially after the Japanese bombing raids from mid-February 1942 and the build-up of US forces arriving in the north.
The town of Darwin was the destination for men on weekend leave from the outlying camps. Men mostly frequented the hotels or pubs, although the beaches and "just taking a decko around" were popular with those on leave. There were few other places to go anyway! Postcards home verified where the men were stationed. It was not a security concern then. However, when posted overseas, their address was given as "AIF Abroad". The armed forces postal service with representatives for each unit delivered mail from their families and friends to the men in their formations.

Darwin's soldiers' riots in September 1941 made the local news. However, the ongoing friction which developed into hostility between local administration and the armed services was largely kept "under the hat". So were the wharf labourers' stop-works and go-slows, largely because of political implications at the time. News censorship was a feature of the day.

Some units were quartered in barracks such as at Larrakeyah. Command groups and brigade headquarters were mostly stationed in Darwin as well. Many of the officers were permitted to billet in flats and hotels. The new garrison city witnessed large parades over the wartime years with the salute being taken by officials such as the Governor-General and brigade or divisional commanders. Entertainers including singer Adele Hurley visited Darwin and put on concerts for the troops.

Earlier in 1941, three "Bird" forces were promulgated. "Lark Force" went to Rabaul, then an Australian protectorate as part of New Guinea, so this deployment commenced before war broke out. "Gull Force" was destined for Ambon and "Sparrow Force" for Timor, the islands at that time being under colonial Dutch and Portuguese rule. Timor consisted of Dutch West Timor and Portuguese East Timor along with a Portuguese enclave at Oecussi on the north coast. So the last two-mentioned Australian "Bird" forces could not embark until war was declared with Japan.

Timor was a strategic island in the chain link to Malaya and Singapore, where most of the allied forces were stationed. The regularly travelled air route was Darwin to Penfoei (Dutch Timor), Denpasar (Bali), Batavia (Java) and then Singapore. Qantas Empire Airways also flew mail, freight and passengers to Kupang, the capital of Dutch West Timor, the Netherlands East Indies as well as other routes in the Far East. Unit officers' reconnaissance, and civilian personnel preparing the way for Sparrow Force to protect Penfui strip and the 6-inch heavy guns with mounts from HMAS Sydney (I) at Klapalima, were made from Darwin from early in 1941.

While the 2/40th, as one of the earliest large formations or battalions to arrive at the Top End, built camps and established a supply infrastructure to feed and supply the men, smaller ancillary units such as the gunners, field engineers, transport, ordnance and medical sections were nominated as components of Sparrow Force. The last of these was a new Independent Company, a mobile, rapid reaction, heavily-armed, over-strength company that remained top secret for most of the war. These were commandos whose assignment on Timor was to operate at the rear to protect the force from anticipated Japanese Special Naval Force paratroop landings. Finally arriving at Katherine in mid-October, the 2nd Ind. Coy did not move from Katherine to the Darwin wharves until the declaration of war.

After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December (the time and date depend on which side of the International Date line and time zone is applied) and invaded Malaya and islands to the east, Australia's Labor Prime Minister John Curtin declared war upon Japan two days later, at 11.15am Eastern standard time. So Sparrow Force moved to the wharves to board the Zealandia and Westralia. The Hubbard Line Zealandia was already known to the 2/40th as it had taken them from Hobart to Melbourne in new year 1941 from where they continued on to Bonegilla for further training. The Westralia was an Australian Navy troop carrier that carried auxiliary units of the Force as well as some of 2/40th B Coy and the commandos. The two unarmed vessels were escorted by the corvette HMAS Ballarat.

The men were mostly on board by midday on 8 December. However, there were serious delays as wharf unionists dropped cargo heavily into the ships which damaged critical equipment such as radios and medical supplies; they also refused to load ammunition. Some cargo was pilfered and it is reported that men of the 2nd Ind. Coy went onto the wharf to "sort them out". The ships finally sailed at 5am on 10 December with more than one day lost and the men confined in cramped quarters without proper mess facilities.
Their departure did not see the importance of Darwin lessen. Even after Sparrow Force arrived on Timor with the main unit on Dutch West Timor and commandos newly allocated to neutral Portuguese East Timor, close ties with Darwin were maintained. The 23rd Brigade HQ was in Darwin, aircraft at Penfui flew to and from Darwin, supply ships and reinforcements came from Darwin and the town was the communications centre for the Malay barrier and ABDACOM (American British Dutch Australian Command).

Qantas suspended air services to Timor after seven Japanese Mitsubishi A6M Zeros shot down the BOAC Short Imperial Airways flying boat G AEUH, the Corio, off Kupang on 30 January, with all but five passengers and crew lost. Qantas had operated the service with aircraft on lease from British Overseas Airways Corporation. In fact, the fates of Sparrow Force and Darwin were much more closely linked than most of us realise. The bombing of Darwin on 19 February was to prevent reinforcements being sent to Timor rather than as a precursor to invasion of northern Australia. The bombing of Darwin coincided with Japanese landings on Timor, south of Kupang at midnight on the 20 December and at Dili in East Timor only a few hours earlier on the evening of the 19th. Ambon fell three weeks earlier and Gull Force ceased operation. Malaya was under Japanese control by the end of January and Singapore surrendered on 15 February. British Bofors gunners arrived from Java only a few days before the Japanese invasion. Two troops or eight guns of the 79th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery went straight into action downing a number of Japanese planes. They were veterans of the Battle of Britain and operated efficiently under fire.

A convoy with reinforcements for an expanded Sparrow Force left Darwin on 15 February on four transports with the US cruiser Houston, destroyer Peary and Australian sloops the Swan and Warrego as escorts. The USS Houston had arrived in late December, to anchor in Darwin harbour on 28 December 1941.

None of the convoy was seriously damaged, largely because the Houston had manoeuvred the attackers away from the other vessels and driven them off. However General Wavell ordered the convoy to return to Darwin as the invasion of Timor was imminent and any reinforcements would not have sufficient time to disembark and deploy on West Timor. Wavell's abort order occurred on the same day that Singapore fell. USS Peary was later sunk at Darwin along with the Zealandia, the ship that first carried the 2/40th to Melbourne and again in December to Timor. The cruiser Houston and Australian Perth went down in the battle of the Sunda Straight on 28 February in action against an Imperial Japanese Navy invasion flotilla of about 70 ships.

After coordinated landings on the north and south coasts of Timor, Sparrow Force on Dutch West Timor fought on for three days. The commandos in East Timor were joined by some men who moved east after the surrender of Col. Leggatt's force at Airkom on 23 February. Both groups took a heavy toll of the Japanese and the 2nd Ind. Coy continued operating in classic guerilla warfare until they were taken off in December 1942. After February when no news was received from Timor, it was assumed that Sparrow Force was lost. However signallers of the remaining East Timor group managed to contact Darwin on 19 April 1942 using a cobbled-up radio nicknamed “Winnie the War Winner”, after Winston Churchill. This saw resupply missions by air and sea which kept Sparrow Force in the field until they were relieved by Lancer Force, the 4th Independent Coy, late in 1942.
Sparrow Force, by then effectively reduced to a commando unit, was taken off East Timor at Betano by the Tjerk Hiddes, a fast Dutch N-class destroyer built in Britain in 1940. They returned to Darwin on 16 December 1942, to a bomb-shattered Darwin. The remnants of Sparrow Force alighted on a makeshift pier near the skeleton structure of Stokes Wharf where they departed one year and six days earlier.

Sparrow Force and Darwin were bonded by more then fire and water. Units of Sparrow Force were among the first to arrive in April 1941. The force was quartered and worked on camps, buildings, roads, bridges and communications around Darwin for nearly nine months. Sparrow Force officers were among those who policed Darwin after the soldier riots in 1942.

The Force left for Timor from Stokes Hill and the remnants returned to the harbour a little more than a year later. Hubbard Line’s Zealandia remains on the floor of the harbour today along with the Peary and Meigs from the Timor campaign. The first message from Sparrow Force commandos, requesting “boots, quinine, money and Tommy gun ammo” was received in Darwin on 18 April 1943. This saw their resupply, survival and success, again from Darwin. Damien Parer who filmed Men of Timor on the occupied island and won an Oscar award for his Kokoda documentary, again used Darwin as his exit and re-entry point in Australia.

The Lockheed Hudson light bombers of No.2 Squadron RAAF were based at both Darwin and Penfui near Kupang. They carried out bombing missions and ferried personnel and supplies to Timor and Ambon before the islands fell. The squadron sustained heavy casualties but was responsible for sinking a number of Japanese vessels and carried out numerous attacks on airstrips and enemy forces on Timor and other islands. RAAF No. 2 Squadron was later awarded a US Presidential Citation.

Darwin was the key to the survival of Sparrow Force. Post-war accounts relate to Japan’s decision not to invade Australia and New Zealand, rather striking west to India where it was considered that the local population would be more amenable to become part of Japan’s South-East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. After years of British rule, Japanese sympathisers advised that they would rise up against their colonial masters if Japan attacked.

More than 2500 frontline Japanese soldiers perished on Timor for the loss of less than 100 men of Sparrow Force, while between 20,000 and 30,000 IJA forces were rotated and maintained on the island to contain and destroy the Force during 1942. Many of these units would otherwise have been in New Guinea and a different outcome at the Kokoda Track and other Japanese reverses likely. The fighting qualities of Sparrow Force and those Australians in Papua New Guinea is reported to have tempered Japan’s change of plans, to thrust towards India through Burma rather than invade Australia and New Zealand.
List of Contributors

Brian Winspear  A Tassie Airman in the North
Paul Rosenzweig  The Cowra breakout, Matthias Ulungura and the capture of Toyoshima
Tom Lewis  The American Alliance – founded in blood and sacrifice in Darwin
Paul Rosenzweig  Bravery and Devotion to Duty in Darwin
Tom Lewis  Darwin’s Submarine
Bob Alford  Berry Springs – a war history
Trevor Menzies  Mapping the Land and Charting the Sea for the War in the North
Graham Wilson  Military detention in the Northern Territory during World War II
Wendy James  Life in a Burnett House
John Perryman  A Fairmile’s Secret War
Tom Lewis  Japanese war widow finds peace off Darwin
Ian Pfennigwerth  The Little Ships
John Harris  The Coastwatcher and the Aborigines: World War II comes to Groote Eylandt
Wendy James  The Neptuna Porthole’s life as a Coffee table
Wendy Farrell  Living in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs when Darwin was bombed – through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl
Bob Alford  Darwin’s Chinatown and the Territory’s Chinese
Anthony Cooper  Darwin 1942: the missing year
Joy Davis  Devastation and Heartache as Civilian Evacuation Badly Managed
Paul Rosenzweig  Commemorating the Filipinos
Sandra McComb  From Darwin to Darwin – Recalling Gull Force
Sachi Hirayama  A Japanese Lady Speaks
Silvano Jung  The Discovery of RAAF Spitfire A58-92 in Darwin Harbour’s West Arm
Tom Lewis  Interview with Kaname Harada, Zero pilot
Elmer Mesman  No.18 NEI Squadron and its Australian roots
Ian Skennerton  From the Jaws of Defeat...Darwin, Timor and Sparrow Force