

Book Reviews



CARRIER ATTACK DARWIN -1942 THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO AUSTRALIA'S OWN PEARL HARBOUR

by Dr Tom Lewis and Peter Ingman

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There have been a number of accounts of the Imperial Japanese Navy raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942. Douglas Lockwood's 1966 *Australia's Pearl Harbour* was one of the first. In 1980 Tim Hall wrote *Darwin 1942* and in 1988 Alan Powell produced a scholarly account in *The Shadow's Edge, Australia's Northern War*. In 2009 Peter Grose wrote *An Awkward Truth, the bombing of Darwin*.

Lewis and Ingman's *Carrier Attack* is the first to concentrate entirely on the military aspects of the attack, and this is much to the advantage of the book. The authors carefully define the task and what is outside their scope – civilian administration and evacuation, for instance, is excluded. They concentrate on 'an analysis and an explanation of events from a military point of view.' They are right to do so for there is much, both strategic and tactical, that has not been explained about the raid. *Carrier*

Attack contains the most detailed and accurate analysis of the military events of the bombing written so far.

Lewis, a naval officer who served in the Iraq War, and Ingman, an expert on World War II aircraft, have collaborated before. In 2010 they published *Zero Hour in Broome, the untold story of the attacks on northwest Australia in 1942*. In this fine account the authors honed their skills and in *Carrier Attack* they apply the same forensic approach to their topic. Readers familiar with *Zero Hour* will not be disappointed by their latest effort.

The early chapters of *Carrier Attack* provide background to the events of 19 February. They deal with topics like the strategic importance of Darwin, and its relationship to the nearby war in Timor and the Dutch East Indies in early 1942. One of the best of the background chapters is an explanation of how flying operations were conducted by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Lewis and Ingman explain the nuts and bolts of launching 188 aircraft off four carriers to form one formation, as they did on 19 February, and something the authors point out no-one else but the Japanese could do at the time. They go on to show how Japanese intelligence about the target modified their plans and their selection of aircraft types and bombs for the Darwin raid.

Then *Carrier Attack* shifts to a thematic format, keeping the events of 19 February 1942 in chronological order as far as is reasonable, but departing from chronology when necessary. The Japanese fighters shooting down of the United States Army Air Force's P-40s, other Allied air operations, the bomber attack on the harbour and the airfields, the USN in the harbour, the follow up attack by Japanese land based aircraft, each receives a chapter to itself.

Seventeen appendices covers such topics as what remains may be seen today, the finding of the wreck of *USS Peary* in the harbour and precise details of ships and aircraft lost. One appendix deals with the myth of the death toll cover-up. The authors argue that there was no cover-up and it is not possible that, as is often claimed, the death toll from the raid is a great deal higher than the official figure of 243. In fact they provide good evidence that it is probably a little lower, at 235.

Much of what is new in *Carrier Attack* is drawn from Japanese sources. It is pleasing to see this trend in Australian military history, for if we do not consult the records of both sides in a battle we can hardly expect to get the story right. A dozen Japanese sources are used, most importantly the Japanese official history, known as the *Senshi Shosho*, and combat logs (*kodo chosho*) of the IJN carrier air groups.

Carrier Attack is the most detailed account of the first raid on Darwin yet written – this is also the opinion of Dr Hiroyuki Shindo of the National Institute of Defence Studies in Tokyo. Shindo has spoken at several WWII conferences in Australia and he recently wrote to me about the book:

"Lewis and Ingman's book provided a very detailed account of the unfolding of the Japanese carrier air attack on Port Darwin on February 19, 1942. I thought the authors also did a very good job of explaining the significance of the Darwin attack within the larger context of the Pacific War in 1942. The use of maps and photographs was excellent, and the appendices, which included technical information on the aircraft and ships involved, and an interesting comparison of the Pearl Harbor and Darwin attacks, were very informative. The discussion of the many myths on the Australian side regarding the Darwin attack were especially helpful for an overseas reader, since such interesting details are rarely found in accounts of the operation written in Japan."

Dr Peter Williams lives in Canberra and has written several books on the Second World War in the Pacific.