Introduction

The official history claims that the first raid on Darwin was “one of the most devastating air raids of the Second World War” and compares it to Coventry that was described by Churchill in his memoirs. “Their Finest Hour Volume 2” (p.307) describes it as “the most devastating raid which we sustained”.

In retrospect the first Darwin raid was in fact one of the three or four heaviest single air raids sustained by the Allies in the war. Four hundred were killed during the German raid against Coventry on 14 November 1941. The city was actually subjected to not just one raid but was attacked by a constant stream of 500 bombers throughout the night. The Japanese sank 18 ships at Pearl Harbour, destroyed 64 aircraft and killed 2000 people. At Darwin, 25 ships were sunk or damaged, 29 aircraft were destroyed with 242 people killed and 302 injured in a single attack by 188 aircraft (author adds 54 bombers two hours later making 242 and unofficial killed and injured much higher). The initial attack on Manila (Clarke Field) on 8 December by 54 bombers, followed by a strafing run with Zeros, resulted in 100 killed with 252 wounded. The first raid on Singapore on 8 December 1941 by 36 bombers left 61 dead and 133 injured.

The above is from Australian Defence Force Journal No.122 Jan/Feb 1997 Page 77 in article on Darwin 1942 by Air Commodore AD Garrison (Ret.).

See copy of above in Appendix (7).
My War Experience

By Stan Burrows

My first day in the army was 7 January 1942 at Georges Heights artillery training depot in Sydney. Six weeks later on 19 February 1942 I was on Active Service in Darwin. I was 18 years of age, conscripted, then enlisted in A.I.F 17 August 1942.

In that period of six weeks I had two days parade ground training, five days final leave, a day visiting a local coastal radar unit, several days outfitting and preparing for tropical service, over a weeks overland travel to Darwin arriving there on 1 February, further foot drill and sundry meaningless lectures at Larrakeyah Barracks, where I was based until 20 February.

I had volunteered for a new unit, secret in those days, which required persons to be trained in Radar to operate Radio Direction Finding equipment (RDF) for gun laying in anti aircraft (AA) units (G.L.) (1). Transfer to a forward area was immediate and promotion was assured. The personnel were chosen in early January 1942 and were to be dispatched forthwith to Darwin NT Anti Aircraft (AA) Batteries.

On leaving Sydney we travelled by train to Albury, changed trains for the different rail gauge to Melbourne and spent the night there in barracks. Our group increased by about thirty gunners who were obviously not wanted and discarded by Melbourne AA Batteries. It seemed strange that our group now of about fifty had been chosen for a new technical radio unit and no one had been asked about any radio background or experience. We travelled by train to Adelaide where we spent a couple of days in barracks. We then boarded the train for Alice Springs and on the way spent the night in tents at Terowie, another change in rail gauge, where we were required to fill our water bottles with cold tea for drinking when crossing the dry inland. Artesian water was available but it tasted and worked like Epsom Salts. Cattle drank it but their droppings were very loose!

At Alice Springs we spent overnight in tents and then boarded covered trucks for a 1000km trip on corrugated red dusty road to Birdum the start of the NT rail trip to Darwin about 500km. We overnighted in tents a couple of nights. Meals on the side of the road were prepared by “cooks” serving up tinned food. It was a battle to keep the enormous amount of flies off the food and get it into the mouth without them. The red dust on the road was so thick that the shirts and shorts we wore never lost traces of it even though they were washed regularly for months after. Anyone “taken short” between stops had to do the best they could out of the back of the moving truck amidst all the encouragement from the mob in the truck.
Alan Powell in “The Shadows Edge” describes the track (the Mt Isa route was not opened in our trip in early 1942. The sea routes were closed after first air raid 19/2/42)

“After the closing of the main sea routes to Darwin most of the supplies and the troops themselves had to go overland from the South. Two railways reached out from the main network of lines in southern and eastern Australia towards Darwin – Adelaide to Alice Springs and Townsville to Mt Isa. Both railheads were about 1000 kms short of Birdum, the southern terminus of the North Australian Railway. The locomotives and rolling stock being old and slow on narrow gauges. In between for most of 1942 lay nothing more than dirt tracks, badly corrugated surfaces, dusty, muddy and washed out in the wet season and seriously impeding military operations. Truck tyres, difficult to replace because of critical shortage of rubber were being worn out or destroyed. Crystallization and breakage of parts resulting from the severe vibrations rapidly destroyed trucks. To move troops, supplies and equipment overland was slow. Food always remained a problem in the Northern Territory. Army rations were mainly tinned or dried without much variation and often in short supply. Fruit and vegetables sent up from the south rarely arrived in fresh condition, if they were edible at all.”

We arrived in Birdum during the NT wet season. For the 500k rail to Darwin we boarded ancient cattle trucks (2) covered with tarpaulins which bellied down and filled with rain water. Previous “passengers” had jabbed their bayonets into the tarps to release the water. The nights and days were spent dodging the water from above and the water spraying up between the gaps in the floorboards.

We arrived in Darwin on 1 February 1942 in the early hours of the morning in a tropical storm. We were taken to Larrakeyah barracks and accommodated in a large upstairs room where all the windows had been left open and the floor flooded. We had to remove the water before settling down on the concrete floor. For breakfast we lined up with our plates expecting a decent meal in barracks. It was disappointing. An introduction to very poor meals for the next year or so. At the serving section there was a huge bowl of boiled eggs. I asked if I could have one and was told to help myself to as many as I liked. It turned out that if several were picked it would be lucky to get one that was not bad! Supplies came by ship and were generally tinned and preserved and sometimes exposed to tropical heat. Weevils were common in porridge and meat from the local meat works was generally “going off” by the time it reached the troops.

Our RDF equipment hadn’t arrived and it never ever did whilst we were there. In research in recent years a copy of a Chiefs of Staff Paper (3) (most secret) dated 19 January 1942 on “Resources Available” stated “we have no stocks of GL (Anti Aircraft Gun Laying) or LC equipment and rate of local production is very limited.” (The first RDF equipment (GL) did not arrive in Darwin until 12 months later! (But not for us). Our RDF equipment was to come from US Forces in the Philippines but the RAAF claimed it and converted it to long range radar. Our volunteering for this unit was an absolute waste of time.
On 19 February 1942 Darwin (4) was a town of mixed civil population numbering about 2000 after the evacuation of a similar number. Briefly the events of that day were:

1. An attack by 188 enemy aircraft being the same Japanese task force that devastated Pearl Harbour (5). An additional 54 land based bombers attacked two hours later. 62 air raids followed in the Northern Territory in 1942/43
2. The wharf was destroyed, 8 ships were sunk and 15 damaged (6A&B). The RAAF base was destroyed and the town badly damaged.
3. 243 people were killed and 400 wounded. Unofficial reports give much larger casualties. It is the greatest disaster in Australian history in terms of lives lost on the mainland (7A&B).

Many bodies were washed up on the shores of the harbour, however, mostly of seamen abandoning sunken or damaged vessels. Some were badly burnt from burning oil on the surface of the water.

The well marked Hospital Ship “Manunda” was bombed with a loss of twelve killed and twenty-eight wounded. The Darwin Public Hospital with Red Crosses on the roof was bomb damaged. The attacking Japanese Naval Task Force of 188 aircraft came to a position about 370k from Darwin. The force consisted of 4 aircraft carriers, 4 heavy cruisers and 9 destroyers (5). The additional 54 land based bombers came from occupied islands north of Australia.

The Official History claims that the first raid on Darwin was “one of the most devastating single air raids of the Second World War” (See Introduction). The Japanese Air leader Commander Fuchido is reported to have said years later “It seems hardly worthy of us. If ever a sledge hammer was used to crack an egg it was then.” See Australia’s Pearl Harbour by Douglas Lockwood 1966.

The air defence on 19 February 1942 was negligible. The few RAAF aircraft on the ground were destroyed. Of 5 visiting US Kittyhawks on the ground and 5 preparing to land, all but one were quickly destroyed. There was no other defence from the air. The only operational ground defence was provided by sixteen 3.7” heavy AA guns and two 3” AA guns. Twelve of the 3.7” and the two 3” were manned by the 14 Australian AA Battery. The other four were manned by the 2nd Australian AA Battery, that had been formed in Darwin with some personnel from 14th battery. These were the only AA units defending the Darwin area on that day. Each gunsite had a .303 Lewis Machine gun for light AA defence. Lewis guns from both batteries were also used in defence of a harbourside depot of oil tanks. There was no early warning radar and no radar equipment on the guns. 1032 high explosive rounds were fired from the 3.7” guns on that day. 6000 rounds were fired from the Lewis Machine guns.

The 3.7” guns (8) had been installed in 1940 but the essential fire control instruments had only recently arrived before the first raid. The gun crews had
been drilling on World War 1, 3" guns. The first time the gun crews fired live ammunition from the 3.7"s were at the attacking Japanese aircraft. It was also found that the powder burning fuses after storage in tropical conditions were highly inaccurate (further fuse adjustments had to be made).

Apart from the US Destroyer Peary, which was sunk with a loss of 88 lives, there were a variety of weapons on a few light naval vessels. Other units in the area engaged low flying aircraft with machine guns and rifle fire.

The 242 attacking aircraft carried 114,600 kgs of bombs being 83% of the tonnage (146,400 kgs) of bombs and torpedoes it had unloaded at Pearl Harbour, a far more significant target. The number of bombs dropped at Darwin on 19 February 1942 was two and a half times higher than it had been at Pearl Harbour (683 versus 271); many smaller bombs being employed in the attack on the RAAF Base – refer S.M.Herald 10.2.92 by David Jenkins, after research in Australia and Japan.

Enemy invasion was taken for granted after such a devastating attack on the Australian mainland. Within a few weeks after their attack on Pearl Harbour, the Japanese army had not been stopped in its occupation of Malaya, Singapore and their advance to islands north of Australia.

Emergency rations were issued to troops consisting of a few biscuits and a tin of beef plus ten rounds of .303 rifle ammunition. The threat of invasion remained for the remainder of 1942 and early 1943. 62 air raids followed in the NT in 1942/43 but not as large as the first raid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Formations</th>
<th>No. of Raids</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) 21 to 27 bombers escorted by 15 to 21 fighters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) 12 to 18 bombers (1 escorted by 9 fighters)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) 6 to 9 bombers (some with escorts of 3 to 12 fighters)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) 20 to 25 fighters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) 3 bombers and 8 fighters</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) 3 bombers or less at night during July to October 1942</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
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After the first raid most of the daylight bombing attacks were from high level bombers at height above 20,000 feet (6,100 meters). The only Army units that could engage the enemy were Heavy AA, which kept the Japanese at a height for less accurate bombing.

To quote from an article “The North Australian Air War 1942-44” in the Australian War Memorial Journal in April 1986:

“The AA were the only ground forces actually engaged in the North Australian air war.”

“Darwin was probably, after Port Moresby, the most frequently bombed allied base in the South Pacific.”
“The formations which attacked Darwin were in general much larger than those that attacked Port Moresby.”
“The AA played an important role throughout the campaign by ensuring bombers remained at an altitude from which accurate bombing became very difficult. The Australian gunners were very effective in this regard.”
“The Allied defence of Northern Australia must be judged a success given that the Allied air forces destroyed 174 aircraft during the 29 months after February 1942, losing only 68 Kittyhawks and Capstans themselves.” (Capstans are Spitfires). Most of the enemy aircraft shot down were bombers with crews of about seven, accounting for many hundreds of enemy aircrew.

There were a total of 32 awards for gallantry to Army, Navy, Airforce and Civilian Services. Members of the 14th and 2nd AA Batteries were awarded 2 Military Medals, 1 Member of British Empire and 2 Mentioned in Dispatches (9). Probably the most decorated Army units of the NT Defence. The 2 Military Medals were the first Australian soldiers to receive decorations for gallantry against an enemy on the Australian mainland – Gunner W.T.Hudson and Lance Bombadier F.R.Wombey.

Larrakeyah Barracks was undamaged. For those of us who were located there it was a matter of taking cover wherever available. We were on the parade ground at the time when formations of aircraft appeared overhead. Someone said something about the Yanks arriving but he was mistaken when they started to release bombs. We had rifles but no ammunition. We had never fired the rifles anyway and they would have been fairly useless against aircraft. We watched helplessly as low flying aircraft swept over the barracks with guns blazing at targets. Bombers dropped sticks of bombs hitting nearby buildings. The explosions were accompanied by the sound of tearing timber as their targets were destroyed. We waited to be the next target. Luckily we weren’t.

Darwin Fortress Area was on a peninsular. Units such as AA and Coastal guns manned fixed defences in that area and remained at their positions. Other units not required in the fortress area could have been cut off in the event of an enemy landing. Several months earlier plans for prearranged positions south of the peninsular were made for those not required in that area in the event of threatened invasion. After such a devastating enemy attack invasion appeared imminent. Advance Headquarters was established at Noonamah 42k south and Rear Headquarters at Adelaide River 113k south. No escape arrangements seem to be made for the personnel of anti aircraft or coastal guns left on the peninsular in the event of an invasion.

On the night of the 19 February 1942 troops in the barracks moved out to their new positions. Our group, not attached or known to anyone else, arose to find the entire place vacated. We hung around until about midday hoping for someone with authority to appear particularly with some food. Early afternoon an Artillery Captain drove in. After inquiry as to whom we were and what we were
doing there he drove off and returned sometime later with extra transport that distributed our group into the various anti aircraft gunsites. I went to the “Oval” gunsite at the side of the harbour opposite the Darwin Hotel.

Being new recruits we naturally copped the unpopular jobs. The worst was the sanitary cart, which was a pan service, some without lids, carted on the back of a flat top truck on corrugated roads to a tip where large health maggots teemed across the ground, was a real experience. We used to sit on the front mudguards of the truck hanging onto the headlights.

I, with one or two others, were required to “take post” during air raids in a grandstand adjacent to the guns storing several hundred rounds of H.E. shells. If the guns ran out of ammunition we were required to run shells across to the guns. The grandstand had a low stone front wall, timber roof used for seating and galvanised iron walls. Sticks of bombs bursting in the vicinity shook the dust inside the old building. If it had been hit we would have been “missing in action”. We soon got a crash course in gun drill and became part of a gun detachment. The first live ammunition I ever handled for firing was against attacking enemy aircraft in a 3.7” gunpit.

As ammunition numbers in a gun detachment, our duty was to carry the cartridge case and shell, about 100cm long and weighing about 26kg, from the ammunition racks, place them in a fuze setter and hand them up to another gunner who placed them in a loading tray. The tray was then pushed across to be loaded in the breach of the gun. Another gunner pulled on a rope and ran the ammunition into the breach ready for firing. The gun was then fired when ordered. Cartridge cases were automatically ejected from the gun onto the floor of the gunpit after firing. They were too hot to handle and had to be kicked out of the way to the sides of the gunpit. Gun crews did not have ear protection. The firing of the gun caused part deafness for quite some time after “cease firing”. As a result, ammunition handlers saw very little of the outside action in the air raid as a gun was capable of firing 12 rounds per minute. They were busy but some generally managed to get a glimpse of the formation of the attacking aircraft until they came into range of the guns. As the angle of the gun increased it indicated whether the bombers were coming directly overhead and we could be in the bombing path. The only indication of what was happening was the nearness of bomb bursts and machine gun fire. The average age of the gunners was 18-20 years.

We got to know the engine tone of the various aircraft using our area and could identify them without seeing them. Lockhead Hudsons, Kittyhawks, Beaufighters, Dakotas etc. The Japanese bombers had a very distinct high tone of their own.

Personnel on AA instruments in the Command Post followed the target. The Height Finder reported heights to the Predictor that calculated the necessary
information to burst a shell onto a target. This information was transferred by cable to dials on the guns for the gun layers and fuse setters to follow. When the shell was fired it activated the fuse in the shell to burst at a certain height. On the order “Fire” the four guns would salvo and from there on load and fire as efficiently as possible until the order “Cease Firing”. One of the best results was when our gunsite at Fanny Bay, shot down on their first salvo, four enemy bombers of a formation of nine.

At first we relied on our own air sentry lookouts to sight enemy formations. On sighting he would ring an alarm which was a steel rod striking a hanging piece of metal. When this happened it was a matter of immediately stopping whatever we were doing, grab a tin hat and respirator and run like hell for our position on the gun. There were regular instances of being caught in the shower and running naked or hastily departing a seat on the toilet and supporting trousers on the way. With various types of work going on around the gunsite, if steel hit steel everybody immediately froze as if it was the start of our alarm system going off. After a dead quiet pause work would resume. One day somebody said in a voice audible to all “Its on” which caused an unnecessary stampede to the guns. Everyone abused him.

Later on the Air Force installed long range radar which picked up formation of bombers 200kms away which was about an hours warning. Then it was a matter of “taking post” at a more leisurely pace but the waiting induced many cigarettes as new distances, directions and flight information were reported by the radar. We did have time for what we used to call “a nervous pee” before hand.

We worked as labourers in the tropical heat and humidity of the wet season filling sandbags etc and preparing defences for future raids or invasion, which was highly probably at the time. The Japanese would attack a place then invade.

A few of us were rostered at times as guards on the main gate to the gunsite. Having had no previous rifle drill we were shown in a few minutes how to “Slope Arms”, “Order Arms” and “Present Arms”. The major could hardly hide his disgust when entering the main gate at the antics of the sentry trying to manipulate his rifle into a hardly recognisable “Present Arms” for his benefit.

Food was very scarce. There was a store of rice somewhere and some meat. I think it was for about six weeks that we had servings of rice and meat three times a day. No bread or butter etc. Rice for dessert may have been sweetened at times. Darwin was supplied by ship. Due to the many wrecks in the harbour after the first bombing and threats of further air raids, ships of any size were kept out of the harbour. Some small ships, smaller than Manly ferries, did their best to keep up supplies for the Armed Services. These ships operated from the East Coast of Australia, generally Cairns and sometimes had part Naval or Airforce escort or ran independently. Supplies were always a problem.
About mid 1942 it must have been discovered in 14 AA Battery records that I and some others should have been at 22 AA Battery (West Australians) at Batchelor and we were marched out forthwith. On arrival there we were again treated as raw recruits despite the gun training and experience at 14 Battery. So it was back to some basic training as well as being on the gun crew of their 3” guns (Mobile) (12). 22 Battery (11) had gunsites at Batchelor, Coomalie Creek and our troop at Finnis River all consisting of 2 guns each. Guns were towed by Marmon Herrington All Wheel Drive (12). Our gunsites were miles into the bush surrounding Batchelor airfield and isolated from all other troops. This was the AA protection of the airfield as well as some bofors on the airfield.

Finnis River was the habitat of pythons. I was on guard with a mate one bright moonlight night in an area of tall thin saplings throwing shadows. I noticed a long shadow without a sapling at either end, about 3 meters away. I looked away and back again to check and it had moved about 30cms. The ground was as hard as concrete covered in dead leaves but as it moved not a sound was heard. I pointed it out to my mate who went off and got a lantern whilst I kept watch on it. When he returned the light caused the snake to coil up with its head about 30cms from the ground. We shot it because most of our troops were bedded on the ground and wouldn't have appreciated the snake as a bedmate. It was about three and a quarter metres long. Other pythons were found in the area whilst we were there.

It was also at Finnis River we found a waterhole in a creek with trees overhanging and entrance through long grass. On approach, lizard like reptiles scurried up trees. Someone called them “fishgators” so we ignored them. It was beautiful in the pool, cool and refreshing. Some aborigines approached one day. We asked them about the fishgators. “No fishgators” was the reply. “Thems baby crocs.” I think we left after that.

From Finnis River we moved our 2 guns to Rum Jungle. Our troop consisted of 1 Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant, 5 Bombardiers, 5 Lance Bombardiers and 34 gunners (11). The food was terrible, short in supply, no fresh vegetables, and no refrigeration in tropical heat resulting in constant diarrhea. There was always someone to talk to at any hour of the night in the open trench latrine – some spent the night sitting on the crosspole not game to leave it. The crosspole accommodated about six participants. We sat like birds on a log side by side. Whilst on this subject I will describe other “conveniences”. A small hole would be dug, refilled, a pipe hammered in and a funnel placed on top. A Pissaphone! Very hygienic. Camps that had a sanitary pan service were issued with seats and surrounds for the pan referred to as “Boxes, thunder, troops for the use of.” An official term.

At Rum Jungle the dingoes were attracted to our kitchen at night seeking food. If they made a kill of some animal in the bush they would howl most of the night.
There was a lot of hard work with the mobile guns. We changed our positions every couple of months. Gun pits had to be constructed, complete with ammunition in racks. Command Post had to be constructed for Height Finder, Predictor and Command Post Officer. Camp had to be set up (tents), kitchen, mess and sanitary pits, etc. Trenches had to be dug around the tents sufficient to keep out flooding from the rain. Initially we slept on the ground on a palliasse (straw mattress) with a mosquito net tucked in all round to keep out the mosquitoes and other creepy crawleys etc including snakes. Later we could make a collapsible bed out of wire netting and tree saplings. It was better than being on the ground. The abundance of mosquitoes at night was unbelievable. The light from a match for a smoke would attract them giving a pins and needle effect on the face. Just after we were settled we would move to another position and start again.

In the wet season the body was absolutely drenched with perspiration running like water. Our daily dress was hat, shorts, boots, no socks or underwear. A tank took out water to us on a truck and deposited it in ex petrol 44 gallon petrol drums. We would wash in ex kerosene drums. It was not until we got to Hughes Field later in the year that we were trucked in batches to a shower attached to the water pipe alongside the North/South Road.

Dermatitis and Prickly Heat were a problem. If so it was treated with Triple Dye. Some of the boys were covered in it at times but no time off work. I once had dermatitis under each armpit and my arms were stuck until the Triple Dye had its affect. Sandflies were not obvious but created itching of the body. If rubbed, the bites became septic from the heavy perspiration. My legs were once covered in septic sandfly bites oozing fluid, so they were covered in Triple Dye. A tent mate said “get out of the tent Burrows, you are attracting the flies”. (He was being funny of course).

About October 1942 our mobile 3” guns were moved to Hughes Field, 46km South of Darwin, a base for Lockhead Hudson bombers. There were two other fighter strips in the same area for Kittyhawk fighters at Livingston and Strauss airfields.

When the guns moved out three of us were left behind to guard some stores. They left us with food until next day when they would return and pick us up. Three days later a Captain and driver turned up in a utility! “You must be hungry.” They gave us a tin of cream and a loaf of bread! They took us to Hughes Field. In the meantime we knew of an aboriginal family of a rail worker living in this remote area and not far away who had some poultry. They kindly gave us some eggs.

The first daylight raid on Hughes Field was by 27 bombers and 15-20 fighters. They were too high and out of range for our guns. We had many night raids on moonlight nights – no searchlights. Generally, 3 bombers at a time first
appearing three nights before the moon at its highest peak, then continuing for six nights until three nights after. The first raid at about 10pm then an hour later each night until about 3am. Uncannily we would wake just prior to “Take Post”.

Hughes Field wasn’t generally the target with the night bombers. They would follow the North South Road appearing to look for targets. We would generally hear them and sometimes see them in the moonlight going south and returning. The RAAF prepared a Kittyhawk for night attack piloted by S/L R. Cresswell. He spent many nights after and before near Hughes trying to locate the formations without success until one night at about 45 degrees from our gunsite, the Kittyhawk opened up illuminating the sky with red tracer shells. White tracers from the Japanese replied until the Japanese burst into flames and crashed west of the main road. The only night bomber shot down by a night fighter in 1942.

The first night attack on Hughes Field was by three bombers which made 13 dummy runs the length of the field over about 1.5 hours. They passed over our gunsite many times but orders were not to shoot unless they committed a hostile act! Something to do with giving positions away. There were no searchlight at Hughes.

We could see them quite clearly when they crossed the face of the moon. On their last run they commenced their bombing dive just before and above us. They were so low that we heard small explosions that were apparently the operation of their bomb day doors opening. By the time they came out of their dive and dropped their bombs (the hostile act) they were out of sight before we could open fire.

After the first raid there was very little diversion from our daily duties. Boredom was a problem. There was very little reading matter available. There was no local leave. There was no where to go. Darwin town was deserted. The civil population had only been about 4000 and these had been evacuated. There was no radio. Transistors or TV weren’t ‘invented. No radio stations for entertainment. We lived in tents enduring extreme tropical weather. After dark, hurricane lamps (kerosene lamps with glass bowl over wick) were our only lighting and not easy for reading if we had something to read. We talked or sometimes sang or played cards. We had guard duty once or twice a week, two hours on and four hours off for twenty-four hours. Night raids generally in moonlight nights disturbed our sleep for an hour or so whether we were the target or not. Later on some concert parties and mobile picture shows entered the area but AA gunsites had to be manned 24 hours a day but sometimes limited numbers could go. I can only remember attending one mobile picture show in the 13 months we were there.

“Going Troppo” became popular. This took the form of doing such things as calling an imaginary dog, patting it and throwing sticks to fetch it. One of our tent mates would spend his leisure time on his bed just staring at the tent ceiling. If
he had washing on the line he would leap up and scream at it “Dry, Dry, Dry”. He was a genuine troppo case who was taken away.

About November 1942 we received a ration of bottled beer. Two per man per month and not free. With no refrigeration or cooling and the heat of the wet season it was not a very good introduction for most of us who had never had a beer before.

It was about at this time we changed from 3” to 3.7” guns giving more range. Americans piloted the Kittyhawk fighters for about the first six months of 1942 and were later replaced by the Australian Squadrons of Kittyhawks. Spitfires came later in the year with British pilots. In order to gain an attacking height above the invaders at about 25000 feet (7600m) as quickly as possible, the Kittyhawks reduced their armour of six machine guns to four. Flying time for a fighter was very limited and after climbing to that height they generally had sufficient fuel for one burst on the formation and head for home. After about thirty or forty fighters had done this a considerable amount of damage could be done to the invaders. The Spitfires originally wanted to dogfight with Japanese fighters if they were escorting but many ran out of fuel and if not retrieved were written off. The Japanese fighters overcame their limited flying time by carrying extra fuel tanks that they jettisoned when empty.

On 25 March 1955 in an address to the Official Opening of the Legislative Council Chambers, Darwin and the unveiling of a Commemorative Plaque on the first bombing of Darwin, Sir Paul Hasluck, the Governor General, referred to the 19/2/42 as a day of national shame (12).

I wrote to him on 7 May 1990 asking what he really meant. His reply of 16 May 1990 enclosed a copy of his address. He stated that there is nothing in the speech that reflects on the conduct of the AA batteries.

He also said “This was one of the many instances when the press, in reporting a speech, seized on one phrase and gave it headlines and ever afterwards writers of stories and makers of documentaries had assumed that was all I ever said”….”My passing reference to a day of shame in my speech at Darwin was clearly no sleight of those who were active in defence. It was a reminder to Australians that before, during and after the raid some Australians had not behaved well. We should not boast about the wrong things and fail to correct our faults.”

The shame referred to in his speech were problems on the waterfront, lack of warning, civilian evacuation panic (arguable) and defencelessness of the town and the nation. I suggest that some of the latter could be:
1. There were not enough AA guns in 1942.
2. There were personnel present to operate AA Gun Laying Radar equipment but there was no equipment for all of 1942.
3. The air defence was negligible except for 10 visiting US Kittyhawks that were quickly disposed of by the enemy.

But there was no lack of courage or lack of devotion to duty by those who manned the equipment they had.

Some writers did concentrate on “shame” to the detriment and disgust of those who had served there. Many stories have concentrated on, and exaggerated, the misdeeds of a minority in this area. The writers did not have the experience of being there at the time and did not have sufficient knowledge of what was happening then. Some cases in particular:

The advance and rear headquarters of the Army were located at Larrakeyah Barracks prior to 19 February 1942. An order dated 21 July 1941 stated that in the event or threat of an invasion, advance and rear headquarters and other units were to retire to Noonamah (27 miles south) and Adelaide River (70 miles south) respectively to avoid being cut off by the enemy at the narrows of the peninsular south of Darwin. Advance and Rear Headquarters left Larrakeyah on the night of the 19 February 1942 to their new positions. To those not aware of these plans it could be construed as “running away”. Some published reports have actually said that. The AA and coastal units remained at their fixed gunsites in the Darwin Fortress area.

Timothy Hall in “Darwin 1942” claimed poor aircraft identification by AA Units when they fired on our own aircraft flying in from Timor early on 19 February 1942. He was probably not aware that friendly aircraft, when approaching Darwin were required to be on a certain lane, height and, if necessary, identify themselves by colours – all changed daily. Orders to AA were to fire on any aircraft that did not identify themselves. These particular aircraft approached incorrectly and a shot was fired ahead of them forcing them to identify themselves to which the aircraft responded correctly. Some Lockheeds had been captured by the enemy in islands to the north and it was feared that they might be used in an attack.

At the end of the war when awarding Campaign Medals, NT was declared “Non Operational!” Censorship of events in Darwin was very tight. The government did not want to panic the nation with events on the mainland. It would appear that World War 1 thinking was that service had to be overseas to be recognised. We might as well be termed overseas as we were surrounded by vast deserts, far from the main Australian cities and supplies. Many who served overseas in W.W.II never engaged the enemy or were far from enemy attack but qualified for many Campaign Medals. In later years it was very common in general conversation for those who only served in Darwin to be told “You were lucky you didn’t go overseas”. Of course many who served overseas had much worse
conditions than we did. We just wanted to be recognised as contributors to the Pacific War.

Apparently, the rest of Australia was not aware of what was happening in the Northern Territory and a lot still do not know. There was so much going on in the war overseas to be reported that service in the Northern Territory seemed to be a forgotten army. Occasionally someone would get a newspaper in the mail and it would generally go the rounds of the camp. An Army News started to get published up there but it only seemed to come to us now and again. I think it was one sheet maybe, printed back and front.

Many years after the war when Secret Documents were released for publication and research made overseas by a number of authors the events in Darwin were exposed. In 1994, 49 years after the end of the war, Darwin was declared an “Operational Area”. A Committee of Inquiry into Defence Awards received submissions from the public and awarded the 1939-45 Star to those who served in Darwin during 1942/3 in recognition of the rest of the armed services who served in operational areas overseas. I was one of a few AA personnel who made submissions for service in the NT. Some say that my research and submission made the success of the applications (16). Requests were also made to the Committee and again later for granting the Pacific Star which only required one days service in an operational area in the Pacific theatre (includes as far as Malaya) but without success.

22 Heavy AA Battery was mostly by West Australians and we left Darwin in March 1943 for Perth, after 50 of the 62 air raids in the area. We were hoping that at Adelaide the Eastern Staters would be sent home on leave but that was not to be. The WA personnel had their leave when we arrived in Perth but we had to wait another 12 months or so before getting home. We manned AA gunsites in the Fremantle area until 1945 when many Artillery units were broken up.

In 1943 I met Helen Greenslade at a dance in Fremantle Town Hall. We married on 16 August 1944 and Judy was born on 31 August 1945.

I made models of the 3.7" (90mm) static AA gun, the mobile 3" gun and the vehicle that lowered the 3", a Ford Marmon Herrington AWD. These are now displayed in the Artillery Museum at North Head, NSW.

Personnel from the discontinued Artillery Units were transferred to Liverpool in NSW to be reallocated to other Units. The majority were trained in Infantry at Bathurst, Greta and Canungra (QLD) – a jungle training school. I was posted to Infantry Intelligence and after finishing at Canungra I was told I had accumulated too much leave and was sent back to my expectant wife in Fremantle for about 24 days leave. Whilst there, the war ended and I was discharged from the Army.
14 H.A.A. Battery Banner is now in a glass case in Darwin High School. My son, Peter Burrows, was one of the two banner carriers when last shown in Sydney, Anzac Day March 2003. Surplus Battery Funds were sent to Darwin High School and are contributing to an annual history prize to a student.

At a park next to Roseville RSL there is a monument of those from Roseville, who served in World War II. My name is there.
Lin shared with me the experiences of my story until we were separated when transferred to Infantry late in the war. He was and still is a great mate. We shared dangers, disappointments, boredom, discomfort, etc as detailed my story. Lin became a qualified Gun Layer and I a qualified Predictor (instrument) Operator. We were generally regarded as reliable gunners by our seniors if a special job was required. I have valued his friendship all my life and was very pleased when he agreed to be godfather to my oldest daughter Judith. We met at 18 years of age and at time of writing we are both 82 years of age.
The wharfies were on strike in Fremantle Harbour. The army took over. I was in a crew of about six and we were put into the hold of a ship, which was loading about 250 pound bombs. The ship’s cranes were operated by army blokes. I got the impression that they were not very experienced in this type of work. The bombs were in railway trucks several paces away from the side of the ship. The ship’s crane operator would lower the crane’s hook down the side of the ship to wharf level. A soldier would then pick up the hook, walk several paces over to the railway truck and hand the hook over to another soldier in the truck, who would place the hook into a hole part of the bomb for lifting purposes. This now formed a triangle from the top of the crane to the bomb in the truck to the side of the ship. As the crane operator lifted the bomb free of the truck, the bomb would career to the side of the ship where it would crash against the hull with a hell of a bang. Down below in the hull we realised a bomb was on the way. The bomb was lifted to a height above the opening to the hold, stopped to be lowered but in the lifting had gathered a circling momentum that had to stop before being lowered. We in the bottom of the hull gazed up in wonder waiting for the next crane movement. Down it came at a rate of knots, stopped just short of where we were standing, to manhandle it into a storage position. But when it stopped it had gathered a circular motion again and chased us around the hull until it stopped. When it stopped we wrestled it into a stored position, unhooked the hook, and signaled the crane to do the operation again, and again and again, etc until we had them loaded.

After a layer of bombs was completed, lengths of timber like flooring boards had to be laid on top of them for another stacking to rest the next layer of bombs. The timber was on the wharf, each piece about fifteen feet long. It was stacked, tied in the middle, hooked to the crane and taken up to hover over the hold opening in a circular motion like the bombs. But the tying in the middle had loosened and we down below gazed up in wonder at this loosened timber now shaped like a star circling above ready to plunge down into us in the bottom of the hull. When it did plunge it rocketed down and stopped just short of where we were standing. And like the bombs it’s momentum circled our platform requiring us to leap and jump over sticks of timber until it stopped. Incidentally the bombs were ‘safe’ as fuses had not been installed. That’s what we were told anyway!
COOGEE BEACH W.A.

The camp was in a sandy area. Toilets were prepared by a post hole digger boring down to a good depth in the sand with a width of about 30 odd centimeters. A seat (boxes, thunder, troops for the use of ) was placed over the hole. They were cleaned out each day by pouring down a small amount of petrol, then dropping in a piece of lighted paper. Dicko got the job one day. He was a person particular in his appearance, wavy well combed hair, moustache, etc. He decided he would give the hole a thorough burn out. On the first one he poured a liberal amount of petrol down the hole, lit a piece of paper and dropped it in. He then decided he would look down the hole and see if it was working. At the same time a flash of flame shot up the hole and caught his face. He reeled back, hand automatically went to back pocket for comb, the first few inches of his hair fell out, his moustache and eyebrows had disappeared. He was lucky he was not seriously burnt. He wouldn’t leave camp until all hair had regrown.

Of course there were a number of burnt behinds of persons using the metal seats not knowing that they had just been burnt out.
HOPE VALLEY  W.A.

Hope Valley gunsite in Western Australia was in a lonely area, black sand and plenty of flies. A dairy not far away in the bush had cows that had a track through the gunsite area, which they used of a morning and returned in the afternoon dropping their pats on the way, to encourage the flies. The Brigadier was coming out for an inspection so we were put on gun maintenance to shine up the guns. The Brigadier arrives. We go on parade with oily, greasy hands. The Brigadier wants to inspect our hands to see how clean and hygienic we were. We stand there with our paws exhibited at chest height. He had never seen such filthy hands and fingernails and gave us a lecture on cleanliness.

Next he wanted to see some physical training exercises. The Lieut didn’t know the first order as it was many years since we had any P.T. The lieut ordered the Sergeant who didn’t know also, so he ordered a Bombardier to start. The first order was “Arms Raise”. Unfortunately, he didn’t say which way – front or sideways. Some of us raised front, some sideways. So we in the ranks decided we shouldn’t be side but be front or vice versa and changed our positions. We carried on like a flock of seagulls waving our arms. We were ordered to stop, then told “Arms Front”

The next order was a beauty. Not having done PT for years and standing in soft sand, the next order was “Heels Raise” then “Knees Bend”. Having lowered our behinds as required most of us lost balance and changed from “Arms Front “ to one arm stuck in the sand for support. The Brig had seen enough and ordered us to stop. He would like to see some marching. There were some difficulties. Our parade of about thirty to forty men took up about half of what we called our parade ground. Soft sand for marching on, surrounded by scrub and heaps of blue metal up to about six foot high which was intended to be spread in the future, to make a better parade ground. So we go the order “Right Turn, Quick March” (I would like to mention here that on the order “Halt” given on the right foot, the drill was two steps to stop). So we are heading for a heap of blue metal and not given an order to miss it. The right hand file starts to go up and over the heap and the two other files straight ahead. Seeing what is happening the Bombardier orders “Halt”. The tallest man on the parade is climbing the heap and his two steps to stop, puts him right on top of the heap gazing down at us from a great height. The Brig has seen enough and departs ordering the Lieut to punish them! That is us! And the B….. did!

A pity the Brig did not go to our mess tent with the black sand floor teeming with flies. When the tent was entered the black mass of flies on the floor rose to let one pass and then settle behind.
When some Artillery Units were broken up towards the end of the war we were all sent to Liverpool NSW to be examined and interviewed by psychiatrists and assistants to ascertain which other unit we would be most suitable for. We had tests in general knowledge such as “a horse goes into a stable what does a pig go into?” Of course the answer was officers’ mess if brave enough. Then we had mechanical tests on such things as “wheel A turns one way, wheel B turns another way which way does wheel C turn?” or something similar. Finally interviewed by a captain, I was asked what would I want to do? I said truck driver. The result was Infantry like just about everybody else.

So after some basic training at Greta I was sent to an Infantry Intelligence course at Bathurst. There were about thirty of us, mostly school teachers. We studied Jap army formations, map drawing of land terrain such as hills etc, which required circling the feature on foot and recording contours every fifty metres or so apart resulting in the shape of the feature. We learnt direction by the stars. We would be taken out late at night in a covered truck and dropped off two at a time to find our way back to camp. We could do it. It was very interesting. Sometimes my mate and I would take a short cut by climbing the nearest high ground and look for the lights of camp and head back. There were three teachers in one group who would argue about direction. They occasionally got lost and were late for breakfast or we had to go looking for them. I thoroughly enjoyed that course. It was so cold though, that the fire buckets at the end of each hut had a thin layer of ice each morning.
GRETA NSW

The transport shed for maintenance of army vehicles stood at the top of a very long grassy slope. A group of us were well down the slope doing something or other when we noticed a large blitzwagon wheel, very very heavy coming gracefully down the slope. Sometimes it hit something solid and slowed its progress by floating in the air for a few feet but continuing its progress down the slope. A poor soul of a soldier in full battle dress was standing in a position closer to the wheel than anybody else. An officer in the vicinity saw what was happening and called out to the soldier “that man” (pointing) “Stop that wheel”. That man, haversack on back etc, chased the wheel and threw himself upon it. The very very heavy wheel hardly wavered, flattened the soldier onto the ground and continued its course to the bottom of the slope much to the amusement of our little group.

There was a large albino dog, a boxer, white all over with pink eyes. He was very friendly with the troops and the boys petted him. One day he came out of the aforesaid Transport Shed with a red circle painted around the base of his tail, a red circle around each eye and on both sides of his body a sign “Buy War Bonds.”

The troops did not particularly like a certain Sergeant Major in an Infantry Training Battalion at Greta NSW. On the morning parade a Sergeant would call for “Markers” who would march to their respective positions on the parade ground. On the order “Company Fall In “ each platoon would march out to their respective markers. About 300 men in total were involved in this parade. All went well, quietly and the march on to the parade perfect. Troops were ordered to stand at “Attention” and the Sergeant handed the parade over to the Sergeant Major. Then troops started to break wind at different volumes. Sergeant Major ordered “settle down” many times until the breaking wind ceased except for one man who would wait for a pause and let off a real ripper. The troops enjoyed it still standing at “Attention” shaking and controlling the urge to burst out laughing.
APPENDIX

1. Military Board Instruction 14.1.42 RDF Units to Darwin
2. Cattle Trucks N.T. Railways
3. Most Secret Papers 29.1.42 No stocks of RDF equipment
4. Darwin Circa 1940
5. Japanese Task Force
6. Ships in harbour positions
7. Defences and Casualties
8. 3.7"(94cm) Heavy Anti Aircraft Gun
9. Bravery Awards
10. Poem – A Gunner remembers Darwin 1942
11. 22AA Battery Manning List – Starting Finnis River
12. 3" mobile gun and Marmon Herrington
13. Sir Paul Hasluck – Day of Shame
14. Results of Enquiry – awarding 1939-45 Star
15. Invitation to Presentation Ceremony of 1939-45 Star
16. Congratulations from other AA Batteries
17. 14 and 2 AA Batteries plaques
18. Anzac Day March
19. An article in Bankstown Torch
20. List of Air Raids
21. Peter Burrows and 14 AA Battery Banner – 3" A.A gunsites
22. Sundry other experiences

Photos:
1. Stan in uniform
2. Plaque of Gun on which he served – in Esplanade Park, Darwin