

# THE BOMBING OF DARWIN

## A defining moment in Australia's history

**On the 19th of February 1942 an event occurred which would change Australia's history.**

Australia's most northern capital was bombed by enemy forces. The official government death toll was more than 240 with hundreds of casualties, but it's a figure many veterans say is nowhere near the mark. Nine ships were sunk in Darwin Harbour and up to 15 others were damaged.



For the first time, the effects of a war that had raged for the most part in countries on the other side of the world, was now being felt on home soil.

The events of 19 February 1942 were as shocking and calculated as the attack on Pearl Harbour just weeks before. It brought the war home to a country previously untouched by foreign conflict.

The first raid on Darwin confirmed the worst fears of Australia's political and military leaders. The nation faced the most dreadful emergency of its history.

In the initial attack on Darwin at 9.58am, there were 188 Japanese planes. A greater number of bombs were dropped over Darwin on that day than were used in the attack on Pearl Harbour. These were the most serious of at least 64 air raids on the Top End of Australia which continued until 12 November 1943.

Despite its drama and importance, the impact of the Bombing of Darwin and the war fought over northern Australia often remains overshadowed by subsequent events in Australia.

The devastation suffered by Territorian families was profound, but it also highlighted the tenacity of those living in the Territory as well as the Australian spirit. The rebuilding of Darwin took courage and commitment which helped shape the city into what it is today.

Remnants of WWII are still visible at many locations across Darwin, Katherine and Adelaide River. These sites offer visitors a chance to pay homage to both the heroes who fought on the



frontline and the Territory's multi-cultural community affected by the bombing raids. Asian, European and Indigenous people worked alongside the allied servicemen as Darwin was attacked over an 18 month period.

The evacuees who returned and the wide community came together to rebuild Darwin after the war, and many stories of tragedy and survival have been shared during the years in which Darwin has grown into the cosmopolitan, tropical city it is today.

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## Countdown of events

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| <b>8 December 1941</b>  | Japanese Imperial Forces attacked Kota Bahru and Pearl Harbour (7 December local time in Hawaii).<br><br>One hour after the attack by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour, Prime Minister John Curtin of Australia declared that "from one hour ago, Australia has been at war with the Japanese Empire".                          |
| <b>10 December 1941</b> | British warships, <i>Prince of Wales</i> and <i>Repulse</i> , are attacked and destroyed off Malaya.   |
| <b>16 December 1941</b> | Evacuation of non-essential civilian women and children from Darwin ordered. By 18 February more than 2,000 people were evacuated. The normal civilian population during that era was around 5,000.  |
| <b>15 February 1942</b> | The British fortress of Singapore falls to Japanese forces who then prepare to invade Timor on 20 February. An Allied convoy leaves Darwin to reinforce Timor. Japanese naval task forces begin sailing into position between Darwin and Timor as a platform for air attacks to neutralise Darwin as a possible allied base. |
| <b>16 February 1942</b> | Heavy air attack forces the Allied convoy to turn back and return to Darwin.   |
| <b>18 February 1942</b> | The Allied convoy arrives back in Darwin.  |
| <b>19 February 1942</b> |  |
| <b>8.00am</b>           | Japanese aircraft (36 Zero Fighters, 71 Dive Bombers and 81 Level Bombers) commence their mission.   |
| <b>9.15m</b>            | Japanese aircraft are seen over Melville Island and then again over Bathurst Island at 9.35am. Warnings are sent by wireless but are misinterpreted. Allied Catalina aircraft are attacked and Bathurst Island airstrip is strafed.  |
| <b>9.58am</b>           | Japanese aircraft drop the first bombs and commence their attack on Darwin Harbour and the city surrounds.   |
| <b>12 noon</b>          | Second wave of 54 Bombers attack the Darwin RAAF Base area.  |

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