

CITATION

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE MUSEUM AND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY INCORPORATED



February 2025



Cyclone Tracy Clean-up and Recovery



200 Year Anniversary of the British arriving at Fort Dundas on the Tiwi Islands

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Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should exercise caution as the Citation Newsletter may contain images of and articles about deceased people. Language used in some articles is that of the day the article was written and may no be considered appropriate today.

Chairman's Message – Dr Gary Manison APM

This Edition of Citation is a mixture of stories with a special focus on the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy. It takes a wide view with not only police accounts but those of other organisations that were called up to help in the recovery. This illustrates the necessity of the police working with other organisations and between them maximising the skills and knowledge they bring to the recovery through their co-operation.

This edition also exemplifies the co-operation between the people of the Tiwi Islands and the historians that are telling the story of the first attempt at settlement in the Territory, which was unsuccessful. Few people are aware of this aspect of Northern Territory history, and it should be illuminating for some readers of Citation.

Finally, on behalf of the Society I would like to thank our current members and supporters for their involvement, and we welcome any feedback. We have plenty of outstanding tasks and projects waiting for volunteers to undertake, so if you have the time and interest, please feel free to contact the society with your offer of assistance.

Please enjoy and prosper in 2025.

Dr Gary F Manison APM

President and Chair.

Editor's Message – Pat King

On behalf of the Citation Team, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to our *Cyclone Tracy Special Edition*, including those who generously shared their stories. A special thank you to the Northern Territory Police Association for their sponsorship, which allowed us to produce a magazine that's truly something special. Citation wouldn't be possible without the incredible support of those working behind the scenes, especially our dedicated typist, Marilyn Evans.

Following our call for more volunteers, we are thrilled to welcome Tracy Dale Middleton, who has joined us as Secretary. Mick Adams and Robyn MacKenzie have also shown how modern technology can enable remote participation, proving that distance doesn't limit involvement. Additionally, Tom Kelly has brought his expertise in photography and movie production to help elevate our media presence.

We rely on volunteers in various capacities—whether it's assisting with moving items when needed, sorting and registering donations and artifacts, or cleaning up. The list goes on, and there's always a way to get involved. Currently, we're looking for a Treasurer to support John Wolthers. MYOB experience is helpful, but training is available if needed.



If you're interested in volunteering, or if you have new stories, photos, books, or other items related to NT Police history, we'd love to hear from you.

Last Saturday Danny and Chrissie Bacon called in to say goodbye. We wish them safe, happy travels and look forward to seeing them in 6 years when they return,

Thank you again for your ongoing support!

Pat King





John Wolthers was the sergeant in charge of the Casuarina police station on the night of Cyclone Tracy. (ABC News: James Purtill) Cyclone Tracy: First aid was the butcher's, the post office became the morgue, ex-policeman recalls. By Eleni Roussos and James Purtill _ Wednesday 3 December 2014

Policing Cyclone Tracy: Former sergeant John Wolthers shares his experience of the recovery (*Eleni Roussos*)

For 10 years John Wolthers could not enter the Darwin post office where the bodies of the dead had lain after Cyclone Tracy. The northern suburb of Casuarina had been worst hit and as the local police sergeant he had been at the centre of the search and rescue efforts.

Still living within walking distance of the station 40 years later, he recalled how on the afternoon before the cyclone there had been many worried calls and officers had told callers "in a very quick voice" to get into the smallest room of the house.

"It was just pick up one and drop it down," he said of the calls. There were more and more calls until abruptly there were none. Communications had gone down.

Sergeant Wolthers rang the police inspector to ask if the men could fetch their wives from home and bring them to the police station. "The reason for that was basically you knew that the family were safe," he said.

The post office became the morgue. For 10 years after that I just couldn't go into the post office. I just could not bring myself to go through those doors.

By midnight 150 non-police were sheltering at police stations in Darwin. Soon the wind had grown too strong for anyone to leave the station. At 1:00am callouts ceased. Sergeant Wolthers remembered watching a car roll over and then, when the red brake lights came on, knowing somebody was inside.

"I just made sure nobody went outside," he said.

"So, in the morning we opened the door and it was just amazing, just aghast. There was such a mess. "The roads were just chock-a-block full of everything. It didn't matter what it was - cars, refrigerators, washing machines - everything just littered the whole road."

"You looked across anywhere and it was just flattened. There were no trees, there was no greenery, there was just nothing. Twenty-seven police officers were injured during the cyclone.

'We set up first aid at the butcher shop'

NT police provided some of the first official response to the cyclone. Patrols resumed at daylight. Search quadrants were drawn, and teams of police and volunteers were sent into the devastated suburbs. Ninety per cent of all Darwin buildings were damaged or destroyed. In parts of the northern suburbs, no buildings stood.

"They all came back with horrific stories," Sergeant Wolthers said. "We started getting injured people."



John Wolthers was the sergeant at Casuarina police station on the night of Cyclone Tracy. (Supplied: John Wolthers)

"We had them in our meal room for a while, but it was just too small. "We set up the first aid place at the butcher shop."

That evening, a leadership meeting of key emergency services concluded: "Darwin had, for the time being, ceased to exist as a city." A decision was made to evacuate Darwin. It would become the largest civilian evacuation in Australian history, with about 25,000 evacuated by air and another 10,000 by road.

"For about two or three days we stayed awake but then we laid hammocks in the main thoroughfare of the police station and went to sleep," Mr Wolthers said. "The post office became the morgue. "For 10 years after that I just couldn't go into the post office. I just could not bring myself to go through those doors."

'40 years on I remember the sound of the wind'

In the months after Tracy, with the dramatic scenes of the recovery etched in his memory, Mr Wolthers took a long road trip up the west coast of Australia. Back in Darwin he could not remember many details. "I just can't recall where I stayed in Broome," he said. "I cannot remember the person that drove my car back to Darwin. I cannot remember that for the life of me. "He came to see me, and I just could not remember him." For many years he could not enter a pitch-dark booth in the Northern Territory Museum where a recording of the cyclone's 240kph winds played on loop. "That is just so realistic," he said. "I could hear it from the outside, but I couldn't walk in. "But now I've sort of overcome that."



"It was just pick up one and drop it down," former policeman John Wolthers said of answering calls to the police station on the night of Cyclone Tracy. *(Supplied: John Wolthers)*

Wednesday 3 Dec 2014 at 5:15pm, updated Mon 8 Dec 2014 at

11:27pm <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-03/former-policeman-john-wolthers-recalls-policing-cyclone-tracy/5897742>

Brief history of the involvement of 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (5/7 RAR) with Cyclone Tracy.

On 13 Jan 75, the battalion received a warning order from 1 Task Force to form a major part of Field Force Group Darwin (FFGD). The task of FFGD was to assist the civilian population of Darwin in the clearing of houses damaged by Cyclone Tracy, which had struck Darwin on Christmas Day 1974. The Commanding Officer, LTCOL E.J. O'Donnell, MC was appointed Commander of FFGD. The reconnaissance group arrived in Darwin on 15 Jan 75 and the main body arrived from 18 Jan 75. On 8 Mar 75, CO 5/7 RAR handed over command of FFGD to CO 6 RAR, and the Battalion returned to Holsworthy. During 5/7 RAR's tour, it cleared 3288 blocks of land, 26 schools, two warehouses, one recreational ground, four shops, one hospital and re-roofed 136 houses.



In 1998, 5/7 RAR later relocated to Darwin from its home of 25 years to Robertson Barracks, Palmerston, until they split into 5 RAR (remained in Darwin) and 7 RAR (relocated to Adelaide) in 2006. On 3 Dec 2024 the two battalions will be relinking again in time for the 50 the anniversary of Cyclone Tracy.

Taken mostly from the 5/7 RAR Association website - <https://57rar.com/history/> and <https://www.cyclonewarriors.com/>



Disaster Relief - Cyclone Tracy by Brett Mitchell

During the early hours of Christmas Day 1974, Cyclone Tracy devastated the city of Darwin with winds in excess of 160 knots, killing 49 people ashore and a further 16 at sea. During the following month, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) would embark upon its largest peacetime disaster relief operation, involving 13 ships, 11 aircraft and some 3000 personnel.

Aerial view of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy in 1974.



Left: Aerial view of the wrecked HMAS Arrow, after she had been recovered from under Stokes Hill Wharf, Darwin. Right: View of the damaged Darwin **Naval Headquarters.**

The 351 naval personnel then based in Darwin possessed only a limited capability to render immediate assistance to the stricken city and its community. Of the four Darwin based Attack Class patrol boats, HMAS *Arrow* had sunk under Stokes Hill Wharf with the loss of two lives, HMAS *Attack* was driven ashore at Doctor's Gully by the sheer force of the cyclonic winds, and HMAS *Advance* and HMAS *Assail* were damaged. Darwin Naval Headquarters was destroyed, as was 80 per cent of the patrol boat base and 90 per cent of the naval married quarters. The oil fuel installation and the naval communications station HMAS *Coonawarra* were extensively damaged. Initial relief was limited to search and rescue operations on the harbour foreshore and in waters out to Melville Island. Communications facilities in Darwin, both military and civil, were crippled, and initial communications were dependant upon Army mobile terminals and the communications systems in *Advance*, *Assail* and the motor vessel *Nyanda*.



As the gravity of the disaster became apparent, a naval task

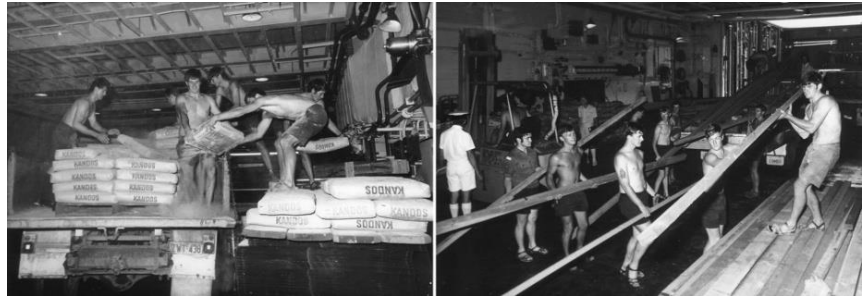
force, under the command of the Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet (FOCAF), Rear Admiral DC Wells, CBE, RAN, was assembled to render aid to Darwin. A general recall was issued to all personnel. Approximately 50 per cent of all Sydney based ships' companies were on annual leave, with many interstate. Of the 2700 personnel on leave, 2200 were able to return to their ships prior to sailing, and others subsequently managed to join their ships in Townsville. Volunteers from other Sydney-based ships and establishments filled the positions of those who could not return to their ships in time. All manner of stores were embarked on the deploying ships, ranging from combat bridges, vehicles and building materials down to disposable cutlery.

The response of Operation NAVY HELP DARWIN was swift. The first RAN asset to arrive in the disaster stricken city, on 26 December, was a HS748 aircraft from 851 Squadron, carrying blood transfusion equipment and a team of Red Cross workers. A second HS748 aircraft carrying members of Clearance Diving Team One (CDT1) arrived shortly thereafter. On 26 December HMAS *Balikapapan* and HMAS *Betano* sailed from Brisbane, HMAS *Flinders* sailed from Cairns, and HMAS *Melbourne* (with FOCAF embarked), HMAS *Brisbane* and HMAS *Stuart* sailed from Sydney. Four S2E Tracker aircraft from 816 and 851 Squadrons prepared to fly to Darwin, but were placed on standby and eventually stood down. The following day, HMAS *Hobart*, HMAS *Stalwart*, HMAS *Supply* and HMAS *Vendetta* sailed from Sydney, and HMAS *Brunei* and HMAS *Tarakan* sailed from Brisbane. Nine Wessex helicopters from 817 and 725 Squadrons were embarked in *Melbourne* and *Stalwart*. HMAS *Wewak* subsequently sailed from Brisbane on 2 January 1975. The submarine HMS *Odin* had been nominated to proceed to Darwin to act as a power station, before the authorities determined that appropriate power conversion facilities did not exist in Darwin.

The Director General of the National Disasters Organisation, Major General AB Stretton, DSO, arrived in Darwin on 26 December with his staff officers to establish an Emergency Services Organisation Committee. Captain EE Johnston, OBE, RAN, Naval Officer Commanding the North Australia Area (NOCNA), was appointed to the committee as Port Controller, with responsibility for controlling the port and its approaches, and for drafting an Emergency Plan in the event of a further cyclone.

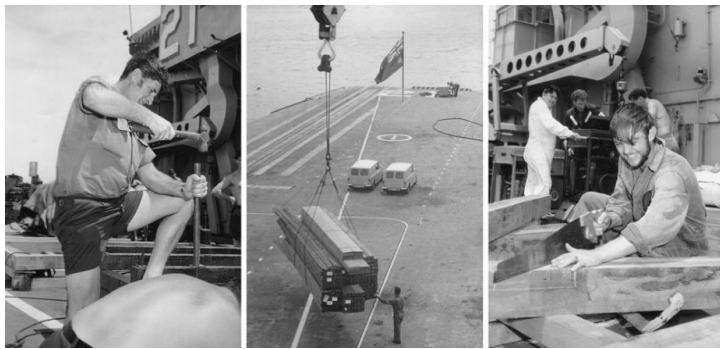
As preparations were made for the arrival of the naval task group, Captain Johnston relocated the naval headquarters to his residence, Admiralty House. Following an exchange of signal traffic between FOCAF and NOCNA, it was agreed that the RAN relief force would be allocated responsibility for clearing and restoring 4740 houses in the northern suburbs of Nightcliff, Rapid Creek and Casuarina. HS748 aircraft continued to ferry personnel and stores to Darwin and evacuees south. Evacuees were accommodated in HMAS *Kuttabul*, HMAS *Penguin* and HMAS *Watson* in Sydney; and HMAS *Moreton* in Brisbane. CDT1 was surveying damage to the patrol boats and civilian craft, searching for missing vessels, clearing Stokes and Fort Hill Wharves, and assessing how to extract the wreck of *Arrow*.

Sailors unloading bags of cement.
Right: Slowing timber in hanger aboard HMAS Melbourne.



The first ships, *Flinders* and *Brisbane*, arrived in Darwin on 31 December. *Flinders* surveyed the approaches to Darwin to ensure the safe passage and anchorage of the Task Group, while *Brisbane* landed working parties and established communications with NOCNA. *Melbourne* and *Stuart* arrived on 1 January; *Stalwart* on 2 January; *Hobart*, *Supply* and *Vendetta* on 3 January; and *Balikpapan* and *Betano* on 4 January. *Brunei*, *Tarakan* and *Wewak* arrived the following week on 13 January. The ships had brought with them some 3000 naval personnel.

The arrival of *Melbourne* precipitated the establishment of a Shore Command Headquarters (SCHQ) at Admiralty House to coordinate the working parties, which were tasked by the Emergency Services Organisation. Working parties were typically composed of 10 or 15 officers and sailors, depending upon the nature of the task.



Left: CPOMTH Bob Bowden working on HMAS Melbourne. Centre: Airlifting material off HMAS Melbourne. Right: CPOMTH Tom Davies cutting materials.



Left: Crew members of HMAS Hobart in action. Right: Crew members from HMAS Vendetta at work.

Shipwrights from HMAS Melbourne salvaged NR Liverpool, which was damaged as a result of Cyclone Tracy.



<https://seapower.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/disaster-relief-cyclone-tracy-and-tasman-bridge>

On 28 February 1975 the Whitlam government established the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, which effectively rebuilt the city within three years. Darwin's near complete destruction led to the introduction of improved building codes across Australia.

Joan Allridge, Vice President of the Red Cross in Darwin



The house fell down around us. It was terrifying, the wind roaring and the house smashing. We were freezing cold. The water pouring in on us was icy. And all I had on was a nightie.

Remains of the Gwynne family home in Wagaman, Darwin

Darwin, indeed, the whole of northern Australia, is no stranger to cyclones. However, Cyclone Tracy, which hit Darwin in the small hours of Christmas Day 1974, was among the most destructive ever recorded in Australia. Its vital statistics make for frightening reading:

- wind gusts reached 217 km/h before the anemometer was destroyed
- gales extended to about 40 kilometres from the cyclone's centre
- there was a storm surge of 1.6 metres in Darwin's harbour: an estimated 4 metres at Casuarina Beach
- 255 mm of rain fell in 12 hours overnight, 145 mm in the two half-hour periods on either side of the eye of the cyclone
- 66 people were killed
- 145 people were seriously injured; more than 500 received minor injuries
- about 70 per cent of houses suffered serious structural failure
- the total damage bill topped \$800 million.

Impact and aftermath of Cyclone Tracy

Cyclone Tracy crossed the coast near Fannie Bay at around 3.30 on Christmas morning. Had it struck during the daytime, the death toll could have been much higher. Most of those who lost their lives were killed by flying debris or crushed beneath their houses.

In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, evacuation of the majority of the population was considered essential given there was no running water, no sanitation, no electricity, little shelter and a high risk of disease outbreaks. More than 36,000 people left Darwin, filling the planes that had arrived with supplies, equipment and specialised personnel.

News of the disaster took hours to reach the rest of the country. The song 'Santa never made it into Darwin' captured the poignancy of the cyclone's arrival on Christmas Day, as most Australians were preparing to celebrate the most significant religious holiday of the year with their families. People donated clothes and money and opened their homes to Darwin's refugees.

Voluntary organisations swung into gear, many sending in teams as soon as news of the disaster broke. Joan Allridge, Vice President of the Red Cross who spent the hours of the cyclone under her kitchen table with two



Roughly 2700 volunteers coordinated by the Red Cross and the Australian Defence Force helped fill in the cracks of the Cyclone Tracy recovery effort. Here, Red Cross volunteers including Betty Watcham (left) help a mother and her twins at the airport as she prepares to leave Darwin.

other adults, six children, one cat, four kittens, one dog and three birds recalled how essential those early fly-in support workers were.

Most of Darwin's population, herself included, emerged from the cyclone in a state of shock. These days there is a much more sophisticated understanding of the psychological impact of being involved in major disasters, both for those who live through them and for the staff or volunteers who go in afterwards.

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2015/01/cyclone-tracy-unseen-images-from-the-red-cross-archive/>

(Photos Credit: Ramon A Williams/Worldwide Photos)

In the days following Cyclone Tracey's wrath, 30,000 Darwin residents were left homeless.

The Red Cross provided support to many of the affected residents, including this woman and her twins. Roughly 2700 volunteers coordinated by the Red Cross and the Australian Defence Force helped fill in the cracks of the rescue effort. They were instrumental in reuniting loved ones, locating the missing, setting up mobile shelters, blood transfusions services and 24-hour fundraising hotlines.



During the cyclone roughly 150 people were seriously injured, and there were also approximately 500 minor injuries to deal with as well. A great deal of blood was collected during the Tracey aftermath.



Volunteer staff assisted in the evacuation of Darwin. Here Darwin residents are being flown to Perth where they are eventually housed in the Army Barracks.



Only 500 of the 12,000 homes escaped serious damage from the cyclone and none were left with power, water or communications. Many people left, and the Red Cross was instrumental in taking records of every person that flew into other cities so that lost loved ones could find their families. Hercules airplanes – military transport carriers – took Darwin's citizens to cities around Australia, where they found shelter in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Only 500 of the 12,000 homes escaped serious damage from the cyclone and none were left with power, water or communications. Many people left, and the Red Cross was instrumental in taking records of every person that flew into other cities so that lost loved ones could find their families.



Red Cross workers help move an elderly person found in a rest home several days after the cyclone to the Red Cross HQ in Darwin suburb of Larrakeyah.

"Cuts became infected really quickly due to the humidity, so we were doing

dressings and thinks like that," says Betty Watcham (second from left), a nurse and first aid trainer with the Red Cross when Tracy struck. By 2am of the morning Tracy crossed Darwin, she had been told to report for duty first thing Boxing Day morning. Here she is in 1974 near the entrance of the Red Cross Headquarters in Lambell Terrace in Darwin.



The old Darwin Hospital was run at full capacity in the days following the cyclone. Roughly 500 people poured through the doors and many volunteers flew in to assist in caring for the injured. Red Cross staff and volunteers helped move young babies from the damaged Darwin Hospital to their nearby HQ. "The mothers carried their babies over and they didn't bring cribs, so we had to find dry boxes to put the babies in," remembers Betty Watcham.



<https://digital.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/nodes/view/287>

Photographer [Australian Red Cross. South Australian Division](#)
 Title Cyclone Tracey evacuees Date taken 1974 Description

Lists of people known to be safe, on boards in foyer of Red Cross House.

FROM THE VAULT – Help at Hand... Cyclone Tracy – The Queensland Police Contingent

QPS Media on [May 14, 2024 @ 11:00am](#)



Anti-Looting Duty: On Saturday 28 December 1974, Constable 1/c Bob Latter, along with three NT Detectives, went to Millner St in Darwin. There they found 3 cars packed with goods looted from destroyed homes and shops. The final haul of confiscated goods was huge and included, amongst other things ...24 rolls toilet paper; 12pkts razor blades; 12 nappies; 10 striped tea towels; 10 tins of crab meat; 8 folding chairs; 8 pair nylon socks; 6 floor mats; 6 pairs of blue jeans; 5 bath towels; 5 mixing bowls; 4 teddy bears; 3 size 14 dresses; 3 lace table cloths; 3 pink brunch coats; 2pkts glazed fruit; 1 cake plate; 1 radio cassette; 1 purple bedspread; 1 Sharp

calculator; 1 fishing net; 1 coffee set; 1 aluminium boat; 1 esky; 1 tool box and 1 pair long trousers. Several men were arrested for stealing these items. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case of looting in days following Cyclone Tracy. Police officers assigned to anti-looting duty were kept continuously busy.

Before dawn on the morning of December, 27, 1974, a contingent of 12 Queensland police officers, drawn from Lowood, Ipswich and Gatton, departed Eagle Farm Airport, headed for Darwin. Their role was to assist the Northern Territory police in restoring order to the city in the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy, which had devastated the area on Christmas Day.



As the first interstate police officers to arrive they arranged with the local Bank Manager, to use the still reasonably intact, Reserve Bank building as Commonwealth and Interstate Police Headquarters. Accommodation for the 12 Officers was hastily arranged at the Travel Lodge Motel, though the building was unroofed, waterlogged and the windows broken, it was the only place available at the time.

Constable 1/c Bob Latter finds unusual things have been looted from destroyed homes. He is holding a small stuffed crocodile and a pair of stuffed crocodile feet found by the anti-looting party sent to Millner St on Saturday December 28, 1974.

On the arrival of other interstate police contingents later that day, a strategic plan was drawn up, and interstate police operations commenced on 28 December. It was determined that their main functions would be search and rescue, anti-looting patrols and airport assembly control. With the second smallest number of interstate representatives, the Queensland police officers performed these tasks, as well as court and investigative duties, and RSPCA Patrol. They worked 12 hour shifts, in often uncomfortable and unhygienic conditions.

Constable 1/c Bob Latter lists the looted possessions found on Saturday, December 28,1974.



With growing tensions between the interstate Police contingents, Northern Territory Police, and at times, the local community, the task of restoring order in Darwin was a challenging one. Queensland's officers were noted for their exemplary conduct throughout, and were in fact the only contingent against whom, no complaints were made. The Queensland contingent returned to Brisbane on January 3, 1975. While Commonwealth forces remained, all other interstate police had vacated Darwin by January 17, 1975.

The devastation of Milner Street after the ravages of Cyclone Tracy, December 28, 1974.

Letter from Mr W.J. McLaren, Commissioner of Police, Darwin, Northern Territory to Acting Commissioner Martens, January 21, 1975.



“Words of mine cannot fully express my gratitude or that of the members of the Police Force for your wonderful gesture in sending a contingent of your men to assist this Police Force perform its duties in the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy. Some of the immediate work to be done was beyond the overtaxed resources of the Force. your contingent of Police assisted greatly, in conjunction with other Police Forces, in performing duty which otherwise would have taken some months for out members to complete. The members of your Police Force performed their duty in the highest traditions of Police Service and their conduct was exemplary. They were a credit to your Force. I would be grateful if you could express to these members my very sincere thanks for the excellent service rendered.”

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Cyclone Tracy – Relief Work Recollections as an Army Reserve Air Dispatcher – Kym Yeoward

Cyclone Tracy – Relief Work Recollections as an Army Reserve Air Dispatcher – Melbourne and Darwin – Dec-Jan 1974/75



Honda generator from Cyclone Tracy Relief

At the time, I lived in Melbourne and worked as a trainee accountant, with a part-time job in the Army Reserve (then the CMF – Citizen Military Forces) as 24 year-old Air Dispatcher with 37 Air Dispatch Platoon (RAASC) from 1971 to 75. We had 20 reservists plus 2 Army staff (Warrant Officer John Liston and Corporal Chris Farrer).

Our job was to pack, and parachute drop supplies in combat and disaster relief, plus load aircraft – mainly C7A Caribou and UH1

Iroquois helicopters but also C-130 Hercules.

Even Army Cessna 180s & Pilatus Porters in my early days.

Drop or airlift “anything and everything, anywhere” – ammo, fuel, food, Land Rovers & commando boats.

We were well trained and experienced in what we did – and ready!

Here’s a timeline of our involvement with Cyclone Tracy relief:

Wed 25/12 - Christmas at home in Melbourne. In evening heard on TV about a massive cyclone in Darwin – few details

Thurs 26th - Boxing Day. News full of Darwin situation. Put on uniform & waited by phone.

5.15 p.m. – Our popular Army warrant officer Johnny Liston (“JL”) rang “it’s on – unit parade at Laverton at 19:45”

Drove to RAAF Laverton airfield hangar (in western Melbourne). 14 of us were there – one snatched from a beach town by police car!

Communications were limited – no links to Darwin, other than a hobbyist “Ham” radio operator there, whose equipment had survived, and a hangered undamaged Connellan Airways Heron passenger plane, which had a radio link to air traffic control at Katherine Airfield,

Local comms for us were just telephone and a Telex tele-type machine. As I used one in my day job, our CO - Capt. Mike Russell-Croucher - had me man it.

Received message from RAAF Richmond (near Sydney) that C-130s would arrive from Darwin early morning with evacuees, plus other Hercs from Richmond, to pick-up supplies for Darwin. All 18 available Hercs were mobilised – modern E models and even the old A models, which had been scheduled for resale. (The RAAF had 22 Hercs – 4 were having maintenance). At Laverton, we also had an RNZAF Herc.

At the small Laverton terminal, we turned all the heaters fully on, scrounged every tea urn and babies’ bottle on the base - and waited.

Friday 27 0223 First Herc arrives. Passengers all women, babies, kids and teens. Helped them into the hangar, where 18 police got them on to Centrelink. Special Benefit cash payments. The Base treated and fed them, before giving them beds for the night in the Base Hospital.



All were exhausted after Tracy and 6½ hours in a noisy Herc! Some young kids had PTSD trauma and couldn’t speak.

That 37 Squadron plane set a record that night. C-130s are designed for up to 92 passengers - that night, I counted 156 coming off the plane, with mums holding 2 or 3 bubs on their knees. And what a m – e – s – s – as you guessed, I had to clean the aircraft - p – h – e – w – y nappies everywhere !!

Friday 27 Meantime, no break for our team, as we packaged relief supplies for the first (cont.) Darwin-bound Herc from Richmond. For 4 nights we just grabbed an occasional cat-nap in our cars, parked alongside the airfield - as we knew Hercs could arrive at any time, for immediate loading. Meals were hamburgers bought by our CO Capt Mike.



Friday 27 0930 Second Herc arrives – this time greeted by a large TV & media pack. Again, well over 100 passengers.

Friday 27 Our team packed pallets and loaded 71 flights will all manner of relief

Sunday 12 medical supplies, food rations, blankets,

tarps, 2,000 petrol generators, 1800 petrol water pumps & 2,000 portable gas stoves (from every camping store in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide). Plan was 1 stove, pump & generator *per street* – for the hubbies left behind. So they could cook an evening meal, have a shower and have some light and power – e.g for CB radios. Other cargo included heavy electro-magnets (from the Melbourne Harbour authority) and emergency vehicles. Also, helping evacuees from many more incoming evacuation flights arriving during this period.

Incidentally, huge thanks to the Melbourne Salvation Army!

During a short break on Saturday morning 28th, I called in at their headquarters in Bourke St, Melbourne – and explained that we only had 14 air-dispatchers to load the Hercs. Next morning, about 20 corpsmen arrived at Laverton and worked ceaselessly throughout, helping us manually assemble, strap and load hundreds of pallets, for the planes. As our team of 14 was small & the hours were long, their labour was a huge help.

Honestly, their hard work – all voluntary – helped us get through - and load 7 times the annual freight volume through Laverton, in 14 days.

I understand our sister Air Dispatch units -38 Platoon based in Richmond and 39 in Sydney, worked similarly during this period, at RAAF Richmond.



Wed 1 Jan 0600 I was packing another load, when our CO Mike Russell-Croucher lobbed-up and said, “Corporal [Vic] Ferguson, Private [Bob] Littlewood and Private [Yeoway] Yeoward – you’re on the next plane to Darwin, to help unload the aircraft (and others) and assess the local situation.” A 24 hour round trip – Darwin, Richmond and back to Laverton next morning.

0730 Our Herc is absolutely crammed with relief supplies – even a station wagon on the ramp – and enough fuel to get us to Darwin, unload and fly to Mt Isa - if fuel was short in Darwin. Plus, a BBQ pack and “refreshments” (beers) for the Darwin air-loaders (from the Mobile Air Movement Unit at RAAF Amberley, near Brisbane).

Vic, Bob and I boarded with no gear – apart from my canteen and one-man 24-hour ration pack, which I always carried. You guessed it! That little pack was carefully eked-out over the round trip - as our only food for 24 hours!

Our pilot reversed us up to the hangar doors at the start of the strip, stood on the wheel brakes, revved-up the engines to full throttle, then - **GO!** – We raced down the runway – for ever – and ever – and ever - - eventually clearing the fence at the end of the 6,500-foot strip by only 50 ft with a loud gasp from all!

0930 Bob awakens – after a difficult night, he’d grabbed a few winks on top of a pallet of blankets. “Where am I?” – “You’re 20,000 feet over Alice Springs!”

1400 Arrived over Darwin – not a leaf in sight for 100 kms and virtually every building destroyed or damaged. All power lines down. Power poles alongside RAAF Base bent over at 90 degrees, facing west – no doubt as Tracy rolled-in from Casuarina. Unloaded, then a brief chat with the RAAF Darwin air-loaders and helping them unload other Hercs, before reboarding our aircraft. Only to find our ramp motor had failed and I had to hoist it the ramp manually – 120 arm-pulls on a lever, before it locked, and we could go. – p – h – e – w! Landed at Richmond at 2130 for a brief break, then in Melbourne on another Herc, arriving at 0800.

Sun 12 Jan We finally finished – with a BBQ. Alas, Whitlam govt. defence cutbacks - “Barnardisation” - meant 37 Air Dispatch was dis-banded in April 75. A small, friendly “M*AS*H” bunch – irreverent, 100% professional & dedicated!

Postscript Air dispatch was started by Britain’s Royal Flying Corps in 1917 - when a biplane dropped a replacement millstone to a starving British garrison besieged in a fort in Iraq – enabling flour milling and bread-making, from their stored grain.

In Australia, it started in 1942 with ammunition and food drops during the Battle of the Kokoda Track.

Since then, Australian Army Air Dispatchers – including Reservists with 176 Air Dispatch Company in Sydney (and former Reserve platoons - 37 in Melbourne, 38 in Richmond NSW and 39 in Sydney) - have provided

vital air-drop and air-lift support in numerous disaster relief and combat support operations, in Australia and overseas.

E.g. in 2014, Australian RAAF C-130 and C-17 air crew and Army air-dispatchers dropped vital water bottles and food to thousands of Yazidi people trapped by ISIS on Mt Sinjar in northern Iraq.

In December 2014 I attended the Cyclone Tracy 40th Anniversary Service at Christ Church Cathedral in Darwin - representing 37 Air Dispatch.

Kym Yeoward, (formerly a 37 AD Private with an Air Dispatch Brevet – service no. 3169608). 7 Dec 2024

P.S. When we landed in Darwin, we spent several hours at the RAAF aircraft refuelling depot, just next to the Stuart Highway - as that shelter was still standing, despite bent-over power poles nearby. Funnily enough, the refuelling station still looks today pretty much as it did then - just a high roof, with no walls !.

PPS: 37 AD was aiming to have 30% of members parachute-qualified. In September 1974 – with no army course available – I did a civilian para course with the Labertouche Sport Parachute Centre, near Melbourne. Alas I broke my right ankle on a hard landing, when jumping from a Cessna 172 at 2,500 ft. A surgeon inserted a steel pin. Unfortunately, during a cold winter visiting Melbourne in 2018, the scar tissue broke apart and formed a venous ulcer. Just now – December 2024 – it’s finally healed, after twice-a-week dressing by community nurses. I’ve now moved to lower-leg compression stockings. RAASC: Royal Australian Army Service Corps – which was re-formed into the new RACT – Royal Australian Corps of Transport in 1975.

From Boxing Day to Tracy’s Aftermath – a RAAF Medic’s journey –

Peter Jager

On Boxing Day 1974, we invited our next-door neighbours to dinner in our brand-new Hoppers Crossing home. At that time, I was based at Point Cook and was working through Christmas, except for public holidays. Helen had worked a day shift at Altona Hospital, [having had to resign her commission from the RAAFNS after marrying a Cpl], and we were sharing a wine with our friends when I received a phone call from the RAAF Laverton Orderly Officer, advising me I would be flying out to Darwin in the morning. When I asked why, the incredulous response was, “Haven’t you seen the news? There has been a cyclone in Darwin – turn your TV on.” Indeed, I had not seen the news and was otherwise occupied, landscaping our new garden – which now would have to wait. Next morning at 0700, I reported to the RAAF Laverton flight line and after some hours waiting, with a couple of other seconded personnel, we boarded a C130 Hercules for Darwin, stopping off at RAAF Richmond to fill the aircraft with fresh water, food and other stores and to pick up a few more personnel.



The flight was one of many other RAAF C130 aircraft destined to Darwin on 27 December, and was uneventful other than the view of devastation, seen as we approached the Darwin base. Whilst the view from the aircraft



portholes was limited, the destruction and debris on the ground was unbelievable, with flattened hangers, badly damaged aircraft, including a RAAF Dakota, and even the historic bloodhound missile, mounted at the base entry, was destroyed. Almost all the total area was a mass of corrugated iron, building debris and uprooted vegetation, except the airstrips were spotlessly clean having been thoroughly cleared to permit safe air movements. The scene was truly surreal.

After unloading from the C130 on the end of the strip, we were taken by Land Rover, the driver required to find a safe passage through the ground obstacles, as no roadways were cleared, destined

to one of the least damaged buildings, which had some terminal facilities. I was heartened to see the Salvos were already setting up a booth, to provide food and refreshment for passengers and crew alike, and besides being very busy, were surprisingly hesitant to take my donation at that time. The Base Medical Flight [BMF] was my next stop and given the total destruction of neighbouring married quarters and other structures, I was astounded to see very little external damage to this building, perhaps saved because it was relatively new. Apart from a little fascia damage, the roof and walls all appeared intact. Inside the BMF there was a 'hive' of activity, as staff had a continuous flow of casualties, some RAAF, some dependents, some neither, through the Treatment Room, mainly dealing with lacerations sustained during the cyclone, or during early clean-up. I remember watching a very proficient Dental Assistant, inserting a neat line of sutures in a patient's lacerated leg – certainly not her normal line of work. Eventually I was allocated a bed space on the corridor floor, alongside the half a dozen or so other personnel already arrived. The bed spaces continued to be filled, as more staff arrived on incoming aircraft.

I was later to learn that the cyclone was not unexpected. Apparently, there were numerous warnings during the prior week, with a major alert 4 days previous from another cyclone, but then it turned away from the city and 'all clear' was declared. Even with the warnings of Cyclone Tracy, it was an on again/off again situation, as the path changed. Consequently, there was some complacency amongst the locals, as during the day on Christmas Eve, some senior base personnel had decided the risk was not so great, as to need to cancel their fishing trip on nearby Fannie Bay. Cyclone warnings or not.

During the evening of the 24th of December, the cyclone path did change. Whilst initially tracking on a south westerly path, through the Arafura Sea adjacent the coast, in the early hours of Christmas Eve the path changed to a south easterly direction and headed towards landfall and Darwin city. At 0145 hours the cyclone was directly over the RAAF Base, before changing direction again and proceeding towards Darwin CBD, then at about 0300 it resumed a south easterly path of destruction towards the Gulf of Carpentaria, but destroying DCA, RAAF and RAN radio transmitters on route. At the height of the storm wind speed was registered at 217kph, and before breaking, the rain gauge recorded 195mm in 8 hours. Typical of all cyclones, when the 'eye' was overhead, the wind stopped, and all was quiet. However, this was only temporary relief, as soon as the eye passed, the turmoil began again, but this time in the opposite direction. Much of the damage was done in this stage.

Many RAAF personnel were housed in 'married quarters' on the base. These buildings were typically 2 story structures, with a living area upstairs constructed with timber and glass, often with louvre windows, and downstairs a masonry block bathroom and laundry. This was fortunate, in that families were able to seek refuge downstairs, when the roof and second storey were damaged or destroyed, however they were left with only the clothing, [often night attire], they were wearing at the time and losing all personal effects and furniture from the floor above.

Across the devastated city, there was widespread death and destruction and extensive injuries. The senior Hospital anaesthetist was almost decapitated on his way to work, when struck by flying corrugated iron roofing, and added to the fatality count. Following the impact there was no water supply, no power supply, no working sanitation and most importantly, no communication – trees were uprooted or denuded of all foliage, birds and insects disappeared. Even those who had kept a battery radio, [as was advised in cyclone season preparation], were not immune, as both radio stations also failed.

At that time Major General Alan Stretton was leading the Canberra based Natural Disasters Organisation, and was soon on the ground, arriving on the first aircraft into Darwin. He was appointed, and given total control of the region, by Deputy Prime Minister Dr Jim Cairns, as Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was on leave overseas. Among his top priorities was the restoration of communication between the RAN, RAAF, Army and Police as well as the rest of the nation. Whilst the Darwin hospital was substantially damaged, it still provided some services with support from local voluntary organizations, including the Red Cross who quickly endeavoured to maintain records of personnel movements, as some residents had already begun evacuating south by road, assuming their vehicle was roadworthy and having lost all else.

My work in the BMF, along with the many other seconded personnel, was limited to assisting the regular staff in the Treatment Room, and general duties around the BMF. Even this mundane work had its surprises however, as when I went to remove a pillow from the linen closet, I unearthed a wide selection of spirits and liqueurs,

salvaged by a staff members from their destroyed home – apparently drinks and cash were a priority to be secured, in case of looting.

Drinks also provided some diversion from the devastation, and I attended a couple of bizarre cyclone parties, with people returning to their homes and sitting in ruins, recalling the good times and remembering ‘what was’. Alcohol was plentiful, although beer [and music] were in short supply, still residents celebrated surviving the cyclone. This ‘honeymoon’ period was accompanied by euphoria and seen as a reason to party, at the relief of being alive or not seriously injured (although losing personal effects, and being thankful that on base, the homes were RAAF owned).

However, the happy times were quickly replaced by feelings of guilt: “How did we survive when others were killed or seriously injured?” Then the guilt was often followed by severe depression, which undoubtedly could lead to long term PTSD. As time passed, there was also often a period of anger, particularly directed at authorities, as relief aid was deemed insufficient and too slow, being implemented.



Some staff were involved in a Medevac, when a call came to evacuate an indigenous casualty, with a severe abdominal condition from Groote Eylandt to Darwin Hospital. Unfortunately, all I could manage was an occasional run into Darwin Hospital by base ambulance, when injured casualties required additional treatment. Interestingly, the presence of indigenous people in the town was minimal, as it appears they ‘went bush’ for safety before the cyclone arrived. What did they know or expect, that the general population didn’t?

Then the formal evacuations by air commenced. Darwin had a population of just under 45,000, and after Tracy had destroyed approximately 70% of housing, there was a need to evacuate as many as possible, in order to provide safety and avoid disease outbreak. Opportunity for evacuation was limited however, as workers were required for clean-up, so the decision was made where women, children and where possible, family pets were the first priority, as generally men were required to stay to assist with clean-up.

Both civilian and service aircraft were involved in evacuation flights, with a Boeing 747 loading a record of almost 700 personnel [including crew]. The addition weight was enabled, due to negligible luggage loaded. C130 Hercules aircraft were also loaded to capacity, with RAAF Health personnel usually allocated as an escort.

I was soon tasked to fly to Adelaide, on an evacuation flight, [whereas most other flights had been to Richmond.] The Herc Loadmaster had squeezed a record number of women, children and pets on board, and the aircraft Captain ordered cargo nets to be strung over the passengers, as they were seated on the floor and unable to be belted in. The nets, however, didn’t contain the cats – those not restrained ran wild, all over the top of the nets even though many were supposedly ‘sedated’ pre-flight – we soon found that human tranquilizers and sedatives are not designed for felines!

The departure from Darwin was quite emotional, as after take-off, “Auld Lang Syne” was sung by families, not knowing where they were destined, or when they would see Dad again. We flew out low over Darwin, with the Herc rear cargo hatch half open, so all could see the devastation.

After arrival in Adelaide, the Herc did a quick turn around and after a few hours, again I accompanied a return flight loaded with food and supplies. This flight was diverted on route however, and was directed to Tindall, as the influx of evacuees by road had overwhelmed the town of Katherine. I can recall the unloading of supplies, specifically a whole pallet of fresh oranges, as well as a pallet of donated clothing, which included items such as heavy suits and even neck-ties – hardly useful items in the tropics, in ‘the wet’. On arrival back in Darwin I also noted other pallets of Our Stories supplies, including woollen blankets, left in the open and exposed to the torrential afternoon rain typical of the season – I guess they would soon be mildewed and rot, as opportunity to drying them was unlikely.

I also met some RAN personnel from HMAS Melbourne, one of the numerous naval vessels which arrived later in the week, and they said they were tasked to complete door to door searches, to look for survivors [or bodies], and to empty fridges and freezers, burying the decaying food in the garden.

On my return I also found some degree of communication had been restored, and as I had been away for more than a week, I qualified for a free telephone call home. In the early evening, I went with a couple of colleagues to two supervised public phones, and after a couple of hours wait in the queue, was able to speak to Helen for a timed 2 minutes.

A total of 66 were killed by the immediate effect of Cyclone Tracy, with others dying later due to injuries sustained.



While rebuilding of Darwin was basically completed in 3 years, well ahead of schedule, many residents never returned to the Territory but found a new life in the other states.

More than 35,000 had been evacuated; >25,000 by air [>16,000 by civilian aircraft and 10,000 by military] and >7,000 drove south by road.

In my last days before returning home, Governor-General Sir John Kerr visited the city and was also escorted through the BMF by senior staff, later issuing a very rare 'Order of the Day' commending 'all members of the Defence Force for their instant response and willing participation in the Darwin relief operations.'

This recognition should have reached much further as made obvious in 'When Will The Birds Return?'



The Beard kids, Jason, Kim and Juliet, on their unexpected 'storm holiday' in Lismore in early 1975. After Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin on Christmas Eve, they were evacuated with their Mum, long-term Darwin resident Judy Beard, and a whopping 670 other passengers on the record-breaking flight from Darwin to Sydney. They stayed in a caravan on a family property in Lismore while relief efforts continued in Darwin, returning to rebuild their lives two months later. Thoughts going out to all Tracy survivors this Christmas.

Image: [Judy Beard](#)

Published: 23 December 2018

Our Stories of Post Cyclone Life

Peter and Joy Codrington

We lived in Kurrajong Cres Nightcliff and at first light we went out with the St John First Aid Kit and moved from house to house (or whatever remained of the house) and assisting with extraction and dressing several wounded.

Then at about 1600hrs drove to Darwin Police HQ via a very unusual route through back and side yards and bits of roadway that could be navigated amongst the pretzel power poles and other debris.

I then went about Police business, and we slept in the cells for a couple of nights then moved to the Travelodge. Joy (who absolutely refused to be evacuated) and Eileen Cossons started up a kitchen in Police HQ and for several months kept the troops fed. Many a juicy steak supplied by Bluey Harvey from a farming contact was consumed.

Joy as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse also spent time at the Darwin Hospital caring for those who did not have long to live. Joy also remembers helping the evacuees with their children and property at the front of the Police STN prior to their departure to the airport.



Dean Smith

Our family's journey began in Cobram, Victoria, where we were dairy farmers until my father, Brian Smith (dec 2013) joined the Northern Territory Police Force in 1974. He graduated in December of that year, and during the graduation ceremony, the skies opened up, signalling the beginning of what would become Cyclone Tracy. At just two years and 11 months old, I was too young to fully grasp the impending disaster, but my memories are shaped by the stories and experiences shared by my family.

On that fateful night, my mother, Elaine Smith, was home alone with my younger brother and baby sister while my father was on police duties. It wasn't until late in the evening that the officers were allowed to return to their families. In an effort to keep us safe, my parents decided to hunker down in the main bedroom, using a mattress to shield us three young children from the storm. I now realize how terrifying that must have been for them, especially knowing that the bathroom, our designated safe space, was potentially at risk from the hot water system on the other side of the wall.

When the storm finally passed, we discovered the full extent of the damage. Our roof was gone, and we had lost all our belongings, including our Christmas presents. Our car was found 200 meters down the road (Easter Cr, Nightcliff), flipped onto its roof. Amidst the devastation, there was a tragic story of another family whose Christmas tree and presents survived in a cupboard, but sadly, they did not. Such tales highlight the trauma that lingered in the community long after the cyclone had passed.

Though I was too young to remember the cyclone vividly, I experienced the aftermath through my parents' stories. I remember peeking out from beneath the mattress, curious about the howling winds and rain, while my parents tried to shield us from the terror outside. Like many others affected by the cyclone, we were evacuated back to Melbourne and then to Cobram to be with family. My father stayed behind to help with the cleanup and rebuilding, and we returned to Darwin shortly after Easter in 1975, where we continued to live for another six and a half years.

Despite the trauma, I have fond memories of growing up in Darwin. My mother tells me that I suffered from nightmares after the cyclone, especially during storms, but life continued. One of my favourite stories from the post-cyclone period was when the Royal Australian Navy came to assist with the cleanup. The police officers, in conjunction with the Naval Police, often brought in drunk sailors for their safety, and one of those Naval Police sailors (Wally Jankiwsyj) became a lifelong family friend. His encouragement ultimately led me to join the Navy years later, bringing me back to Darwin for a posting at Coonawarra—a full circle of life.

In 1980, my father was posted to Alice Springs, marking our exit from Darwin. I cherish those laid-back days spent driving around in my dad's mini-moke, no seatbelts in sight, embodying the relaxed spirit of the town. Since then, I've visited Darwin a few times and still have friends there. Though it has changed, it remains a place I love dearly.

Esther Murray's story

Christmas Day and the following few days were just crazy and in a lot of ways very scary. Could I say that Darwin looked like a deck of cards that had just fallen over, everywhere? Some of the houses had just bits and pieces of walls, with windows and roofs scattered about. Cars were on their sides/heads with some ending up in their owners or neighbors' pools. The hospital was a mess, flooding everywhere, very few staff, all trying to sort it out, it was virtually impossible. Nevertheless, a lot of patients were seen despite the lack of staff numbers and safe spaces. People carrying their children as they traversed the flooded areas. Heartbreaking, in a lot of cases.

We had no home to stay so we headed up to St Mary Primary School, in Smith Street. The Parish Priest had opened the school for people to use. We hoped we could stay there and help people as much as possible. The walk from the hospital at the bottom of Smith Street to St Mary's, usually a 15-minute walk, was so difficult. Everywhere was covered in debris, it was virtually impossible to stand up let alone walk forward. It took the emergency service quite some time to clear it, allowing some easier access.

We moved into a "book cupboard" in one of the school spaces. Pulling two small desks into the space, it was much like a large wardrobe, we slept on the desk with no mattress or sheets, but hell, *we were alive*. That was the first time, much to my displeasure, that I met Mr. American - one of the flying cockroach species found in Darwin. Apparently, he had also moved into the book cupboard with a few dozen of his *mates*.



Showers were nonexistent but we discovered that a pipeline near Stuart Park was being used to collect water and to wash oneself. We used it often with hundreds of other people.

We spent a few weeks at the school helping in any way possible. We had a lovely group of people there, maybe 60 or so at any given time, with some being evacuated each day. Families were housed in classrooms and any space that could be found. We didn't leave Darwin as we felt we were needed. My husband John was to commence his training at the Police Academy in Mitchell St in early January, however it was so badly damaged it wasn't possible. An arrangement was made with the S.A Police, to hold the training at their Thebarton Training Academy in Adelaide. We flew down the end of January 1974. Little did we know we would not be returning to Darwin. After training, John was allocated Alice Springs in the March. We spent some time at Yuendumu a few years later. I worked, mainly in Community Health, plus we had two daughters during that time. We returned to Darwin when John joined Task Force in the mid-1980s. We loved the new Darwin, and I especially loved the new hospital. Our 2 girls settled into Darwin life very well. We left Darwin, for the final time in 1994, heading to Melbourne. Darwin will always hold a place in our hearts. John unfortunately passed away in 2019.

THE MORNING AFTER AND BEYOND FOR MARCIA & ROWAN CHARRINGTON OF WANGURI TERRACE, WANGURI

Rowan and a couple of neighbours went to rescue the young Son of our neighbours - Hamish was pinned under a collapsed wardrobe for most of the night. Fortunately, young Hamish had superficial injuries.

People from our area moved to the Telecom (Telstra) exchange on the corner of Van Der Lin & Lee Point Drive Roads (in Wanguri). It was a solid concrete building under construction. The concrete roof had been poured the week before but there were no windows or doors installed. There were Portaloo's on the property for the construction workers - we were so appreciative of them.



The exchange floor was covered with water therefore no dry place to rest. The men set about working to get a large dry area for people & children to rest and maybe sleep. Everyone was so concerned about any weather to come. At that stage there was no radio. The men began using the building materials stored there e.g.: metal wall battens and sheets of dry gyprock to make a platform around the entire edge of the building as there were so many people & children there - it worked well - a great job by our men. After some of the roads had been cleared with heavy plant we had a visit from a fire truck & firemen in the evening of 26th. They brought us clean water & juices plus much awaited news. They let us know Casuarina Shopping Centre would be

open the next morning for only the men to go at an arranged time to collect at no cost a change of clothes for families - limited to 1 set per person.

We had plenty of food - home BBQ's came over & we cooked in shifts. The ABC radio restarted with long awaited news & information, unfortunately in the very beginning the announcers only had 2 pieces of music to play (in the days of vinyl). One was "Annie's Song" and the other "A walk in the Black Forrest" - they joked about this constantly, but more music arrived after a day or so.

Rowan & I moved to the Weights & Measures Laboratory in Winnellie where he worked as a Weights & Measures Inspector. Not only were Weights & Measures staff & family there but quite a few others including the NT Government Staff responsible for & caring for children in care awaiting fostering & adoption. Everyone was very distressed & emotional by this time. We all wanted a shower.

The radio announced the start of air evacuations. I didn't want to leave Rowan but I was beginning to feel unwell so agreed to fly to Adelaide to stay with my parents and go & see a doctor.

I flew to Adelaide close to the end of the week after Tracy with only the clothes I was wearing that Rowan had got from Casuarina Shopping Centre. I felt absolutely lousy.

My mother took me into the city the next day to get clothes. We were in one of the main department stores to firstly get some bras. The assistant asked me what size I wear - I couldn't remember my bra size - I broke down & cried. Mum explained I had lost everything in cyclone Tracy. They took me aside measured me and donated 1/2 dozen new bra's I couldn't believe their generosity, I was so overcome.

My next focus was to get back to Darwin - this was going to be difficult. I needed to register in the city & provide details & conditions of where I would live.

Rowan was still accommodated in the Weights & Measures laboratory. He was desperately trying to find suitable accommodation for us so I could return. At last, he was able to get us a room in the Government Hostel (aka - Backpackers Lodge) in Mitchell Street. I went to provide this detail at the Office in Adelaide City set up for the permit system for people to enter Darwin. I bumped into a group of Darwin people in the city & we headed for a coffee place in Hindley Street to chat & catchup. While at the table awaiting our orders one of the staff dropped a huge dishwashing tray of glasses & crockery - we all dived under the table as the sound was too much. We all knew we wouldn't get over the effects of Tracy for a very, very long time if ever.



I was issued with a permit to enter Darwin. The flight I caught in Adelaide had very few people mostly media & political people, I didn't see anyone who was like me returning to Darwin.

Rowan met me at the airport I just melted into his loving arms we were to celebrate our 2nd wedding anniversary in February. My return to Darwin in early January was full of difficult emotions. The destruction was everywhere there was no street lighting and no recognisable areas to get your

bearings. Life in the Government Hostel wasn't easy, water leaked everywhere & we had to put plastic over our bed to keep it dry (we were in a single bedroom on the top floor). Meals were provided in the dining room canteen style. I still wasn't feeling very well and found I was very often nauseous. If Rowan got back from work too late to eat in the dining room we went to the Capri cafe/restaurant in Knuckey Street to get a pizza or Italian dish - delicious.

Rowan, his boss, and a small group of other Government staff were made into a team that went out to assess addresses and properties that were given by people wishing to return to Darwin as suitable and safe. Not an easy job. The information was the important factor for issuing permits for people wanting & needing to return to Darwin. I still have my official permit granting my return to Darwin.

At this early stage there were very strong rumours Darwin would be abandoned & re-built elsewhere. The Government Department I worked for had relocated to set up and work from Brisbane. A lot of Government Departments were relocated to interstate addresses eg: Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane. This allowed business to continue & staff to live in safer and healthier accommodation.

My Government employment changed to a position as a receptionist/courier shared with another staff member in the Executive section of the Department of NT (prior to self-government - Legislative Assembly). This was a very busy and sensitive work area. Constantly delivering documents for signature to Government House & all areas of the Defence Forces. A machine was introduced that could transmit & receive document copies called a Voadex Machine - early version of a fax machine. It took 15-20 minutes to receive or send 1 page. Sometimes late copies would be coming through for executive staff from Canberra - I might be delayed in leaving the Office by about 2hrs on these occasions.

Still not feeling to well - kept thinking it was the canteen food and stresses we were in, Rowan took me to the Doctor. It was Dr Ella Stack - the Mayor of Darwin. She checked me over then did a pregnancy test. Dr Stack confirmed I was pregnant with our 1st child. My unwellness was, of course, morning sickness. Baby's due date was 28th August therefore Rowan & I realised that with all the traumas of Tracy we didn't lose our little one.

The rumours about abandoning Darwin proved to be wrong. The plan was to bring as many caravans up from all over Australia and install 2 to as many house blocks that were suitable so people could have dry accommodation. Each block had to have water and sewerage. Teams of people came to begin this project and so many were in the Hostel/Lodge we were in. Every room in Hotels and Motels were full of people living there week to week. There were the Demolition teams as well going through properties demolishing & removing unsafe structures & buildings. They all needed accommodation & food; Darwin High School was set up as a huge feeding station.

I tried to keep safe now I knew I was pregnant - I was terrified I would be evacuated again.

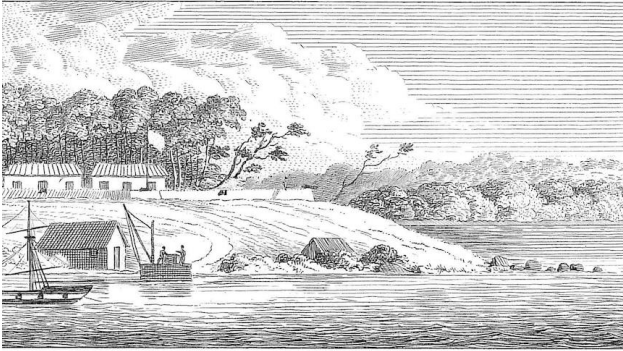
There was a ballot system to allocate caravans. Our block out at Wanguri had 2 lovely caravans placed and Rowan and I moved out of the Lodge/Hotel just at the 7 month of my pregnancy and dear friends moved into the other caravan with their beautiful dog Angel.

Our baby girl arrived safe and well at 01:15am on 1st September 1975 less than 12 months after Tracy. She was born in the newly restored maternity ward of the Old Darwin Hospital at Larrakia. There were a few other new Mums there on that Day.

Things were moving forward but all building was on hold whilst the new building code was established.



200 Year Anniversary of the British arriving at Fort Dundas on the Tiwi Islands - The Forgotten Struggle of Fort Dundas: A Tale of Resistance and Resilience



View of FORT DUNDAS, taken from Garden Point.

Why is this story important to the NT Police? The Marines were the first to take on a police role in the Northern Territory. The marine were never relieved by new detachments, like the soldiers, they endured the entire lifetime of the settlement. Boredom was a major problem. Not all marines in New Holland had such little to do as their duties depended on the posting. Elsewhere they guarded convict and were involved with the system of convict transportation, some were used to hunt down bush rangers, o saw action in the suppression of armed resistance by Indigenous Australians, and they assisted local police to maintain public order, Marine also undertook ceremonial duties such as firing ceremonial

artillery salutes and developed the nation's military defences. They ran quarantine stations and some government houses and manned coastal defences, built fortifications, put out fires, organised executions, provided guards for wrecks and mounted escorts for moving gold from the gold fields. They also fought at the Eureka Stockade, The collapsed wall of weather-beaten bricks, surrounded by a dense forest of cycad palms and eucalyptus, may seem unremarkable, but it holds a significant place in the history of the Tiwi people.

In 1824, about 70 British soldiers and convicts landed on the shores of the Tiwi Islands with grand ambitions to build an international trade port to rival Singapore. Over the next five years, the colonists faced sickness, malnutrition, and sporadic raids from Tiwi warriors, ultimately abandoning their outpost in favour of settlements further east, which also failed. The 3rd Foot Marines preceded the 57thFoot.

A Monument to Tiwi Resistance - Tiwi Land Council member Brian Tipungwuti emphasizes the importance of Fort Dundas as a monument to the Tiwi's resistance to foreign incursion. "What the Tiwi have done is always protect our land," he says. "We were warriors and vicious people that wouldn't let anyone come on land and do anything."



The Tiwi offered fierce resistance to the colonists of Fort Dundas. According to a report from Fort Dundas's commandant John Campbell in 1826, a Tiwi leader named Tampu was captured, accused of killing a convict. However, Tiwi oral history offers a different perspective. Mr. Tipungwuti recounts that Tampu was wrongfully captured while passing by sick settlers and was later able to escape and warn his people about the newcomers.



NT schoolchildren commemorating the centenary of Fort Dundas in 1924. (Supplied: NT Archives) The Struggles of the Settlers

Archaeologist Solomon Staunton, visiting the ruins with Mr. Tipungwuti, is researching his own ancestor, John Richardson, a convict gardener at Fort Dundas. The settlement suffered from scurvy and nutritional deficiencies, and Richardson volunteered to help. However, he clashed with the fort's commandant, who criticized his gardening skills.



Historian Derek Pugh explains that the objective of Fort Dundas was to give the British a foothold in lucrative Southeast Asian trade routes. The British envisioned Melville Island as another Singapore, but the settlement failed to attract trade and was eventually abandoned.

A Heritage Claim for the Future

Mr. Pugh and Mr. Staunton presented their research at a Munupi clan meeting, where about 40 clan members passed a motion to progress a heritage claim for the site, ahead of its 200th anniversary next year. Mr. Tipungwuti believes the site represents the Tiwi people's journey through the complex terrain between tradition and modernity. "Moving forward, this is a new future. That's how we've got to live now, coming together," he says.



The Legacy of Fort Dundas

Captain J. J. Gordon Bremer set sail from Port Jackson in 1824 to colonize the northern part of Australia. The construction of Fort Dundas began upon arrival and was officially proclaimed on Trafalgar Day. The settlers faced hostility from the Tiwi people, tropical storms, isolation, and low supplies, leading to the fort's abandonment in 1829. Remnants of the fort were visible nearly 70 years after its closure, and a commemoration event was held in Darwin in 1924. Relics of uniforms worn at Fort Dundas were found during a medical survey of Melville Island in 1938 and donated to the Mitchell Library at the University of Sydney in 1972.

A New Chapter

Today, the ruins of Fort Dundas stand as a testament to the resilience and resistance of the Tiwi people. As the 200th anniversary approaches, the Munupi clan's heritage claim aims to preserve this important historical site for future generations, ensuring that the story of Fort Dundas and the Tiwi's enduring spirit is never forgotten.

Tiwi Islanders 'fought viciously'



Mr Pugh said the British wanted to use this site to build an international trade port. (*ABC News: Peter Garnish*)

Mr Pugh and Mr Staunton both presented their research about Fort Dundas at a Munupi clan meeting, along with author and filmmaker Santilla Chigiape who presented an account of African convicts also sent to the outpost.

Brian Tipungwuti stands by the ruins of Fort Dundas on the Tiwi Islands.

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Dundas Artifacts – Kym Chilton’s Collection

These are some of the items recovered by Kym Chilton in the 1980s - 1990s at the Fort Dundas site using a metal detector.



1. 3rd Foot (The Buffs) shako plate. This badge has the inscription Peninsular and Douro. The word Douro is a city in Portugal, where the 3rd foot and others in May 1809 had fought gallantly defending off the French during the Peninsular war.



- 2 Remnants of a 57th foot shako plate.

3. Three British uniform buttons. The top two are from a Royal Marines uniform. The bottom pewter button is from the 57th foot. This button was located next to the water well.

4. British shako / Stove hat chin strap with gilt rosettes and lion head emblem to one end.



5. These are some of the log splitters recovered.

Note the now faint broad arrow stamp marks, which designate British Military ownership.



6. Brass shoulder epaulettes from a Royal Marines uniform.



7. Piece of broken gold ring band



8. A buckle and old musket shot ball. Several of these were recovered.



9. Piece of broken lime juice bottle with the seal mark GR, being for King George 111 of England. Lime juice was detrimental to help prevent scurvy to the Royal Marines.

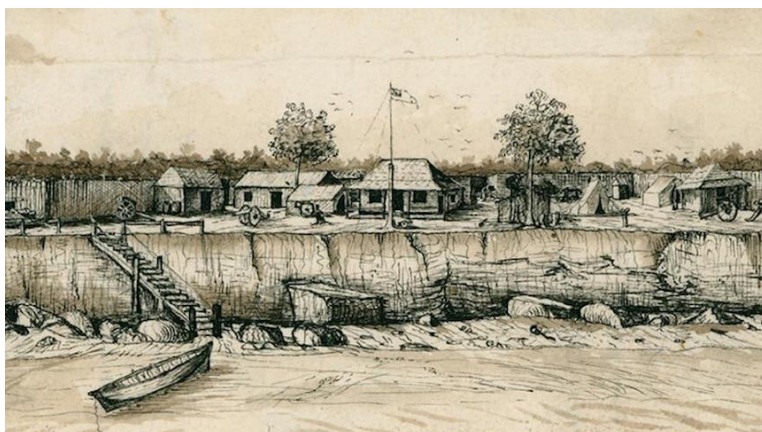
10. Lion head emblem from a British Royal Marines uniform ie, cross belt, shako hat etc.



11. Mattock head. This was located under a large rock. It may have been hidden there by convict/s.



12 The remnants of a rake head. This could have possibly been used by the gardeners. John Mathew Richardson and Thomas Sullivan.



[Early Attempts to Establish Settlements: Fort Dundas - ABC Education](#)

Life after Serving – Wendy Schultz APM



When did you join NT Police? 2 Oct 1978

When did you retire? 15 Jan 2015

What is a memorable moment for you? Operation Delta the protests at Pine Gap in 1983.

What inspired you to join and then to stay? I never wanted just a desk job. I loved the difference in opportunities in the NT police

Who were some of your mentors and greatest influencers? Les Chapman and Glenys Simpson

How does it feel to be retired? Good as I try to have a busy life.

What did you do to prepare yourself for retirement?

Day job and 12 months long service leave before retiring

How are you looking after yourself now? I swim and try and play golf and fish.

Wendy has an impressive service history. She became a 1st Class Constable on 2 October 1982, a Senior Constable 2 October 1988 and a Sergeant on 26 May 1975.

She was awarded The National Service Medal in 1993, the 25 year clasp in 2004.

In 2004 Wendy was awarded to Commissioner's Outstanding Leadership Medal.

On 1999 Wendy was awarded the NT Police Service Medal and 20 year bar followed by the 30 year bar in 2009.

In 2010 she was awarded the Australian Police Medal

Native Constable Walter -

No biographical details of this member are known.

On 1st November 1892 a Native Constable was killed when he and a fellow Native Constable were ambushed near Erldunda.

The two Aboriginal Police Officers, now known only as Tommy and Walter, while investigating the theft of some goats from Erldunda Station, were attacked by about 20 Aborigines.

Native Constable Walter was killed by a spear which went through his kidneys. Native Constable Tommy was also speared in the attack which was repulsed after firing a few revolver shots. Next, Mounted Constable Thomas Daer and Tommy, having buried Walter, followed the tracks of the fugitives to Ippia Range

The Aboriginal fugitives kept to the rocks, and they would not surrender. Daer reported that Tommy got "very ill" from his spear wound at this stage and they were forced to lift the siege and return to Erldunda.



As far as we know no one was ever held responsible for the murder of Native Constable Walter. He is honoured by a plaque on the National Police Memorial in Canberra which was dedicated on Police Remembrance Day in 2022.

National Police Wall of Remembrance
Canberra ACT.

Died While Serving - Charles Western (Weston) Lees

Police Trooper Third Class

Date of Birth—15th January 1847 in Ireland. Date of Death—8th November 1880 - aged 33 years

Police Trooper Third Class Charles Weston Lees joined the South Australian Police on the 15th January 1874 and transferred to the Northern Territory in February of that year.

Police Trooper Third Class Lees resigned on the 20th April 1876, to go to England, but re-joined in July 1879.

Police Trooper Third Class Lees, who was described as "an excellent man well up in duties", died of fever and is buried in the Goyder Road Cemetery, Darwin.



Many of our readers will be sorry to learn that Mr Charles Western Lees died in the Palmerston Hospital on the 8th instant, of bilious intermittent fever, aged thirty-five years. Lees was appointed to the Northern Territory police force in January 1874, resigned his appointment in

April, 1876, for the purpose of visiting the old country. After an absence of eighteen months he returned to South Australia, and joined Dr Brown's party, and arrived in the Territory in July, 1879. In September he rejoined the police force, and was in charge of the Pine Creek station till a few weeks before his death. He was well liked by his officers and all who knew him.



NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Station Story - CONNISTON

This Police Station was also known as Brooks Soak

The Conniston (sometimes Coniston) Police station was opened late in 1931 and closed in 1935.

In February 1931, a recommendation was made for the erection of a police station on 5 square miles of land to be established at Weldon Soak on the boundary of Pine Hill and Coniston Stations.



Brooks Soak near Coniston Station, Northern Territory, 1928

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-149196149>

The purpose of the Police Station was to act as a base for the Northwest Camel Patrol which patrolled the area to the North and West of the Alice Springs Police Station, obviating the need for the patrol to return from the region of Coniston.

Due to Weldon Soak not being considered a permanent water supply, the chosen site was moved to Mount Naval Action or "Brooks Soak", situated 14 miles (22 kms) west of Coniston Homestead at the junction of the Tanami and Wolfram Roads.

The sites were investigated by mounted Constable Albert Stuart McColl, on 5th March 1931, who reported that the Mount Naval Action Site was most appropriate.

McColl erected the shelter later in 1931.

In a letter to the Secretary for Home Affairs on 7th January 1932 the Deputy Administrator stated:

"A shelter hut for the officer performing The Northwest Patrol has been erected about 14 miles from Conniston Station. Spring water is available and the site would be very suitable for the location of a Police Station suitable for a married officer."

Shortly after erecting the station, McColl was transferred to Darwin and was a member of a police patrol sent to Caledon Bay in East Arnhem Land in 1933 to investigate the murders of five Japanese and two English fishermen. During this patrol, on 1st August 1933, McColl was speared to death on Woodah Island.

By late 1935, the shelter became badly infested with white ants and it was recommended that it be replaced by a new police station. Although a more substantial prefabricated building was purchased, it was not put up at Conniston and was stored for some years at Alice Springs



IN 1938 the building was erected, not at Conniston but at Finke to establish the Finke Police Station.

As a result, the police station at Conniston was abandoned in 1935 and it was never re-opened.

Site of Fred Brook's grave near Coniston Station, Northern Territory, 1928

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-149196241>

CRISIS SUPPORT PHONE NUMBERS

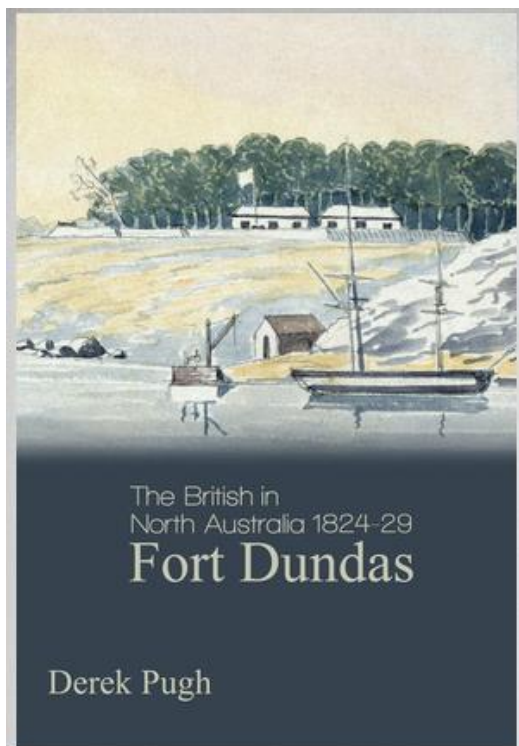
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[FORT DUNDAS](#)

By Derek Pugh

Derek Pugh OAM is a historian has lived in the Northern Territory for over 40 years. After a career in Education contexts ranging from large urban senior schools, to tiny remote homeland centre schools in Arnhem Land, and several International schools. He has published 15 books.

MERCHANDISE

If you are interested in the history of policing in the Northern Territory, the NT Police Museum and Historical Society has two publications and a coin you can purchase. These items make great gifts!

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<https://www.ntpmhs.com.au/all-products>



THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
Police Shoulder Patch

The original triangle police shoulder patch was introduced in 1976, marking one of the earliest patches adopted by an Australian police jurisdiction. The colours of the patch reflect the North Australian Observer Unit, commonly known as the "Nackeross" who operated across the Top End during WWII. Following the Northern Territory's attainment of self-government, this emblem was redesigned to reflect the Territory's evolving status.

The current Northern Territory Police shoulder patch, which was adopted in 1988, underwent a meticulous design process spanning two years and was gradually implemented over an 18-month period. At its core, the patch features a kangaroo, symbolising the rugged terrain of the Australian outback, encircling the kangaroo is a laurel wreath adorned with the Territory's floral emblem, Sturt's desert rose. Above the kangaroo stands St Edward's Crown, representing the Commonwealth ties of the Northern Territory.

This distinctive shoulder patch design emerged from a pool of staff submissions, with Senior Constable Peter Hamon credited for the design's final iteration. The inclusion of the words 'serve' and 'protect' can also be attributed to the insightful contribution of Senior Constable Arthur Eggleston.

History of Policing in Timber Creek

A commemorative booklet produced by the Northern Territory Police

History of Policing in Timber Creek

\$15.00

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