

**THE TERRITORY
REMEMBERS
75 YEARS**

*Commemorating the Bombing of Darwin
and defence of Northern Australia*

Father John McGrath

On the morning of 19 February 1942, Father John McGrath of the Sacred Heart Mission on Bathurst Island (now called Wurruminanga) noticed a formation of aircraft overhead.

As part of the Australian coast watching network, he immediately went for his radio and at 9.35am sent a message to the Amalgamated Wireless Radio Station at Darwin advising of a "large" air formation bearing down from the northwest.

What Father McGrath had seen was 188 aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Flying which had left from four aircraft carriers some 300 kilometres to the north-west. They tracked over the Tiwi islands on their way to the assault on Darwin.

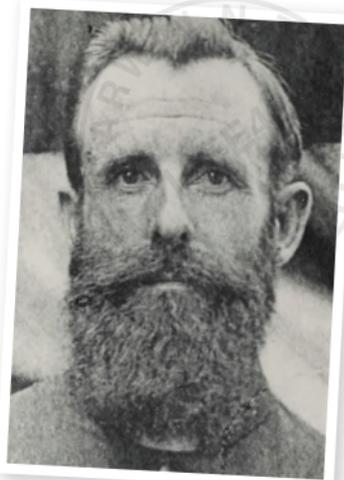
As they passed through, Zero fighters strafed the Bathurst Island runway where a transport aircraft was parked and hit the radio hut where Father McGrath was in the process of broadcasting his warning.

The message was then relayed to the Royal Australian Air Force Operations at 9.37 am, but the officers there wrongly judged that the aircraft which had been sighted were ten USAAF P-40s, returning to Darwin after bad weather forced them to abort a flight to Java via Kupang, West Timor. As a result, the air raid

sirens at Darwin were not sounded before the raid.

The Japanese raiders began to arrive over Darwin at 9:58 am. Ships in the harbour and buildings and installations ashore came under attack. The first bombs were falling in a line from the wharves up across Government House. Then a direct hit struck the Post Office, killing the postmaster, his family and seven Post Office workers sheltering in a slit-trench outside.

The Bombing of Darwin, on 19 February 1942 was the first and the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australian soil. By the end of the day a total of 235 people had died, 11 ships were sunk, and 30 Allied aircraft had been destroyed.



*Father John McGrath
Image courtesy of the Catholic
Diocese of Darwin*

