Remembering Territory families

World War II – frontline

On 22 March 1942 Japanese planes flew as far south as Katherine and residents there saw first hand the effects of war. Kath Mills recollected the events vividly:

But there certainly was a build up and we were told at that early stage at school to listen to the siren. And when the siren went we had to all run home. And that was the sort of build up to the war that I recall. Not knowing what a war was. We never knew what a war was...

I told you about the Army moving in overnight. And it looked like mushrooms had grown down our street – with all the tents, you know? Then those men were instructing the house- the people with properties around. They dug trenches in our yards and when there was a siren, the drill was to all go down into the trenches...

Yes, and it was like an L-shape.... And that's what we were being warned about, and they'd give a couple of dummy runs. But my mum would never let us go down into the trenches. She just thought, and I think about the horrible thing now too, I mean if there was an accident and we died all they'd have to do was cover us over. You know what I mean? I mean, yeah, that's practical and everything, but oh, when you think about it. It's horrible eh? To think about. But yeah, but when it did actually happen and the war did happen and the planes did come – everybody ran for the bush! No one went into the trenches! One poor old lady did try – she got stuck. She was a huge woman and got stuck... it must have been a horrible feeling...

I remember the planes coming in and we were told we had to go through this exercise – and we all ran down to the billabong. The silly thing about it, later on we found we were going towards them because they were bombing the aerodrome.

They were trying to knock out the aerodrome and the big railway bridge, well we were nearer to the railway bridge from where we lived and we would have been in the line of fire if you think of guns coming down the main street of Katherine from the bridge. They could have just taken all those houses with the shrapnel and goodness knows what. But they were specifically aiming for the bridge because they thought that that was the only source of transportation for Darwin. They were going to disable Darwin by cutting off the bridge because they thought that would cut us off from the southern states and all the supplies. That was in line with the railway and everything. So they were targeting that. We actually saw the dogfight...
Poor old thing, the old missionary man and he got shell shock and he was running around and he had a white shirt. The police, the soldiers said, ‘Halt or you’ll be shot!’ They had to warn you. But that man was oblivious, no wonder, he was shaking like a leaf. And the Army sang out, ‘Someone get that man!’ Because white, you never wear white because it’s more easily distinctive on the ground and they could see where people were.

So my Dad ran out and grabbed him, and rugby tackled him and pulled him out into the cover of the bushes where we were...

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