AN INCIDENT IN THE BOMBING OF DARWIN, 19th FEBRUARY 1942.

The incident refers to pages 67-68 from the book Darwin 1942 Australia’s Darkest Hour by Timothy Hall.
The reference on pages 67-68 is an account of Group Commander Scherger’s experience on that day of being machine gunned by a Japanese Zero Aircraft and taking cover with a shocked lorry driver. In fact there were two drivers from the same vehicle, namely George Toomby and George Horwood of the Ammunition Section of the 7th Aust Army Service Corp and their experience on that day is as follows:

During the afternoon of the 18th February 1942 (day before the raid) the aforementioned personnel delivered a load of 3.7 (3 ton) of anti aircraft shells to Anti Aircraft Battery (4 guns) located at Fanny Bay.

The commanding officer related to us that he had ordered a further load of shells to be delivered by us the next morning.
The next morning, the 19th, George Toomby and myself loaded the shells at the Ammunition depot at Francis Bay and delivered the load to the gun site at approximately 9.30 a.m. At near completion of unloading, 9.55 a.m., aerial dogfights were in progress overhead and the Fanny Bay battery opened fire on the attacking enemy aircraft.

The battery officer requested and called for a further load of shells to be delivered urgently.

George Toomby driving quickly (with myself as co-driver) back towards the Ammunition depot at Francis Bay and whilst passing the RAAF Airfield and following a staff car, a zero fighter flying very low and coming in from our right, with machine guns firing, with bullets digging up furrows in the road a few metres in front of us.

George Toomby turned the lorry to our left and into the bush where we jumped from the vehicle and took cover and there encountered the Air Force Officer Group Captain Scherger. (as related by him in Timothy Hall’s book pages 67-68).

We remained there while the Japanese aircraft flew in low over our heads dive bombing and strafing the RAAF drome for approximately the next 20
minutes.

After the raid we again loaded with 3.7 shells from Francis Bay Depot and at approximately 12 noon proceeded towards the Fanny Bay battery.

Again passing in close proximity of the airfield we were forced to take cover in a slit trench as 54 Japanese land based (Betty) heavy bombers again attacked the airfield dropping their complete load of bombs.

It was a massive attack and the noise horrific, the airfield and all aircraft were completely and utterly destroyed and the whole area laid to waste.

As George and I were both 19 years of age the feeling of fright, both of the strafing and bombing, has never been forgotten and the memory of that day is still very clear in my mind.

A short time later, approximately 2 to 3 weeks, our section officer Lt. “Rusty” Roberts congratulated us at roll call stating that the ammunition section had been mentioned in despatches for running ammunition during the raid. To my knowledge this has never been confirmed.

Private George Horwood NX160704
7th AASC 1942
Raid of 7 Japanese “Betty” Bombers on Easter Saturday 4th April 1942 on the RAAF Station.

Around 13.30 hours (1.30pm) on the 4th April 1942, Easter Saturday, the 7 enemy aircraft flying high at approximately 18,000 feet and being fired on by the Fanny Bay Anti-Aircraft Battery of 4 3.7” Anti-Aircraft guns, when 2 shells fused to explode at the right height at which the enemy aircraft were flying exploded causing the destruction of 4 aircraft.

Taking cover with my friend George Toomby in a slit trench and from a crouched position I remember looking up and seeing the exploding aircraft and watching the fragments of the enemy planes falling to the ground. As the aircraft exploded and detonated directly above us the debris scattered and fell all around us. I remember being hunched up as much as possible under my steel helmet during this terrifying few minutes and looking up and seeing the only 3 remaining aircraft flying on.

Some fifteen minutes later I walked out onto the road and found a piece of enemy aircraft engine which was still hot and smoking so I kicked it to the side of the road and retrieved it later in the afternoon. I kept that piece of enemy aircraft engine with me for many months and discarded it on our return south on leave in March 1943.

I have regretted discarding that wonderful piece of memorabilia ever since as evidence of Easter Saturday 1942 of the raid on the RAAF drome in Darwin.

 Nx1607 of George W. Toomby
On the 21st February orders for the relocation of the Ammunition Section of the 7 M.D. A.A.S.C. from Vestey's meatworks to Francis Bay Ammunition Magazines where we were to be in close attendance and on call for ordinance when urgently required.

We were housed in an old house vacated by a Chinese family and also tents at Francis Bay. As there was no mess hut we set about building a mess from bush poles and old corrugated iron obtained from the wreckage of Darwin township.

On March 4th 1942, 3 members of the section we fixing the roof iron, namely George Toomby, Jack Lynch and George Horwood, when approximately at 1400 hours (2pm) 5 Zero fighters appeared flying low, strafing and shooting at any target on offer, of which we were one. Although no-one was hit we jumped to the ground and took cover in a slit trench while the Zeros continued to fly around at will looking for and shooting up random targets.

It was a frightening and terrifying short period of time, that memory still remains with me to this day.

[Signature]

George V. Horwood

NX 160704

1/2 A.A.S.C.