



 **THE TERRITORY
REMEMBERS
75 YEARS**

Commemorating the Bombing of Darwin
and defence of Northern Australia

Roy and Sarah Craig, Joy, Bessie and Stuart Drysdale.
(Courtesy Joy Davis)

The Territory Remembers

Devastation and Heartache as Civilian Evacuation Badly Managed

By Joy Davis

On 12 December 1941, Northern Territory Administrator Aubrey Abbott issued an order that all women not in the essential services, children and the infirm were to be evacuated from Darwin, with their luggage limited to one suitcase weighing no more than 35lb (15.9kg) per family. The order was published in the *Northern Standard* newspaper and a letter was delivered to every household in Darwin. The evacuation was to commence in 48 hours, and residents were assured that the federal government had made arrangements for the comfort and welfare of the families in the south. In a later letter to the West Australian Government and other state governments, Abbott advised that there were no cases of the Darwin evacuees needing assistance of any kind.¹

Nothing could be further from the truth.

So began the heartache and devastation to the lives of the inhabitants of the Top End of the Northern Territory. The evacuees received no help from the general public in the south, as you would normally expect, because the evacuation of Darwin was not publicised and the general public were not aware of it. There were no comforts nor accommodation as Administrator Abbott had stated. We were on our own, many of us had no money, and certainly no warm clothes or anything else needed to make a home. No utensils, no linen, no furniture. All we had was one suitcase of summer clothes for the whole family.

On reaching our destinations, we felt like aliens and were full of despair at being torn from family, neighbors and

friends, and ending up in places never seen before with no help from anyone. Many southern people did not even know where Darwin was. Once when my mother said she came from Darwin, one lady asked her how she liked Australia.

However, the Top End people were made of sterner stuff, and we found accommodation, albeit a horse stable or other rough shelter, and proceeded to make a home with our one suitcase. Everyone was in limbo just waiting for the war to end so we could return to our beloved Territory. There is an old saying that “you can take the people out of the Territory, but you can’t take the Territory out of the people”.

Evacuees from Darwin that were in contact with others previously from Darwin were helped where possible, and I imagine many scoured the second-hand shops to find anything which would help. I know that is what our family did. Many items usually in shops were not available because the war effort came first, with its demands for cotton and wool for uniforms, and for food, which was needed for the troops as well as to send to England to help with their needs.

In Adelaide and other cities, the Top End people used to congregate at Coles cafeteria every two weeks to meet friends and to catch up on any news coming from the Territory. The papers were not telling it as it really was so we depended on anyone who had just arrived from the Top End.²

My Story

People were evacuated by sea or air, or by road and train. My Mum and I were lucky in that we were evacuated by air south to Adelaide. When my mother was given notice that she and I were to go, she refused and didn't turn up at the appointed place until Mr Arthur Miller the ARP (air raid precaution) warden, spoke to Dad saying they would have to arrest her and evacuate her by force. Dad persuaded Mum to go, and arranged for us to fly out the next day to Adelaide on the Guinea Airways plane. He convinced her to go for my welfare. After farewells and me instructing my father that, if Father Christmas called, he (Dad) was to tell him I was in Adelaide, we left the Darwin airport (where Ross Smith Avenue is now) on 24 December 1941.

The plane held 10 passengers, I think, among them Mrs Maisie Young and her two sons. Our first stop for fuel was Pine Creek where we were given breakfast. That was the only food provided on the whole trip. The journey was bumpy, noisy and arduous, with frequent refueling stops until we finally landed that night at Parafield Airfield. Taken by bus it was 9pm when we reached Guinea Airways office in Adelaide.

As we were strangers to the city, we asked the receptionist to ring around for accommodation. We looked dirty and destitute, and she informed us: You won't get any accommodation; Adelaide is booked out; its Christmas. Don't you know there is a war on?"

With this remark, my tiny red-headed mother drew herself up to her full height and replied: "Lady, how dare you look down your nose at us like you have been doing. Most of our husbands could buy and sell this establishment. We only look raggedy because we have been on a plane all day with nothing to eat, and most of the children are airsick. We have just been sent away by force out of our homes to a strange place with nothing BECAUSE there is a war on. Now you will ring every place in Adelaide to get some accommodation or we are going to bed down here in this office whether you like it or not."

The receptionist said "No, you can't do that" to which Mum replied "Can't we? Just watch us". The receptionist did find us accommodation and so began our lives in the south.

Soon afterwards, my mother and I travelled to Hobart to stay with Mum's parents. Gran and Grandpa lived at 75 Davey Street, just around the corner from Murray Street, a main city street. I attended the Collegiate Church of England Girls School. I cannot remember how long we lived there but I recall we left Hobart to go back to Queenscliffe in Victoria where my eldest sister, Jean Shewring, and her three daughters lived. I think Jean was ill and we went back there so Mum could help her care for the children. I attended the Queenscliffe Public School with my three nieces and Nella Richard's two daughters.

Later we heard that Darwin had been bombed, and I remember very clearly the consternation of wives, children and relatives trying to get information about their loved ones who were still in Darwin at that time. The government was giving out conflicting information about the casualties and damage to Darwin, as they did not want the citizens of the other states panicking because the bombing was on Australian soil. The rumours flew hard and fast and the evacuees were not informed about casualties or survivors.⁽ⁱ⁾

Stuart Drysdale, my father, had the mail contract to pick up and deliver the mail from the Post Office, planes, ships and train. He was just leaving his premises in Cavanagh Street to go to the Post Office to pick up the mail as he was due there at 10am. On his way out he was called by someone on the footpath, so he stopped and spoke to him. It was while he was there that the first air raid began. My brother, Fred Drysdale, was working on another truck, and the Aboriginals were also at work when the raid began. After calling those in the street nearby, they all ran into the above-ground air raid shelter that my father had built under an large old mango tree. Mrs Jess Chardon was among those who sheltered there, as well as a naval rating and several other people.

We knew if Dad wanted to contact us he would send a telegram to his niece, Ivy, in Melbourne. He did not know where Jean was evacuated to or where Mum and I had gone after arriving in Adelaide. I think my parents must have conferred before our evacuation and said they would contact Ivy and we would always tell Ivy where we were.

A Unique Air Raid Shelter Built in Darwin

In December 1941 the Administrator ordered that all householders in Darwin should dig a slit trench on their property. He gave directions of the sizes these slit trenches were to be dug.

My father would not dig a slit trench because he said that in the Wet season it would be full of water and children may drown while adults would be standing or sitting in water. He did however build an air raid shelter that was above ground.

In the centre of his land there was a large very old mango tree growing, and under its branches is where he built his shelter. First he designed a rectangular room with the door facing the trunk of the tree. From the doorway was an L-shaped passage, so that strafing by the enemy could not enter the doorway into the shelter.

The structure was made of large cement blocks cemented together. Above these were curved railway lines bolted to the cement blocks each side of the top walls. On these were sheets of galvanized iron, and finally above this roof were placed filled sandbags. When the rains came, grass grew through the sandbag fibres and made a green covering over all, making it invisible from above. Inside the shelter clean white sand was spread on the floor.

Prior to the bombing there had been some air raid siren warning exercises for the people to get to know the sirens sounds and practice what to do if an air raid began. Our two dogs, one cat and pet wallaby went with the adults into the shelter when these exercises were taking place. When the bombing of Darwin actually began our animals were the first to arrive inside the shelter.

The shelter worked very well and probably felt very safe as it could not be seen from the air and was cool and dry inside when needed.

We left Queenscliffe and went to live with Ivy and her husband. After living there for a while Dad sent a telegram saying all civilian men not in essential services were to be evacuated from Darwin and he would meet us at Ivy's place.

A few weeks later my father arrived after travelling overland from Darwin to Adelaide and train to Melbourne. He didn't have any luggage with him but carried my large golden teddy bear on his arm all the way. I was overjoyed to see him and also delighted to have my Teddy back with me. Dad, Mum and I returned to Adelaide. As he was familiar with post office processes, he got a job at the GPO in Adelaide working as a mail sorter.

We were living in a one-bedroom flat that Mum had rented across the road from the Norwood Public School, so this is where I attended school. Later my sister May sent word that she was being evacuated from Alice Springs where she still worked for the administrator.

Mr Abbott had previously arranged for the girls in his office, among the few women still in Darwin, to fly to Alice Springs and take some of the essential Government papers with them to set up offices. On 17 February 1942, Les Penhall drove the girls, their luggage and the Government boxes in a truck to the airport and they all were evacuated to Alice Springs. Some of them I remember were Dorothy (Doe) Stretton, Vicki Ormond, Peggy Johns, Carmel Pascal, Jean McPherson, Joan Hammond and Esma Morris. The women staff were later evacuated from Alice Springs because there was a food shortage in the Territory.

Evacuation by Sea

There was no choice of destination for the evacuees by sea, who were sent wherever the ship they were allocated to was destined to go. On arrival at the wharf in Darwin, evacuees often spent many hours sitting in the sun without food or water before they were allowed to board the ship, and relatives (menfolk) remaining in Darwin were not allowed to stay with them.

There were five ships employed in the evacuation. Of the five ships, only the American-owned *President Grant* lived up to expectations of comfort aboard for the evacuees. Of the others, which were all merchant ships, the worst was *Zealandia* which became known as the "Hell Ship". She was filthy, and had 200 Japanese prisoners on board and picked up another 200 at Thursday Island. Each ship held Japanese prisoners of war, as well as Dutch refugees taken from the islands to the north. There was gross overcrowding and the Darwin families were packed into the cabins like sardines as well as having to sleep in the passageways or sometimes in hammocks on the deck. The food was bully beef and hard tack biscuits, and no provision was made for babies or infants. Before the *Zealandia* reached Cairns, it had run out of food.

Here are some brief stories of the fates of others.

Rev Leonard Kentish: He was a Methodist missionary who was an army padre attached to the Port Darwin Garrison. Naval authorities installed a radio at Mr Kentish's Goulburn Island Mission and gave him responsibility for sending news of Japanese shipping movements to Darwin. He was on the *Patricia Cam* when it was sunk by a Japanese

floatplane in January 1943. Six of the 19 men aboard died in the water and, when the plane landed, the Japanese crew with their pistols drawn forced the clergyman to board the aircraft. He was beheaded at Dobo in Aroe Island less than two weeks later. His wife, son and daughter had been evacuated earlier by lugger, army truck and train to Brisbane. It was not until July 1947 that his wife learnt of his fate.³

Mrs O'Brien and two sons: When they were on the Darwin wharf waiting to be evacuated, the boys each had a teddy bear in their arms that they had received for Christmas. The army guard walking along the line of people stopped next to them, reached down and grabbed the bears from their arms and said "only one suitcase per family" and threw the bears into the harbour.⁴

Mrs Hasto and daughter Pearl aged 10 years were taken down to the wharf by truck on 20 December. Pearl had a small suitcase in addition to the one her mother had. The guards asked her what was it and she replied, her dolls. She was allowed to keep one doll and then they threw the suitcase and its contents into the harbor. Fortunately her mother had some of her clothes. She started to cry, and was so traumatised that from then on there were so many bad things that she didn't want to recall. She stood there and saw her father watching them from behind the barrier, they couldn't kiss or hug goodbye; only wave. Reverend Goy had arranged a shipment of oranges and fruit for them to eat, but they weren't allowed to have them. They were thrown overboard – the explanation for doing so was said to be because the ship was overloaded. Later they put ballast bags on board to even the ship up. The women were very angry about the ballast bags because they had to leave most of their belongings behind.⁵

Mabel Marie (Dolly) Boath née Graham and William Boath lived in Darwin. They had five children, including Gail who was born on Sunday 7 December 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Ten days after Gail's birth, they were evacuated from Darwin on the ship *Koolinda* bound for Perth, where they boarded a train and went to South Australia. This was where Dolly's sister, Sarah, and her husband, Roy, lived. Even though they had no children and lived in a big house, the Boaths were turned away, with Roy saying they couldn't possibly help the family.

Their only alternative was to live in sheds that in earlier days had been stables. The stables had been converted to two big sheds and this is where the family lived along with many others who were also evacuees. Dolly died not long after the birth of another child in Port Pirie in 1942.

Ron Boath said they were allowed 35 pounds of luggage and he remembered his mother going through the bags and throwing out things like photos to make room for nappies for the baby. The *Koolinda* was so crowded that boys had to sleep on the floor in the dining room. In Adelaide his mother and the baby were given a room but the older children slept in a stable.⁶

Dolly's brother, **Tassie Graham, and his wife June**, had arrived from Darwin and were told there was no room for them in the horse stables. However, my parents were lucky enough to be renting a three-bedroom house in Maylands and, on hearing of the Grahams' predicament, asked

them to come and live with us. My sister May had been evacuated overland and married Colin Beard in Adelaide, so she and their baby, Colin, also lived with us. Tassie and June took Dolly's youngest children, Gail and Colin, to live with them. Our house then housed five adults and seven children until after Christmas, when Tassie found a job with the railways that included a railway house outside Adelaide.⁷

The policeman Sandy McNab went about the town looking for people who hadn't been evacuated and found among others the **Agostini Family**. Mrs Tecuala Mary Agostini and children Les, Vincent and Jack were put aboard the *Koolinda* that left Darwin on 16 February 1942. They went via the Western Australian coast and strict blackout conditions were enforced as everyone was conscious that the ship *Sydney* had been sunk off the same coast not long before.

When they reached Broome the ship received cargo but was held up from leaving, as they had to wait for the tide to come in before there was enough water for her to sail out of the harbour. The next port of call was Canarvon where they took on a load of bananas. When they reached Perth they heard that Darwin had been bombed. They were accommodated at Armidale on a farming block at Gosnells for a week. Then moved to North Beach into a broken down beach holiday shack, but at least they had a roof over their heads. Les attended the Leederville Christian Brothers College and his younger brothers went to Cwlep Primary Convent. Their father Isadore Agostini, after the bombing of Darwin, was evacuated with Mr Abbott the Administrator down to Alice Springs.⁸

Mrs Mary Peterson was living in Mataranka with her husband who worked for the Railways. With her children Joan, Pamela and Herbert, she was evacuated via Army Truck Convoy to Alice Springs, then boarded a train to Adelaide. Not knowing anyone in Adelaide they travelled to Melbourne where they were met by the CWA who helped look after the children and took Mary shopping. It was very cold in Melbourne so they went to Sydney where Mary's brother-in-law, Mr Ramsay, lived. Not finding any accommodation to rent they again boarded a train for Brisbane. They were met by Mary's other married sister Laurencia Canning. She was able to find them a house, so they spent the rest of the war years in this house at Tape Street, Albion, in Brisbane.⁹

My cousin **Gladys Brown** was evacuated on 17 February 1942 on the *Koolinda*, boarding on the afternoon of the 16th and sailing on the tide about 4am on the 17th. She said: "My story seems very mundane in the whole scheme of things, and you just simply got on with it, whatever comes." When the first air raid siren went off, they were attending a demonstration of how to stop bleeding by putting pressure on the femoral artery, so the lesson didn't finish, and they were evacuated before any further training took place.

On the trip down, the ship was crowded, there were Dutch refugees that had been picked up in Java, New Guinea and other places. They didn't like the Darwin people and thought they were superior. They had always had servants and didn't have to do their own washing or cooking – some of those servants were with them.

Southern Opinion

The Premier of South Australia, Mr Playford, today strongly criticised the action of Commonwealth authorities in sending a substantial number of Aborigines from the north to this State. Mr Playford contended the climatic conditions of Adelaide were unsuitable for people accustomed by race and breeding to tropical conditions. They were unused to civilised ways and there were other reasons that they should be kept in Central Australia.

The Premier made representations to the Prime Minister emphasising the serious view taken by authorities on aboriginal welfare, and asked that no further parties were sent here. The Commonwealth authorities stated that transport facilities made it difficult to keep people supplied with food in the north. The evacuees from the missions were sent to different locations according to religion. They were housed at Balaclava, Hawker, Wallaroo, Carrieton and Peterborough as well as other places.

There were Japanese prisoners on the deck and, if you went up there for some fresh air, the Japanese would spit. When they arrived in Wyndham, the radio officer heard that Darwin had been bombed. Docking at Perth most of the evacuees had no money so they went to the Government to ask for some to help. They were turned away but the Dutch people were given money, clothes and accommodation. When this was pointed out to the people working there, they were told it was because the Dutch were refugees from other countries, but we were evacuees in our own country, so didn't need assistance.¹⁰

Gladys's father, Jack, was working for the railways and was in the wharf area when Darwin was bombed. Many of his mates were killed and he was worried about Edgar, his 15-year-old son, who was at home on Railway Hill. When he managed to negotiate his way there, he found him unhurt and collecting souvenirs of the bombing.

Uncle Jack and Edgar left Darwin by overland and arrived in Sydney where Jack's sister lived. His wife, Eileen (my mother's sister), and their other sister, Hilda, with Eileen's two daughters Dorothy and Laurel, had gone down to Melbourne earlier for a holiday but, when they wanted to return to Darwin, they were not able to because the civilian evacuation had begun. Hilda stayed in Melbourne with her son, and Eileen and her daughters went to Sydney to meet up with Jack.

Although he had been born in Darwin, Jack, the son of E V V Brown, who had lived there all his life, had been so traumatised by the bombing of Darwin that, after peace was declared, he refused to return and stayed in Sydney for the rest of his life. My Aunt Eileen wanted to go back to her family and friends who had returned to Darwin but, because Jack refused, she did not see Darwin again. Their eldest son, Ted, after his discharge from the army, returned to Darwin and married and raised a family there till his death in 1997.

When the evacuation began, all the Japanese families and others classified as aliens were arrested by the military police and incarcerated at Adelaide River. Later under guard they travelled in the hull of a ship with Japanese prisoners taken in the northern islands. I recall the military police coming to our school and arresting the Japanese students and taking them away, although some of them were second and third-generation Australians.

Mrs Mary Nakashiba, a member of a Darwin Japanese family, stated: "Before the war we never felt any anti-Japanese sentiment. No-one was thinking that there would be a war. After Pearl Harbour everyone in Darwin with Japanese blood was rounded up and taken to Adelaide River and put in a compound. Then they were taken to the Zealandia; it was an awful ship, overcrowded and filthy." Other Japanese families were taken under guard on the *Montoro*, as related by Mona Adams: "Also on the *Montoro* were some Japanese families who were taken away under guard. Some of the children were our friends we had grown up and gone to school with. We weren't allowed to go and talk to them, so each morning we would just wave to them and they would wave back. It was so sad."¹¹

The **Murakami family** of six boys and two girls had lived in Darwin for many years. They were among the Japanese children who were unceremoniously taken from their classes by soldiers brandishing bayonets. They were taken by truck to a camp at Adelaide River where they were kept under guard until a suitable ship was available to transport them to internment camps in New South Wales and Victoria.¹²

A number of children were evacuated and placed in orphanages in the southern states. This would have been quite a shock after the carefree life they lived in Darwin.

Joan Presley was born in Darwin and had three younger brothers, Laurence, Cyril and William. The family lived in the police paddock at Stuart Park. Joan took care of her brothers because her parents both drank heavily. Her mother left home and Joan became the permanent mother figure. She had few clothes and no shoes at all, but had a reasonably happy childhood in Darwin. Their neighbour, **Eileen Anthony**, took her under her wing and they had many happy hours together. She spent time selling cakes around town from a suitcase on the back of a pushbike. She didn't spend much time at school because she did all the household chores, including getting the water for the washing from a well.¹³

With no idea that the evacuation was in progress, one morning in January 1942 her father without explanation told her to bathe and dress herself and her three brothers. When they were ready, he took them down to the wharf. She was a very bewildered 15-year old, and later couldn't recall what they had for luggage. They were evacuated on the *Montoro*, and all she remembered was standing on the ship looking back at her father wondering "What are we doing on the ship and what are we supposed to do, and where are we going". It finally dawned on her that they were on their own and she had to look after the boys.¹⁴

The ship stopped at Thursday Island for a few hours but no-one was allowed to get off. Further stops were made at Bowen, Cairns and Townsville. After they left Thursday

Island, everything went quiet. They had to be careful about bumping or tinkling things or making any noise because it could alert Japanese submarines. The ship didn't have a lot of lights on and her youngest brother was with her constantly. They became aware that the war was coming not only by air but by sea as well. After four days she stood at the back of the ship and cried and cried. Then she pulled herself together and went back to caring for the boys.

She would exercise the boys daily by taking them up on deck and walking around the ship. Her eldest brother walked ahead but her other two brothers clung to her arms and clothing. She tied her youngest brother to her with a belt from somebody's clothing to prevent him from falling overboard. She was very aware that she was responsible for her brothers, and in the bathroom she found the soap wouldn't lather (because it was sea water), and she thought it was because she wasn't doing things right and this upset her.

They disembarked at Townsville and she was so concerned about the boys that she wasn't aware of what was going on around her. She wanted to stay with the other Darwin evacuees but they were put on a train going to Brisbane by the Native Affairs Department, and on arrival were sent to the Nudgee Orphanage.¹⁵

She was there for three weeks and, as she was then 16-years old, she was sent out to work as a domestic servant. Money was sent out of her pay to the orphanage for her brothers' upkeep. She did all types of jobs in the house, doing everything that was needed. On her one day off on Sunday, she would get the train to Banyo and walk from there to Nudgee. She took her brothers toothbrushes, socks and oranges, anything she thought would be good for the boys.

They were very resilient children and were used to seeing to themselves. Her younger brother was a bed-wetter, so those boys had chaff bags to sleep on. In the morning, the bags would be hung along the cow rail and hosed off. If it was wet weather, they were left to air and the boys hoped for the best. After the war ended, the children were abandoned by both parents and never sent for nor contacted by anyone from Darwin.¹⁶

Annabell Craig, who was three-years old, was sent to Perth aboard a naval ship and was spoilt by all the sailors with two special friends giving her a little suitcase full of lollies. When they reached Perth she was taken to the Queen's Park Orphanage and was never called for at the war's end because her father had been a POW in Crete and died during his internment and she didn't have any other family. I believe she kept the little suitcase and never forgot those two sailor friends of hers.¹⁷

Carol Vellacott was evacuated to Perth with her mother. She was put into an orphanage for nine months and then lived with her godparents. Her father was attached to the American Army, and was an overseer on the building of the Larrakeyah Barracks. He was in Darwin for the bombing but wasn't ever able to talk about his experience.¹⁸

Hazel Reid and her sister were put in a boarding school in Toowoomba for two years, because Hazel's mother took a job as housekeeper and nurse on a farm to make ends meet. She later joined her husband in Alice Springs.

For holidays the girls visited members of the CWA who lived nearby. They didn't see their parents for two years. It was very sad for them, starting again. They had no clothes except the clothes they stood up in and a change. Of course, in those days they had to have coupons so that even if you had the money, you often didn't have the coupons to buy material, so life was pretty hard for a while.¹⁹

Evacuation by Land

When the order for evacuation was given in Darwin, **Tommy Fong and his wife Shu Ack Fong**, left Darwin and went to Pine Creek where they thought they would be safe. When the first raid on Pine Creek and Katherine occurred, all women, children and the infirm had to evacuate to the southern States. The Fongs had four little girls at the time and another baby expected. Tommy did not evacuate as he grew vegetables and supplied the army with them.

Mrs Fong and her girls boarded the train that took them to Birdum. After arrival they were loaded into the back of canvas-covered trucks and required to sit on bare floorboards. The driver of their truck took pity on Mrs Fong and told her she could sit in front with him but she declined this as she had the other four girls with her, and they had not been away from home before. At lunch time they were given bread and a tin of bully beef or fish.

Late in the evening the convoy of trucks would pull up and the army men built a bush shower for the people to clean and refresh themselves. The men also made a big stew of bully beef and tinned vegetables with slices of bread to accompany it. Thus they fed the evacuees a welcome hot meal, albeit made from tinned ingredients that many had not had before. After dinner, Mrs Fong and her girls with the others all lay down on canvas spread on the ground and went to sleep for a much longed-for rest.

Travelling with her was her Uncle Sang, his wife and children as well as a few other Chinese people and others. The journey was long and tiring and took three days and two nights. On the afternoon of the third day, they reached Alice Springs and she, her girls, her uncle and his family were met by Mr and Mrs George Lim (earlier evacuees), and taken to their home.²⁰ Her Uncle Sang's wife was Mrs Lim's sister. Their hosts welcomed them and provided beds for the night. Su Dook, Mrs Fong's aunty did the washing.²¹

In the morning they were given a substantial breakfast with parcels of food to eat on the train. The families were driven to the station where they boarded the train for Adelaide. This was not the old Ghan but an earlier one, and the seats were a bit softer than the Darwin train, but they were very cramped for space. Mrs Fong sat in a corner and travelled all the way with one girl sitting on her lap and the others squashed in beside her. At night time the train stopped so the passengers could get a meal, but she and another Chinese woman with several children couldn't get anything as by the time they got to the end of the platform with their children the train would have departed. They ate a piece of dry bread and bully beef or fish. When they became thirsty they went to the toilet and managed to get a small drink from there.

On arrival in Adelaide they were billeted in a place they called Fullerton House that used to house unmarried girls but was empty at that time. Her Uncle Sang, his wife and children had to share a room with Mrs Fong and her children. After a couple of days, the other women's husbands arrived and, if they had money, bought a house and lived in it.

Mrs Fong was sent to the home of Mr and Mrs Lum, who shared their house with their doctor son and his wife who was a nurse. She had a small room with a kitchenette. After two weeks or so, because her confinement was imminent, she and the girls were taken to the new Fullerton Home. It was run by nuns who were very kind to her and they stayed there till her baby was born. The home was occupied by unmarried girls awaiting their confinements. They lived in a cottage and worked during the day in the laundry and at other jobs there. Mrs Fong didn't work because she now had four toddlers and a new baby. She was visited by a lady named Mrs Hayes who was from the Tourist Bureau, who brought some clothing and other things because they didn't have any warm clothes and it was cold. After about three months, Tommy managed to get some money sent down to her. She then asked Mr and Mrs Jimmy Ah Toy, also evacuees, if she could rent a room and use their kitchen

Evacuees must be cared for

From the Adelaide News

The reception given to 24 men and children evacuated from Darwin after Japan entered the war does not do Adelaide credit. Quartered in an emergency at a Mount Lofty boarding house eight of these people comprising three families, were packed into one room with space for only seven stretchers.

A mother and two daughters live in a converted horse box fitted with bunks. The floor is bare bricks. another woman with a six-week-old baby shares a room with three other children.

Privacy and other comforts are lacking for both mothers and children.

The caretakers, and individual officials have shown the visitors nothing but kindness, but this does not lessen official responsibility to see that the evacuees are properly looked after.

The reception of these evacuees has been a muddle from the start. The Commonwealth, who brought the women south, delegated the job of caring for them to the State.

The State authorities claim that they were not notified when evacuees were due to arrive, so that the visitors had to wait for hours, after a long journey by ship and rail, on the railway station before anyone took charge of them. Then as no other accommodation could be found in a hurry, they were sent to Mount Lofty.

No matter who is to blame, it is clearly the responsibility now of the South Australian Government to see that people who have been sent to South Australia for their own and their country's good should be decently cared for.

in the house they had just bought in Adelaide. Their older sister, Mrs Hee, was also living with them, but there was a large yard for the children to play in.

When her baby, Eleanor, was nine months old, Tommy was able to get permission for her to return to Pine Creek. The threat of invasion had passed and, as Tommy was working for the army, they sanctioned his family's return. She was the first evacuee to return to Pine Creek.²²

The women, children and missionaries from the islands near Darwin were evacuated, and some of them went to Darwin by lugger and were there when Darwin was bombed. Others walked from Darwin to Katherine, and went to Adelaide by the same route as Mrs Fong. Some Aborigines went too.

After the first air raid, a rumor went about that martial law was in force and all civilians, principally the remaining menfolk, were to get out. The civilians, however, didn't have their vehicles as the army had seconded all vehicles that were not being used for the defence of Darwin.²³ They had to go by train to Larrimah or Birdum, then by Army truck or walk overland to Alice Springs and then by train again to Adelaide or Brisbane.

In Sydney, the *Telegraph Newspaper* noted that protests were being made in Adelaide against the arrival of large numbers of Aboriginal half-caste children and Chinese evacuees. Some were to be looked after in other States with the Commonwealth Government footing the bill.

In the meantime, the secretary of the Balaklava Racing Club (located some 80km to the north of Adelaide) had written to the Works and Services Branch of the South Australian State Government giving permission for the use of the racecourse enclosure as a welfare centre for the Northern Territory refugees for the duration of the war. An annual rental of £100 was to be charged which "barely covers our rates and taxes and insurance etc". The whole episode was clearly distasteful to the NT Administration, now located in Alice Springs, and the government secretary actually saw fit to write to the Commissioner for Civil Defence in Adelaide apologising in advance for the quality of the Katherine

evacuees which had just passed through Alice Springs on their way south:

*"I am afraid I must apologise in advance for the quality of this group of evacuees. I am afraid you will have great difficulty in fitting them in anywhere. To put it crudely, they are a very poor lot, and include some of the worst types we have in the North. Were it not for the food problem and difficulties of transport they would be much better off if they remained in the North. Most of the half-caste women are without morals and have little experience of civilised home life. To attempt to billet them in European homes would meet with disaster."*²⁴

Although such views were expressed privately at the time, it is hard to understand how warnings of this kind could have assisted in the difficult process of accommodating the refugees in an entirely foreign environment.

In July 1942 the government secretary travelled in person with another group of 62 half-caste women and children evacuees to the welfare centre at Balaklava. He noted that some 120 inmates were housed there together with the matron and lay helper and were well cared for. Conditions for the Asiatic families were found to be rather primitive as building alterations were not yet complete: "These are housed in the horse stalls which are fronted with bags and hessian"²⁵

In addition to the racecourse enclosure were three neighbouring farms (Vogts, Erambies and Cottles) and some empty farm houses in the Saints area (named after a local farmer) where other evacuees were quartered. A further 126 found private accommodation in the Adelaide area. Those able to do so were encouraged to find suitable employment in the munitions industry or fruit picking, in season, to reduce institutional and staffing costs.

Mrs Abbott, the wife of the Administrator, and a party of six nuns and 35 half-caste children from the Catholic half-caste mission at Melville Island north of Darwin experienced the Darwin bombing on 19 February. They were then evacuated to Adelaide. Mrs Olive Sweeney, a nurse and Methodist missionary, and her children, Blanche,



Bessy Drysdale and Mrs Bowles

Grace and Gordon, with the women and children from her mission travelled by lugger to the mainland, then overland to Katherine where they boarded the train for Birdum. They were loaded onto an open cattle truck, sitting on the wooden floor in the sun. Mrs Abbott was on the same train, sitting on a deck chair with a parasol attached to the back in the middle of the carriage.

Mrs BA O'Brien lived in Darwin with her husband, Dan, for six years and during that time came to like the place and district very well. She was evacuated and went to live with her mother, Mrs Jones, in Renmark. Mrs O'Brien had four children aged from 9 to 16 years. Her husband was an inspector in the Posts and Telegraph Department.

Mrs O'Brien did not want to leave Darwin. She noted: "You have no idea of what it means to leave your home suddenly with four children. Our party comprised 80 women and 140 children. We were treated splendidly but you must imagine what it was like with those 140 children. There were expectant mothers among us, and the youngest member was a girl four days old. No man was allowed to leave Darwin with us. I cannot speak too highly of the treatment we received but for all that it was terrible to leave Darwin and our men behind." Perhaps the difference between Mrs O'Brien's experience and that of many others was that her party left Darwin later than the early evacuees.²⁶

Mrs Bowles from Sydney was in Darwin for a holiday when the evacuation was announced. She had paid a return fare when coming to the NT but was still only allowed to take one suitcase of 35 pounds weight back with her. She was sent by another ship than that she had paid for and left Darwin on the *Koolinda* for Perth. She asked the Government to pay her fare by train for her to get back to her home in Sydney but this was refused. However she was better off than the other evacuees because she was returning home to family, friends and her home full of her possessions.

The evacuees were not informed by the Government when Darwin was bombed nor if their husbands or family had survived the bombing. Lydia De Julia was out shopping one day. She went to a movie and when she came out the newspaper boys were yelling, "Extra, Extra. Darwin bombed". It wasn't till several weeks later that she received a note on a scrap of paper telling her that her husband had been killed on the wharf during the first raid. She said she took it calmly, and never cried for more than a week. Then one day when the children were at school, she was doing the washing when she felt the pain of his passing and she bent over among the suds and cried and cried. She cried a flood all that day and for some time after, at night she walked up and down the verandah carrying her youngest daughter crying.²⁷

Zara Guion was returning from visiting a sick friend in hospital, and when she was on the tram she heard the newspaper boys calling about the raid in Darwin. She felt sick and when she alighted bought a paper. She had money coming from her husband but after the first raid it stopped. For six weeks she didn't receive any and hasn't received the six weeks pay from the Public Works Department at this time.²⁸

Men Came South Later

After the Japanese air attacks on Darwin, men were evacuated. They had grim tales of low-level machine-gunning and men swimming towards the shore in oil-covered water. Some were American officers and seamen, others British, Filipino and Chinese. The journeys from Darwin were similar to those of the women.

Aged, Sick Evacuees A Pitiful Sight

On to a platform of the Adelaide Railway Station this morning tottered some 40 aged, decrepit Chinese men. They arrived by evacuee train and had travelled from Katherine and Pine Creek. They were thinly clad and shivered in the morning sunlight. Their few belongings were pitiful and inadequate in the extreme.

One old man wandered dazedly along the platform with his possessions stuffed in a large cardboard carton which had once held hundreds of cigarettes. A few of the old men did not even totter on to the platform. They were too ill. They lay on carriage seats breathing harshly, their faces skull-like.

One of them was assisted on to a platform seat. There he collapsed into a huddled heap. Onlookers thought he would die at any moment. He and two of his sick companions were put on to stretchers and taken to hospital.

From the train too, came Chinese women, babies and children. They were in a better state; quite animated in fact. But one woman had given birth to a baby three weeks ago – about 10 days before the trip started. She too was carried away on a stretcher with her baby in the arms of the Army nurse who had been in the train.

The 30 half-castes who arrived on Saturday were a sad enough sight, but these people are much worse. Sending them south has got to stop.

The old white men have got their pensions, and can spend the rest of their time in homes for the aged. But what's going to happen to the old Chinese? As far as known, they have no means of support. The Government will look after them, I suppose but they are too old to work or to settle down. The Chinese who arrived today are being temporarily quartered in a former Government institution in the hills.

Of the aged whites, some are continuing their journey interstate; others are being accommodated at the Magill Home.

There were about 60 half-castes in today's train. These were taken off at Hamley Bridge, and joined a train for Balaklava where there is a camp for them.

Among evacuees who arrived in Adelaide today was a former Mayor of Darwin Mr JH Brogan. He said that he had been mayor for six years. Mr. Brogan, who conducted a furniture business in partnership with Mr. McKinnon, said that his premises were not damaged in the first raid on Darwin, but that it was necessary to "just close the shop and leave £600 to £700 worth of furniture there".³¹

They travelled in open railway trucks to Birdum, and then for several days in motor trucks before transferring to other trains at Alice Springs. One man commented: "The whole of one side of me is bruised and sore from sitting or lying in those darned trucks. It got so bad that some of us stood for 100 miles."²⁹

Seamen from one ship praised the courage and determination of their two gunners, who fired on the Japanese raiders until their gun was wrecked by a direct hit. They were CE Davis and Max Pemberton, of Sydney. Four near misses exploded alongside a nearby ship. Then a bomber, flying fairly low, came at their ship, and they opened fire with their gun. Soon afterwards the ship was hit and burst into flames. Emberton volunteered to go down a hatch to fight the fire. As the seamen went to launch a lifeboat, a burning spar fell and carried the boat away. Three times the ship was raked by machine-gun fire and all lifeboats on the starboard side were peppered with bullets.³⁰

Lifeboats on the port side had just returned to the ship from boat drill and those that had been hauled up were quickly lowered into the water again. The seamen were able to reach shore in them. One American's recollection of Darwin was trying to make the shore in a lifeboat shot full of holes by machine-gun bullets.

Joe Fay was evacuated overland after the first bombing. By the time he arrived he had on only a khaki shirt and shorts, his hair had grown long and he had a black beard that had grown on the way down. He had started out with shoes but on the way down when he went to sleep one night he took them off. In the morning he found someone had stolen them. His personal possessions were in a sugar bag.

When he alighted at the Adelaide Train Station he asked a taxi driver to take him to an address in the upmarket suburb in Toorak where his mother lived. He said he and two of his companions had no money but on arrival his mother would pay the fare. The taxi driver, unaware of the evacuation, looked him up and down and didn't like what he saw so refused. This led to an argument until a policeman was called. Joe explained what he wanted to the policeman who rang Mrs Fay and she confirmed she had a son Joseph who lived in Darwin and she would pay the taxi fare. The policeman then instructed the taxi driver to take Joe and he would be paid when they arrived.

William Harris aka Lucky was a wharfie unloading the *Neptuna* on the day of the first bombing attack. They were working in shifts in the hold (because it was so hot down there), unloading the cargo. William was just about to return to the hold when the foreman told him to go and have his morning smoko and sent another wharfie who had had his break to go in his place. William was walking to the shed for his smoko when he was stopped by another for a talk.

While they were talking, the first air raid began and the wharf was bombed. Both the ship and the shed received direct hits, and William was thrown into the water. He swam through water that was on fire from the spilled oil that was floating on top until he was rescued by someone in a small boat. After this incident William would never swim or go into the sea and would never talk of the bombing of Darwin.

On reflection

Suffice to say I am very proud to be a Territorian. From the above, it can be seen that a few people had an easy evacuation, but for most it was an ill-managed traumatic experience. Individual officials and members of the public usually showed nothing but kindness once they understood the nature and magnitude of this great migration. However, this did not lessen official responsibility to ensure that the evacuees were properly looked after. The reception of the evacuees was a muddle from the start. The Commonwealth Government, who ordered the women and children south, delegated the job of caring for them to the states, especially South Australia.

The state authorities claimed that they were not notified when evacuees were due to arrive, so that preparations could not be easily made. The evacuees often had to wait for hours, after a long journey by ship and rail, on railway stations or wharves before anyone took charge of them. In addition, first accommodation was often sub-standard.

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Lily Finnis nee James, Les Finnis, Thelma James, Bill Finnis, Joyce Finnis nee James



Jean Shewring nee Drysdale & Nella Richards nee Murray
Queenscliff Victoria 1943

Joy Davis was born in Darwin on 23rd November 1934, the youngest of five children of Stewart and Bessie Drysdale. Most of her primary school years were spent at the Convent School in Darwin and her high school years at St Hilda's Boarding School in Southport, Qld.

After leaving school she trained as a nurse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney NSW and then at the Darwin Hospital. Joy married Edgar Davis on 19th May 1956. She and her husband had many business ventures: transport driving, crocodile shooting, prospecting, proprietors of Drysdale's Service Station Darwin, building and owning Timber Creek Wayside Inn at Timber Creek NT, and becoming speculative builders in Darwin. They have had six children and 57 years of happily married life until Edgar's death in 2013. Although Joy now lives in Queensland she visits Darwin each year and still considers herself a Territorian.

Notes

(i) Ed: it has been popularly supposed, and is still reported widely, that the federal government repressed information about the initial Darwin raids. In fact, the southern newspapers of the days following the attacks carried numerous stories, which became more and more detailed as the fuller statistics of the action were fully revealed. While initially the death toll was under-reported, it reflects the slow lead times and reporting methods of those days. Further, those in charge of Darwin were hardly going to be concerned with reporting lists of those dead, given invasion was an immediate fear. Nor did the armed forces have large media departments as they do today. By the 24th the Canberra Times was reporting Prime Minister Curtin as saying that he "did not propose to inform the Japanese of the degree of the success or failure of their attack." This was a rather sensible precaution to take. But by 28 February newspapers, such as the Adelaide Mail, were reporting details of the raids complete with a map showing the direction of the Japanese attack from the south-east. Scores of stories were appearing in a myriad of newspapers around Australia, in particular small anecdotes from survivors. On 3 March The West Australian carried a story about the "70 bombers" which had attacked Darwin. The following day the Townsville Daily Bulletin featured more precise detail, citing 90 planes. At the end of March the Lowe Report was released, and it advised that deaths "did not exceed 240." (See "Appendix 11. Myth: The Raid was Concealed", in Lewis and Ingman, Carrier Attack.)

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