

Historic photos show WWII soldiers' charming life in Darwin before Japanese planes dropped 'bombs like confetti' killing 235 people in Australia's worst ever attack

- **On February 19, 1942, 188 Japanese planes bombed Darwin in two air raids, drawing north Australia into WW2**
- **Japan's bombing campaign brought a distant war to Australia and the Northern Territory became the frontline**
- **It was the largest and most destructive single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on the country**
- **More bombs fell on Darwin, more civilians were killed, and more ships were sunk than during Pearl Harbor**
- **Brian Winspear, one of the last surviving witnesses to the bombings, said forces were not prepared for attack**

By Rachael Burford For Mailonline

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Historic photos show the peaceful life of World War II soldiers' just days before Japanese planes dropped 'bombs like confetti' and forced northern Australia into the conflict.

On February 19, 1942, 188 Japanese planes attacked Darwin in two air raids, killing 235 people, wounding 400 and drawing Australia into World War II. A series of photos of soldiers stationed in Darwin have been released to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the bombings.

It was the largest and most destructive single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia and led to the worst death toll in the nation's history.

Now, one of the last surviving World War II veterans to witness the Darwin bombings says the soldiers were never prepared for the attacks.



Historic photos show the peaceful life of World War II soldiers' just days before Japanese planes dropped 'bombs like confetti'. Force members are pictured with a sign reading, 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here', in Darwin in 1942



Seventy-five years ago on February 19, 1942, 188 Japanese planes attacked Darwin in two air raids. A reinforcements truck is pictured bogged down in water as it makes its way to Darwin in 1942



In 1942, Darwin was a small town with limited civil and military infrastructure but, due to its strategic position in northern Australia, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) had constructed bases near the town. Pictured are soldiers posing for photos in a road into Darwin



One of the last surviving World War II veterans to witness the Darwin bombings says the force was never prepared for the attacks. A military commander's goat being milked by a young soldier is pictured



It was the largest and most destructive single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia and led to the worst death toll in the nation's history. Oil tanks burning are pictured burning in Darwin after the attack



Tasmanian Brian Winspear (pictured), one of the last surviving World War II veterans to witness the Darwin bombings, says some of the stories still remain untold after politicians in the south fell silent and censorship was rife in fear of sparking panic

Tasmanian Brian Winspear says he can still picture the sun glinting off the bombs like confetti as hell rained down on the city.

The then 21-year-old air gunner bolted for the trenches close to the RAAF hangar when the first of 188 enemy aircraft appeared on the horizon.

The assault was more savage than Pearl Harbor; more bombs fell on Darwin, more civilians were killed, and more ships were sunk.

He says that three quarters of a century on, some of the stories remain in the shadows after politicians in the south fell silent and censorship was rife in fear of sparking panic.

'At the time there was no publicity whatsoever, the government was so ashamed of being caught with their pants down with no defence,' he said in Darwin on Friday.



Soldiers are pictured preparing for a fishing trip at the Howard River. Mr Winspear said the Australian Government was 'ashamed' of being caught with 'no defence' after the attacks happened



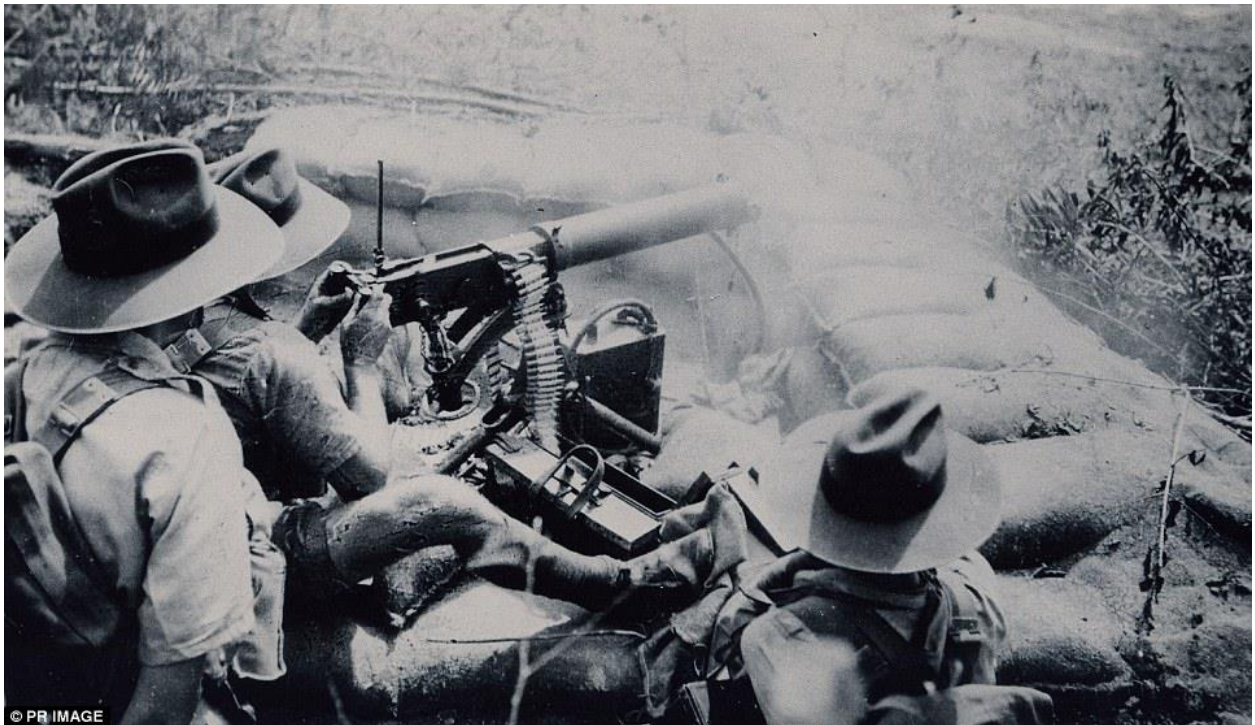
A series of photos of soldiers stationed in Darwin have been released to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the attacks. Cooks of the HMAS Melville are pictured in 1942.



Soldiers are pictured relaxing on Darwin's famous Mindil Beach. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin during World War II



Despite Darwin's strategic importance to the defence of Australia, the city was actually quite poorly defended. A sleeping quarters at Larrakeyah Barracks in Darwin is pictured in 1942



The Australian Army's anti-aircraft defences comprised of sixteen QF 3.7 inch AA guns and two 3-inch AA guns to counter aircraft flying at high altitude and a small number of Lewis Guns for use against low-flying raiders. A Vickers machine gun is pictured firing in Darwin in 1942

'It's an insult to the politicians of the day... it shouldn't have happened.'

The 96-year-old digger has now travelled thousands of kilometres back to ground zero to mark Sunday's anniversary of the attack.

In 1942, Darwin was a small town with limited civil and military infrastructure but, due to its strategic position in northern Australia, the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force had constructed bases near the town.

Despite Darwin's strategic importance to the defence of Australia, the city was quite poorly defended.

Mr Winspear was holding the line against formidable Japanese forces in Indonesia when he was evacuated to Darwin, arriving just two hours before the raids began.

Once in the trenches he put a tin helmet on and a cork between his teeth 'to stop concussion' as planes flew overhead.



Gun crews had conducted little recent training due to ammunition shortages. Smiling soldiers are pictured watching a raid and dog fights in the skies above Darwin in 1942



Nearly 2000 people were evacuated before the attack, mainly women and children, but there was widespread panic and about half of Darwin's remaining civilian population fled in the immediate aftermath. Picture is bomb damage at the Don Hotel



The assault was more savage than Pearl Harbor; more bombs fell on Darwin, more civilians were killed, and more ships were sunk. Pictured: A sign for an emplacement known as 'Hell Fire Corner' (pictured).





The assaults on northern Australia continued for the next two years, with more than 200 raids from Exmouth in the west to Townsville in Queensland. Pictured left are battalion pipers with local children and, right, a soldier on guard in 1942



The raids on Darwin were planned and led by the commander responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor ten weeks earlier, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto

From this terrifyingly close vantage point, Mr Winspear said he could see the Japanese pilots grinning from the cockpit.

He said: 'It was bloody hell. As we looked up the sun glinted on the bombs... it was just like confetti.'

Mr Winspear is among 29 diggers who have made the pilgrimage back to Darwin from across the country to make sure the true cost of war is never downplayed again.

'When my generation goes... you can bet your yellow socks that in another five or ten years time someone around a table will say 'let's have another war', Mr Windspear said.

'For goodness sake, don't forget to remember.'

THE BATTLE OF DARWIN: THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE ATTACK IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY



Thirty aircraft were destroyed, 11 ships were sunk, and many civil and military facilities were also heavily damaged. Pictured is the remains of naval headquarters in Darwin after the raid

Seventy-five years ago, 188 Japanese planes bombed Darwin in two air raids, drawing the top end of Australia into World War II.

There were 235 people killed, and up to 400 wounded during the attacks, which began on February 19, 1942.

Thirty aircraft were destroyed, 11 ships were sunk, and many civil and military facilities were also heavily damaged.

Nearly 2000 women and children had already been evacuated before the bombings started, but there was widespread panic and about half of Darwin's remaining civilian population fled in the immediate aftermath.

The raids were planned and led by the commander responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor ten weeks earlier, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

One Japanese plane crash-landed on Melville Island to Darwin's north, and its pilot was captured by a local Aboriginal man. He was the first prisoner of war taken on Australian soil.

The assaults on northern Australia continued for the next two years, with more than 200 raids from Exmouth in the west to Townsville in Queensland.