

Introduction

*“No single incident in my life has affected me more than that raid,
a disaster of a magnitude and ferocity that is hard to describe.”*

Commander Herb Kriloff (USN, retired)

It was not surprising that Darwin was attacked on 19 February 1942. But it was the ferocity of the attack that was so shocking, and this has led to the raid having a peculiar enduring interest for Australians. The very fact that, after many weeks of intense warfare in the Pacific, it was the lonely outpost of Darwin that received the attention of the mighty Pearl Harbor attackers is striking. As no invasion followed, what was the reason for this? Was Darwin really of such vital strategic importance?

For historians the Darwin story also contains a unique peculiarity. A very short time after the raid, a Royal Commission under Justice Lowe was appointed to investigate all aspects of the raid, including the preparedness and actions of both the services and civilians. It was remarkable that the commission began hearings in Darwin just two weeks after the assault. Witnesses were filmed but assured their statements would remain secret. Adding to the tense atmosphere, during long hours the hearings were often interrupted by air raid warnings. After several days it was re-convened in Melbourne. The transcripts of evidence run to almost 1,000 pages, and represent an invaluable historical resource.

For writers the Lowe transcripts are a ready source of high drama. There are dozens of colourful characters, from Generals and Air Vice-Marsals to humble sailors and labourers. Each of these witnesses had their own particular circumstances, and there are petty intrigues galore. When crafted by skilled writers, the Lowe evidence can be turned into something akin to a sweeping historic novel, played out against the background of a great and violent event. In this way the Darwin raid stories have become part of Australian folklore.

However, there is a danger that the Lowe transcripts create the impression that all aspects of the Darwin raid are perfectly recorded and readily accessible. The respected Professor Alan Powell, in his 1988 work *The Shadow's Edge*, says as much: “The tale of the raids on Darwin that day has been twice told at length, by Lockwood with acumen, by Hall with hyperbole, and needs no general retelling.” Powell is referring to Douglas Lockwood’s *Australia’s Pearl Harbor* (1966) and Timothy Hall’s *Darwin 1942* (1980). Lockwood did not have access to the Lowe transcripts, but knew the general contents. His is also a first-hand account as he was present during the raid, and he had the benefit of interviewing many

eyewitnesses. Hall wrote with full access to the transcripts, as well as drawing heavily on Lockwood. In Hall's category can also be added the recent work by Peter Grose: *An Awkward Truth* (2009). All of these books have appealed to mainstream readers and appear to have sold widely.

We have been researching in areas akin to, and including, the Darwin raids for many years. Author Lewis penned a work on the Japanese submarine sunk outside the harbour in 1997, later re-issued as *Darwin Submarine I-124*, and a bestselling "tourist" publication entitled *A War at Home* in 1999. He is also the author of many articles on the raids, and actively researched aspects such as the harbour ship and aircraft wrecks for *Wrecks in Darwin Waters* (1991). Together we wrote *Zero Hour in Broome* about the nine Zero fighter raid in March 1942 which killed 86 people – another chapter of Australian history which has remained outside of the country's consciousness.

But even as well-versed as we became in the story, many aspects of the Darwin attacks struck us both as puzzling. All of the timelines given couldn't be right – they ranged from 40 minutes to well over an hour. Many accounts portray the air above the harbour as full of aircraft for a long time – but why would this be so, given that 152 out of the 188 enemy machines were bombers, which once they'd delivered their ordnance should depart? Were two warnings given by radio – and both ignored? That sounded strange. Even recent works have repeated gross errors: for example, we are told the *Benjamin Franklin* was attacked in the harbour, when a quick Google search shows this "ghost ship" was actually a Norwegian vessel sunk a year before in the Atlantic. The Australian Official Histories also contain various inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

This book is an attempt to provide a much-needed factual guide to the raid drawing on all sources now available. It is an analysis and explanation of events from a military point of view. As such, it is a different approach to the works above which rely more on personal experiences. Much new material has been examined, the most important of which has been Japanese sources. These provide a fresh new perspective to the subject, free of an Australian-centric approach. Indeed, from a Japanese wartime point of view there are several aspects of the Darwin raid that made it a highly significant achievement.

There are a myriad of civilian subjects and characters which are outside the scope of this analysis. These include the stories of Administrator Abbott, Judge Wells, the wharf labourers, the North Australian Workers Union, the police, the Air Raid Precautions organisation; the evacuation of thousands of people, mainly women and children, from the towns of the north once the Japanese entered the war; looting of property after the first raids; and the fate of the indigenous population during the war. These subjects are important and complex in their own way. We

did not feel we could do them justice by including them as a corollary of a military analysis. The civilian aspects alone are worthy of their own specialised study.

The authors are grateful to a large number of persons who have assisted with this work. Probably no one person has done as much for wartime research in the Northern Territory as Bob Alford. A long-time resident of Darwin, Bob now resides in Thailand. Bob spent many years engaged in military history research in Darwin, most of it focused on aviation. After a career in the RAAF, he was the Historian for the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory (AHSNT), which operates the Darwin aviation museum. Among the exhibits there are pilot Toyoshima's Zero, which crashed on Melville Island after the first raid. The historic RAAF water tower/control tower is also preserved there.

Bob also worked as a heritage consultant. He has personally visited and investigated almost every known wartime air crash site in the area, and his second edition of *Darwin's Air War* is a vital reference work to anyone seeking to understand the air war which began on 15 February with a combat action between a Japanese aircraft and an American fighter outside Darwin. The air war continued for two years, and Bob's work is the most comprehensive account of it available. Scores of Northern Territory government signs explaining historic wartime sites were drafted by Bob, and in this way he continues to educate many thousands of tourists every year. During his work in the 1980s and 1990s Bob was fortunate to meet and correspond with many important veterans. In this way he has been an invaluable living link to the likes of P-40 pilot Bob McMahan. He has contributed in an invaluable way on many of the aviation aspects of the work; provided insights into other thematic areas, and been an honest critic. We are immensely grateful for his help, although any errors which we have made are ours alone.

By 2012 when we finished this work there were precious few Darwin veterans still alive. The authors have been privileged to have been in contact with two veterans in particular: Jack Mulholland, who was an army AA gunner, and Herb Kriloff, an American naval officer. While both men lived long and rich lives, the Darwin raid had a special impact and both penned their own memoirs. Jack passed away in 2012.

Other people whom we thank (in alphabetical order) include: Craig Bellamy, Gordon Birkett, John Bradford, Ron and Pat Lewis, Darwin Military Museum Curator Simon Loveday in Japan, John Perryman at the SeaPower Centre-Australia; Alan Powell at Charles Darwin University, Phil Vabre, Owen Veale, Dr Peter Williams, and Haruki Yoshida.

Dr Tom Lewis
Peter Ingman
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