



*Australia Under Attack*

Darwin and the Northern Territory *1942–1945*

Front cover

*Naval personnel use an asbestos shield as they direct a hose on to an oil tank set on fire during a Japanese raid on Darwin in March 1942. (AWM 157291)*

Back cover

*Four Kittyhawk fighter aircraft of the 49th Fighter Group USAAF.  
For full caption see page 33. (AWM 012636)*

Metric conversions of imperial measurements quoted in this text are approximate.

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P00621



*Australia Under Attack*

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# Darwin and the Northern Territory 1942–1945

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## *Guarding Australia's Front Door*

On the morning of 19 February 1942, Gunner Wilbert Thomas Hudson, 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, from Merrylands, New South Wales, was in charge of a Lewis machine-gun at the Berrima anti-aircraft station in Darwin. Hudson's gun was mounted roughly on a blast wall as his permanent gun position was under construction and so, for the time being, he would be without adequate protection in the event of an air attack. The attack came at 9.58 am, when twenty-seven Japanese bombers with accompanying fighter escorts began the first enemy air raid on the mainland of Australia. Hudson was shot at by low flying aircraft and, finding that his position was of little use for returning fire, he rushed out into the open with his Lewis gun and propped it up on an empty oil drum. From this exposed position, Hudson fired on his Japanese attackers and continued to operate his gun until it was out of ammunition.

At the naval oil tanks at Darwin harbour, another young gunner ± Lance Bombardier Frederick Wombey, 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, from Tallong, near Goulburn, New South Wales ± was also under attack. His Lewis gun position was close to the oil tanks and twice he ordered his men to take cover while he stood his ground and waited for an enemy plane to offer him a target. Then Wombey opened fire and prevented the Japanese dive-bombers from obtaining a good run at the oil tanks. For their courage in defending Darwin, Wilbert Hudson and Frederick Wombey were each awarded the Military Medal and became the first two Australians to gain bravery awards in battle on Australian soil.

Despite the courageous efforts of Gunner Hudson and Lance Bombardier Wombey and many others, Darwin was devastated that morning. The Japanese mounted two attacks. The first concentrated on the town and the harbour. Of the

forty-seven ships at Darwin that day, eight were sunk and one beached and lost. Eleven others were damaged. Among those damaged was the hospital ship HMAS *Manunda*, on which a bomb fell through a number of decks before exploding, killing twelve people, including Sister Margaret de Mestre. The tanker *British Motorist* blew apart and sank, spilling blazing oil into the water. The American destroyer USS *Peary* was hit by five bombs, one of which exploded in the ship's magazine. The crew fought back, manning their guns, as the *Peary* sank:

*The ship disintegrated in a burst of flame which appeared to grow out and reach a height of 100 feet [30 m]. She finally pointed her nose to the sky and disappeared in a pall of black oily smoke, the gun on her fo'c's'le firing to the bitter end.*<sup>1</sup>

Of the *Peary's* crew of 144, only fifty-three survived. The ammunition ship *Neptunia* was also hit and sunk, killing forty-five men.

Darwin town itself suffered severely. Many public buildings were badly damaged: the post office, police barracks and Administrator's office among them. Postmaster Hurtle Bald had been preparing for air raids. Behind his residence he had dug a deep shelter trench, supposedly the best in Darwin. A Japanese bomb fell directly into the trench, killing Mr Bald, his wife Alice and daughter Iris, and six other post office workers. Another man wounded in the trench died later. Both the residence and the post office were wrecked. The largest group of civilians to die in this first air raid were twenty-one waterside workers who had gathered at the shore end of a wharf for a 'smoko' when a bomb exploded among them.

The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Gallipoli veteran Aubrey Abbot, his wife Hilda, and other members of their staff were in Abbot's office as the bombs began to fall. Hilda Abbot recalled:

*We had just got into our place when came the most terrific, incalculable noise. Mortar, concrete, grit fell bruising and blinding us. The whole structure*

*cracked and moved down over us and the most terrible screams filled the air. I rushed towards the opening where the pillars had been highest, in that instant knowing we would all be crushed under the breaking and moving concrete roof above us.<sup>2</sup>*

The Abbots escaped, but their Aboriginal housemaid, Daisy Martin, was pinned down and killed by falling rubble. Out in the circular lawn in front of Abbot's office was a flagpole where an Australian flag flew throughout the air raid. Abbot recalled that it seemed to annoy the Japanese airmen for they made a number of passes to fire at it. Although damaged, the flag survived and Abbot took it with him when he left Darwin. It is now in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

At the time of the Japanese attack on Darwin, the town was not totally without air cover. Ten United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) Kittyhawk fighters were returning to Darwin as the enemy approached. Five of the planes landed for refuelling but the other five were caught by attacking Japanese 'Zero' fighters over the harbour. Four of the American planes were shot down, but the fifth, piloted by Lieutenant Robert Oestreicher, managed to escape and bring down one of the Zeros. The five Kittyhawks which had landed at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) station tried to get back into the air, but four were shot down before they could gain altitude and the fifth was destroyed on the ground. Ground staff at the station fought back against the Japanese fighters and dive-bombers. As the RAAF official historian later described the scene:

*Squadron Leader [AD] Swan and Warrant Officer [HW] Chapman were in action with a Lewis gun from one trench, supported by a group of riflemen, while Wing Commander [AR] Tindall, with a Vickers aircraft-type machine-gun mounted on the top of a trench, kept up a steady fire until he was killed by a cannon shell. His death is believed to be the first RAAF fatal casualty in actual combat on the Australian mainland.<sup>3</sup>*

The Japanese broke off the first raid at 10.30 am, but at 11.58 am another wave of bombers approached the RAAF station at high altitude. For about twenty minutes the station was accurately bombed while the staff sought shelter in slit trenches. In two raids the station lost its two hangars and central store, while four blocks of airmen's quarters and the hospital were severely damaged. As the Japanese airmen flew away that morning, so ended the most devastating enemy attack ever on the mainland of Australia.

Well before the air raid of 19 February 1942, Darwin and the Northern Territory had felt the approach of war. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) had established stores to maintain supplies in the event of an enemy blockade, started coastal patrols and built a long-range wireless station. In April 1940, the boom defence vessels HMA Ships *Kookaburra* and *Koala* arrived in Darwin and eventually provided the port with the longest anti-submarine boom in the world, stretching six kilometres across the outer harbour. The RAAF had deployed No. 12 Squadron to the Darwin civil aerodrome in September 1939 to fly reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrols, opened RAAF Station Darwin in 1940, and had begun work on other operational airfields and staging fields. The Army's contribution to the defence of the area consisted of various infantry detachments, anti-aircraft batteries and other support units such as the 7th Fortress Company, Australian Engineers. The inadequate road system north of Alice Springs and across the Barkly Tableland from Mount Isa to Tennant Creek had been upgraded with Commonwealth funds to a formed dirt road by a combined effort of the governments of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. These roads, however, quickly turned to mud in the 'wet' and after the raid of 19 February they were gradually sealed to create all-weather roads.

To many Australian servicemen from the south, however, Darwin seemed like a far-away place. Lieutenant Dudley Vose, 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, recalled:

*When we sailed into Darwin I thought – what a place, seven days steaming*



*from Sydney, and even two days in a flying boat. It seemed a very isolated, unreal sort of place. It certainly wasn't at all like Sydney, where I came from. Some men couldn't believe that they were still in Australia, it seemed so different and exotic.*<sup>4</sup>

On 16 December 1941, after the Japanese attacks on Malaya and Pearl Harbor, Administrator Abbot ordered an evacuation south of European women and children, apart from those women required for essential services such as the post office telegraphists. Some part-Aboriginal families were also taken south to places such as Balaclava in South Australia, or to Sydney, where they remained for the duration of the war. As early as 1940, many coastal Aborigines had been removed inland to pastoral stations or camps. Later, their labour proved important to the Territory's war effort.

What the air raid of 19 February showed clearly was that Darwin and the Northern Territory were now in the front line against the Japanese offensive south towards Australia. By March 1942, all the islands of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesian archipelago) were in enemy hands and many thought an invasion of Australia likely. Throughout the remainder of 1942, thousands of Australian and Allied servicemen and women poured into the Northern Territory to take part in its defence should the Japanese land.

Two of the well-known units raised at this time for service in the Territory were the North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU), better known as the 'Nackeroos', and the Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU). The Nackeroos, consisting of 550 men, operated in small patrols along the northern coast, their purpose being to report any enemy landing and then to conduct guerilla warfare against it.

The SRU was similar to the NAOU but was staffed by local Aboriginal volunteers and operated in Arnhem Land, where its task was to watch at various coastal posts for an invasion and then to report on and harass enemy movements. In April 1943,

Squadron Leader Donald Thomson, commanding officer of the SRU, had this to say about the contribution to the unit of Private Raiwalla, an Arnhem Land Aborigine, who had enlisted in the Australian Army at Darwin in 1942:

*Of all the members of the SRU, the service of this man stood apart ... He had established a reputation throughout eastern Arnhem Land for his fighting prowess, and when enlisted he devoted the whole of his energies and influence to the work of undermining and destroying Japanese influence and prestige ... This man's unfaltering loyalty and whole-hearted devotion, more than any other single factor, contributed to the building up of the native Unit and the maintenance of order and discipline within this.<sup>5</sup>*

While the threatened invasion never came, the Territory nevertheless remained the only part of Australia under repeated enemy attack. Between 19 February 1942 and 12 November 1943, the Japanese mounted more than eighty air raids on Darwin and other Northern Territory airfields. Opposing the Japanese were the wireless and radar operators who tracked the approach of the enemy planes, the pilots of RAAF, RAF and USAAF fighter squadrons and the men of the heavy and light anti-aircraft batteries. Typical of these anti-aircraft units was 133rd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery raised at Miranda and Caringbah, in south Sydney, in early 1943. Like many Australian service personnel, the men of the 133rd made the long trip from the southern states by rail to Alice Springs and then by military vehicles to the Fenton Field heavy bomber base between Darwin and Pine Creek. At Fenton, and later Long Field, they helped defend the base against Japanese bombers. During one attack on 6 July 1943, the battery's Radio Direction Finding (RDF) equipment picked up the enemy planes and with accurate fire the gunners forced the bombers to climb from 18,000 to 24,000 feet. Smoke was seen pouring from two planes as the Japanese bombs began to fall. As the bombers flew off, the 133rd targeted them again and one Japanese plane was seen to emit smoke and flame. A message was later received from an observation post that an unidentified

aircraft had been seen plunging into the sea 10 kilometres off the coast.

The raid of 6 July was a major one against the home airfield of the 380th Bombardment Group USAAF, which flew Liberator bombers against Japanese targets to the north. The radar operators at Cape Fourcroy had first picked up the enemy formation at 10.37 am when it was over 200 kilometres out from the coast. Three squadrons of Spitfire fighters led by Group Captain Clive Caldwell, RAAF, were scrambled to intercept the twenty-six bombers and their fighter escort ± No. 54 Squadron RAF and Nos 452 and 457 Squadrons RAAF. The Spitfires began their attack as the Japanese formations crossed the coast at 11.30 am and over the next ninety minutes eight Japanese aircraft were destroyed. However, eight Spitfires were also lost and three pilots killed ± Flying Officer Frank Hamilton, aged twenty-eight, of Thirroul, New South Wales; Pilot Officer Frederick McDowell, aged twenty-five, of Oatley, New South Wales; and Flying Officer Norman Robinson, aged twenty-one, of Toorak, Victoria. McDowell was buried in Adelaide River War Cemetery but the bodies of Hamilton and Robinson were never located and their names are on the memorial to the missing at Adelaide River.

The Allied airmen in the Northern Territory not only defended the area against attack, they also took the war to the enemy. A chain of airfields was developed stretching south from Darwin at places such as Livingstone, Strauss, Batchelor, Coomalie Creek, Fenton and Daly Waters. During those anxious months of mid-1942 when invasion seemed likely, the Hudson bombers of Nos 2 and 13 Squadrons RAAF, operating from Darwin and Hughes, kept up the pressure on Japanese targets in Timor and other enemy held islands. On 1 April 1942, for example, Hudsons destroyed six aircraft and damaged a further six at Penfui aerodrome, Timor. One of the most daring raids launched from the Territory was that conducted by American Liberator bombers of the USAAF's 380th Bombardment Group on 13 August 1943. Twelve Liberators took off from Fenton and headed for Balikpapan in Borneo, a round trip of over 3700 kilometres. One of the Liberators,

`ShadyLady', captained by 1st Lieutenant Douglas Craig, had on board a RAAF photographer, Sandy Rustin. They successfully dropped their bomb load over Balikpapan but, as they were flying over Koepeng in Timor on the return journey with just a couple of hours' fuel left, `ShadyLady' was attacked. The plane's flying log recorded:

*0705: Waist gunners notice two Jap fighters leaving the drome. We make up our minds to go down fighting. Pilots put on power and descend to 1500 feet just over the water. Sun rising on our left wing. Zeros fly between us and the sun, pull ahead, then make alternate head-on attacks ... Forward turret fails to function. Gunner simply sits there and points useless weapon at enemy on each pass. We think we are hit forward. Investigation reveals oil burning on gun. Top turret goes out due to failure of booster pump. Gunner manually kept useless gun swinging at enemy ... The two Zeros press the attack for nearly an hour.*

*0800: We hit low, scattered cumulus [cloud] deck. Safety. Zeros make couple more passes then disappear ... Gas getting pretty low. No sight of coast.<sup>6</sup>*

`ShadyLady' made the coast at 9.10 am on 14 August, over 24 hours after it had taken off from Fenton for Balikpapan. Craig crash-landed the bomber on sandy flats. For two days the crew was befriended by three Aborigines who helped them find water. Late on 15 August they were rescued. The Balikpapan raid was a success, with only `ShadyLady' having failed to make it back to base. An oil plant and a refinery had been set on fire and a large transport ship sunk.

By the end of 1942, the threat of Japanese invasion was over. However, until the end of the war the Northern Territory continued to act as a forward base, and between 1942 and 1945 many thousands of servicemen and women saw part of their war service there. They served in a great variety of military and special civilian units. For example, the Darwin Overland Maintenance Force ran truck supply convoys north from Alice Springs; the Civil Constructional Corps toiled to

hundreds of men and women of the RAAF and Army medical services staffed the Territory's thirty-seven military hospitals and convalescent camps. Members of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) and the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS) also served in the Territory.

As the war dragged on into 1944 and 1945 the strategic significance of the Northern Territory declined. Long-range bombing operations continued and played their part in tying down Japanese resources in the Dutch East Indies, but the main Allied effort against the Japanese was concentrated on New Guinea, the Philippines and the Pacific islands leading up to Japan itself. In 1942, the Territory had undoubtedly been Australia's frontline; by 1945, it was a backwater. Nevertheless, the war and the threat of invasion had a profound influence on Australian thinking about the north. Australian servicemen and women from down south had, for the first time, begun to learn about the north and to sense it as part of Australia. This mood is conveyed well by a young soldier from New South Wales who wrote home in August 1942:

*Darwin and the Far North ... strange, sunbitten land of matted, stunted, green, ant-riddled trees; of billabongs and sweeping plains, mangroves and dustbowls. Here it is that we live, thousands of men, living in our homeland, yet far from our homes.<sup>7</sup>*

For this man and thousands of others, war service in the Territory bound that far-away place more closely to the rest of the country. There was much pride, too, in having served on a part of the Australian mainland that had been unquestionably threatened by the enemy. Again, this pride comes through from that same New South Wales soldier:

*At the coastal guns, in the A.A. Posts, at the searchlights, in the camps, the men of Australia's northern army, the Northern Territory Force, stand ready*

*for anything the Jap can turn on. And while they wait – that menacing force, trained to the minute, strong and resolute – they know that they are guarding Australia's Front Door. It will not be opened.*<sup>8</sup>

No finer tribute could be written for those who served Australia in the Northern Territory and at Darwin in World War II.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Unnamed observer, in Peter and Sheila Forrest, *Federation Frontline*, Darwin, 2001, p. 48
- <sup>2</sup> Hilda Abbot, in Alcorta, *Australia's Frontline: The Northern Territory's War*, pp. 24–25
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939–1942*, Canberra, 1962, p. 428
- <sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Dudley Vose, 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, in Alcorta, *Australia's Frontline: The Northern Territory's War*, p. 17
- <sup>5</sup> Squadron Leader Donald Thomson, *Report on the Organisation of the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit*, Land Headquarters Melbourne, 1943, p. 82
- <sup>6</sup> 'Shady Lady' log, in Alcorta, *Australia's Frontline: The Northern Territory's War*, pp. 51–52
- <sup>7</sup> Unnamed soldier, in Peter and Sheila Forrest, *Federation Frontline*, p. 92
- <sup>8</sup> Unnamed soldier, in Peter and Sheila Forrest, *Federation Frontline*, p. 95
- <sup>9</sup> Edith McQuade White, in Jan Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War*, Melbourne, 1992, p. 155
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Frank Alcorta, *Australia's Frontline: The Northern Territory's War*, North Sydney, 1991, p. 21
- <sup>11</sup> Unnamed observer, in Peter and Sheila Forrest, *Federation Frontline*, Darwin, 2001, p. 48
- <sup>12</sup> Unnamed soldier, in Peter and Sheila Forrest, *Federation Frontline*, p. 95

## *Other material consulted in the preparation of this publication*

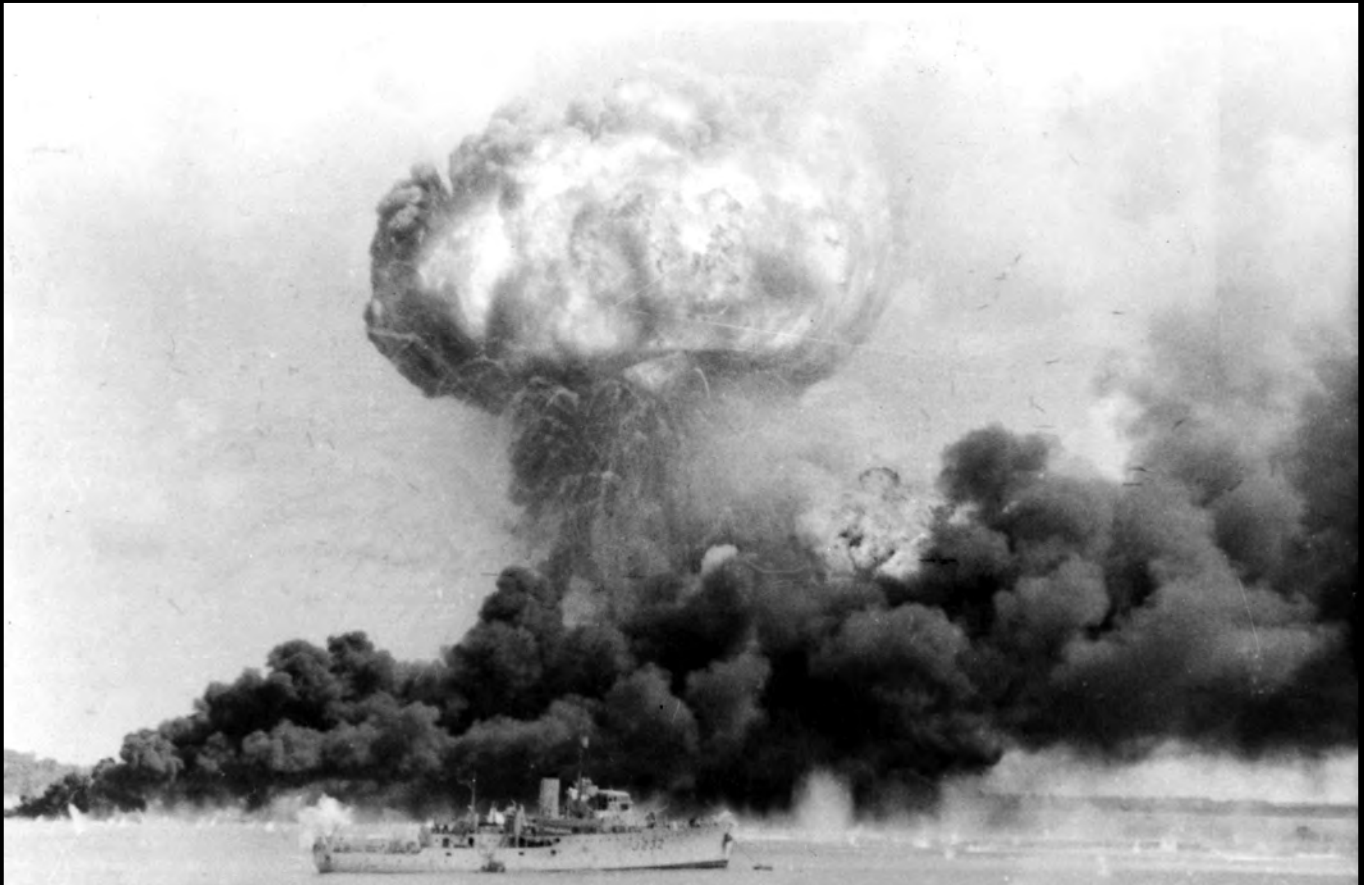
Jan Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992

George Odgers, *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957

Robert J Rayner, *Darwin and Northern Territory Force*, Rudder Press, NSW, 2001

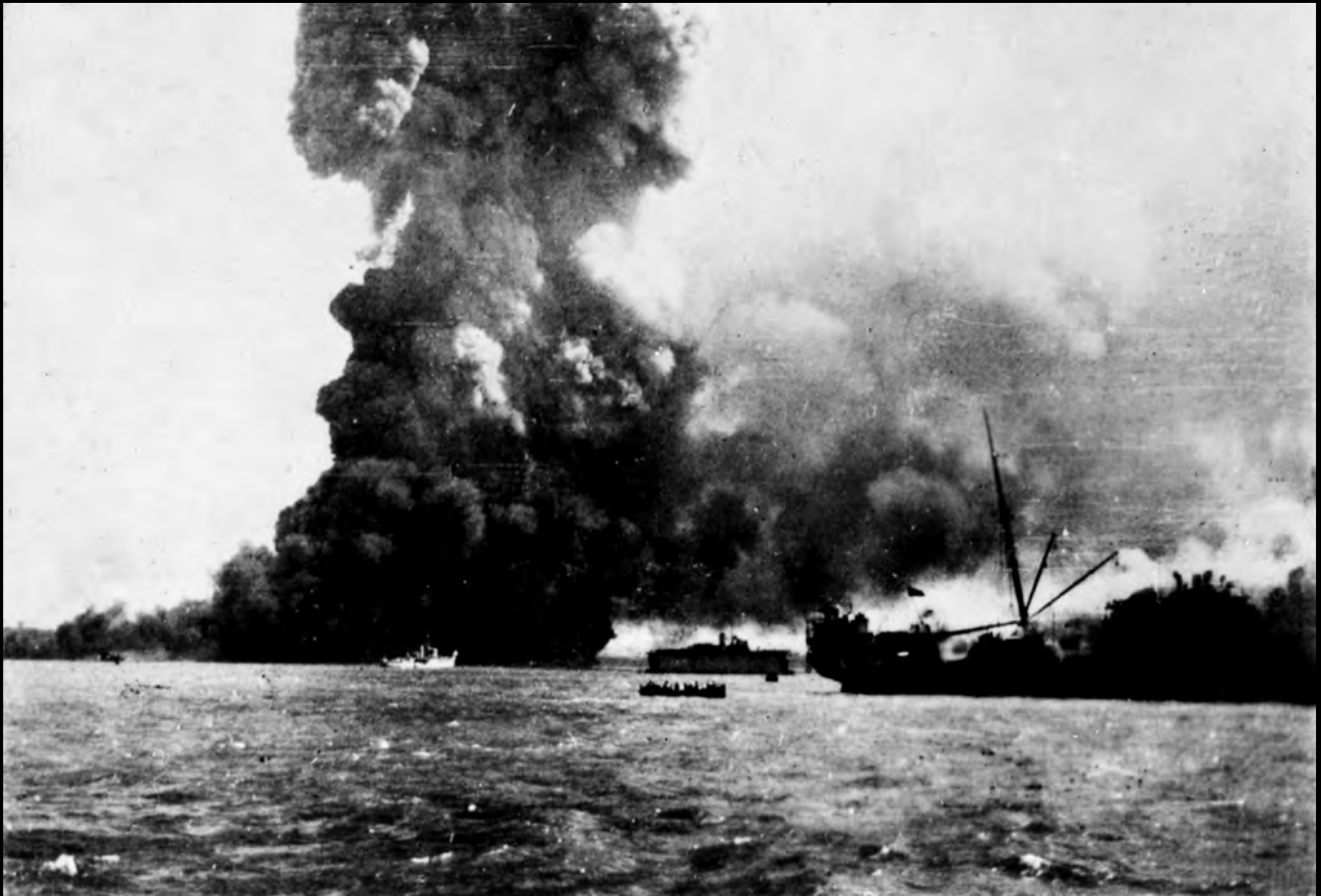


*The wharf was still burning on the afternoon of the 20th February, as I waited with four Sisters from the 119th AGH [Australian General Hospital] who had volunteered to help the staff of the Manunda nurses, the whole scene was one of devastation; bodies were washed up on the beaches. Men were collecting the dead and placing them on barges for burial at sea.<sup>9</sup>*



Dense clouds of smoke rise from oil tanks at Darwin harbour during the Japanese air raid of 19 February 1942. The corvette in the foreground, HMAS *Deloraine*, escaped damage.

(AWM 128108)



During the first Japanese air raid on Darwin harbour on 19 February 1942, SS *Neptunia*, loaded with ammunition, exploded and burned at the wharf. In front of the explosion the patrol vessel HMAS *Vigilant* carries out rescue work, while to her right SS *Katoomba* sits undamaged in a floating dock. In the right foreground is SS *Zealandia*, also loaded with ammunition, which was set afire and subsequently sank. (AWM 134955)



Nurses and physiotherapists aboard Australian Hospital Ship *Manunda*, which received a direct hit during the first bombing raid on Darwin. A dozen people on the ship were killed during the attack, including Sister Margaret de Mestre (second from right), and forty-seven others were wounded. ([AWM P01081.005](#))



Mawuka Garawiritja (Mrs Louisa Cubillo) and her nine children were evacuated from Darwin in 1942 soon after her husband was killed unloading the *Manunda*, bombed in Darwin harbour during the first air raid. The family spent the war years in Balaclava, South Australia.

(AWM P02588.001)



Gunner Wilbert 'Ducky' Hudson MM, 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, holding a .303 rifle, Darwin, 1942. For his bravery when defending his position against a Japanese 'Zero' strafing the area, Hudson was awarded the Military Medal (MM). Hudson's was one of the first two bravery awards given for action on Australian soil. (*AWM P02539.001*)



Lance Bombardier Fred Wombey MM, 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, Darwin, 12 November 1942. Wombey received a Military Medal for his bravery on 19 February 1942 in manning his Lewis gun in defence of the naval oil tanks, continuously firing his gun from an exposed position on planes strafing the wharf area. *(AWM 027800)*



The ruins of the Darwin Post Office after the first Japanese raid. (AWM 044607)





Graves of some of the civilian personnel killed during the first Japanese air raid on Darwin. Their bodies were interred and crosses erected by the 12th Mobile Laundry, Australian Army.

*(AWM 012787)*



Two radio personnel stand in a large bomb crater in the main street of Darwin, February 1942. The bomb damaged the nearby hospital. *(AWM P02759.012)*



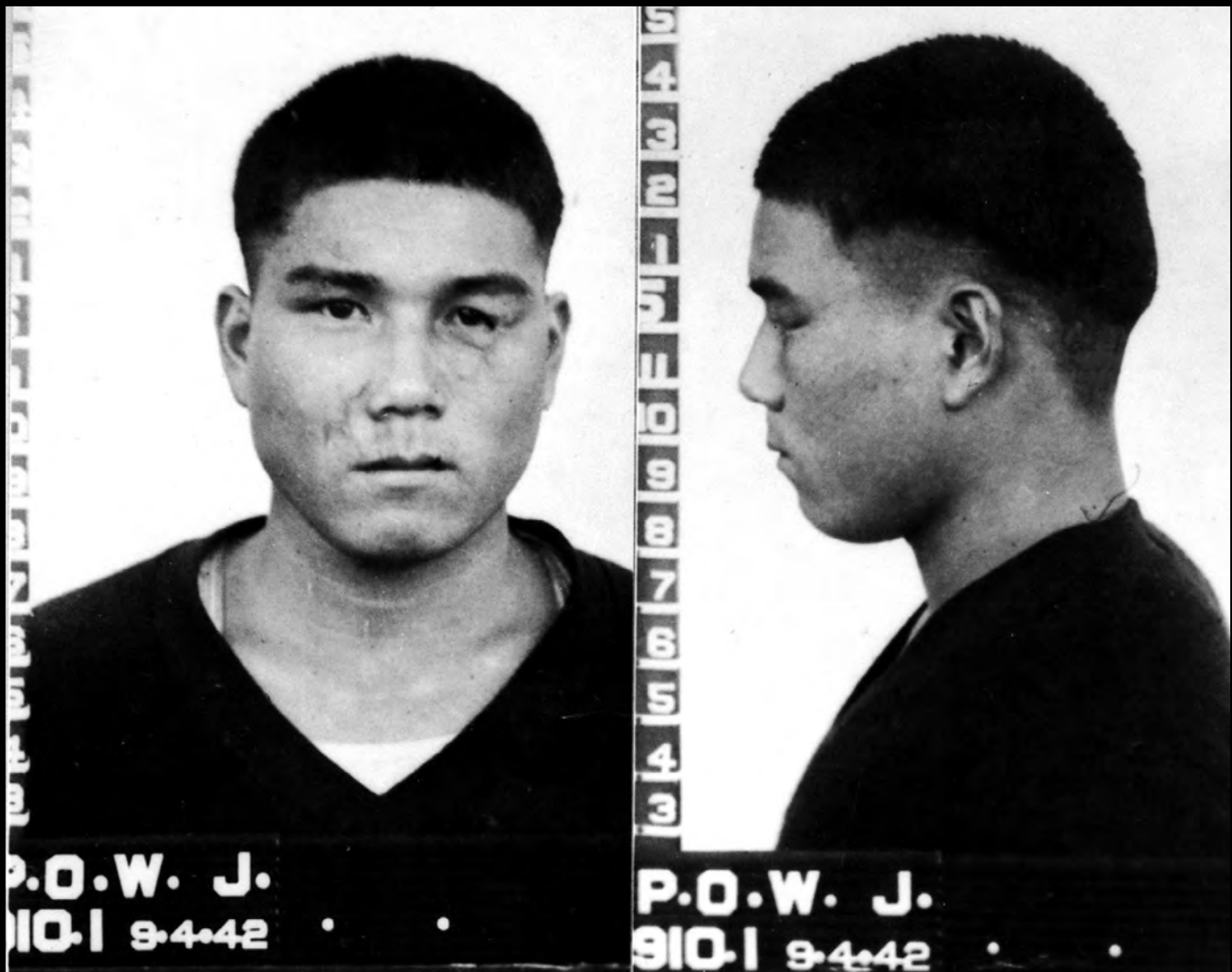
Australian Army bomb disposal experts recover an unexploded Japanese aerial bomb, Darwin, February 1942. (AWM 012703)



Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima (left), Australia's first Japanese prisoner of war, Bathurst Island, 27 February 1942. Toyoshima was the pilot of a Zero fighter damaged during the 19 February air raid on Darwin. Forced to crash-land on Melville Island, Toyoshima was disarmed and captured by Aborigines who took him to Bathurst Island to hand over to Sergeant Leslie Powell (right), 23rd Field Company, Australian Engineers. Powell, who had been sent to maintain demolition installations on the island and was unarmed, used Toyoshima's service pistol to escort him into captivity. Toyoshima died in the break-out of Japanese prisoners from the Cowra Prisoner of War camp, New South Wales, on the night of 4 August 1944. The bugle he blew to signal the start of the break-out is held in the Australian War Memorial collection. *(AWM P00022.001)*



The Zero fighter flown by Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima from the Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu* and damaged during the first air raid on Darwin lies where it crash-landed on Melville Island. This was the first Zero captured by the Allies. ([AWM P00022.002](#))



Identification photographs of Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima, who posed as Tadao Minami and claimed to be a Sergeant Pilot flying from Ambon to Darwin. Under this name he was allocated the first number (POWJ 910.1) for a Japanese prisoner of war captured on Australian soil, on 9 April 1942. (*AWM 068530*)



Japanese aerial photograph of Darwin, taken in March 1942 by reconnaissance aircraft at a height of more than 1000 metres. (AWM P00913.002)



Lewis gun attached to 14 Australian Anti-aircraft Battery, Darwin (Gunner Tommy Hill and Gunner Neil Cook), by Roy Hodgkinson, watercolour with gouache and coloured crayons, 52.8 x 55.6cm. (AWM ART22720)



*It was all over in less than 30 minutes. I didn't have time to be frightened during the raid, and the reaction afterwards was of sheer exhaustion ... Then we started to get frightened. We realised that there would be more raids, and you wondered whether you would survive the next one.*

Bob Heppel, 14th Anti-Aircraft Battery, 18 years old during the bombing of Darwin.<sup>10</sup>



Naval personnel use an asbestos shield as they direct a hose on to an oil tank set on fire during a Japanese raid on Darwin in March 1942. *(AWM 157291)*



2/9th Field Company, Australian Engineers, moves north by train from Adelaide to Alice Springs in May 1942, a journey of at least 56 hours. *(AWM 040764)*



A truck and car burn in Darwin after the Japanese air raid of 15 June 1942. This raid involved some fifteen Japanese fighters and twenty-seven bombers. Intercepted by twenty eight American P-40s, the Japanese lost six fighters and one bomber, while one American aircraft was destroyed and another reported missing. (*AWM P02759.010*)



Four Kittyhawk fighter aircraft of the 49th Fighter Group USAAF. The aircraft closest to the camera, number 51, L Ace, was flown by Lieutenant James Bruce Morehead, USAAF, who shot down seven Japanese aircraft while flying out of Darwin with No. 8 Squadron in the 49th Fighter Group. Captain WJ Hennon, who shot down at least five enemy aircraft, is sitting in the cockpit of Kittyhawk number 36. (AWM 012636)



Machine-gun crew on anti-aircraft duty in the Darwin area, July 1942. The Japanese pilots were careful to keep out of range of light anti-aircraft defences, thus reducing the enemy aircrafts' accurate bombing range. (AWM 012741)



Bulldozers form a new section of the 1600 kilometre Alice Springs to Darwin road, July 1942. *(AWM 150142)*



A convoy of trucks from the 108th General Transport Company moves out of its staging area onto the Alice Springs to Darwin road, July 1942. (AWM 150144)





The Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Richard 'Dick' Cresswell (centre, front row), and pilots of No. 77 Squadron RAAF in front of one of their Curtiss P-40E Kittyhawk fighter aircraft, Darwin, 1942. The squadron reached Darwin in August 1942. *(AWM P01370.002)*



Medical officers and nurses of the 119th Australian General Hospital (AGH) make their morning rounds, Adelaide River, October 1942. The 119th AGH was the only hospital in Australia entirely under canvas. *(AWM 013435)*



Soldiers using Aboriginal building techniques to construct large shelters lay ti-tree bark as waterproof roofing, 18 November 1942. *(AWM 013577)*



Flight Lieutenant Robert Foster, No. 54 Squadron RAF, of London, England, photographed in the Darwin area, stands beside the Spitfire in which he shot down a Japanese reconnaissance plane on 6 February 1943, in the first action involving a Spitfire in the south-west Pacific.

*(AWM 014496)*



A camera-gun photograph of a Japanese 'Betty' bomber, taken in June 1943 from a Spitfire flown by Flight Sergeant Batchelor, No. 457 Squadron RAAF, during a Japanese air raid on Darwin. [\(AWM P02822.001\)](#)



Ground staff of a USAAF Heavy Bombardment Squadron pose in front of their Liberator bomber, 'The Nipper', Northern Territory, June 1943. (AWM 014991)



HMA Ships *Karangi*, *Kangaroo*, *Koala*, *Tolga* and *Vigilant* steam past the Governor-General, the Right Honourable Lord Gowrie, Darwin, 2 August 1943. (AWM 055922)



Father O'Herlihy conducts the funeral of 2nd Engineer Harold Keller, in the Berrima War Cemetery, near Darwin, 8 August 1943. Keller was killed when a Japanese float-plane sank the Australian cargo vessel *SS Macumba* by dropping a bomb down its funnel. (AWM 055132)



*The ship disintegrated in a burst of flame which appeared to grow out and reach a height of 100 feet [30 m]. She finally pointed her nose to the sky and disappeared in a pall of black oily smoke, the gun on her fo'c's'le firing to the bitter end.<sup>11</sup>*



The riders and trainers of the 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU) – the ‘Nackeroos’ – practise their parade ground drill before an inspection of the local brumbies and Northern Territory horses purchased by the Army for the 300–400 mile [500–650 kilometre] patrols carried out by the unit, Katherine, 1942. *(AWM P02499.002)*



Sergeant WL Lavington of the NAOU breaks a mare to the saddle for use by unit personnel, September 1943. (*AWM 057431*)



Men of the Australian Defence Canteens Service stack bags of sugar in their bulk store, Darwin, September 1943. (AWM 057006)



A squad of Melville Islanders, enlisted into the Royal Australian Navy for special duties including locating stranded airmen and Japanese mines, on parade near Darwin, December 1943. (*AWM 062344*)



Members of the 11th Infantry Battalion and the 11th Works and Parks Forestry Platoon stack beams and feed timber on to a docking saw bench, Darwin, July 1944. *(AWM 067449)*



Private HT Griffin (left) and Private WG Cole, 16th Infantry Battalion, fire Bren guns from the hip during a unit exercise, 53 Mile Point, Stuart Highway, July 1944. (AWM 067797)



The 'Ponds' hockey team of the 69th Australian Women's Army Service barracks, who played against the 'Crocks' team from the same barracks, Adelaide River, August 1944. (AWM 068952)





Private N Heidke wheels cases of lettuce from the paddock to the packing shed at the Coomalie Farm of the 1st Farm Company, Darwin, September 1944. (AWM 069130)



Members of the 1st Field Company, Australian Engineers, excavate a pipeline during construction of a weir to dam water for elevated tanks at Paraparap, Howard Springs, September 1944. (AWM 081111)



Members of the 11th Infantry Battalion relax during a 10-day break from routine, Lee Point, October 1944. (AWM 081524)



A signalwoman tunes a No. 4 set at a receiving and transmitting centre, Headquarters, Northern Territory Force, Katherine, April 1945. (*AWM 088627*)



A Catalina of No. 43 Squadron RAAF taxis to its mooring buoy after returning from a mine laying operation in enemy territory, Darwin, May 1945. *(AWM NWA0902)*



Newly repatriated Australian Imperial Force prisoners of war get their first sight of Australia from the window of a RAAF Liberator aircraft, Darwin, September 1945. *(AWM NWA1025)*



Australian servicemen and women, some of whom were the last to leave the Northern Territory, line the decks of HMAS *Westralia* as she departs Darwin for the southern states, March 1946. (AWM 126013)



Nine of the Japanese prisoners charged with war crimes at the Japanese War Criminal Trials in Darwin march towards the courtroom escorted by a member of 12/40th Battalion, March 1946. *(AWM NWA 1062)*



*At the coastal guns, in the A.A. Posts, at the searchlights, in the camps, the men of Australia's northern army, the Northern Territory Force, stand ready for anything the Jap can turn on. And while they wait – that menacing force, trained to the minute, strong and resolute – they know that they are guarding Australia's Front Door. It will not be opened.<sup>12</sup>*



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