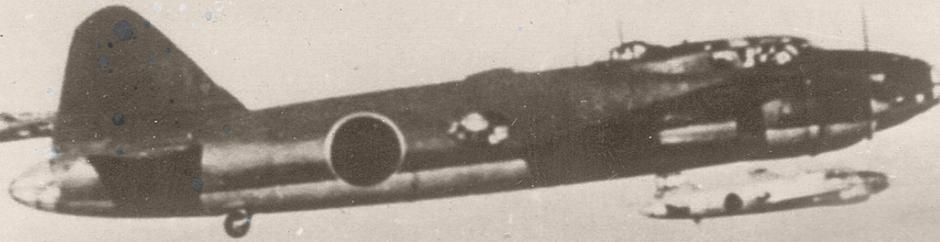


**The Katherine Museum with
The Honourable Vicki O'Halloran AO,
The Administrator of the Northern Territory**



Presents the commemorative service for

**80th ANNIVERSARY of the
BOMBING of KATHERINE**



22 March 1942

"The day the bombs fell"

OPENING

MC Her Worship the Mayor Elisabeth Clark

ARRIVAL OF HER HONOUR

The Honorable Vicki O'Halloran AO,
Administrator of the Northern Territory

AIR RAID SIREN

FLY OVER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

MC Her Worship the Mayor Elisabeth Clark

OPENING PRAYER

Chaplain Christopher Buckley-Wilshire

COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

The Honorable Vicki O'Halloran AO,
Administrator of the Northern Territory

WREATH LAYING

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

Scott Lander

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.

ALL: We will remember them

Lest We Forget

ALL - Lest We Forget

THE LAST POST

Performed by Shona Forsberg

ONE MINUTES SILENCE

ROUSE

Performed by Shona Forsberg

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are one and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

BENEDICTION

Chaplain Christopher Buckley-Wilshire

DEPARTURE OF HER HONOUR

The Honorable Vicki O'Halloran AO,
Administrator of the Northern Territory

COMMEMORATION CONCLUDES

THE ANDREWS SISTERS TRIBUTE SHOW

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

Warning: Readers of this booklet should be aware that, in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, seeing images of deceased persons in photographs, may cause sadness and distress in some cases, offend against strongly held cultural prohibitions.

The Historical Society of Katherine wishes to advise that the Katherine Museum adheres to the Aboriginal Indigenous protocols defined by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, ACT.

WE COME TOGETHER TODAY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SERVICE



Takao Ku Betty Bombers over the coast. Photo courtesy Mike Reed Collection

Today we reflect on a raid on Katherine by aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy and pay tribute to the tens of thousands of Australian Army and Air Force personnel, along with those of the United States Army who were stationed in and around Katherine during World War II. Together with thousands of civilians who made an essential contribution to the war effort. The people of Katherine endured extreme hardship during the bombing of Katherine and the war years, with little services available to them, families were torn apart during evacuations and all the while in harsh environments.

Although the impact of World War II caused great loss and disruption to community . It was also a turning point for the development of infrastructure towards the growth of the Northern Territory and especially Katherine. Due to the influx of troops and army personnel accommodation was established to support them. The Sidney Williams Huts were a prefabricated structure designed for the Australian Army and remained after their post war departure. The structures were later disposed of by the Army Decommission Disposal Unit and became churches, retail shops, mechanical workshops and residential accommodation for families who remained in the region. World War II also put Katherine and the Northern Territory on the map and its importance was then highlighted.

Quote *'The Northern Territory has been an unlucky child. Nobody loved it. Many legislators regarded it as the bastard child of the Australian family, Nevertheless I have complete faith in it future'*

Aubrey Abbott, Administrator of the Northern Territory 1937-1946

KATHERINE IN THE WAR YEARS

At the end of the 1930's Katherine had a population around 250 people but in a few years it evolved from a cattle and railway town to a large, strategic military base.

The road (a two wheel track) north to Darwin crossed the Katherine River at Knott's Crossing and followed the Overland Telegraph Line to Pine Creek and on to Darwin.

By 1941, Katherine was bulging at the seams under military command as it became a major supply and maintenance centre, and more so in 1942 after the bombing of Darwin. In late 1941, the Australian Army was sending troops to Katherine for training and support units and headquarters were established.



Katherine Main Street 1943, From left Commercial Hotel (now Stuart Hotel), Building with awning Katherine Stores (now 5 Star Supermarket, low elevated building the Civic Hall. Photographs courtesy of Australian War Memorial.

The road north was soon incapable of handling the large number of United States military convoys of up to a mile long. With bull dust up to the axles, the convoys sent up plumes of dust making them easily noticeable and prime targets for enemy air-craft, a situation which gravely concerned the United States military.

When the wet season flooding closed the Low Level bridge, road traffic used the railway bridge in the centre of town. By the end of the war 'The Track' was sealed from Alice Springs through to Darwin.

KATHERINE IN THE WAR YEARS CONTINUED.....

In fact, the various Australian state authorities undertook the job and construction of the stream and river crossings. The first river road bridge over the Katherine River, now known as the Low Level Crossing was constructed. While working for the Allied Works Council the New South Wales Department of Main Roads built the Low Level Bridge, seen here under construction to provide a formal crossing over the Katherine River.



The Allied Works Council (AWC) constructed and sealed major sections of the north-south road, now the Stuart Highway, including the first river bridge over the Katherine River, The Low Level Bridge.



Trucks transporting farm workers crossing the Katherine River at Knotts Crossing on the North-South Road prior to construction of the Low Level Bridge.

EVACUATION ORDER FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

A few days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott, gave an evacuation notice to the citizens of the Territory.



RAAF Supermarine Spitfires being serviced at the Katherine Airstrip, 1943

A small pre-war community of just 250 people, Katherine was transformed into a major military centre supporting units of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Australian Army, United States Army and United States Army Air Force (USAAF). On 22nd March, 1942 personnel of the first US Army Engineering Unit to arrive in Australia, the 808th Engineer Aviation Battalion, were working to upgrade the Katherine Airstrip at the time nine Japanese 'Betty' bombers commenced dropping their bombs.

It was 12.30pm on 22 March 1942, that nine Japanese Betty Bombers launched a direct attack on the early settlement of Katherine. First spotted high above the township, the aircraft circled twice before each released its load of 10 daisy cutters (anti-personnel) bombs. Sadly, during the sole attack on Katherine an Aboriginal man, Dodger Kodjalwal, 42 years old, was killed, and three other people were also injured that day. An aboriginal man named Hector later passed from his injuries sustained on that day. Noel Hall a local identity lost his fingertip from shrapnel at the Gallon License Store.



Jack Corbell, Post Master General (PMG) linesman standing in bomb crater. Photo courtesy of the Henry Scott Collection

Noel Hall's wife, Dorothy remembers 'We saw all the bombs drop on Katherine that day....' *The bomb dropped near the heap of rocks, killed an aboriginal fellow... Mrs Knotts later said 'that nothing would shift her, she was stopping there to cook for the mob, even if the Japs came. Within the next hour (after the bombing) she was packed up and gone'.*



Hector having his wound dressed at the 121 Army General Hospital AGH a few days after the bombing of Katherine 1942.



*The Governor General and Bert Nixon receiving his Order of Australia, 26 January 1979, for the service to the development of Primary Industries in the Northern Territory.
Bert Nixon grew produce to help feed the troops during the war years in Katherine*

LOCALS TELL THEIR STORIES

Local farmer Bert Nixon recalled 'I heard the planes, they were different - they had a high-pitched sing. I looked across the south side of the river where this construction mob from Alaska were building taxiways on the old aerodrome. A falling bomb struck near the workmen'

During this attack on Katherine, the furthest inland attack in the Northern Territory, It was estimated that 91 bombs were dropped on Katherine, 84 on the Katherine Aerodrome and shrapnel was found years later on Bert's farm across the river. Bombs also hit an area near Manbulloo.



Lily Kruger recalled her '*children had to have sticks in their mouths*

to stop them from biting their tongues when the bombs went off, we were in such close proximity to the bombing 'you could feel the ground shuddering' ...

'The army men screaming out orders'.... 'I expect the shock of it going off could hurt a little child's ears. We had to cover our ears and the children were biting these sticks.'

Oral history interview, Katherine Times 10 October 1991

MANBULLOO AIRSTRIP AND CIVILIAN ACTIVITY

Manbulloo Airstrip was constructed to provide a base for RAAF and USAAF B-24 Liberator bombers to conduct bombing raids against Japanese positions on islands to our north whilst RAAF and USAAF fighter aircraft were deployed to counter the increasing number of raids by Japanese aircraft on Top End targets.

Civilian activity included operation of the North Australia Railway (NAR) which together with road transport provided an essential link between Alice Springs and Darwin. The NAR was staffed by local and interstate fitters and locomotive drivers who, despite the narrow gauge and old locomotives, ran up to 100 trains a week between Birdum and Darwin transferring military equipment, fuel and personnel to the frontline, without which the war effort would have ground to a halt.

The part played by Aboriginal men and women is largely unrecognised despite the variety of duties undertaken ranging from hospital orderlies to transport, farm and stock work at Australian Army abattoirs.

NORTH AUSTRALIA OBSERVER UNIT (NAOU) – THE NACKEROOS

Due to its central location Katherine was chosen as the base for the North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU). Comprising 600 men, many of whom were chosen because they had good bush skills, they were grouped into three Field and one Headquarters Company. Headquarters were situated where the Katherine South Primary School now stands. Established as a bush commando unit in 1942, the NAOU had the huge task of coastal surveillance from Derby in Western Australia to Normanton in the Gulf of Carpentaria and inland to Halls Creek, Alice Springs and Cloncurry.

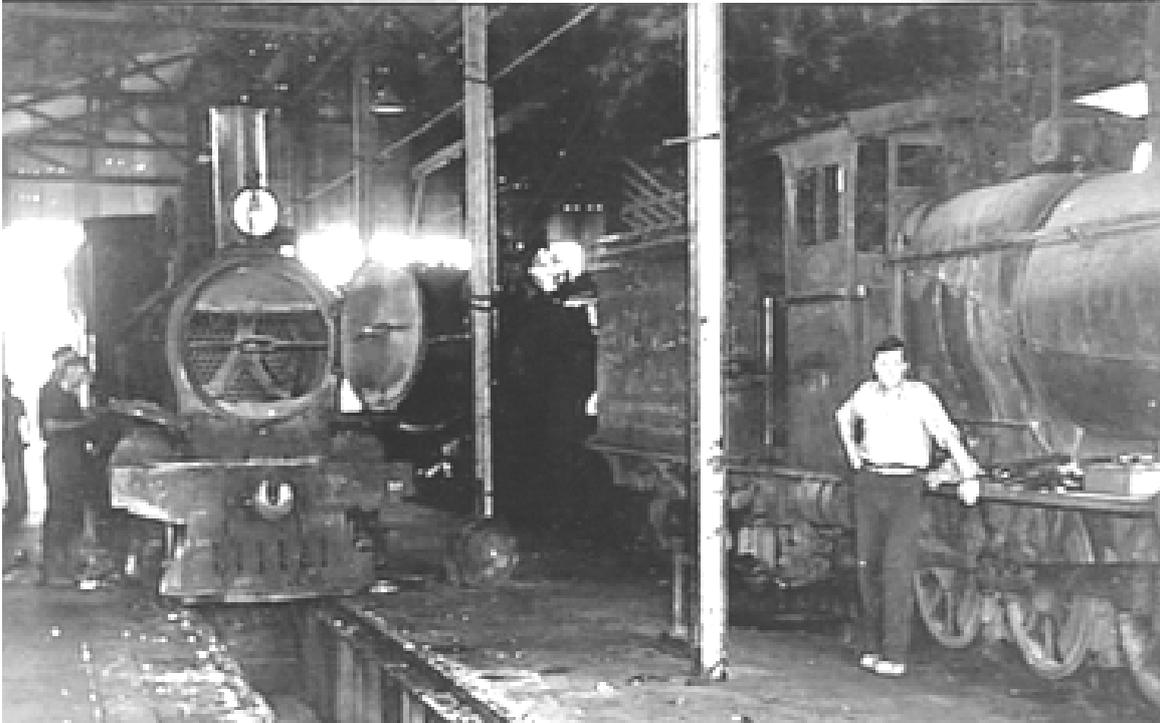


North Australia Observer Unit on parade in Katherine, 1943

The NAOU was a horsed unit, highly mobile and had considerable firepower. The 600 members of the three Field and one Headquarters Company were the largest mounted unit the Australian Army had ever assembled, with 2,200 horses and donkeys and a number of small boats. The unit established observation posts on major waterways such as the Victoria and Roper Rivers to guard against Japanese invasion. Personnel manning these posts experienced severe isolation and had to depend on their own resourcefulness to provide food and shelter for extended periods.

The North Australia Observer Unit, also known as Curtin's Cowboys, or the Nackerroos had acquired legendary status based on the privation they suffered. The innovative means they created to fulfill the task of surveillance and providing an 'early warning system' over the most remote and isolated areas of northern Australia during the war was also noted.

NORTH AUSTRALIA RAILWAY (NAR) locomotive workshop, Katherine. Rail employees were stretched to the limit to meet the high demand for rail transport, a difficult task with some locos dating back to the 1880's and old units handed down by the states.



Loco workshop were located where the Kathine Club is situated today



Katherine Main Street prior to the war



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Les Cox, Jaunita Heparia and Neila Boyle for generously sharing their stories of the Bombing of Katherine.

Thank you to Simone Croft, local historian, for compiling the historical overview of Katherine for this program.

The Katherine Museum also recognises the support from Northern Territory Government, we would like to acknowledge the funding support through the 2021 Major Community Benefit Events Grant to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Bombing of Katherine.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of RAAF Base Tindal, Katherine Town Council, RSL Katherine Sub-Branch, volunteers, and community members.

Proudly Sponsored by the Northern Territory Government 2021 Major Community Benefit Events Grant to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Bombing of Katherine.

