

CHAPTER 6

THE ARMY STORY

The Army was the smallest service present when Tracy struck in terms of personnel, with a strength of 160, made up of essential elements around which further numbers could be built. Despite the initial efforts being carried largely by the Navy and Air Force, in sheer tonnage moved to help Darwin post-disaster the Army comes out on top.

The initial Army presence was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel RB Rogers. The individual units consisted of:

	Officers	Other ranks
Headquarters, 7 Military District	11	47
121 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and Training Troop		2
125 Signal Squadron	1	13
Detachment – 7 Signal Regiment	2	14
711 Supply Company	2	25
7 Transport and Movement Group	1	19
Darwin Workshop Platoon	1	22
Totals	18	142

No report has been located which shows the number of Army dependents, but no Army members or dependents were killed or seriously injured in the storm. One Army member, injured enough to warrant specialised medical attention, was taken to Darwin Hospital.

Immediate duties

One officer was ordered to take a measure of the damage the next morning. The Army liaison officer at the RAAF base was released to return to the barracks around 0630. He left his radio set and operator behind and took about an hour to make his way approximately five kilometres between the two bases “driving over roof tops on the road, along footpaths and through people’s yards.” The damage to the barracks was rated at severe, with nothing habitable, and with “49% of buildings unusable or damaged beyond repair”.

Army initially supplied some assistance to policing, without actually taking on police powers themselves:

... Commander 7th Military District will accept the request. Pers. will not carry arms. There will be one police officer with each group carrying arms. Troops are to assist police in each area in any task they may request.

Army soldiers were used to guard petrol depots, but unarmed, and alongside NT Police members. The Army also provided accommodation for up to 100 policemen but noted that the quality of the living quarters “... will be rough”.