



The 83rd Anniversary

Bombing of Darwin Commemorative Service
Wednesday 19 February 2025
Darwin Cenotaph, The Esplanade, Darwin
9:30 am – 11:00 am

Darwin Bombed: A Young Person's Guide to the Japanese attack of 19 February 1942

The Japanese attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942, stunned the nation and has been a topic of considerable historical reflection ever since. It was incredible that the powerful Japanese aircraft carriers, which decimated the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, turned their attention to Darwin just weeks later.

Such was the strength and ferocity of the Japanese attack that approximately 236 people were killed, eight large ships were sunk, 30 aircraft destroyed, and parts of Darwin were left in ruins. It was the deadliest single attack ever suffered on Australian soil. Darwin was a victim of its own geography, being close to the Netherlands East Indies which the Japanese were in the process of seizing. Darwin's harbour and airfield were of significant strategic value and the allied forces that utilised these facilities posed a threat to Japanese operations.

Since 2013, the Bombing of Darwin Day, observed on 19 February, has been commemorated as a National Day of Observance—the third national date after Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. Consequently, the need for educational materials has never been greater. *Darwin Bombed!* is a fully illustrated guide designed for school children of all ages.

Dr Tom Lewis is a long-time Darwin resident and one of Australia's foremost military historians. A high school teacher and former naval officer, he is the author of 14 books.

Lewis, T. (2020). *Darwin Bombed: A Young Person's Guide to the Japanese attack of 19 February 1942*. Avonmore Books.

The 1942 Bombing of Darwin

Research Sites for Schools

Library & Archives NT (LANT) has a large collection of books, images & oral histories relating to the Bombing of Darwin February 19, 1942.

Explore the following resources to learn more:

[LANT Explore NT History – Bombing of Darwin](#)

Bombed in more than 50 air raids during the Second World War, Darwin is a city shaped by war. Drawing on the Northern Territory Library's collections, this is a visual account of the day war came to Australian shores.

Library & Archives NT. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*. <https://lant.nt.gov.au/explore-nt-history/bombing-darwin>

[LANT Explore NT History – Tiwi Heroes](#)

The islands of the Tiwi people sit in the Arafura Sea to Darwin's north. During World War Two, the Tiwi Islands were deemed essential to defending Darwin from Japanese attack. Throughout the war, Tiwi people contributed significantly to Australia's military defence. This online story demonstrates the important contribution Tiwi people made to the Australian war effort.

Library & Archives NT. (2025). *Tiwi Heroes*. <https://lant.nt.gov.au/explore-nt-history/tiwi-heroes>

[National Library of Australia \(NLA\) – Trove Newspapers](#)

Search Trove to find information about the Bombing of Darwin through historical newspapers and other resources.

National Library & Australia. (2025). *Trove Newspapers*. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/search/category/newspapers>

[National Archives of Australia – Bombing of Darwin Fact Sheet](#)

Fact sheets introduce you to subjects in the collection and include a selection of records. They are a useful starting point for research. On 19 February 1942 mainland Australia came under attack for the first time when Japanese forces mounted two air raids on Darwin.

National Archives of Australia. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin Fact Sheet*. <https://www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/fact-sheets/bombing-darwin>

[Darwin City Council – Bombing of Darwin](#)

On 19 February 1942 Darwin was bombed by enemy forces becoming the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia. The attack left hundreds of servicemen and civilians dead, and countless others injured. Each year we come together as a city and a nation, to pay tribute to the men and women who were there.

Darwin City Council. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*.

<https://www.darwin.nt.gov.au/community/things-to-do/community-celebrations/bombing-of-darwin>

[Darwin Military Museum – Defence of Darwin](#)

Opened in 2012, as part of the 70th commemoration of the bombing of Darwin, the Defence of Darwin Experience has quickly grown to be one of the most powerful attractions in the Top End. It tells the story of an extraordinary, but little known chapter in Australian history, the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese on the 19 February 1942.

Darwin Military Museum. (2025). *Defence of Darwin*.

<https://www.magnt.net.au/defence-of-darwin-experience>

[Australian War Memorial – Bombing of Darwin](#)

Darwin, the largest population centre in northern Australia, was considered a vital asset in Australia's defences against an increasingly aggressive Japanese Empire in the 1930s. The outbreak of war in the Pacific resulted in the rapid enlargement of the military presence in Darwin and it was used as a base from which to deploy forces for the defence of the Dutch East Indies. In January and February these forces were overwhelmed by Japanese landings, usually preceded by heavy air attacks.

Australian War Memorial. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84294>

[Anzac Portal – Bombing of Darwin Day 19 February](#)

We observe Bombing of Darwin Day on the anniversary of the day in 1942 when Darwin, in northern Australia, was first bombed by Japanese warplanes. The people of Darwin suffered terribly during this time and many civilians were evacuated. To this day, this action remains the largest and most devastating modern attack by a foreign power on mainland Australia.

Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2024). *Bombing of Darwin Day 19 February*.

<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/commemoration/days/bombing-of-darwin>

[ABC – Tiwi Islands unknown frontline war stories](#)

Aboriginal islanders recruited during World War II went behind enemy lines by submarine, canoed an injured airman across the sea for help, rescued a shipload of stricken sailors, and captured six of the enemy. But it took 20 years for recognition and payment for their efforts.

Byrne, C. & Khan, N. (2022). Light finally shed on unknown WWII frontline war stories from the Tiwi Islands. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-17/tiwi-islands-unknown-frontline-war-stories/100817320>

[ABC Education – Bombing of Darwin](#)

Darwin was a vital asset in the defence against the Japanese in World War II. But on the 19th of February 1942, Darwin was overwhelmed by Japanese air raids which destroyed buildings and killed hundreds. It was the largest attack on Australia in World War II and left the city of Darwin in ruins.

Find out more about the events of this day and the impacts on Australia from Darwin Military Museum Director, Norm Cramp.

ABC Education. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*. <https://www.abc.net.au/education/the-bombing-of-darwin/13891848>

[Royal Flying Doctor Service Darwin Museum – Bombing of Darwin](#)

Experience the horrifying events of February 19, 1942, when Darwin faced its darkest hour under the assault of 242 Japanese aircraft—the largest foreign attack ever on Australian soil. Aiming to thwart Allied use of Darwin’s strategic positioning, Japanese fighters and bombers targeted the town, Darwin Harbour, and its two airfields, with more ordinance than at Pearl Harbor.

At the RFDS Darwin Tourist Facility, relive this infamous attack with cutting-edge technology, offering a firsthand glimpse into the harrowing events of that unforgettable day.

Royal Flying Doctor Service Darwin Museum. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*. <https://www.rfdsdarwin.com.au/bombing>

[Commonwealth War Graves Commission - Adelaide River War Cemetery](#)

During the Second World War, Adelaide River was the headquarters of a large base, and the war cemetery was created especially for the burial of servicemen who died in this part of Australia.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission. (2025). *Adelaide River War Cemetery*. <https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/2023510/adelaide-river-war-cemetery/>

[Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub – Bombing of Darwin](#)

Australia came under attack for the first time when Japanese forces mounted two air bombing raids. The two attacks, which were planned and led by the commander responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbour ten weeks earlier, involved 54 land-based bombers. They were launched from four Japanese aircraft carriers in the Timor Sea.

Australian Disaster Resilience. (2025). *Bombing of Darwin*.

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/other-disasters-wartime-bombing-raids-northern-territory-1942/>