



# CITATION

## Cyclone Tracy 50 Year Special Edition

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THE NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE MUSEUM AND  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY INCORPORATED

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### **Strength in the Storm**

By Pat King

When the skies darken and winds wail,  
A fierce cyclone brings chaos and hail.  
Trees bend, waters rise, yet a child appears,  
As communities gather, sharing their fears.

With hands interlocked, they stand side by side,  
In the storm's fury, their courage their guide.  
Iron sheets may scatter, but hope lights the way,  
In the heart of the storm, their spirits will stay.

They patch up the pieces, rebuild what is lost,  
For love is their fortress, no matter the cost.  
Though storms may ravage, they cannot destroy,  
The strength of their bonds, the power of joy.

**President's Message** – Dr. Gary Manison APM

**Editor's Message** – Pat King

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## **President's Message – Dr. Gary Manison APM**

### **Their Service Must Be Recognised**

The Christmas edition of *Citation* in 1974 contained Commissioner Bill McLaren's message in which he wished his members a safe and happy festive season. Nothing could be further from what happened on Christmas Eve, 1974, when Cyclone Tracy struck.

There are no serving police remaining that were members in 1974, however, the Retired Police Association have former members who experienced the disaster and the consequences of that terrible event.

Fortunately, since Cyclone Tracy the Northern Territory Museum and Historical Society have collected reports and accounts by police who were serving at the time along with a collection of oral histories that also involved retired members whose experiences during and after Tracy are harrowing to listeners.

What follows from my Message are the individual stories of bravery and selfless actions during the cyclone and the outstanding work they performed in the recover stage.

Once the cyclone passed it was left to the police, those that survived without major injuries, to provide the leadership in this disaster. They organised the basics of food, clothing and shelter and dealt with the grizzly task of locating and removing the dead. Some of the victims were known to them and in the case children, another layer of trauma was experienced.

What followed was a recovery operation with the emphasis on maintaining law and order in a constructive but sensitive manner. There was no counselling for the police after the event as it was *just get on with your job and that was what we do!*

The outstanding service and bravery of members of the Northern Territory Police during and after the cyclone have received little recognition for their work, performed under horrific conditions and without adequate resources. Hopefully, even though it is too late for the officers that have passed away, at least their families and those still with us, who served during this disaster, can be finally recognised.

As mentioned, some officers have passed who served during Tracy and thereafter, and those that are still with us carry the memory of that experience. From a personal trauma perspective, they would be treated a whole lot better in today's environment. Still 50 years have passed and there is no recognition or offers to help those still living with the traumatic experiences of Cyclone Tracy.

The Society's web page has a one-line statement on its front page: *Preserving the rich history of the Northern Territory Police Force*. In the case of Cyclone Tracy, we are doing our best – to those that were present and did their duty – Thank You For Your Service – It Was Outstanding.

Finally, it should recognised the dedicated work of the members of other organisations like St John's and the Fire Service, along with the Australian Defence Force, medical and welfare services that also made a major contribution towards managing and recovering from this natural disaster.

## Editor's Message – Pat King

This edition of *Citation* includes reports from NT Police Officers following Cyclone Tracy, showcasing their unique stories of resilience, bravery, and hope. Officers, wives and children recount their experiences, including how they sheltered from the storm, protected children, and selflessly served their community during and after the disaster. Marilyn Evans who has typed these reports, has shared her reflections on the process.

The edition also features stories from former children of 1974 and individuals outside of NTPOL, such as a nurse and members of the Salvation Army. Jen Gehrig, a former NT Paramedic and NSW SES Officer influenced by her cyclone experiences, is included as well. Appropriate credits for quotes, photos, and articles have been provided where possible. Those with no citation are sourced from the NT Police Museum and History Society archives. If you can cite any sources for articles, please don't hesitate to let me know. There has been a huge response to the call for stories, and they continue to come in. I will include them in the 2025 editions of *Citation* in February, May, August, and November

**40 Years After 'Tracy', my story.** It is 9.06pm on Christmas Eve 2014 and I sit here at a computer and remembering that 40 years ago computers were things that filled a room, not sat on your lap, fitted into your handbag or could be held in the palm of your hand. Tonight there is no rain, no wind but the buildup is still making it very humid. I sit here relaxed and pondering what was. Very thankful that I was the rung at the bottom of the ladder of responsibility that night.

Our little home, a 16foot caravan was tied down and prepared for Cyclone Selma. That was a good practice run. We used star pickets and 40foot lashings to secure that van with the hope that there would be minimal damage. We anchored the annex by tying a suitcase of textbooks to a loop in the roof then tied ropes over and across the annex to stop it billowing up. We headed off for our rostered volunteer shift at St John. We checked the cars, restocked and prepared. Rain, rain rain. Cyclone Selma was close. The phone rang and we headed off to a motor vehicle accident on the corner of Parap Road and the Stuart Highway. Limited visibility, everyone drenched, moderate injuries, slippery roads.

More rain, ongoing rain, days of rain, dry days, hot days.

Christmas Eve, still more rain. Another cyclone, can't be complacent. Van is anchored, everything is stowed. Same day of the week, same roster, maybe get there earlier. Cars checked, restocked and prepared. Time for tea. Fannie Bay shop and the man asks, 'do you think this will hit?'. Don't be complacent we say, listen to what they say. Did I go on any jobs that night? I don't know. Later when we changed shifts people came, and people left. Some went home to be with family, some brought family to us. A team, one big family.

Phone calls come and crews are out. Rain, rain and wind. Uncertainty. Apprehension. Wind intensifies, ambulances still out. Phones continue to ring with reports of injuries and needing help. Need to remember first aid and explain over the phone. Danger, response, airway, breathing circulation. Improvise. Stop bleeding. Ambulances need to come back to the centre, wind too strong, too dangerous. A heart attack just across the road, can we help? Not sure. Get up to ask advice but quick as a flash and a gust of wind. The aircon is where I have been. A hole in the wall and the rain comes in. The notice board may block but it won't be anchored. Walls of the comms room start to shake. Waterproof the phones and radios, need to preserve them. Garbages, plastic bags, sticky tape, anything will do. Windows break. The children in danger, we are in danger. We need to move to a safer area. We stand at the door and wait for a lull. Grants holds his new baby ready to run out of the door and down the stairs. The radio tower comes down with the cable just missing the baby. We all jump back and land in a heap. The baby is safe. We try again and with success reach the crew room, but some are distressed. We see the damage happening out there and hear the roar of the wind. Howling, scraping tin, rain, train roar. Children play peekaboo on the bed. Adults are anxious and listen with dread. The wind is so strong. Was that the roof? Was that the wall? Are the cars ok?

Silence. We pause, we look at each other and wonder if it is over. Outside we go and the carnage we see but the man with the heart attack, where is he? The crew go to look but don't get far, it is impossible to find him. Roads strewn with debris, its 4.00am, too quiet, too still. A huge tree on my car, it won't go far! The radio tower rests on the ambulance, it is dented and bent.

We hear the roar and race back inside. From safety we listen with despair and alarm to the wind which is crazier. The children play on and the baby sleeps safe, all unaware of the danger we face. It is 6.00am and the wind has died down, we wait for a short while then venture outside. Are we the only ones to survive this night from hell? All around there is damage, not a nice site. The huge tree that was on my car has gone. The road are all blocked the debris is thick, people start to arrive, both the injured and sick. We check all the vehicles are safe and ready to go. No radio, no phone. We go to the school where people are gathering and ... my memory fails, we were out all day, we worked through the night but what were we doing? Those trips to the hospital, there were so many ...

Exhausted, fell asleep on the table in the crew room. Others asleep, but not for long. Back on the road. Blood. At Casuarina Square, triage the injured, keep the families together, no linen or equipment, just assurance and hope. The meat trays are dry, they are clean and ready, people lay in them protected for now. What were their injuries, I don't remember, there are so many. No linen for stretchers, bare covers that's all. Disinfect and go again.

The days and nights roll into one, fall asleep in the car on the front seat, stretch out in the back for a quick nap. The injuries we see are so varied from spinal to cuts and deep lacerations. Blood. We all work as a team and do what we can.

The pilot from Ansett. Who was he. He phoned my mum to tell her I was ok. She sat at the TV looking for news of me but now she could rest.

Our Volunteer family are all safe though some are injured and in a bad state. She miscarried her baby, but their children were found one in a bin and one on the ground. The families arrived and did what they could. No water, no power, so toilets were dug. Tents on the lawn. BBQ. I know I ate but have no idea what. Bath time at the airport fire station under a hydrant.

The nights are black, the rain keeps on, the sun comes out, the damage is done. Despair, pain, hope. We are changed for ever, our outlook is new, I appreciate life, its taken on a new view.

Help comes from the south and our time is done we turn to home, if there is one.

What of our home? Why bother we say. And there it stands all majestic and grand. A rip in the annex but all safe and sound!

Its 10.45 on Christmas Eve night and what have I learnt from 40 years ago. Our friends are precious, 'things' we don't need. Live life simply and don't rush with great speed. Smell the roses and laugh at life. Listen, take heed, don't panic and you succeed.

### **Marilyn Evans, Citation Typist. My thoughts and memories in relation to Cyclone Tracy.**

I was 15 years old, living in New South Wales, when the news of Cyclone 'Tracy' had hit Darwin on Christmas Day 1974. I remember thinking of all the children that had missed out on waking up to see what Santa had left them after hearing the news on the radio and seeing the footage on TV of the devastation. I couldn't understand how anybody could recover from something like that.

Until nearly 12 months ago my husband and I lived in Stuart Park and Darwin city for approximately 8 years. During these 8 years I, myself witnessed the effects of Cyclone 'Marcus' (only graded a category '1') which at the time was not expected to cross Darwin. I was on my own before, during and sometime after 'Marcus' passed through never having been through something like that before left me shellshocked. On several other occasions during our stay Darwin was victim to earth tremors which caused the buildings we lived in to sway with the movement but were not strong enough to make any household items to fall or cause any structural damage (well none that I know of).

During re-typing the police reports from the events of Cyclone 'Tracy' I felt a range of mixed emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, curiosity. What these officers and families survived through was horrendous and made me realise that what I had personally been through and felt whilst staying in Darwin was nothing in comparison and I feel ashamed for feeling sorry for myself.

- Sadness: For what was endured and lost. Mental health would have been a major issue of a lot of people living through something like this and yet (or at least talked about) as 99% of the reports stated no injuries had occurred. (I could just hear the old Aussie saying – “She’ll be right mate” but for a lot of people they would have suffered in silence).
- Anger: Appropriate authorities, since the disaster, not ensuring that if ever this was to occur again that the population would be safer (such as all suburbs having underground power).  
And anger towards ‘Mother Nature’ for being so cruel and unpredictable.
- Guilt: Not being able to do anything about it and for myself being able to enjoy that Christmas like any other year.
- Curiosity: What happened to those families after. Did authorities know or care about these persons and what affects something like this would have on a persons’ state of mental health besides physical injuries.

I am sorry for the people of Darwin who were there during this time and can only hope that they never had or have to witness such an event again.

**Police Boys Training Hall. Smith Street Darwin.**



**N B Plumb, Insp.**

At approximately 2am a neighbour’s house to the north disintegrated and part of a wall crashed into the main bedroom. The wind pressure then entered the dwelling and wrecked the three bedrooms and lounge.

On the initial disintegration I was struck on the head by a swinging door. I sheltered in the bathroom but was again struck on the head as the building expanded under pressure allowing a heavy skylight cover to fall in. I left the bathroom and sheltered in an entrance alcove that remained intact during the blow despite the large amount of debris crashing into the house.

Just prior to dawn the wind started to shift and I left the building to inspect my vehicle. I found it badly damaged with little chance of moving it owing to piled up iron, timber, furniture, etc.

After dawn the wind eased and I started out on foot for the Casuarina Police Station. Enroute I assisted a family carry small children to the Wagaman School, which was nearby. I continued and saw a Police 4x4 being driven by a new Probationary Const., Const. Spahr.

I directed Spahr to convey me to the Casuarina Police Station, there I found the premises packed to capacity with injured persons. Sgts 3/C Tenthly and Wolthers had set up the office and were handling all enquiries.

I took over the operation. Doctors were contacted and a mini hospital was set up at the Casuarina Shopping Centre. I ordered doors to be ripped off cupboards for use as stretchers and cleared the Station. I arranged a morgue in the Casuarina Post Office. I ordered members to commandeer four wheel drive vehicles wherever they found them. This was necessary as the debris made it impossible to travel in the badly stricken areas with conventional vehicles.

Search and rescue was the main priority and this activity was extremely intense during the morning. To facilitate this function, I had Police and Civilians commandeer heavy equipment and start clearing the roads from the Station outwards.

I despatched a Police motor cyclist to the Army and Air Force during the morning to obtain assistance in search and rescue. Both were unable to assist.

Under my instructions Police took over Coles Store at Casuarina completely. Initially they had to clear looters who were removing T.V. sets etc. Unfortunately, outside of using physical force, legal action could not be taken. The store was used as a supply base to feed and clothe thousands of people who were being controlled by Police at a dozen schools in the district. A large amount of the stock in the chemist shop was used initially by the Doctors treating the injured at the centre and later people at the schools.

As a large amount of the Police strength in Darwin reported for duty at Casuarina, we were able to cope with the situation. Very few of the men had any uniforms and sidearms were in short supply. I obtained uniforms from the badly damaged store in Bennett Street. I was unable to find anyone to obtain firearms from the armoury. I then searched the C.I. Branch Office and obtained a number of stainless steel handguns from members desks. Later I obtained riot shotguns from Chief Insp. Cossons.

During the first morning thousands of people started travelling by car, apparently searching for friends. This blocked the roads and hampered Police and ambulance considerably. Hundreds of people trying to obtain petrol caused considerable trouble, which was not controlled until Police took over, armed with shotguns.

Even with the arrival of the head of the disaster committee in Darwin, various organizations that were formed, were not viable for many days. It was mainly left to the Police to bridge the gap. Some Fire Officers and Gaol Guards assisted admirably and those that did are to be commended.

Of immediate concern in the operation on Christmas morning was the large amount of punctures of tyres of Police operated vehicles. We eventually overcame this difficulty with a supply of a special pressure pack foam in place of the normal air.

Many people must have been in the same position. This became apparent on the morning of Boxing Day. I discovered that numerous tyres and rims had been stolen during the from vehicles parked in the vicinity of the Casuarina Police Station.

The Casuarina Police Station was not equipped with emergency power. I found it necessary to take possession of a mobile department of works generator that I located in an electrical sub-station in Trower Road.

I would point out at this point that as time went by I received complete co-operation from Harold Bradford in obtaining vehicles from the Motor Transport Pool.

Almost every school in the Northern suburbs was used as a refugee centre. Police were either placed in the schools, or, as they were already there, directed to form committees and control all facets of the requirements of the public sheltering in these facilities. Food and all types of necessary items were supplied to the schools from Casuarina. Initially power plants and water tanks were commandeered.

The Fire Brigade gave great assistance with the continual need to supply water.



### **Kevin James Smith, Sgt 3/C No 43**

It was observed that the high winds and rains were making most of our house unliveable. Our family then gathered in the bathroom and toilet area of our house. We then gathered a number of blankets from the linen cupboard and wrapped ourselves in these as a form of protection against flying debris. At about 2am I would say that our house disintegrated around us, and the front wall and door area fell upon the entrance to the toilet and bathroom area blocking our exit from the bathroom and toilet area temporarily. This section seemed to brace the bathroom and toilet and these rooms are still intact at this time. During the collapse of the front wall I was struck on the right shoulder, but was not injured owing to the fact that I had a double bed blanket over my shoulder. My wife was later found to be suffering from a badly bruised ankle, reason unknown. My children were not injured during the cyclone. During the time of the cyclone between 1 am and approximately 3 am it was found that the wind was blowing from the North and spraying salt spray into our faces, even though where we lived was approximately 3/8 to 1/2 mile inshore from the sea.

At about 3 am there was a lull in the intensity of the wind and my family and myself took this opportunity to extricate ourselves from the remains of our house and went to the residence of Mr Geoff BONE of 2 Cunjevoi Cres, Nightcliff. During the remainder of the cyclone some 26 persons from neighbouring houses sheltered with Mr BONE. His house withstood the cyclone and was only superficially damaged.

At about 6.10am as dawn broke Mr BONE and myself went to 34 Bougainvillia Street, Nightcliff and assisted in the removal of a Mrs FONTIN from the wreckage of her house. Her husband was dead under the wreckage. Mrs Fontin was removed to the residence of Mr Bone. I then went to Bagot Road and made contact with 1/C Const. CROWELL and advised him of the dead body at 34 Bougainvillia Street, Nightcliff. I then searched a number of houses and rendered first aid where necessary. I later met up with Dr De Leuill and went with him to a number of houses rendering aid

where necessary. I later left the company of Dr De Leuill and assisted in clearing access roads into the Bougainvillia Street, Nightcliff area. I later again returned to 2 Cunjevoi Cres, Nightcliff, dressed and reported for duty at Casuarina Station time of reporting for duty is not known to me.



**P J Bonato, Sgt 3/C Reg No. 41**

On the evening of 24/12/74 subsequent to cyclone radio warnings, I filled canteens with water and strapped all moveable items down with ropes etc. and filled all vehicles with fuel. The three youngest children were in bed at 8pm. I went about the yard checking various items whilst my wife mended and ironed and listened to the local radio broadcasts. We were not particularly perturbed by the warnings and treated them with a somewhat casual approach.

At approximately 10.00pm the wind became stiffer and the roofing iron commenced to rattle. I placed all items of show on the floors and placed rubber cushions about circumference of the children's rooms and opened all louvres on the s/west side of residence, all curtains were pulled down and placed under the beds.

At approximately 11.00pm the roof over the kitchen commenced to lift, and I placed all single bed mattresses in one room, with children lying on floor between the mattresses and beds, close together. The power failed shortly prior to this but we had adequate torches for use. At approximately 11.30pm the roof came off the lounge room and appeared loose on two of the bedrooms. I instructed all members of the family to wrap themselves in blankets and stand in the small corridor. At that stage other houses commenced to disintegrate and wind strength increased. I was unable to open a door against wind pressure. Direction of wind approximately N.E., later swinging further East.

At approximately 1.00am 25/12/74 wind strength increased, and trees commenced to fall, the walls commenced to collapse with exception of the corridor which stood up till 3.00am, when beams commenced to spear down from other residences. At this stage the wind swung about and came from the west. I carried the children to the Willys 4x4 truck and we remained in the vehicle with a buffer protection of blankets until 5.00am when the wind ceased.



The family remained in the vehicle until 5.45am when I left to look about the yard. The Jeep vehicle was extensively damaged by flying building materials but no member of the family were injured.

At 6.00am I checked neighbours and ascertained several had been injured. I then commenced removing bricks from the building behind my residence but was unable to see any person under the rubble and gave up approximately 6.45am. At that time Const. S. BRADLEY called to obtain transport for injured persons in vicinity to Darwin Hospital, however, neither of my two vehicles would start. I had purposely left them out in the rain to prevent them being damaged by the building in case it collapsed completely.

I settled the family down in the vehicle and under of the house and commenced assisting persons remove injured persons to Hospital. Debris was cleared from roading allowing vehicles to pass. However, at approximately 10.00am vehicles returned with the drivers stating they could not get through Bagot Road owing to debris. Various females in area applied first aid and residences were checked out for badly injured persons. No names or addresses were taken as all persons were in same state of shock.

The following day I attended at Casuarina Police Station and assisted in General Duties, out of uniform and removed my family to Police Barracks Darwin, while I collected some launch gear together for harbour searches. A dingy and a 21 foot Johnson powered launch was obtained from Marineland (N.T.) Pty Ltd by Sgt W.L. TORNEY, and the old Police launch gear inspected with a view to salvaging, however, the idea was discarded owing to extensive damage and lack of fibre and gel available. The inner harbours were patrolled, and no persons were found in water by myself.

Upon being informed of large quantities of wreckage in Shaol Bay area. I patrolled there by vehicle and spoke to aboriginals camped along tree point/Gun Point areas. Also forestry and Gaol employees. Apart from the Engineer from the "Buchingham" who swam ashore and two others who came ashore following morning (25/12/74). There was no evidence to indicate any other persons had been washed ashore. The beaches and sand dunes were inspected for tracks with negative results.

Number life jackets, portions of rafts, dinghies and survival gear were found washed along shorelines and owners of all identifiable dinghies have been notified of position of the items.

Continued patrols have been made of Inner Harbour, East Arm, Middle Arm, Channel Islands, West Arm and portions of Bynoe Harbour, since with negative results. Patrols have been by launch, dinghy and vehicle along shoreline where possible. Some aerial searches were made with RAAF helicopters and Navy divers were taken to harbour wrecks for underwater inspection for bodies, with negative results.

Matters were discussed with N.T. Police Officer, the Harbour Master, N.T. Port Authority, and Navy Commanders Darwin of RAAF Operations and to date it would appear all possible, has been done, and in all probability some bodies would be in vessels not yet found in vicinity of Darwin wharf.

Full co-operation was given by all these parties, with the exception of following sentence. I consider the "Orion" aircraft and survey vessel "Flinders" both failed in their expected duties. These units are reported to be fitted with sophisticated electronic equipment for locating wrecks, submarines etc and their achievements left much to be desired. I do not intend withdrawing this paragraph from this report.

As from 16/1/75 I carried on routine launch and Police duties as per normal roster. I am still currently on approved recreation leave and will continue my leave when permitted. My family are in Queensland and I have been continually residing at 93 Lee Point Road, Wagaman, and have my meals at home with an occasional added meal at N.T. Police Headquarters. The residence at 93 Lee Point Road is suitable for myself for the foreseeable future.



### **Roderick P MacKenzie, Const. Reg No 660**

On the night of Christmas Eve, I carried out routine patrol with Const. Peter WOODS of the Traffic Section until the beginning of the severe winds of the cyclone. For some time while the electricity was still connected. I then assisted members of the E.S.U. directing traffic around fallen power lines. After the power was switched off I then answered a number of distress calls from people in houses in the Darwin area which began to break up early during the cyclone. People evacuated from these premises were taken to the Darwin Police Station where they were supplied with blankets and first aid. Included in these was my own wife and child. Patrols were called off the road at midnight on Christmas Eve, but a number of emergency calls were made after that time until conditions became too bad to drive. I then slept at Darwin Police Station until 5.30am. At approximately 6am I drove to the Northern suburbs with Sgt WYATT and Const. WOODS to make a general assessment of road conditions. During Christmas Day, on instructions from Insp. HONEYSETT, I assisted Sgt B. SYMONS to set up an emergency centre at Darwin High School. Assistance was gained from the Red Cross and Civil Defence. Some frozen food was salvaged from Sgt SYMONS home and from my own home and taken to the Darwin High School. Late on Christmas day I packed some food from my home and took them to my wife at the Darwin Police Station.

### **Robyn MacKenzie, 50 Years Later. In memory of Rod Mackenzie (Reg No 660) 1948 – 2022**

Rod joined NT Police in January 1974 (Squad 15). When Tracy hit we were living in an older style house in Marsina Street located between the city and hospital. Rod worked day shift in the Traffic Branch on 24 December. We were looking forward to him having Xmas day off and enjoying our 7 month old daughter's first Xmas.

At about 6.30pm a police car pulled up at home and Rod was requested to report back for duty as the Cyclone was now expected to impact Darwin. Rod was rostered on with Peter Woods, who had been in the job for less than a week. They were out on the road working until midnight by which time conditions had deteriorated considerably. Rod and Peter had a close call when they were driving past a service station on Bagot Road when the entire roof dislodged and slammed into the police car, tearing away the lights on the roof.



At about 2am, Rod and Peter arrived at our house, the intention being to take me and the baby to Police Headquarters where other families were sheltering. It had taken 40 minutes for Rod and Peter to drive 2 kilometres. The drive back to the city centre, during the eye, was quite a journey with Rod driving and Peter navigating towards the direction of the police complex, frequently bumping into debris and having to negotiate detours, often with water flooding into the car. They were guided by two visible lights operating on emergency power, being the Darwin Post Office and Police Headquarters. Quite a relief when the car was secure under the police building.

In the Headquarters building, as the cyclone intensified again, we watched the Traffic Branch building disintegrate with structural material flickering off into the distance. We marvelled at the strength of wind that could tear a building apart and pick up heavy police motorcycles, flinging them around with ease.

Eventually the Cyclone eased and at the police complex it was all hands on deck. The police families were quietly ushered to a location in the CIB area away from the public entrance when the first deceased person was brought in. The number of police families in the complex continued to increase. As Australia began to respond to the realisation that Darwin had been devastated, Major-General Stretton arrived from Canberra and commenced operations from Police Headquarters. My only sighting of him occurred on Xmas evening when he was obviously trying to sort out what to do with this traumatised group of women and children taking up valuable space in the police complex.

Around 3pm on Boxing Day, we were advised that Stretton had organised the evacuation of families of essential service personnel and that we were being transported to the airport. I went looking for Rod to say goodbye and found my way into a dark room with soft daylight filtering through the window. I was surprised to see so many people sleeping in the room and wondered why babies and children were lying on their own in neat rows. Realisation dawned when I took in the numbers attached to each person. Unfortunately, I had walked into the make-shift morgue.

Three police families from Police Headquarters were on the Ansett 727 flight to Brisbane, via Mt Isa that departed at about 6pm on 26 December; Judy Rees and her 4 children, Bobby Smith, Robyn and baby. I was later told that Christine Bradford and her 2 children were also on the flight. Our names and others don't appear on the Red Cross evacuees list because we were prioritised by Stretton before the list was organised. Fortunately, we were all able to return to Darwin within a few weeks.

Back in Darwin, police were performing extraordinary and often appalling tasks. Rod was accommodated in a room minus windows at the Travelodge until the Navy put a roof on our home that had sustained damage but was still standing. In addition to undertaking other necessary police duties at the time, he and some others still had driveable police motorbikes and were tasked with delivering messages and items all over Darwin as communication means had been destroyed. Flat tyres were a real problem and it was thanks to hard working mechanics that the bikes could continue to be useful. The Traffic Team also had responsibilities for escorting politicians and others when they came to Darwin.

Thank you to all those dedicated NT police who served the community of Darwin so well during and after Cyclone Tracy. What you did was extraordinary. Robyn Mackenzie



*This photo was taken in early 1975 when they were escorting Princess Ann. Wrecked Darwin in the background.*

### **Kevin Maley, Cyclone Tracy Memorial. Casuarina Snr College.**

The memorial Constructed with twisted girders from the home of Sgt Kevin Malley which was destroyed in the cyclone in 1974, commemorates those who died in Cyclone Tracy.

At the height of the Cyclone Tracy the Malley home totally disintegrated, blowing Malley, and his two children, who were in his arms, 15 meters to the ground. His wife Joyce fell beside him. He threw himself over his children to protect them, receiving severe injuries which required 200 stitches from flying debris. Joyce had a broken spine and Fiona severe leg injuries which required 23 operations to correct. Only their son Stephen escaped unscathed.

The family was the first evacuated by aircraft to Sydney. The girders were bent by front end loaders during the cleanup operations. A teacher from Casuarina High School took the initiative to use the twisted girders as a monument. The girders were set in concrete and the memorial was unveiled by the Administrator of the Northern Territory in June 1984



[Cyclone Tracy Memorial | Monument Australia](#)

### **L F Meneghetti, Const. Reg No 684**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I was working midnight shift in the Watch-house with Const. CURTIS. At about 2.30am the window situated next to the main switchboard blew in and with the help from two other Constables we managed to cover the hole with blankets etc.

Const. CURTIS and myself then assisted in helping civilians, regarding bedding, blankets, drinks and towels. By 6.30am I would estimate there were 100 civilians in the cell areas, therefore, prisoners were moved to cell block 3.

My wife, Leonie Jan, was rescued at 10.30am by Const. Peter BUDD at 7 Carey Street, our house was completely destroyed. My wife took shelter in a flat below our house, with the tenant, in six inches of water until rescued. She suffered only from shock. During the time my wife was in the Watch-house she assisted many people in helping to make them comfortable. She also assisted myself and

Const. CURTIS with an injured person, who was later taken to Hospital where he was dead on arrival.

Sometime during the afternoon I conveyed my wife to the home of Const. CURTIS, which is situated at 15 Meigs Court, Stuart Park. After seeing her doze off to sleep, I returned to the Police Station where myself and Const. CURTIS were allocated a vehicle and we then assisted wherever we could. Towards midnight we returned to 15 Meigs Court where we had refreshments and two hours sleep, returning to the Police Station in the early hours of the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974.

During the time I was on patrol, a periodical check was made at 15 Meigs Court. Toward daylight I remained at the premises for approximately three hours, as my wife was continually vomiting. At approximately 4.30pm Boxing Day my wife, accompanied by Mrs Yvonne CURTIS and her four children, was evacuated by Fokker Friendship to Alice Springs where she remained until the following day, and was then flown to Melbourne.

Const. CURTIS and myself remained on duty together for the next two or three days, sleeping when possible. On the third day after the cyclone we attended at Larrakia Army Barracks, where a body had been found. After assisting the St Johns Ambulance crew, we then organised a small boat to convey the body to Stokes Hill Wharf, where it was then conveyed to Wood Street Funeral Parlour.

After informing the shift boss, we then went to 15 Meigs Court where we slept for approximately twelve hours.



### **John A Abbott, Sgt 2/C Reg No. 65**

When the Cyclone struck in the early hours of the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, 1974, I was at home with my wife Lena and four sons, Graeme – 15 years, Geoffrey – 13 years, John – 11 years, and David – 7 years. At approximately 1.30am we lost the roof of the house. At the time we were in the Lounge room. After the lull the back lash came and the walls of the house fell in and I managed to get the family into the bathroom and we rode the cyclone out in there until daybreak, which was about 6.15am. I then managed to get my family out of the house into a neighbours place at the rear of my

residence. This place was a Housing Commission residence which had little damage. When I arrived there I was told there were four injured people trapped in a house directly behind my residence which was occupied by the ROE family. I gave assistance in getting them out and arranging transport for their evacuation to hospital.

Later that morning I moved my family into Milner Pre School with a number of other families in the area. With my wife who is a trained Nursing Sister, we then organised the cleaning up of the place to make it liveable. There was approximately 35 people at the Pre School and the day was taken up cleaning out toilets, salvaging food and clothing etc.

On the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974, at approximately 8am I reported for duty at Casuarina Police Station and carried out Station supervision.



### **A Godwin, Chief Insp.**

The first I heard about Cyclone Tracy was about lunch time on Christmas Day. Reports coming through on the news on Christmas Day was very sketchy and it was not really until Boxing Day that more detailed news was available. As the death toll continued to mount, my wife who has most of her family in Darwin became more concerned. I made no attempt to return to Darwin until the 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 when we had ascertained that no immediate relations were dead or injured. During this time I had been in contact with Chief Insp. Porter and Const. Monaghan, who were also in Brisbane at the time. Arrangements were made, that should anyone be able to get a booking to return to Darwin, he was to try and book the others also.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> December after many exasperating phone calls, I spoke to a Police Officer in Canberra who took steps to secure the three of us passage to Darwin on an aircraft. We left Brisbane at about 2am on the 28<sup>th</sup> December, arriving in Darwin about 7.30am.

I commenced duties at Casuarina Police Station on the 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 and continued at this station until the middle of January, when I resumed duties in Darwin Station.





Danny McIver, 25, amid the rubble of his home in Casuarina with his pet dog and bathroom sink.

*NTPOL Danny McIver Cyclone! Christmas in Darwin 1974.  
A Sydney Morning Herald Publication.*

#### **JOHN WOODCOCK Sgt 1/C Reg No. 244**

I vacated my house at 2.15am 25 December 1974 after the living room collapsed and roof came off. My wife and daughter were injured about the face and head by flying glass. All of the household sought refuge behind the brick storeroom under the house until daylight. At 6.30am my father was struck by flying iron, cutting an artery in his upper left leg. I then extricated my neighbours, John Davis and his wife Brenda from the wreckage of their house and conveyed all to Hospital at 7am. I collected another person with a fractured arm in Cahill Crescent whilst on the way. The trip to Hospital took 1 ½ hours due to the debris on the roadway. Prior to leaving home I instructed my wife, mother and children to walk to the Nakara Pre School and stay there.

During Christmas morning I drove from the Northern suburbs to the Hospital conveying injured persons who flagged me down. I reported to the Darwin Police Station in the Communication Section. I was instructed to assist in the Northern suburbs with injured person. I continued with this until 9.30pm then returned to the Nakara Pre School to find my family. I was unable to do so, and found them at my house, residing in the main bedroom. Because of poor sanitary conditions my wife would not stay at the school.

My house sustained major damage to the front. The kitchen and living room were demolished completely. Ninety per cent of the roof disappeared. My caravan and my parents van were wrecked. My private vehicle sustained extensive damage, including being struck by a refrigerator. The police utility ZBB674 sustained quite a lot of damage to the driver's side.



*Cyclone! Christmas in Darwin 1974. A Sydney Morning Herald Publication.*

**Alexander J Carolan, A/Sgt 3/C Reg No 464**

I am a single member and I lived in the Police Barracks, Cavanagh Street. I occupied Room Number 35 on the first floor. At approximately 2am on Christmas morning, Const. FISHER who was residing on the top floor, came to my room and informed me that the roof had blown off the Barracks. We moved to the bottom floor where we were joined by Const. THOMPSON. We spent the night in the laundry at the Barracks.

At first light we assisted Insp. A.A. GRANT to move some children from his residence which was severely damaged, to the recreation hall at the barracks. I then did a brief patrol of Smith Street with Sgt W. WILSON. I reported for duty at the Police Station shortly after 7am.

I worked in the Communications Section until approximately 4pm on Christmas Day. I then went with the Pathologist, Dr J RODE to Casuarina Post Office which had been set up as a temporary mortuary. I assisted the Pathologist until 29/12/74. I performed duties in the Body Identification/Missing Persons Section, until 18/1/75. I commenced duties in the C.I.B. on 19/1/75. I went on Rest and Recreation Leave on 27/1/75.

During the Cyclone, my room at the Barracks suffered severe water damage. Most of my property including all my books, clothing etc., could not be salvaged as I did not have an opportunity to visit the room until 29/12/74.



Electric fans are used to dry out native artifacts from museums and art galleries.

*Cyclone! Christmas in Darwin 1974. A Sydney Morning Herald Publication.*



*Cyclone! Christmas in Darwin 1974. A Sydney Morning Herald Publication.*

Two weeks after Tracy shattered Darwin, the official death toll was 48, including 13 children under the age of 12. More bodies were expected to be found from boats that sank during the cyclone – at least 17 people on boats were still missing, believed dead.

Within two weeks all but two of the 48 bodies had been positively identified. The gruesome pictures lined the wall of the body identification room in the Darwin Police Station.

Snr police officers, having once seen them, made a point of looking elsewhere when they entered the room. But a man who saw all the bodies at close quarters in the mortuary was Sgt Alex Carolan of the Northern Territory Police.

“It’s a pretty shattering job,” he said. “You have to keep your cool. People who just brought in bodies that were obviously dead had left them with us. Of the 23 bodies that we had at Casuarina Post Office – the temporary mortuary – on Christmas Day night only about 10 had anything on them to give us some identification.”

The police took details of the clothing, scars, rings, deformities and precise information if available on where the body was found. Each body was photographed and complete sets of pictures were sent to police headquarters in every State.

A large proportion of the children were not positively identified for several days. “In some cases the parents took children to the hospital or the police station in the middle of the crisis and said ‘He is my child – dead,’” said Sgt Carolan.

But while chaos and the suffering of the injured raged all round, staff were in many cases too busy with emergency treatment to take precise details of names. Later, injured parents had been evacuated.

“In many cases the parents of the children knew that they were dead but we didn’t have a positive identification for some time,” Sgt Carolan said. But later the parents gave identifications from hospitals in the south.

In 90 per cent of cases the cause of death was asphyxiation.

One or two more bodies were expected to be found among the ruins of the city but the most likely victims not found were thought to be on boats that left in the cyclone and sank. At least one person was believed to be on the ferry Darwin Princess and three more on the Mandora Queen.

### **Allan E Mugge, Const. Reg No 438**

On Christmas Eve I removed all the picture frames from the walls and any other ornaments that could fall or be blown around as well. The yard was clear, and all moveable things were placed in the storeroom or in the laundry sinks. At about 10.00pm I went to bed and was woken at midnight by my

wife to listen to the radio for the latest on the cyclone. Approximately 1.00am Christmas Day we removed all the carpets and rugs from the floor of the house due to the volume of water coming into the house through the louvres and under the door. This was all done with the aid of a torch as the power went off about 12.30am. Some time later there was a crashing of glass and metal in the kitchen sitting room area of the house, and the wind rushed in. I closed the bedroom door and braced myself against it and told the wife to put on a dress or brunch coat and her lace up shoes on. I also put a shirt on and when we left the room to get a pair of shoes for myself the wall of the hallway caved in. I then let go of the bedroom door and the rest of the house blew away around us. My wife fell to the floor and started to slide away, and I grabbed her and shielded her from a flying door and made for the landing on top of the stairs. We huddled there protected only by the asbestos and railings at the top of the stairs. When the wind changed direction, we made our way down the stairs to the storeroom where we stayed until the wind and rain abated. At about 7.00am the neighbour from the back came to check on our safety and with him and other neighbours checked other houses before going to his house to dry off and shelter from the wind. About an hour later with five other families we made our way to the Wagaman Primary School when told that the cyclone was believed to have turned back for Darwin. Not long after arriving at the school I complained of a dizzy head and a swelling of my head above my right ear. I then went into delayed shock and concussion and finally woke up about midday. That night my wife who is pregnant and is due on February 7<sup>th</sup>, complained of pains to the side of her body and this was diagnosed as bruising due to her fall and to the position of the baby as well.

For the rest of Christmas Day I assisted at the school where possible doing light tasks owing to my sore head and headaches. When it was possible I went with my wife back to what was left of our house to get some clothes for myself and my wife. All that was left standing of the house was the storeroom and laundry and the floor, the rest had been blown away.

#### **Garnet Alan Dixon, Const. Reg No 642**

On 24.12.74 at 11.00pm, I commenced duty to complete my rostered midnight shift, in the Communications Section. Present to assist in my duties, due to the cyclone, were Sgt TAYLOR, Const. M. EVANS, Const. ROBERTSON and Sgt KETTLE, representing the St Johns Ambulance.

My performed duties were to answer incoming phone calls (urgent or otherwise) and to control the mobiles out patrolling the Darwin areas. Persons enquiring on the telephone were given what assistance necessary so that they could in some form weather the cyclone. The directions mainly given were those that would ensure safety to the person calling, assurance and directions to designated places of safety, which were to our knowledge the Darwin, Nightcliff and Casuarina High Schools. The only other directions given were to stay in the smallest room of the house, being either the bathroom or toilet, and shelter there until the eye of the cyclone had finished. Other duties performed were to keep open communications to all possible outlets, but we only considered the Darwin areas at the time and not outside outlets such as Katherine. The Communications room was vacated at 3.00am 25.12.74 due to the ferocity of the cyclone and it appeared that the outside wall would collapse. All personnel sheltered in the watchhouse until the cyclone eased. At 4.30am 25.12.74, Sgt TAYLOR, Const. EVANS and myself, resumed duty and continued to take incoming calls. A line check was made to see what other establishments still had operating phones and to ascertain some idea of the damage. The only indication of the ferocity of the cyclone was the damage done to the old Bennett Street Police Station.

At daybreak (time not known) all mobiles were organised to ascertain the extent of the damage caused by the cyclone. When the mobiles booked on the radio reception was as per normal, but as they proceeded further out of the town area the radio reception became non-existent. From ground observation it could be seen that the aerial was no longer standing, thus reducing our reception to zero. At 9.30am 25.12.74 after further routine duties within the Communications centre, Const. EVANS and myself requested leave to find out how our respective families had survived the cyclone,

if that was the case as we had no knowledge of the situation in the Northern Suburbs. After locating my wife and was satisfied that she was alright, I then accompanied Const. EVANS in assisting injured persons to first aid centres for treatment. We continued this duty and normal patrol until approximately 5.30pm 25.12.74 when we then resumed duty within Communications.

**Geoffrey W Sherville, Const Reg No. 239**

At approximately 0130hrs, on 25 December, 1974, I realized the intensity and danger when a piece of 4 x 2 timber came through the bedroom windows and sheets of corrugated iron started hitting the windows. Also, I could hear other houses around breaking up. I then arranged a shelter in the first bedroom of the house which was protected to some degree by the bathroom and toilet on one side, the front porch on the other and lounge and bedrooms on remaining two sides. The shelter was made with beds and lined with double and single mattresses in which we all sheltered. I had tried to get down to the brick storeroom under the house but I judged the flying debris was too much of a danger to take the boy and baby outside. We stayed in the shelter until approximately 6am when it started to get light and wind began to abate. When the wind slowed to an extent that the danger from flying debris had lessened considerably, I went outside and checked all the neighbours and with the assistance of men checked all persons in our area. Although some of the houses were completely destroyed no persons in our area were injured.

After the check of people in the neighbourhood rumours began to cause more panic. One of the men and myself then attempted to drive to Casuarina Police Station to ascertain if there was any truth to the rumours. On arrival at Casuarina, I found communications out, but no person seemed to think the cyclone was returning. I stayed at Casuarina for approximately an hour answering queries then returned to our houses and laid rest to rumours that the cyclone was returning. I informed the people that many refugees were going to schools for shelter. A number of the people then left. I advised against going to the schools as I did not consider they would be suitable for a number of reasons. My immediate neighbours then decided to stay and we all decided to live under some of the houses in a type of commune. We spent the rest of 25/12/74 arranging shelter for the women and children, setting up cooking facilities, etc. On 26/12/74 I attended at Darwin Police Station at a parade conducted by Chief Insp. OWENS. For the one or two nights after 25 December I carried out anti-looting patrols with other members during the night. On about 27 December Const. BRADLEY and myself were put on the board as carrying out C.I.B. duties. We did this until rosters came out with all C.I.B. members returning to normal duties.



**FORENSIC** dentist John Plummer has the grim task of finally laying the ghost of Cyclone Tracy to rest.

By **FRED McCUE**

It is a challenging task. A real life scientific detective story. With just 25 days remaining until the 10th anniversary of the cyclone, police have recalled some of the surviving woodworkers near Darwin's timber mill on Christmas morning 1974.

The reason the files are incomplete: An unexplained set of vertical marks lying in the vicinity of some files was thought.

The marks are one of 11 people still officially listed as missing in the 1974 cyclone.

All were on boats that had been in an elevated position - but Tracy's 100 km/h winds.

Various files the marks and the files cover were never seen again after gathering against the side in the face of the tropical storm.

Dr Plummer has a small collection of files to work with in his laboratory.

For a start, the remains were found in the half of the ill-fated fishing boat 'Kangaroo' when it was finally raised on July 8, 1977.

The boat was deliberately sunk shortly after the cyclone because it posed a threat to shipping.

After being used by the

boat, it was eventually retained by the navy, says Dr Plummer, who will bring it to the surface for another two years.

Only three crew members of the fishing boat, George, William and David, were mentioned by name in the identification in September of Robert Brown, who until his body was confirmed had been known simply as 'ROBERT BROWN'.

There still missing from the flood lists are the skipper, Margaret Odawa, David Brown, Fredy and George Brown.

"It was at least thought the remains were those of the victims," Dr Plummer said.

The skull was sent back to the of Darwin's leading anthropologist, Max Huxley, at the University of Adelaide.

"But it was hard to say if it was the victim's," he said.

This victim may be known to Plummer with a similar task of determining which of the remaining 200 crew members it is.

But it will not be that easy.

Only once a coroner is satisfied that the remains are the victim's, Dr Plummer's dentist will do the job.



Dr Plummer - laying Tracy's ghost to rest

and that could take any amount of time. "Cyclone Tracy destroyed cyclone boat - all 1000 tons of the boat - victim No. 10 was taken from Darwin Harbor, nearly three years later.

The 30-year-old man, TRACY, and the vessel's crew

of the Flood Boat is one of Dr Plummer's major objectives.

But it is challenging like any other task, many attributed him to his particular brand of dentistry.

"I guess this is about the hardest I should be called to do - I have a steady in my teeth, dentistry with

shaking dentures," he said.

In this case Dr Plummer had access to the flood boat, building lists of a successful forensic dental specialist.

"We've got to have some idea of who we're looking for," he said.

In this case we've

got a number of names of who it might be."

There are two routes he can follow to his identification: one the identity of victims No. 100 to 40.

The firm is purely the use of dental records. "Checking those records may not be difficult."

Dental practices should have and to

could be disposed of," he said.

In this particular case the dental records are incomplete.

At a recent Dr Plummer may be asked to provide his second opinion - photographic superimposition.

This is a process whereby what Dr Plummer says "dental superimposition" to get closer to the identity of the victim.

The procedure involves the use of an old photograph of the possible victim.

Value judgement is then used to move the picture to fit size and eventually superimposing the image on to the skull which is mounted on a special stand.

"It's a real a matter of time," he said. It does a long way," Dr Plummer said.

He has been involved in forensic dentistry since 1977 when at the city office in Darwin he was asked to identify a number of people killed when a flash flood in the city killed 11 people, including the Darwin's Mayor.

There was a transfer to Dr Plummer's dental forensic specialist. The victims had been in Darwin the previous week and had been his patients.

"It's a lot of a very hard people who had been staying with you the week before in what we would call 'the first case case'."

Dr Plummer accepts that his work is often a "dental detective".

"The necessary work is to do it."

Sunday Territorian 3 December 1989

Brisbane Sunday Sun 11/3/90

## SEARCHERS RETURN TO THE SCENE OF 1974 TRAGEDY

# Divers hunt for cyclone's victims

By **DARREN GRANT**

New hopes are held for the recovery of the bodies of 12 victims lost in Cyclone Tracy, which ravaged Darwin in 1974.

Sixty divers of the south west coast Operation High will begin a three-month search of Darwin's harbor in May.

They will search the seabed under naval supervision.

Police, who have stopped up efforts to locate the dead in the past year, believe the search may uncover the still greater number of bodies and its five crew members.

Detective Senior Constable Trevor Wardrop, of the Northern Territory Missing Persons Unit, said the lawyer was the only person never to give up any of the crew.

On board were Ruth Vincent, 26, Gregory Wetherman, 28, Terence Wainwright, 24, Gary Davidson, 26, and Gerald Thompson, 21.

Previous attempts to locate the ship have failed. The last identified victim would lead to identification, but this proved fruitless.

Last year's report on the bodies of the crew was identified from dental records after his body was exhumed from Darwin cemetery.

Wardrop was washed overboard and was found floating near a buoy three days later.

"It was not until March last year that police had enough evidence to identify the crew."

Other victims were listed as missing are Ronald Marshall, 21, of the Charles Todd, Harold Clarke, 28, of the Darwin Princess, Geoffrey White, and Arvid Daniel, 28, of the Mariner Queen, Robert Wade, 26, and William Woodcock, 24, of the brigate ship David Peary, 19, and Lieutenant Odawa, 25, of the Flood Boat.

The ruins of the Darwin suburb of Mad after Tracy struck

Brisbane Sunday Times 11 March 1990

22 9 89

# Cyclone skeleton identified

By PATRICK WHITELEY

A 15-year-old mystery came full circle yesterday after the skeletal remains of a man killed in Cyclone Tracy were identified as a Port Lincoln teenager.

Northern Territory Coroner, Mrs Sally Thomas, found the exhumed remains of a body discovered three days after the cyclone, were those of Robert Gordon Swann.

The positive identification of Swann's body came as a relief for the dead boy's father Mr John Swann, a former Port Lincoln jeweller now living in Adelaide, his wife and their three remaining children.

Mr Swann, 68, said his family had accepted Robert's death but had been left feeling "empty" because there had been no positive identification.

"Robert spoke to us two days before the cyclone and was looking forward to coming back to Port Lincoln for his Christmas break but the cyclone knocked that away," he said.

"When we went up to Darwin for the memorial service all the parents were there but we were the only family whose son had not been found."

Robert, 15, was thought to have drowned after being swept off a fishing boat in Darwin Harbor when the 1974 cyclone hit. Police believed the remains, which had been mutilated by sharks and crocodiles, could have belonged to either Robert, or Gregory John Westermann, 22, of Perth, who was also aboard the boat.

Police reopened the file on the two men six months ago, but a mix-up in cemetery records at the time of the mass burials after Cyclone Tracy caused the wrong body to be exhumed.

Police took fresh exhumation orders on Wednesday in an effort to obtain the unidentified remains. NT police forensic dentist Dr John Plummer told the inquest there was no doubt in his mind that the remains were those of Robert.

Mr Swann said his son was an "adventurous" young man. He left Port Lincoln when he finished school and had spent nine months as a cadet on board a prawn trawler before he died. A private memorial service will be held in Darwin next week.

Cyclone Tracy killed 66 people, 50 on land and 16 at sea.

Sept 21 1989

# Cyclone death back in court

**A police investigation into the death of a man in Cyclone Tracy was before the courts again yesterday.**

**A fresh police application for an exhumation at the Darwin Cemetery was granted.**

**But the Chief Magistrate, Mrs Sally Thomas, at the request of police, suppressed all evidence heard by the court.**

**Mrs Thomas will hear tomorrow an inquest into the death of a man in the cyclone.**

# NEW MOVE ON TRACY RIDDLE

By CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

A 13-year-old mystery could come full circle next week as Darwin police attempt to exhume the body of an unidentified man, killed in Cyclone Tracy.

But the man's skeletal remains, buried in an unmarked plot at the Darwin Cemetery, are only half the mystery.

Darwin police are holding the skeleton of another man also killed in the 1974 catastrophe which could also be identified in the new developments.

Police are confident either one or both of the dead men



The unmarked grave at Darwin Cemetery.

will be identified if an application to exhume the body is granted in the Darwin Magistrates Court on Monday.

Police have been trying to piece together the complex puzzle for the past six

months. They have the names of two young men, both missing in Darwin when Christmas Eve, 1974.

The two bodies were found soon after the cyclone hit Darwin.

One was discovered three days after the cyclone at the Chertsey Block buoy in Darwin Harbor.

It was discovered by the crew of a boat, the Lady Cynthia.

The body was buried at the Maritime 2nd Cemetery as "John Doe" at 45 on the same day of its discovery.

Police pathologists at the time performed a post-mortem with what little makeshift facilities they had.

The dead man's dental chart was drawn on scrap paper and photos are now being taken original records from Adelaide.

The second body was discovered 10 years ago on board the boat Floodlight when it was washed from the bottom of the harbor. It has remained with police since.

The two men listed as miss-

ing on December 25 are Robert Gordon Swain, 18, originally from Port Lincoln in South Australia and Gregory John Wainwright, 27, originally from Perth.

Both men were working on boats in the Darwin Harbor when the cyclone hit — Mr Swain on the Floodlight and Mr Wainwright on the Doona.

Police have notified both sets of parents of their intention to exhume the body.

They said the parents had agreed to the move and were anxious to solve the puzzle.

A coronial inquest into the death of the man at the Chertsey Block buoy was held in Darwin in 1985.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Sally Thomas, ruled at the inquest that although the man's identity remained a mystery, his death had been caused by drowning.



### **Trevor Wardrope, Snr Const. Reg No. 858. 50 Years Later**

Three days after Cyclone Tracy, a body was found floating in Darwin harbour. An autopsy was carried out in what remained of the hospital mortuary and a dental chart drawn on a piece of scrap paper. Due to advanced decomposition and no refrigeration, he was buried the same day in Darwin Cemetery, Plot 97, as body 48.

This file was the first one that I looked at when I was transferred to the Missing Persons Unit in March 1989. What caught my eye was that some dental records were present and a note that Body 48 could be either Robert Swann or Gregory Westerman. A few days later, I was in the office of Dr John Plummer, a Forensic Odontologist, who was an expert in dental identification. Dr Plummer looked at the file, the dental records and hand drawn chart on the scrap of paper and said that he felt he knew who Body 48 was, but would need to see body 48's teeth to be absolutely sure.

Easy – job done. If only .... the work had only just begun.

It took another 6 months of tracking down Next Of Kin to notify them of current events, obtaining necessary permits, permissions and court orders as well as assistance from interstate police, local councils and health departments. All through this process, there was a hidden fear of what an exhumation may reveal. After Cyclone Tracy, there were rumours and accusations of mass burials along the Stuart Highway near Adelaide River, multiple burials at the cemetery and cover ups as to the actual number of people killed.

In September 1989, a warrant was issued to exhume body 48 from plot 97, a body bag (no caskets were available) was located. When the body was exhumed it was discovered that the contents were not body 48 as this body had some distinctive features. Back to the coroner whose comment was along the line of "*I thought something like this could happen*", then made us go back, reopen the plot and dig down until we were certain the earth had not been disturbed to negate multiple burials.

This person was quickly identified, again because of a distinctive feature, and council records revealed that he was also a Cyclone Tracy victim and had been buried at the same time as Body 48 in

plot 98. Back to the coroner again and a warrant was issued to exhume plot 98 with a comment that 6 people had been buried that day and if Body 48 was not located in plot 98, the coroner would be reticent to issue any more exhumation warrants.

Plot 98 was excavated, remains located which were identified as being Body 48 and further identified as Robert Swann.

The story does not really end there as Mr and Mrs Swann lived in South Australia and wished to attend their son's reburial, but at the time there was an airline strike. Superintendent Kevin Maley stepped in and 'arranged' 2 workers to be removed from a BHP Charter Flight from Adelaide to Darwin and their seats made available to Mr and Mrs Swann. Brian Measey of Cheapa Renta Car made a vehicle available and the Beaufort Hotel provided accommodation. Robert Swann was buried with his parents present in a service conducted by the Police Chaplain, Major Davis. Mrs Swann commented that they had always hoped that Robert had hit his head, suffered memory loss and one day he would regain his memory and return home. To that end, they always set a plate at the Christmas table for him. Mrs Swann thanked everyone for their efforts saying "*I now know where he is and, after 15 years, I can start to grieve*".

### **Trevor Wardrope, Snr Const. Reg No. 858. 50 Years Later**

Whilst making enquiries in regards to the Body 48 file, there was mention of a skull that had been located in the fishing vessel '**Flood Bird**' which had sunk during Cyclone Tracy.

The skull was located in the secure area within the Forensic Unit where it had been since 1977. As the skull was located within the '**Flood Bird**', it was assumed it was most likely a crew member. We know that when the vessel sank the following 4 crew were on board:

1. Captain Odawada
2. George Roewer
3. David Fealy
4. Robert Swann.

This is because a 5<sup>th</sup> crew member during the cyclone jumped overboard with a rope and the intention to swim to another vessel to either tow it or get towed. Surprisingly, this crew member survived. Robert Swann had been previously identified, being Body 48.

The skull showed characteristics of being Caucasian. As Captain Odawada was a Japanese national, the chances that the skull was Captain Odawada was considered remote. That left George Roewer and David Fealy.

Dental records were not of significant value. Dr Plummer contacted a Dr Brown in Adelaide who had previously carried out identifications using a procedure called 'cranio-facial video super imposition'. This procedure is when an image of the skull is super-imposed over a photograph to look for points of similarities or differences.

Dr Plummer took the skull and photographs of George Roewer and David Fealy to Dr Brown at the University of Adelaide, the Forensic Odontology Unit, where the skull was identified as being George Roewer.

### **Len Cossons, Det. Chief Insp.**

We were all aware of the cyclone warnings that were being broadcast by the local radio stations and at approximately 11.30pm 24/12/74 the wind gusts appeared to be getting stronger and there was every likelihood that Darwin would suffer some effects from the cyclone and it was at this stage that we all decided to prepare for any eventuality.

We all dressed in suitable clothing, prepared overnight bags, removed all objects from the walls, etc. more or less in line with the information contained in the cyclone warnings, securely fastened the upstairs portion of the residence and took up accommodation in the downstairs room which we considered would be the safest portion of the house.

We had emergency gas lighting and cooking gear in this area.

The strong winds continued and it was very apparent that the cyclone had arrived and during the initial stages communication was maintained with Sgt TAYLOR at the Darwin Police Station Communications Centre by telephone until approximately 12.45 – 1am (these contacts were not recorded in the Communications Centre owing to the volume of telephone calls being received) and contact was also made with Deputy Commissioner TEXTOR.

During the contacts with the Communications Centre the instruction was given by me for all mobile patrols to cease operating until such time as it was safe for them to recommence.

There was no doubt in our minds that the cyclone had hit Darwin but sitting inside our residence it was hard to imagine what was happening elsewhere other than Sgt 3/C TAYLOR had advised us on the telephone that at least 50 or 60 reports had been received of houses losing their roofs.

A 35/40 foot high coconut palm in the front of our residence together with three large frangipani trees were blown over during the first blow when the gusts were coming from the northeast, the street lighting along the Ross Smith Avenue was going on and off and it was obvious that there were power problems, there were lots of unidentified crashings and smashing going on but it was still hard to appreciate what was really happening but self preservation kept all of us inside.

No record was kept of our activities but it seemed to be around 2.15am – 2.30am that the 'eye' of the cyclone came to our area and during this period the wind appeared to have stopped, it was certainly much calmer and milder than before, and this was the time that we went outside and tried to obtain some assessment of what was happening.

Mr GABEL who resides on the corner of Freer and Worgan Streets came over and reported that Mrs McGAW of 42 Playford Street had lost the roof of her house but they were unable to contact her and thought that she may have been inside the house either dead or injured.

We went over to Mrs McGAW's residence and climbed over the walls and gained entrance but found the premises empty.

While we were there an ambulance arrived and an E.S.U. truck was also in attendance, how they were able to drive around in such conditions is hard to comprehend.

As we were walking back to our house it fast became apparent that the wind intensity was increasing and that the reverse cycle of the cyclone was now on its way.

We just seemed to get back inside the house when the wind hit with renewed fury and with much greater force than previously. This was the stage when the trees were stripped completely of their leaves, that limbs of trees were broken off and houses were damaged or disintegrated. A projectile of some sort smashed through the walls of our downstairs room, the roof was ripped off but even at this stage it was still difficult to envisage just how far this course of destruction and damage extended and my opinion was that we were just one of the unlucky few.

With the loss of the roof the water started to pour down through the overhead floor and at the same time water was flooding through the room generally and this was caused simply from the volume of the rain. For a period we covered up with a carpet that had been on the floor but this soon became saturated and the room untenable so we then evacuated this area and spent the rest of the night in our car parked under the carport on the side of the house.

The remainder of the night continued without incident.

The next morning we got out and surveyed the damage and this was when we started to realise that the magnitude of the damage was going to be much greater than anything we had imagined.

We checked with the neighbours and soon found that all the houses in the area had suffered considerable damage with walls blown in and roofs blown off but apart from this no one seemed to be missing nor were any injuries reported.

Mr H, BRADFORD expressed concern about his relatives in the northern suburbs, Const.s R.C. and I.G. BRADFORD, their wives and children and as it was obvious that an assessment of the situation would have to be made concerning damage sustained, police operations and requirements a patrol to the northern suburbs was carried out.

Right from the very outset of this patrol it soon became obvious that the cyclone damage was immense and the Ross Smith Avenue was littered with debris, i.e. roofing iron, fallen electric light cables, collapsed electric light poles, any manner of material used in the building of houses.

All the houses in this area appeared to have suffered damage some being almost completely demolished.

The homes of Det. Insp. GOEDEGEBUURE and Det. Sgt 3/C CASTILLON were observed to be very badly damaged and would not have been habitable.

The Ross Smith Avenue section from Freer Street to the Stuart Highway could only be negotiated with difficulty by motor vehicle, and by way of comparison the Stuart Highway from Ross Smith Drive to the Bagot Road was relatively free of obstructions.

Bagot Road was a complete shambles, commencing with fallen light poles and cables at the Stuart Highway end, flooding near and under the overpass bridge near Ludmilla School and this sector was a 'touch and go' affair with a conventional vehicle. Our vehicle negotiated this floodwater but the engine promptly stopped as soon as we were out of the water but it did restart after a short period of drying out.

The damage sustained to the housing in Ludmilla, along Bagot Road and to the R.A.A.F. Base had to be seen to be believed plus the fact that massive power poles were bent and distorted as if they had been Constructed of licorice.

While we were travelling along Bagot Road we were in radio communications with the other vehicles and there were other Police vehicles on the road and eventually we reached Deputy Commissioner TEXTOR's residence at Lakeside Drive via McMillans Road, Sabine Road and Trower Road. Extreme caution had to be used at all times whilst travelling as all roads were obstacle courses by themselves being littered with debris from houses, power line poles, cables, etc.

The Deputy Commissioner's official vehicle was immobile under various types of debris which were also blocking the driveway. This vehicle was eventually freed and could be used as transport.

The Deputy Commissioner was keeping informed by way of wireless concerning police operations in the area and other patrols were calling at his residence.

The original patrol was continued by way of Lakeside Drive which was so flooded that an attempt was made to circumvent this by driving around some of the back streets in this area but this proved fruitless and the road was traversed by keeping to the footpath as much as possible until we reached Goodwin Street, Nakara.

Destruction in this area was almost complete with the majority of houses being demolished to floor level and this certainly happened to the Police houses in the area.

The members that we sighted were uninjured and at that early stage were looking after their families, i.e. Const. I.G. BRADFORD and advice was received that Sgt 3/C SANDRY had his family at the Nakara School and was organising the local evacuees there in regard to accommodation, etc.

Patrolled to Casuarina Police Station which was a hive of activity and a temporary morgue had been set up in the Casuarina Post Office. Insp. Plumb was in charge of operations.

Arrangements were made at this stage for a motor cycle despatch rider to contact both the R.A.A.F. and Army for personnel to be provided to perform guard duty at local shopping centre to provide protection against looters. The Casuarina Shopping Centre was damaged to such an extent that it would have been an open invitation to looters, if guards had not been provided from the immediate resources available. No action resulted from the request to either of the armed forces.

Returned to the Deputy Commissioner's residence and advised him of my observations and then patrolled to Reed Place, Rapid Creek whilst enroute to Darwin re the safety of Mr and Mrs SOUTH and their four children. Both adults had been injured by flying glass and debris, their house had partly disintegrated and they were advised to seek accommodation at the nearest school.

Enroute to Darwin punctured two tyres and vehicle left at the demolished Mobil Service Station, Bagot Road and further transport obtained by hitch-hiking a ride to my residence at Fannie Bay.

The roof and the end wall partly out of the main bedroom seemed to be the main damage and the premises were inhabitable so we filled both of our cars with salvageable possession and evacuated the premises to take up temporary accommodation in my office at Police Headquarters.

Other members of the Force and their families came to take up this type of temporary residence and arrangements were made to supply cooking facilities which at first consisted of camping type gas cookers but quickly improved to at least kitchen size gas cookers and ovens. Private refrigerators and deep freeze units complete with food stocks were in use during the initial stages and as conditions improved these were supplemented from other sources.

Gas lights, torches and candles provided lighting in the main headquarters building until such time as a portable generator set was obtained and put in use. This unit only provided limited power 2.5kva but this was sufficient until such time as a large generating unit was installed in the parking area outside the police buildings and this unit was of sufficient size to supply power for any purposes, i.e. air-conditioning, power, lights.

During the initial stages my official duties were concerned with missing and deceased persons resulting from the cyclone and police accommodation.

49 deaths were recorded as having been caused through the disaster with a further possible 16 persons missing believed to have drowned. The missing persons were crew members of boats that had been lost in the Darwin Harbour. The number of persons injured is not known but any persons seriously injured were evacuated south by aircraft for medical care and attention.

Accommodation was arranged for 200 police at the Travel Lodge Motel and the order for this accommodation was signed by General Stretton. There was never any attempt for a complete takeover of the premises by Police and even when the above arrangements were being negotiated accommodation was found on these premises for a large medical team that had arrived from interstate, possibly New South Wales, to assist the local authorities. These persons were at that time under the care of Matron Brennan of the Department of Health and there was no problem in their being supplied with accommodation.

With reference to accommodation and cooking facilities, the facilities that were installed in the foyer of the Police Headquarters building steadily became a type of community kitchen which catered mainly to members of the Northern Territory Police, Victorian Police Communications complement and to public servants associated with the Attorney Generals Department. The staff manning this kitchen were casual employees and their efforts were a great morale booster to all sections who had the opportunity to avail themselves of the fare supplied.



*Constable R Bradford's House  
Kilfoyle Cresc Casuarina*

### **John Wolthers, Sgt 3/C Reg No 309**

At 2.30pm on Tuesday the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I commenced duty at the Casuarina Police Station. I completed my shift at 1030pm prior to ceasing duty I was notified to instruct all members working to remain on duty due to the impending Cyclone 'Tracy'. I then contacted Sgt Simpson and requested that my wife and family come to the station and any other wives who wished to come, he in turn suggested I contact Insp. Woodroffe. Upon doing so the Insp. readily agreed and my wife and child attended, and I notified any member who wished their wife's to come to the station could do so. As members arrived for midnight shift these members were also advised of the above. Most members chose to bring their wives to the Station. Snr Const. Mackintosh then arrived to run midnight shift at approximately 10.30pm he then went on patrol, and I stayed at the station and attended to the telephone-front counter duties. A room was set up in the women police office for the wives and children.

At approximately 11pm winds started increasing and by approximately 12MN powerlines in the Casuarina area started to cause trouble by sparks flying off them, by 1.30pm calls were being received that roofs of houses were being blown off. Telephone calls kept coming in one after the other stating their houses were breaking up. On every instance I advised the members of the public to go to the smallest room in the house and remain there until it was all over.

Some time after the phones went dead the winds increased all members were instructed to return to the Station. All did with the exception of two vehicles conveying S/Const. Mackintosh and Const. Werner in the Station Sgts Utility and Const. Thompson and with another member, in a police van. Both units were assisting trapped persons and were unable to return due to vehicle break down. All members arrived back at Casuarina uninjured in the morning.

At approximately 2.30 Sgt Tenthly arrived at the Station. At this stage flying debris were hitting the Police Station and the air condition room doors had blown off. At approximately 4.30am a large section of the Casuarina Post Office roof collided into the rear of the station near the parking bays, knocking down a section of brick retaining wall and the roof of the plant room. A short time later another section of the post office roof collided into the station causing a further section of roof and a window panel to tear out.

On returning to the station a convoy of three cars arrived containing four families with young children and they were settled in with other people in the corridor of the station.

Sgt Tenty and myself then compiled a list of all persons at the station (87 persons) and instructed them that no-one was to leave the station without authority.

At 8.00am I instructed two members to drive to Darwin, obtain radio equipment and survey the situation, they returned on foot approximately ½ hour later stating that the roads were impassable and that they had punctured all the tyres in the debris. Large numbers of people had begun to arrive at the station bringing with them injured and dead persons. I then sent out foot patrols to Darwin to report to the Officer -in-Charge. A number of people attended at the station with 4 wheel drive vehicles and they were organised into rescue teams of one police officer and three civilians and each given an area to search. They were instructed to leave all dead persons on the site and record the address and convey the injured to the station.

A Casualty station was organised from among police families in the lunch room and supplies and equipment obtained from the Casuarina Shopping Centre, later the Casualty station was transferred to the Shopping Centre due to lack of room at the station.

By 9.00am a number of earth-moving contractors and their equipment had been organised and begun clearing the main access roads from the station, under the direction of Police.

With Sgt Tenty I then organised police patrols, guarding of premises, searches and issue of patrol, clothing, food and water until 6.00pm on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974, when we were relieved.



***Demolished house in Bell St Nakara. 4 People died when wall collapsed.***



***Constable J White's Residence Trower Rd Nakara***



*Constable Kennedy's Residence. Rothdale Rd Jingili*

**Charles G Simpson, Sgt 1/Class Reg No 71**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1974, I was rostered on Day Duty and at approximately 12md I received information from Chief Insp. N. OWENS that Cyclone Tracy may strike Darwin. At 4pm the same afternoon Insp. A. WOODROOFE advised me that the possibility had increased and I was to advise the Day shift members to remain on standby callout in the event of an emergency. I remained at the Station until 6pm and then proceeded to my residence.

I received several telephone calls from Sgt 3/C J. WOLTHERS, the Officer-in-charge of the Evening shift relevant to the situation and at 9.30pm Sgt Wolthers requested approval to allow duty members to bring their dependants to the Station for safety. I approved of this action and instructed him to contact Insp. Woodrooffe, the Duty Officer, for confirmation. This was done and the Insp. approved the request.

I attempted to convey myself and family to the Station at approximately 10.15pm but was unable to do so. Houses were being unroofed in the Jingili area (my residential area) and I was unable to use my private vehicle as the driveway was blocked. I attempted to call the Station but found that the telephone was dead. My Station vehicle, ZBB607 had been left at the Station by me as an emergency vehicle and I had no means of transport or communication with my Station.

The situation in Jingili area deteriorated rapidly and I became completely isolated by 11.30pm. All power had failed and flying debris made it hazardous to attempt to leave shelter.

The cyclone struck with full force in my area at 1.15am. Two bedrooms on the East side were destroyed and I sheltered my family in the toilet and bathroom. I experienced the 'eye' of the cyclone at 2.25am for approximately 20 minutes. The winds then struck my home from the West. The kitchen and dining room was demolished by a flying roof at 3.15am. In attending to the needs of my family, I was moving about and was struck on the left shin by a china mug and the handle became embedded in my leg. As was common to other persons, I received numerous minor cuts and bruises.

I removed my children from the bathroom and toilet and secured them under two steel beds in the South side bedroom and covered the beds with two mattresses. My wife and I held the mattresses down and my wife in addition, applied a tourniquet to and manual pressure to my leg until first light, 6.10am when I evacuated the home, which apart from the storeroom underneath, was demolished upstairs.

I proceeded to a neighbours home which suffered only minor damage and there contacted Const. Ross SMITH, also a neighbour, whose home had been demolished. The Const. and I set out for Casuarina Police Station in Const. Smith's vehicle and arrived at the Station at 7.40am after much difficulty. At the Station I spoke with Sgt 3/C Wolthers and Insp. N. Plumb. I was instructed by Insp.

Plumb to proceed to the Casuarina Shopping Centre and gain medical aid for my leg. I was assisted in this regard by Const. D. PALMER of Casuarina.

At approximately 9.30am I left the Centre to travel to the Darwin Hospital. I carried a baby name Kathy YU, who had a fractured skull and assisted an unknown young woman with neck injuries. With three injured males I was driven to the Darwin Hospital by a Probationary Const. whom I would recognise but do not know his name. We arrived at the Hospital at about 11am.

I received 10 stitches in the wound and by private vehicle returned to my Station at 2.30pm. I remained at the Station until about sundown when I was advised by Const. Ross Smith that my family was at the Jingili Primary School complex. I advised Sgt Wolthers that I would proceed to Jingili School and attempt to organise the situation there. Sgt Wolthers made written notes of my condition and whereabouts and I had him place me as an 'Injured' standby list.

I obtained a private lift to Jingili School and found many hundreds of people in attendance. At about 2am on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 74, I made contact with Det. Sgt 3/C R. FITZGIBBONS and Const. Ross Smith and we organised men to collect rain water in plastic containers during a storm.

At approximately 6.30am on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 74, I assembled Det. Sgt 3/C Fitzgibbons, Plain Clothes Const. D. Dale, Const. Ross Smith and Det. Sgt 3/C D. Williams, who prior to the cyclone had been on sick leave, five Firearm and Prison Guard, E. Keogh. Det. Sgt 3/C Fitzgibbons, the Snr Firearm and myself then addressed all persons present which exceeded 1000, and stated our requirements. I then left these persons to organise the area and travelled to Casuarina Station. I spoke with Sgt Wolthers and was appraised of the present situation, listed my requirements, etc fuel, food and water and placed the other Police members on Sgt Wolthers list and stated that they were under my control but available as required. I handed the Station keys to Sgt Wolthers for use to the various lockup rooms and in particular my safe key to store revolvers as the key to the Shift Sgts safe was missing at that time. I then returned to the Jingili School.

Const. Smith supplied me with a wooden crutch and by this means I was able to move around until I was medical evacuated at 5pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 74, on the written instruction of Insp. Plumb on a New Zealand Air Force Hercules aircraft.

Prior to my evacuation, I reported to Casuarina Station daily for a situation report. Through the efforts of two R.A.A.F. cooks and numerous tradesmen, the Police at Jingili School were able to organise and effectively control approximately 1,500 men women and children, until the air evacuation became effective. Our efforts were lightened by the very efficient supply of all requirements arranged by the Police at Casuarina to the centre.

When Det. Sgt Williams condition was made known to me, I arranged with Det. Sgt Fitzgibbons for his evacuation with his family on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> December, 74, along with other members wives at Jingili School. All Police mentioned in this report performed their duty in a most exemplary manner whilst under my control.

I was admitted to the Balmain District Hospital, Sydney, N.S.W. on the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 74, with an infected left leg. I was discharged into the care of my private Doctor at Stockinbingal, N.S.W. on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 75, and remained under treatment until the 24<sup>th</sup> January 75, when I was declared medically fit to return to duty. At 10.30am on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 75, I telephoned Chief Insp. F. CRONSHAW in Darwin relevant to my return and commenced duty at Casuarina on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 75.



*Inspector Cronshaw's Residence. Eden St Stuart Park.*



*Const Herald's Residence, Rothdale Rd Jingili.*

### **Tony Fuller, 50 Years Later**

I was eight years old and living in Mosec Street Ludmilla with my parents, my brother and my sister who was one. On Christmas Eve, my father came to my brother and I and said a big storm was coming and that we had the option of opening our presents then if we wanted to, we chose to open our presents and then we hid them in a cupboard in the room for safekeeping. That night we spent the night huddled in the hallway. We saw the manhole cover get taken away and realised that our roof had gone. We watched the rain and the wind above us in the sky and things flying across in the night. We moved into the bathroom and where we had all stayed together. In the night there was a break in the wind which dad explained was the eye of the storm. We went out to the side of the house and looked next door and we could see that the house next door was still there, we went back into our safe place and stayed there for the night. When dawn came. We went back onto our veranda and looked next door to see that the house next door was gone and the family next door was huddled in the backyard altogether. I could see a policeman that I knew lived in our street. He was running around the park, helping people and looking for injured people. I'm pretty sure it was Bob Crasher Crowell that was doing that and then he was in his underwear or at least had very little clothing on. My brother and I retrieved our Christmas presents from our hiding spot. One of the gifts was a remote control tank and we played with them in our first floor house with no roof and water all over the floorboards. Dad took us for a drive around the suburbs and we went up to Wells Street, Ludmilla I could still remember the devastation and one house was totally uplifted and in the street. We evacuated to Ludmilla Primary School where we all stayed with lots of other people. A couple days later Mum, my brother and sister and I were taken to the airport and waited on the tarmac for a plane to leave. We had with us garbages as suitcases, with some of our belongings. We had planned to go to Sydney but at the last minute they put us on the plane to Brisbane with a whole heap of other people. I remember, my brother and I, being in a huge shed in Brisbane that had a whole heap of other refugees with us and these lovely people walking around offering us drinks and ice creams, of course my brother and I helped ourselves to more than one ice cream. It was in all honesty a bit of an adventure then, but we were probably in shock. At that time we were picked up and taken to our grandparents place in Kawana Waters, Queensland. I remember the first day I went back to school in Mooloolaba and I walked in and sat out the back of the room. I was trying to sit nice and quiet as a

young kid in a new school after being displaced from our home. The teacher introduced me and told the students that I had survived cyclone Tracey. I remember all the heads in the class spinning around to then look at me. I felt like a deer in the headlights. We stayed at Kawana Waters for about six months while dad stayed in Darwin to help with a rebuild. People were really nice to us. At one stage, we had to go to the doctor and the doctor bought us Christmas presents because he had heard that we had been evacuated from Darwin. When we returned to Darwin our house was being rebuilt so we had builders and other tradesmen coming and going. A couple of them stayed on site with us and remain family friends today. Dad would tell us a few stories of what he got up to when we were interstate. He told me he was staying in a shed opposite the old brewery. The shed was owned by a family friend of ours and it had a phone that was working. It was one of the only phones working in Darwin at the time and people soon worked out that they had a phone and they then brought beers and gifts to dad so that they could ring Family interstate. Dad laughed because he knew that the phone bill was gonna be quite big, but it wasn't his phone. Dad didn't like firearms but he was given a 22 to help protect against looters. One night there was a heap of noise across the road at the brewery and dad feeling brave grabbed the rifle and walked across to confront two or three cars of blokes that arrived to the brewery. He yelled at them to leave to which they replied, fuck off we are the cops. Apparently it was some interstate cops that decided they were going to help themselves to the brewery and some of its beer. Dad retreated and left them too it as he was out gunned. It certainly was different times. Mum was probably the most traumatised out of all of us, she never liked going to the museum and listening to the sound of the wind and the battering on the side of the building. It certainly brought up bad memories for her and to be honest made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Tony Fuller



### **W L Goedegebuure, Det. Insp.**

Shortly after 1.00am on 25 December, 1974 my house was unroofed by the cyclone and myself, wife and five year old son sought shelter in the kitchen between a refrigerator and freezer.

At about 3.00am the eye of the cyclone arrived lasting for about 20 minutes. During this period I checked neighbouring residences and assisted where necessary.

After the eye of the cyclone the fury of the winds increased considerably and demolished the top part of the house, however, the bathroom toilet remained intact except for the roof and the ground level kitchen was not damaged except for water pouring in through the walls and ceiling.

At about 6.30am on 25/12/74 I commenced a check of neighbouring houses and found the persons in the area to be unhurt. I assisted neighbours where necessary. At about 8.00am I proceeded to Alawa with the intention of depositing my family with close friends. Enroute to Alawa I assisted in the clearing of Bagot Road. As I was unable to locate our friends I returned to my residence where I commenced giving assistance to neighbours.

I own a 2 ½ K.V.A. Honda Generator which I used to keep food frozen by supplying electricity to immediate neighbours and bringing other freezers to my yard. I drew up a roster so that all the freezers would be kept frozen. There were 11 freezers and 2 refrigerators supplied with power by

running 24 hours around the clock, also some lights were rigged up. The food in the freezers and refrigerators kept in excess of sixty people supplied with meat and frozen vegetables.

Chief Insp. Cossons called at my residence and allowed me to continue the work I was doing. I also replaced the walls and back on the garage and allowed that to be used as shelter by neighbours wishing to do so.

My family was evacuated on 27 December, 1974. On the same day I handed the running of the generator over to my next door neighbour. I commenced duty at Casuarina Police Station that same day and from then continued to report for duty as rostered.



*Bennett St Police Station, West Lane Side (Note wall of clothing store)*

### **Shane Patrick O'Donoghue, Const. Reg No 651**

On Christmas Eve I was on duty at Casuarina Station and was rostered to complete my shift at 2300 hours, however as instructed I remained on duty and assisted with the care and welfare of approximately fifty persons, men, women and children, who arrived at the Police Station after midnight and into the early hours of the morning of Christmas Day.

During the cyclone, my wife was in the above premises alone, however, later in the night she went upstairs to Flat 3, which was occupied by Const. A.E Potts, his wife, Valerie, and their two daughters, Stephanie (4 years) and Nathalie (13months). Const. Potts ensured the safety of my wife and his family by keeping the group in the bathroom 'shower alcove' and placing an entire bedframe over themselves, to protect against flying glass and building material.

My wife and I incurred no injuries during the Cyclone, however, during the period until New Years Day, in which the hours of duty were Constant and demanding, I had a recurrence of muscular pain in the lower back region of the body. This injury was originally incurred whilst on duty – motor cycle accident at Casuarina High School on Friday 11 June, 1974.

After the Cyclone, during Christmas Day, I assisted other members from the Station in emergency and rescue work in the northern suburbs until about 2pm. At that time I went to enquire into the whereabouts and welfare of my wife at our above address. At about 3pm after returning to the Station I was immediately despatched, in company with Const. Potts to the Relief Centre, at Nightcliff High School. Const. Potts and myself remained on duty at this Centre, endeavouring to maintain order

amongst an estimated four to five thousand people, during Christmas night and until we were eventually relieved at approximately 2pm on Boxing Day. During this period, with the invaluable assistance of about six civilians at the Centre, we organised work parties of adults to clean the premises for the health and hygiene of all. At approximately midnight, on Christmas night, a group of three men attempted to forcibly break into the Centre kitchen and take food. They were disturbed by one of the civilian relief staff and subsequently ran off. He stated they appeared well under the influence of liquor. Police observation at this time showed that many persons were in a depressed state and were consuming large quantities of liquor. As a result of these observations and to maintain order at the Centre at this stage all hard liquor was confiscated and disposed of.

### **Shane O'Donoghue, 50 years later**

When thinking of that perilous night, Christmas Eve, 1974, I remember being out on patrol in Darwin's northern suburbs with fellow Const. Bruce Wernham. Late in our evening shift we were trying to safely direct the sparse traffic of the few motorist 'sight-see'ers' around the falling power lines, which were striking the Bagot Roadway, near McMillans Rd, with 'bright sparks' as they came down; this too, amongst with debris sweeping across the road. We were out standing against the terrific wind & rain. It was around 11.30pm and I recall vividly the entire sky canopy above us was a moving caldron of very bright lime-green fluorescence light (probably caused by the continuous lightning within that cloud canopy).

Upon getting back into our vehicle, base radio 'G.O' told us, as the last Police vehicle on road patrol, to return at once to Casuarina Police Station, as they informed it as a directive from Assistant Commissioner Textor. It was a very slow, hazardous trip, avoiding moving building debris sweeping across roadways, and too, trying to keep our vehicle upright as we made our 'crawling-way' at about 10kph. We thankfully made it back.

Another memory, is later on the Christmas Day night & Boxing Day, Const. Tony Potts and I were assigned, from mid-afternoon, as the only Police present, to try to establish order at the Nightcliff High School which had become a major relief centre with between 2K - 5K people. We had no power, no running water, and initially no food, let alone bedding for the people and families to use. Thereafter we managed to arrange and commandeer as much food etc as possible from the ruins of Woolworths at Nightcliff. We worked right through the night, and the many challenges within that. On the next day, the Boxing Day morning, a small group, of about 6 people there, were so resourceful to assist us, by forming a most helpful committee in organising necessities as much as humanly possible, in the dire conditions we were all in. The leader of that improvised committee was a former military Colonel who had recently served in the Vietnam War. His calm and supervision installed much in many people and Tony and I were very grateful. It showed me how some human resilience can rise through calamity.

### **Lynnette O'Donoghue, 50 years later.**

My memory of cyclone Tracy 50 years ago is still quite clear in my mind. We knew a cyclone was coming but of course the warnings were not clear and we were not that troubled. We were just going to enjoy a relaxed Christmas Eve and have a few drinks with our friends Val and Tony Potts in their upstairs flat in the same block as ours. Shane was on duty that night as a police officer and was intending to finish his shift at 12 o'clock and join us for a late night Christmas drink. Shane was in the area at about 11 o'clock and called pass to see that we were o'kay and we saw the first indication that the tropical rain was not normal. In the lights of the police car we could see that the rain was going sideways and swirling. We knew that a cyclone was going to possibly hit Darwin but we certainly were not expecting it to be as violent as it became. About an hour or so later it became very

evident that this was no normal storm and we realised that we all needed to seek shelter quickly. Val and Tony had two small children and together we went to the safest area in their flat which was the doorway into their main bedroom. We sheltered there for the first half of the cyclone which seemed like hours. The noise was horrendous and terrifying. After some time the roof was ripped off and exposed the sky which I have never seen anything like it since. It was iridescent green with continual lightening all the time. Sometime during the night it suddenly all became eerily quiet. Tony reminded us that this was the eye of the cyclone and we needed to prepare ourselves for the next onslaught which could come any time. In my memory the eye of the cyclone lasted for about 14 minutes. In that time we now found shelter in the bathroom on the opposite side to where we had been sheltering. We all sat in the shower area and I don't know how but Tony managed to bring the bedframe into the bathroom to help protect us. We sat there for the rest of the night listening to everything being ripped apart around us. The noise, the colour of the sky and the devastation will remain with me always. Finally the next morning as the cyclone passed we were able to climb down out of the upstairs flat, and saw the devastation around us. I decided it was a miracle that we had survived and that other people had as well. Tony went around to check our area and fortunately everyone was okay. Waiting and hoping that Shane was okay seemed to freeze time. Finally I was extremely relieved when Shane arrived back at about the middle of Christmas day. How he managed to get through, I don't know, as the road appeared to be impassable. I seem to recall that he said 'One wheel at a time.' We knew the cyclone was over but realised the enormity of what had happened was going to have a lasting impact for a long time

### **Anthony Potts, Const. Reg No 653**

At 0200 hours on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1974, the wind had broken the kitchen and bedroom windows on our flat which was a second storey flat at 4823 Kurang Crescent, Nightcliff. The roof was torn off about five minutes later. When the first half of the Cyclone struck we sheltered in the master bedroom on the southern side of the building covered by the bed frame and mattress. This half lasted until 0400 hours. During the eye of the Cyclone, which lasted about twelve minutes we changed our location to the bathroom which was on the opposite side of the building. The second half lasted until dawn which was about 0600 hours. I then assisted my family down via a brick lattice wall to the ground as the stairs were blocked off. They were taken into the ground flat by the people below.

I then went out into currawong Crescent and made enquiries as to deaths or injuries sustained by people during the Cyclone. Fortunately, few injuries had occurred in the area. I then checked with people who had dry flats (all second story flats had been destroyed) so that they could shelter people that required it. The time after I had completed this would have been 1000 hours. I then had a rest for about an hour because I had had severe cramps in both legs and arms and I suffering from cold.

At about 1300 hours Const. O'Donoghue arrived at the flats and conveyed me to Casuarina Police Station as I did not have any other means of transportation. At Casuarina Police Station I was rostered on duty until the 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1975. During the remainder of Christmas Day and until 1900 hours on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1974 I was doing patrol and courier work including the collection of bodies.

At 1930 hours on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1974, Const. O'Donoghue and I were called to a disturbance at the Nightcliff High School. From 2000 hours the same day to 1300 hours on the 27<sup>th</sup> December 1974, Const. O'Donoghue and I reorganised the Nightcliff High School, which was in an appalling state at the time, forming the committee and implementing their actions. There was in excess of 2500 people staying at the Nightcliff High School during these actions.

Const. O'Donoghue and I were finally relieved at 1300 hours and were ordered back to Casuarina Police Station. By this time my wife and two children had been evacuated from Darwin.

As I was still too restless to sleep so I continued patrol and courier work until about 0700 hours on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1974. I then attempted to have five hours sleep after which I resumed work. At about 1400 hours that same day I collapsed in the radio room at the Casuarina Police Station. I was ordered by Sgt Swift to have a 36 hour break. I then went on a normal duty roster as per the Casuarina Police Station.

### **Anthony Potts, 50 Years Later**

The first night that I was rostered on at Nightcliff High School, I saw a need for supplies of bandages, antiseptic creams and sanitary supplies as a number of people had injuries. I drove to the Nightcliff shopping centre where a supermarket had smashed in windows so I retrieved a plastic garbage bin full of these products and returned to the first aid room at the High School. The nurses were most appreciative of these supplies.

After Tracy, I suffered extreme fatigue after collapsing in Casuarina Police Station where everything appeared unreal. This lasted for around two weeks as I had difficulty sleeping. Because of the humidity in Darwin, the only place one could wash in fresh water were in the running streams of McMillans Road near the airport. A number of the Police did this. I remembered that many people were bathing using water which was being tapped from the main pipeline along Stuart Hwy between Bagot Road and Stuart Park.

I was very appreciative of the “Blood Sweat and Tears” concert that was held in the gardens near Mindell Beach as one could see that the local population was suffering from fatigue. I think it provided a lot of relief to the Darwin people.

Another issue that arose in the aftermath of Tracy was the haggling with Insurance Companies over claims on vehicle valuations. I arranged for my car to be returned to Adelaide to be repaired, which saved me \$1300 as they were going to write the vehicle off at a significant loss to me. Fortunately, as the home unit we were living in was completely destroyed, the occupants in the home unit below ours, were transferred to Brisbane. This allowed us to move into the unit below that had only slight damage.

One of the things that I noticed for years after Tracy, anytime there was gusty wind, I could tell the direction it was coming from and the direction it was going. Just by the sound. I still find that I suffer from slight PTSD symptoms when I see some TV programs on Tracy, especially hearing others speaking of their experiences. It is something I will never forget. However, since Tracy, I have returned to Darwin twice (1996) and (2017) and I am amazed at its transformation into a truly Capital City.

### **Val Potts, 50 Years Later**

We lived in an upstairs masonry flat in a block of four in Nightcliff N.T. My main memories are of the incredible loud noise of the wind, the absolute ferocity of nature, of vulnerability and danger.

Christmas Eve 1974. We were not initially too concerned as the predicted wind speeds broadcast went from 70 kph gusting to 120 kph, and then 120 kph gusting to 150 kph as the time grew closer to the expected arrival of the cyclone. I had experienced storms before in Sydney where the gusts reached 120 kph without major incident. This lulled us into a false sense of security. We had invited Lyn O'Donoghue from the flat below to join us for a Christmas drink, as her husband Shane, a Police Const., was working an evening shift and she was home alone. My husband Tony was not working and we had two daughters aged one and four at the time.

When we realized the storm was getting far worse than we expected, we made plans to maximise our safety and to take shelter in the bedroom. We used the metal frame from our double bed (minus the bedhead board, removed with a desperate effort by my husband) and a blanket to form a makeshift shelter. Lyn had stayed with us so 5 of us were crammed into our “shelter”.

We had taken the usual precautions prior to the storm by taping our windows and removing outdoor furniture and bins. We lost power and radio signal just after midnight prior to our move to the bedroom. At about 1am the rear windows to our flat were smashed by debris from the roof of the house behind. Shortly after that, our roof lifted off and we were showered with pieces of gyprock and rain. The blanket helped keep most of the ceiling debris from falling on us.

We stayed in the bedroom until the eye came at about 4 am. We then moved to the bathroom shower alcove on the opposite side of the flat. We knew that the winds would come back from the opposite direction and most probably be even more ferocious than we had just experienced. We stayed in the bathroom until morning and when the winds had abated considerably.

We had elected to stay upstairs and not move down to Lyn’s flat as we were concerned that the building might collapse as it was shaking so violently with every wind gust and we would rather be on the concrete floor slab and not under it. There was also the possibility of a tidal surge as we were only 150 metres from the sea. During the ordeal we pretended to our four year old that this was a normal Darwin storm so she would not experience any long term trauma. We treated it as an adventure as we had no idea what might happen to us!

Two days later, Lyn accompanied me and my two children on an evacuation flight in a Hercules transport plane (earmarked for Adelaide but landed in Sydney). We were jammed in like sardines with nearly every woman nursing a child and our knees almost interlocking. We were grateful for the ride! Lyn nursed Natalie (13 months old) all the way and I had Stephanie on my lap. Lyn was an enormous help.

Lyn and I have remained close friends for over 50 years.

After my experience I really appreciated the value of friendship, the kindness of strangers, the insignificance of material possessions, how precious life is and the luck of being an Australian in an ordered society. Despite the devastation around us we knew we would be okay.

P.S. After I returned to Darwin in mid-February 1975 I was struck by the number of volunteers from “down south” who were busy helping to restore power and water and to help clean up the debris everywhere, so life could resume some kind of normality. As a society we depend on volunteers of all kinds and we should be thankful for their generosity.



## **Dean Smith son of Brian Smith. 50 Years Later**

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 favorite 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 Jankiwskyj) 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.

## **D F Alexander, Det. Sgt 2/C No 127**

On 24/12/74 I carried out general Criminal Investigation Branch duties at Police Headquarters until 4pm. I then went home, and my wife and I prepared in general for the impending cyclone. Later that same night Sgt 2/C M. BOURKE, who resided two houses from me, assisted me to attend to our neighbours' houses and yards as they were absent on leave.

At about 12.30am 25/12/74 my family and I found it impossible to sleep due to the wind and rain buffeting our house. Water was then entering the house through the closed louvre windows and the house was shaking. We placed a mattress in the hallway where my wife, two children and myself

sheltered. We listened to a transistor radio for information in relation to the cyclone and the last information we received was that the cyclone was due to hit the Darwin area about 5am.

At about 1.30am some louvre windows on the weatherside of the house blew in and it appeared as though some sections of the roof blew away as water started to enter the house through the ceiling manholes. Very shortly after this the lounge room and kitchen area of the house blew away leaving only floorboards. Almost immediately the other end of the house blew away and the hallway wall collapsed on top of us. However, because of the narrowness of the hallway the wall wedged, and we were able to escape. My wife received a blow to her head and a deep four inch long laceration to her left knee, and the two children received numerous lacerations. I was not injured.

We were not able to seek the immediate shelter of the bathroom and no shelter was immediately available because as advised we had filled the bath with water. I found that the whole of my house had been demolished with the exception of the bathroom which was very badly damaged.

As the cyclone warning had indicated that the cyclone was due at about 5am and our house was lost somewhere between 1.30am and 2am we believed that the major intensity of the cyclone was still to come. With this in view we left the remains of our house and ran to the brick Housing Commission house immediately behind us and which was at that time relatively undamaged.

For the remainder of the night we sheltered with these neighbours in their bathroom. All included there was six adults and seven children in the room of about six foot square. With the increase of the cyclone at about 2.30am the roof of this house was lost and part of the brick walls were damaged.

At daylight we found that the winds had eased and with the exception of my wife's injuries and my children's injuries no other persons were injured.

As soon as possible, which was about 6am I met up with Sgt 2/C M. Bourke and later with Const. 1/C J. Frazer-Allen and we carried out enquiries with our neighbours. No seriously injured or dead persons were located. Const. Frazer-Allen and I then made our way on foot to the Casuarina Police Station and on the way rendered assistance to persons as the needs arose.

On arrival at the Casuarina Police Station I assisted in general and about 9.30am I returned to attend to the needs of my family. I found that my wife's injury was more serious than I had first thought, and I took her to the First Aid Post at the Casuarina High School where it was sutured.

On two occasions I returned to the Casuarina Police Station and carried out general duties for about one hour each time. Later that afternoon I took my family to the Casuarina High School where we spent the night. In company with Plainclothes Sgt Gill and Const. Marchant I carried out general police duties at the High School as the needs arose. These duties continued for most of the following day.

As from 27/12/74 my duties included anti-looting patrols, obtaining accommodation for police, Body identification and Missing Persons Section enquiries, Criminal Intelligence Section and Criminal Investigation Branch duties, all of which were at the personal direction of Det. Chief Insp. Cossons.

During this period, I resided in either my boat underneath the remains of my house or in the tool shed.

I am presently carrying out normal Criminal Investigation Branch duties. My home and contents were totally damaged and my family has been emotionally disturbed to such an extent that they do not wish to return to Darwin. I also believe that I too have been adversely affected but to what extent I cannot personally gauge at present.

### **Wayne Torney Sgt 3/C Reg No 458**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December last I was working Day Shift on the Police Launch when I first heard Cyclone Tracy was approaching. As the police launch was unable to be moved from water the mooring chain

was renewed and 4 x 1 ½ lines placed to the mooring. The storm cover was placed on and the motors lowered to help keep the bows into the wind. Ceased duty at 1830 hours.

At 2030 hours I returned to Stokes Hill Wharf and saw the police launch was riding on the mooring satisfactorily, I returned home. At 2300 hours the wind had increased considerably and I returned to Stokes Hill Wharf with the intention of taking the launch up into Ashgrove Creek. At this stage there were two vessels smashing into the outside of the Wharf Pylons. There was no persons on board.

The wind velocity at this time made it impossible to reach the launch by dinghy and the pontoon holding the dinghy had disappeared as had the dinghy so I returned home.

During the night I sheltered with my wife and two children in a passageway between the bathroom and toilet as the majority of our house was demolished. None of us were injured.

At daylight when the wind abated my family moved out of the house into a motor vehicle where they put on dry clothes and partook of some food. With a neighbour I checked houses within a 200 yard radius for dead or injured.

At 0500 hours 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I returned to my residence and rescued some personal belongings. With Const. Le Auteur at 0900 hours we continued the search for dead or injured and learnt during this time from a police patrol the extent of the devastation. At 1030 hours we attended at Casuarina Police Station and got a better appreciation of the situation.

I decided to send my family to Adelaide River and returned to my residence where I helped pack some gear and food for them. They left with two other police families and were put up by Const. 1/C Price and his wife. They returned to Darwin on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 and were evacuated to Melbourne that afternoon per aircraft.

When my family departed for Adelaide River I came to Darwin Station arriving approximately 1400 hours and commenced working from Communications Centre, working through until 0400 hours 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 on varied duties.

At 0600 hours 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 recommenced duty after sleeping in the communications room. Duties were again of a various nature to 0900 when I commenced a foot search from Doctor's Gully to Mindell Beach along the foreshores, in search of survivors or bodies from the missing boats in Darwin Harbour. None were found, however, wreckage of a number of boats was sighted including the hull of the police launch at Doctor's Gully. The super structure and bows were torn off, it was upside down with the heads of the motors buried in the mud. It was not repairable.

Enquiries were then commenced around the waterfront area and a part completed missing boats and crew members list was formed during the evening of 26<sup>th</sup> / 27<sup>th</sup> December. I worked mostly visiting various schools and areas of large accommodation explaining how the evacuation of residents south would take place and operating the Police BHF radios in communications centre.

During the morning on 27<sup>th</sup> I conferred for considerable time with Lieutenant Burrell R.A.N. at Harbourmaster's Office, re missing persons and boats. Borrowed 16 foot outboard powered craft from Benny Tomaselli of Herbert Street and searched all of the harbour possible before dark.

Mandorah was visited and it was learnt that all persons were well with the exception of one elderly male who was later evacuated to Darwin.

The remainder of the time was spent searching the harbour and conveying naval skin divers to wrecks around the harbour, until I was relieved by Sgt Bonato, when I commenced rostered shifts until 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1975. I then commenced two weeks R and R leave. I returned on the 27<sup>th</sup> January and commenced shift at 1600 hours.





*History Society NT*

**Patrick V Salter Sgt 3/C Reg No. 49**

At about 2330 hours on Christmas Eve I returned with my family to our home in Eden Street. At the time strong winds were blowing, and rain started then, or a short time later. Our second car was parked in the usual place beneath the house. The front of this vehicle was facing to the south. I parked our family car alongside the smaller vehicle, parallel to it, and facing the same direction. I placed a box trailer in front of the family car, at an inclination with the tow bar over the bonnet of the car. This arrangement was meant to act as a shield for the car. Once inside our home, the children listened on their transistor radios to the regular cyclone warning broadcast over the local radio stations. Electric power went off at 0002 hours. All my family remained dressed (except for shoes) the children gathering in the lounge room to sit out the cyclone. My wife attempted to sleep in the main bedroom, whilst I mopped up large quantities of water forced into the house by strong winds. The rain became heavier, and the winds stronger over the next three hours. At about 0130 hours I telephoned my mother-in-law at Nightcliff to enquire for her wellbeing. At the same time I telephoned my sister-in-law at Fannie Bay, and whilst talking to her son the telephone line was broken. At about 0230 hours both the broadcasting stations ceased transmission. During these first few hours when the wind came from the north our house was struck several times by stray sheets of corrugated iron, these strikes were mainly on the roof. All the trees to blown down in our yard did so during the first few hours, before the lull, and the wind change. Shortly after 0135 hours there was a lull in the storm and this lasted for about fifteen or twenty minutes. At about 0340 hours the wind recommenced, this time from a southerly direction. This wind gained velocity rapidly, causing far more intense vibrations to my house than had the northerly winds. More strikes occurred on our roof as sheets of iron made contact. The house held together completely for about ten minutes under these conditions, then a large section of roof struck our residence, smashing through the kitchen windows. Glass from this impact was shattered all over the kitchen and lounge and accompanying debris shattered panels of glass in the front door on the opposite side of the house. Kitchen cupboards blew open, as did the doors of the refrigerator and the oven. The refrigerator was blown from its niche to crash against the kitchen divider. Immediately after this flying debris struck and shattered the louvres in the bathroom and toilet. Kitchen, bathroom and toilet all were situated against the south wall of the house facing the force of the wind. Within a very short time, perhaps a minute or two of the shattering of the kitchen windows, the eastern wall of the house (the lounge room wall) was completely blown out. The contents of the lounge and kitchen began to empty out of the house through the space caused by the missing wall. Much debris was flying about inside the house and more frequent strikes of heavy objects could be felt as they made contact with the building. At this stage we were all sheltering in the lee of the bathroom wall in the main passageway of the house. The idea of sheltering in the bathroom or toilet discarded because of the shattering glass and frequent strikes of debris, also because of the presence of the hot water tank and stand immediately above the bathroom. At this stage the reaction of the house to the winds changed, and violent rattling and shaking replaced the previous tight vibrations which had been Constantly present. It appeared that the house was about to break up and or blow away. Glass and crockery were shattered all over the floor and during this short interval of time all members of the family suffered cuts to the feet. I forced the front door open (inwards) against the force of the wind and my wife and two sons started downstairs to shelter behind the family car. The wind blew the door shut and jammed my left hand before my third son could escape. I re-opened the door and let him out, then got out myself. I followed the

family downstairs and saw them safely crouched in the lee of the rear of the car. The children took their pets with them except for the family cat which (last seen in one of the bedrooms) has not been seen since. We had been behind the car for a few minutes when the front walls of the house were blown out across the front steps. The only injuries suffered in our flight from the house were the cut feet, already mentioned, and a blow across my nose and forehead, also a blow which lacerated my left foot. These later injuries were suffered before I crouched behind the car. We remained in the same shelter behind the car for some time until the wind changed to a more westerly direction. We then sat and squatted between the two cars, on the left side of the family car. None of us suffered any further injury from flying debris, although much of this struck our car. One such object was the washing machine, which was blown fifteen odd feet when the laundry wall disintegrated under the force of the wind, and debris. I had discarded the idea of sheltering in or under our car/s if the house collapsed downwards on top of the vehicles, they would be crushed. I reasoned that such a force would not crush them both right to the ground, and that we should be safe as a last resort, lying on the ground. In all we sheltered under the house from about 0350 to 0630. At the latter time the wind was still very strong in gusts. Groups of people were moving about the street immediately prior to daylight, and six or eight men reported one of their number missing. The missing person was last seen in a drunken condition asleep on the verandah of their house. A search of the house and surrounding wreckage and street failed to locate the man. I advised the group to keep searching for their friend until he was found. This man was found a short time later by Mr John Meeking who discovered the person, with lacerations to his head, seated in his car. The car was parked in the lee of Meeking's house. At about this time I went into Eden Street and checked up and down the street on both sides. There was no other persons injured, dead, or in need of immediate assistance. At this time the front driveway of our residence was cluttered with the wreckage of four trees as well as sheets of iron, timber, clothing, and general household contents. It took my family and I four hours to clear the driveway sufficiently to gain ingress and egress for our cars. Eden Street was littered with the wreckage of houses, trees, transmission lines, and abandoned cars. The street was impassable between Graham Street and the Stuart Highway. As soon as able, we drove to Fannie Bay to check the safety of my sister-in-law, then to Nightcliff to check the safety and welfare of my mother-in-law. I then returned with my family I took stock of water, fuel and food. I was concerned at the time for the health, safety, and welfare of my family, and kept a close watch on their mental reaction to the situation. The immediate aftermath of the cyclone left us without water, power or telephone. The toilet was operated by filling the cistern with a bucket of water. When the water supply was restored a few days after the cyclone, and ruptured pipes sealed where our laundry had been, I found that the solar heater was operating.

The only injuries suffered by any of my family were the lacerations, etc. mentioned above. No medical treatment was sought, as the injuries were superficial and healed during the next week. My wife has remained in Darwin and continued her employment with T.A.A.

### **Robin Chalker, Det. A/Insp.**

On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I carried out day shift duties at Criminal Investigation Branch,

At about 11.30pm on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I was lying in bed when the hallway louvres smashed and rain and debris entered my house. I attempted to secure the openings with no success and I then moved my two sons to dry surroundings and returned to my main bedroom and as I laid down on the bed something struck the end of my house and knocked out the side windows and wall and knocked down the double bed. My wife and I managed to get out of bed and we were able to reach our children and move into the first bedroom off the lounge room where my youngest sister, Mirelle Chalker was sleeping. I was able to get the double bed mattress from my main bedroom and I placed this against the wardrobe in this room and my family arranged themselves against the mattress and I

pulled a single bed up over their bodies and pulled a single mattress over their heads. In this fashion we weathered the cyclone.

During the cyclone my house was damaged to the extent that the main bedroom was demolished to the floor, the second bedroom wall was fractured, the main portion of the roof was removed, the bathroom and toilet were demolished by flying timber, the kitchen roof was punctured, all walls were twisted and warped by rain. All personal belongings were damaged by rain.

At about 5.50am Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1974 I attempted to leave the house to see the extent of damage to my house, however, I was unable to do so due to the fact the doors on my house were jammed. At about 5.30am my neighbour kicked the door in and my family and myself started to clean up the house. I checked neighbours houses and found all in the immediate vicinity were safe.

At about 7am 25<sup>th</sup> December 1974, with my family and neighbours NASCEIVERAS and Gunder RYDER of Rossiter Street, went to Rapid Creek Primary School where it was found that the buildings were in a safe and dry condition. Ryder, who is a school teacher at Rapid Creek Primary School, opened the school and we commenced to make the school a relief centre. During the day I conveyed Ryder to Casuarina Shopping Centre where he received stitches for a severe foot wound. Whilst there I obtained food, medical supplies, blankets and clothing for the relief centre. These articles were received from Mr Parker, Manager of New World.

During the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1974, I assumed control of the relief centre with the assistance of Gunder Ryder, Tommy Baban, Don Burrows and Hazel Baban. During the day over 150 people came to the centre and details of these people were recorded and rooms and areas allotted to these people and their families. Also during the day a kitchen was set up, latrines and rubbish pits were dug.

Initially I was unable to advise any member of the Police Force of my whereabouts or activities but during the afternoon I was able to advise Insp. Plumb at Casuarina Police Station of my position and he instructed me to carry on the duties I was performing. I returned to Rapid Creek Primary and carried out control duties continuously until relieved by Commonwealth Police at about 4.30pm Friday 27<sup>th</sup> December 1974.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1974, I attended a parade at 8am at Darwin Station carried out by Insp. Owens. I informed him of my duties, and I returned to Rapid Creek Primary School.

I reported for duty at Casuarina Station on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1974 and carried out Communication Duties until about 5.30pm and went off duty. I carried out Day Shift duties until 1 January, 1975 when I performed evening shift at Casuarina Station and at 8am on 2 January 1975 I returned to Criminal Investigation Branch, Darwin and commenced duties.

I carried out Criminal Investigation Branch duties until 6 January, 1975 when I departed Darwin for Melbourne on rest and recreation leave.

### **Robin Chalker, 50 Years Later**

I suppose my experience and memories of Cyclone Tracy begin on the evening of 24 December, 1974. I recall getting a lift home from pre Christmas drinks by Insp. Neil Plumb and his fiancée Jill. Jill had a VW beetle and when we arrived at my home at Oliver Street Rapid Creek I could not open the passenger side door due to the force of the rising wind! Of course Darwin residents had been alerted to the possibility of a cyclone over the Christmas period. Unfortunately no one knew it would be a category 5 plus monster.

When I arrived home, my family of wife Marie, sons Jamie (5) Paul (3) and my youngest sister Mirelle (23) were all there. All the recommended Cyclone precautions had been done, ie secure all

loose impediments, check a safe place, fill bath with water etc had been done. Christmas presents were all strategically placed under the Christmas tree and we retired to bed!

At approximately 11.30pm we were awakened to the sounds of glass smashing and then a large piece of timber flew under our double bed in the main bedroom and Marie and I were suddenly on the floor. Our house was known as a C19 elevated, three bedroom fibro home consisting of large banks of glass louvres!

Immediately after our bed was destroyed I grabbed our boys and Marie and alerted Mirelle and we moved into the bathroom as a shelter. At that time we had a family dog and cat. Both animals refused to settle in the bathroom and were so restless we moved into Mirelle's bedroom. I gathered mattresses and formed a cave like shelter and moved us all, including animals in there! Unbeknown to us at the time shortly afterwards the bathroom was completely demolished and filled with flying debris. The cleanup crew actually removed several truck loads of debris from the bathroom, including one 4x2 plank, approx. 5 metres long!

During our time in the third bedroom we experienced lifting and air pressure symptoms. Like everywhere else we had no electricity and the wind, noise and smashing debris were intense and the darkness was foreboding! At some time during the night, Marie and I decided to let the boys have their Christmas presents. With no lights I cautiously made my way towards the living room Christmas tree, suddenly there was a lightning flash and then a thunderous

roar and a large piece of steel tubing flew under my bare feet and smashed into the kitchen area. With one bound I scooped up presents and flew back into the bedroom shelter. The following morning I found the tubing, approx. 20 cm round and three metres long embedded in the kitchen sink area! A lucky escape!

The boys received their Christmas presents, little soldier suits, and we covered ourselves with mattresses and hung on. A side issue was due to the loss of our roof we were being soaked with swirling rain. I had an overhead fan above me and I kept thinking it was some sort of Chinese water torture as the fan was spinning wildly and the water was dripping on my unprotected head. It was at this time we experienced the lifting sensation created by the Cyclone. Luckily it was only for a short time and we fortunately did not have any further movement.

We survived the night, however when I went to check our bedroom, the door was intact and when I opened it all we had was floorboards left. Everything else, double bed, side cupboards, clothing was gone!

Our house was a write off, however we had the living room and third bedroom left, but our front door was jammed and we could not get out. Apart from minor cuts and bruises we were ok. At about 6.30am a neighbour and NT police officer, Ian, Dutch Holland arrived and forced the door so we could get out. Luckily they were going house to house checking on people.

Due to the damage to the roads and the uncertainty of what had happened we as a family moved to the Rapid Creek Primary school, which was largely undamaged. Like just about everyone else we had very little clothing or personal possessions. I had one uniform shirt with one sleeve, the boys had their army suits and the girls what ever they could salvage!

At that time I was unable to contact Police HQ so we decided to help as many survivors as we could. I have previously written about setting up Rapid Creek Primary School as a "refugee" centre. With school teacher Gundyer Ryder, Marie and a couple of helpers we housed and settled in excess of 130 people of all ages at the school. We were able to record all persons details and ensured they were well cared for until they were safely evacuated.

When I finally contacted HQ I was instructed to remain at Rapid Creek school until evacuation could be completed.

After a few days we were advised the Police wives and families would be given priority evacuation, so Police members could return to assisting with the problem. This turned out to be untrue as my family left Rapid Creek only to be set aside for sometime to allow others to leave. Fortunately Bob (Crasher) Crowell found out our families had been overlooked and he forcefully ensured they were eventually evacuated! The downside was we did not know where our families had been sent! Sometime later I found out Marie and the boys had ended up in Callan Park Sydney. For those that don't know Callan Park was a former mental asylum!

We have had a few laughs about that over the years.

Once our families were finally out of Darwin we were able to return to some sort of Policing role. I was officially OIC CIB Darwin however due to the CIB offices being otherwise utilised we were sent out to Casuarina Police Station to perform everyday duties. We helped check and search house etc for possible survivors etc and cleanups where appropriate.

In February we travelled south for R&R and catch up with families.

I returned in late February 1975 and was able to secure accommodation at the Mansion Flats for my family. Marie and the boys returned shortly afterwards. We lived at the Mansions for over 18 months. We rebuilt on our block at Oliver Street, Rapid Creek and lived there until 1996 when I retired from the NT Police.

Now as the 50 year anniversary looms large I suppose reflecting on that time brings back some pleasant and not so pleasant memories. One thing that annoys me is the lack of recognition given to serving members of the NT Police at the time of Tracy. Almost ALL members who were able reported for duty in some form or other! Whether it was at a police station or a school where survivors were looked after and made safe. Very little Official recognition was given to ALL Darwin citizens who left their families and gave their service to the Darwin community during this devastating time!

Additionally the continuous ill informed comments concerning the number of persons killed during Tracy is perplexing! There is an official list of the 66 victims at the museum. I have heard of ludicrous stories of refrigerator trucks with hundreds of bodies being kept from the public! What nonsense! Can any thinking person believe that relatives of these "ghosts" would not inquire as to their whereabouts. I personally visited one temporary morgue and saw a number of deceased victims. Unfortunately I knew some! Silly stories like those above only tarnish the truth! I have little doubt that some of the seriously injured and elderly residents may have succumbed some time later, however I am not aware of any data covering this issue!

When one thinks it is 50 years since the horrors of Cyclone Tracy it is difficult to reconcile the Darwin of 1974 to present day. Perhaps the celebrations should be one of reflection and a blessing "for there but for the grace of God go I." Robin Chalker APM Ascom Ret.

## Major Hilton Morris and family, The Salvation Army Flying Padre based in Darwin, 24 December 2019



THE SALVATION ARMY ‘OTHERS’ WRITER JESSICA MORRIS PIECES TOGETHER THE STORY OF HER FAMILY AS THEY RECALL THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SURVIVING CYCLONE TRACY, WHICH TORE THROUGH THE TOP END OF AUSTRALIA IN 1974

**In 1974, my family had two Christmas guests – Commissioner Harry Warren, leader of The Salvation Army Southern Territory, and Cyclone Tracy, the devastating cyclone that ripped their city apart.**

History shows that the cyclone took 71 lives, 30,000 people lost their homes and the damage bill was \$837 million. But the tragedy has recently become a little more personal.

Since I was a child, this event has been Morris family folklore – the story of how my family, and The Salvation Army, survived a then unprecedented natural disaster and lost everything but each other. Forty-five years after Cyclone Tracy displaced my family, I have asked some of them to tell me the story again. Gathered around a table with me are my grandma Wilga Morris and three of her four children – Winsome, Valerie and Duncan (my father). At the time of the cyclone, my grandparents (Majors Hilton and Wilga Morris) were The Salvation Army’s flying padres in the Top End.

Tears well up as Wilga recalls the moment Commissioner Warren arrived to take control of The Salvation Army’s emergency response. “It was Boxing Day, and we were in the city with the Darwin Corps Officers, Majors Alan and Margaret Walker, trying to figure out what to do next,” she says. “Then we saw this man [Commissioner Warren] get out of this car, and he just came and put his arms around us. I still get emotional about it.” Under Commissioner Warren’s direction, The Salvation Army was one of the first response teams on the ground after Tracy hit.

The story is told that Commissioner Warren “hitchhiked to the apocalyptic zone”, and began working with the Army’s two officer couples – the Morris’ and the Walkers. Corps members and families came out to join them and the relief effort began. As the song says, ‘Santa never made it into Darwin’ that year, but the Salvos did, and they made their presence felt. My grandfather [Hilton] was promoted to glory in 2014, and Wilga now carries the legacy of their role in the relief efforts.

I ask my family what it was like on the night the cyclone hit – Tuesday 24 December, Christmas Eve. They recall gathering in the corner of their kitchen, along with their oldest brother Brian, two cousins and the dog. For six hours they huddled together near the refrigerator, shivering as they sang choruses. Hilton monitored the wind strength using an old car mattress, and we laugh when someone realises the family still uses it today.

“We ran into the kitchen as the house began falling apart, and I remember Mum saying, ‘We need to talk to Jesus’,” recalls Winsome (now Lieut-Colonel Winsome Merrett, Australia Territory Assistant Chief Secretary). “As soon as the name of Jesus was said, this enormous peace just came over me. As a result of Cyclone Tracy, I always believe that God is intimately involved in the lives of his people.”

The details about that night go from terrifying to miraculous. Winsome tells me about the tree that went through the girls’ room seconds after they ran downstairs. Valerie mentions how two potential shelters for the family – the caravan and stairs – were blown away while their corner of the kitchen remained standing. And Duncan tells me how a large piece of Masonite literally followed his brother

Brian into the kitchen, sheltering them from 240km/h winds. The Morris family emerged from the wreckage of their home at 6.30am on Christmas Day.

More than 70 per cent of Darwin's buildings were flattened. There was no electricity, sanitation or clean water. Instead of caring for their own needs, the Morris family realised there was greater need – the city's residents needed the Salvos. Painting the word 'SALVO' haphazardly on the side of their car, they set up a point of operation at fellow Salvationists Ruth and Graham White's place.

With the lower storey of their house still standing, it became a safe haven and focal point for the community. Ever the handyman, Hilton managed to get the car radio to work and locals gathered around the vehicle, listening to their only point of communication with the outside world.

The little group of Salvos did what they could on Christmas Day, then headed into the city on Boxing Day to see what remained of The Salvation Army corps hall. That's when Commissioner Warren pulled up at the curb. "Thankfully, by God's grace and the generosity of the community, help came quickly after that," says one of my family members.

In the following days, the Salvos would acquire a donated rolling kitchen and start distributing food, clothes and water to hundreds of people. One of the first buildings to rise from the devastation was a warehouse for the Salvos to conduct their operations – and Sunday meetings also resumed. "Some people have said that when the hall went, they thought there'd be no more Salvos in Darwin," says Valerie. "But people had no idea of the impact of the Army up there. In fact, that's when we became more active than ever."

I ask Wilga how she prioritised helping others and her family at the same time, and she is matter of fact. "Oh well, we had survived. And they were friends with all the other kids – they got busy [helping people], same as Hilton and I did," she says. Winsome adds, "We had a shared purpose because we had a shared experience."

### **Noel D Stewart, Const. No. 511**

On December 24, 1974 I was rostered on day shift at Criminal Investigation Branch, Darwin.

At about 1.30am on December 25 glass louvres began to smash by debris carried by the wind. My wife and I immediately went to the bedroom of our two years old, daughter and woke her and sat on her bed with her. Very shortly after that the roof was blown off the house. I then put my wife and daughter under the bed in the room and made an attempt to go to the main bedroom of the house to get extra clothing. However, I was unable to open the door due to the vacuum created by the high speed of the wind. I then joined my wife and daughter under the bed and barricaded ourselves with pillows and bedclothes. An inside wall and the ceiling then fell on the bed, and I spent the rest of the night holding up the bed. Just after dawn when the wind had dropped sufficiently, I checked all neighbours in the immediate area and instructed them to proceed to the Wagaman School. I then took my family there and spent the rest of the day organising dry areas for people to sleep and collecting as much food as possible.

I remained at the school for the next two days assisting with food distribution. I also assisted Const.s McDowell and Holland in removing two bodies from the wreckage of the Drysdale Flats in Ryland Road. I then reported to Casuarina Police Station with Const. Mugge and we were instructed to return to Wagaman School to keep order and give any assistance. From that time we remained at the school and also provided a guard for food supplies and generators at night. We were later joined by two members of the Commonwealth Police Contingent from Sydney. These members, Const.s Ray Jones and Ross Jackson were of great assistance and their efforts were much appreciated.

My wife and daughter were evacuated on Friday, December 27 and they are presently residing with her parents in Auckland, New Zealand. They will not be returning to Australia.



**Robert J Rosier, Const. RN 548**

At approximately 1.30am the wind had got to such an intensity that I decided to wake the children and moved them into the bathroom and brought all the cushions out of the lounge and covered my wife and children. At approximately 2.30am the roof began to lift, and some debris began to smash into the bedroom walls. At this time the wind seemed quite ferocious, and I could hear a lot of objects hitting the house and rumbling.

Then almost as if in an instant the wind decreased in intensity and I could hear persons yelling out. I presumed that we were experiencing the eye and called out to the persons who were yelling as I went down the front steps. The persons yelling were my next door neighbours at 28 Gardenia Street and their Housing Commission house had completely disintegrated into rubble. There were five persons at this residence and they were wandering around in dazed confusion. The neighbours wife had a bad cut to the back of her head and so did the younger boy. I brought them up into my house and dressed the wounds. They then muttered about their daughter still being in the house so I went back down and found the girl amongst the rubble on the concrete floor, she was in pain and said she could not move. I checked her over and as she could not feel my touch below her waist nor could she move her toes, I determined that she had a broken back.

I also found another person, presumably a relative, wandering around and as he appeared physically sound I requested he remain with the girl. I advised him that I believed we were in the eye of the cyclone and at any moment the fierce winds would return. We attempted to shelter the girl and other person with a double bed mattress and left. I quickly checked my other neighbour, whose house had half collapsed, and found them in the bathroom, safe and sound. Also I checked the two houses behind me and ascertained that all were alright.

At around 3.45am while I was outside I could hear an incredible noise – as if 40,000 express trains were coming down the road from the west. Realizing that the eye was passing, I raced upstairs and secured the front door and arranged the other three persons along my linen press. I could not put all of us in the bathroom as the bath was full of water. When the wind struck the three bedrooms disintegrated and about 5-10 minutes later, the hall and lounge did likewise. At this time the

bathroom rear wall also disappeared and I had a fleeting feeling that my children had been sucked out, I asked my wife who confirmed that the children were safe.

At about 6.00am the dawn had appeared and the wind had decreased somewhat. No further major structure of the house had disintegrated in the meantime and all persons in my group were safe and well. I attempted to go down what was left of the front stairs but had to wait for another 20 minutes until the wind was less intense and then checked the girl next door. She was still in agony but otherwise unharmed. I then saw some persons in a vehicle in the driveway across the road. Two males were in this vehicle and were okay. The driveway of the house they had been sheltering in was partially unroofed and had been unoccupied for the past week. We checked the house and as persons began to appear from the rubble, we invited them over to this house. The house needed to be cleared of glass as there were about 12 children in group of 28 of us. I then requested that some of the men check all the block for other persons and I went to look for Medical Assistance on my motorcycle. I got as far as the Dolphin and met S/Const. CROWELL in a patrol wagon. He advised me that the road to the hospital at that stage was out due to debris. I returned to the group and it was decided to attempt to place the girl on a makeshift stretcher. This was done eventually by using a door and she was placed in the back of a station wagon and rugged up.

A nursing sister was found and she suggested the girl be seen by a doctor. She suggested this should be done as soon as possible as the girl had lost a fair amount of blood from a head wound. At approximately 0830hrs we attempted to take the girl to the hospital – the trip taking approximately one hour.

Upon returning, children had been fed and dried and put into dryish clothes. It was then decided to make the house as habitable as possible rather than go to one of the relief centres. The rest of the day was spent recovering items of clothing, foodstuffs, water, cooking utensils and bedding. My motorcycle had broken down and I managed to clear my vehicle from under my house by later afternoon.

After a night sleep, I reported to Casuarina Police Station at 0700hrs 26/12/74. I remained on duty at Casuarina Shopping Centre till 1730hrs and went home. After tea I decided I had better report to the communications centre, which I did at 2100hrs – I remained on duty till 0900hrs 27/12/74.



*Frank Simmons' home in Moil standing proud amidst the devastation.*

#### **Nicholas W Pinnuck, Const. 599**

During the cyclone I carried out a general patrol of all area of Darwin with Sgt 3/C Tenthey, until approximately 1am when all vehicles were ordered back to the nearest Police Station. At approximately 1.45am Sgt Tenthey, Const. Guy and myself went mobile from Darwin Station to check on the homes of members that were on duty. After doing this Const. Guy was dropped off at his house as he had completed his shift at 12MN. Sgt Tenthey and myself then went to Casuarina Station arriving there at about 3am. During the check on the houses it was noticed that although the roofs of a few houses were off the rest seemed to be alright. At Casuarina Station I assisted other

members to help bring in women and children of refugee who had come to the Police Station for assistance. At about 4.30am when there was a bit of a lull in the storm Sgt Tenthey and myself left the station to try to get our wives and children and bring them to Casuarina Station but were unable to get any further than Goodman St. It was then noticed that Bradshaw Terrace, Rowling St, Goodman St and Dripstone Road were all running about 18 inches deep in water and that a lot of the houses were down. We then returned to Casuarina Station.

At about 7am Sgts Wolthers and Tenthey organised us into different groups to check houses in Streets that had been allocated us along with civilian volunteers for dead and injured and to inform people without shelter to go to the nearest school, after which we returned to Casuarina Police Station. During the remainder of the day Const. Stephenson, Const. Howatson and myself went around houses picking up dead and taking them to the Casuarina Post Office which was being used as a temporary morgue.



### **Thomas C Baker, Det. Sgt 3/C Reg No 287**

At 11.35pm on 24 December, 1974, the power and telephone ceased to operate at my home; at this stage the house was being buffeted by the wind and the house was inundated with water which was being forced in through the closed louvres by the wind. An effort was made to deal with this water but it was a hopeless task and our efforts were abandoned. My wife and I then commenced to collect some clothing and other property from the house to take into the bathroom where we intended to spend the remainder of the night.

On opening the bathroom door, I saw that the roof was off that part of the house and when I opened the door the ceiling of the room also disappeared; we then went to the toilet which was next door to the bathroom and as I opened the door, I saw the outside wall of the toilet disappear; I then went to the main bedroom of the house and saw that the end outside wall had disappeared and that the side walls of the room were moving under the pressure of the wind. I could see that this room was not safe and then went to the lounge room of the premises. As I entered the lounge, the end outside wall fell away. I could hear debris being thrown about outside the only entrance to the house and considering that it was unsafe to attempt to leave the premises, decided to remain in a small passageway leading into the bathroom and toilet. My wife and I attempted to hold the bathroom and toilet doors shut and we placed our two children between our bodies to protect them.

After some time, a linen press which was behind us and which was built into one of the interior walls of the house collapsed into one of the bedrooms behind us; it was obvious that the house had disintegrated around us, so my wife and I got down onto the floor alongside the base of the lines press and put our children underneath us for protection. In a matter of seconds, the interior walls of the bathroom and toilet collapsed over the top of us and came to rest on the overturned linen press. The bathroom wall was heavily tiled and I could hear debris striking the tiles and being deflected away. At this time, we were in an area approximately five feet by three feet and were unable to move. My wife was supporting some of the wreckage on her back and she was pinned under the wreckage by her ankles; I was supporting some of the wreckage with my left leg and was unable to move. Our two children were underneath our bodies. We were protected from flying debris, but were unable to get any relief from the rain. We remained in this position until daylight as we were unable to see what was happening around us and could feel broken glass, nails and other dangerous debris all around the area we were in. Shortly after daylight, I managed to get clear of the debris and saw that my house had been blown down to floorboards level; with the assistance of neighbours, my wife and children were removed from the wreckage and taken to the home of Mr Maxwell THOMASON, at 99 Ryland Road, Nightcliff, where we set up a small Evacuation Centre. I then commenced to check all the houses nearby in Ryland Road and also in Jordan Place and several elderly people were taken to Thomason's house where they were fed and given First-Aid by a St John's Ambulance Brigade member who arrived at the house. At about 11am on 25 December, 1974, these people, together with my wife and family were taken to Nightcliff High School where they were Reg and given further treatment.

I remained at the Nightcliff High School for the remainder of that day, assisting in any way whatever to get the Centre functioning and on 26 December, 1974, came to Police Headquarters Building where my family were billeted until they were evacuated by air on 27 December, 1974. My family were evacuated to Melbourne, and subsequently travelled to New Zealand where they are now living with relatives.

During the Cyclone, I suffered cuts and abrasions to the legs and arms and an injury to my left foot which was penetrated by a nail. My wife suffered cuts and abrasions and several fractured ribs and both children had cuts and abrasions to their arms and legs.

My home was completely destroyed during the cyclone and this also includes most of the contents.



**Sharon Evans, daughter of Murray John Evans Reg No 394. Fifty Years Later.**

We were a family of seven, My mother, my father (who was a police officer station at Dawin Police Station), my 2 older brothers aged 17 and 16, myself who was 14 and my younger sisters aged 10 and 3.

My family and I lived in Nakara, it was Christmas Eve and during the day it was raining and there were cyclone warnings. Mum was getting prepared for Christmas day meals, presents etc and my Dad was working afternoon shift.

During the night the winds intensified, we could hear the howling outside. Mum went into the loungeroom which was flooded, so we all huddled in the hallway by this time Tracy had begun. We moved to the bathroom at which time the wall blew out and over the backstep, Mum then made us go under the debris to the storage room attached to the laundry under the house. We stayed there till the morning when a police officer from Casuarina Police Station came and found us.

We were taken to Casuarina Shopping Centre then to Casuarina High School, where we stayed until we were evacuated by the Hercules plane from the raaf base to Sydney.

Dad resigned from the Police Force and we moved to Sydney in 1975. He passed away in 2021, and he had nothing but fond memories of his time in the Northern Territory Police force.



*NT News 'Eye of the storm: We look back at the NT's biggest cyclones' Date Unknown*





Casey Home in Nakara. Private photo collection Garry Casey

# The water in the kitchen was pink ... I saw Dad bleeding in the water

**R**AY Casey is probably alive today because his wife, Mavis, and daughter, Sue, wrapped themselves around his bleeding and unconscious body to give him warmth in the ruins of their home.

Sue was in Darwin on holiday when the cyclone hit.

She said: "We were sitting in the kitchen area and all of a sudden there was an incredible explosion. The windows just blew out."

"There was this great storm, we had power, and Dad had us to move to the bedroom."

### Petrified

"Things got worse. All the windows blew out. I was petrified about Dad because we hadn't seen him."

"I told Mum 'I've got to go and find Dad' and I crawled out on my hands and knees."

"There was this enormous flash of lightning and the water in the kitchen was pink. I saw Dad lying bleeding in the water."

"There was no movement at all. I couldn't



Garry Casey in the ruins of his home

save him. It's hard to believe I suppose but I dragged him back to the bedroom. Mum and I lay over him, his whole body was so cold."

"I was screaming for God to stop it because he was the only one who could."

"The house just kept rocking. The noise was so shocking ... I was petrified."

Mr Casey recalls: "I was suffering from hyperthermia and very bad shock because of the loss of blood."

"At 5.30 a.m. some neighbours came and took

me out to the hospital to be stitched up."

Mr Casey stayed on for six days to help with the evacuation of 20,000 people.

"Ella Mack (a former Darwin mayor) was my doctor," he said.

"She gave me a certificate and ordered me evacuated immediately. I just love it up."

"I did most of the evacuation of civilians out of Darwin. She ran into Ella again."

"She said, 'You still have, well you won't be for long. I'm putting you under police guard'."

Mr Casey and his family were evacuated on New Year's Eve.

But's brother, Garry, saw with the NT police, was driving home to Nakara when cyclone Tracy struck.

"I went to bed after 11.30 but things started to get worse," he said.

"I got up, put my slippers on and my old army boots on, got my torch, and walked out to the kitchen to get a drink."

"I felt chilly. I looked up and the ceiling and the roof were gone."

"As I walked past the bathroom, the whole wall and everything just took off with me."

Mr Casey found himself in trouble along with his lounge chairs and two dogs, one his own, the other a neighbour's.

He said: "Somehow I got hold of the railing outside and held on to that. The two dogs and the chairs were flying through the air."

"I crawled back across the floor. Two of the bedrooms were still intact."

"My wife at the time was standing in the corridor screaming."

"They made it downstairs where the two dogs had automatically made it back."

"There wasn't a mark

on them," Mr Casey said. "We stayed in the storeroom for the rest of the night."

"It happened in mid the night upstairs I was sitting against a wrapped bed and around the ... it was terrifying."

"The only thing that kept my sanity was my torch because I had a light and my cigarettes and I could talk to the dog. I could hear Father screaming."

"I put my hand through a hole to let her know I was all right and she said she was going next door to get help."

"I don't know how long she was gone. The cracked back and the neighbours had said yet stuffed, we're not missing."

"Debbie then lifted the concrete blocks off the top of the cupboard, enough for me to get out."

Mr Casey had been given the keys to a neighbour's house to look after while they were in hospital.

"That was one of the jokes of the cyclone. When they came back I gave them their keys. There was no home," Mr Casey said.

## **Daniela (Dani) Mattiuzzio, Reg No 1440**

I was a small child of 5 when Cyclone Tracey hit Darwin.

It is in fact my first and most vivid childhood memory. The theory of trauma sticking around forever rings true!

I remember my mum being on the phone to my dad asking him to come home from the staff Xmas party for his men. It was raining and stormy but we weren't really aware that we should be worried. A short time later my dad came home. Mum put my brother and I to bed in their room. My next memory is being shaken awake by mum who ushered us into the upstairs bathroom. We lived in Nightcliff in an upstairs house one street from the beach.

My younger brother and I, along with mum huddled in the bath with blankets and a torch. My dad sat on the toilet. There was banging and howling and it was like the world around us screaming out in the worst kind of pain imaginable.

I was aware at some time of everything becoming so quiet and still. And then my dad disappeared for a long time. I later learned that this was the eye of Tracey and dad had gone outside to try to cut down a very big coconut tree that was threatening to fall on the house.

My next memory is of daylight and chaos. I don't think we were supposed to be outside but I remember being outside, standing on the fallen tree in our front yard, along with our neighbours roof and an upside down car. I remember wondering where all the trees were. I had no concept of the enormity of course. Just of the chaos and the stress of the grown ups around me. Most houses in our street were gone. Ours was pretty unscathed.

We had stored water, and generators and fridges and freezers that were working so soon there were many many people at our house. I don't recall being upset about the loss of Christmas and do remember being happy that our dog was safe.

The following days are a blur but soon there was a convoy of cars was on its way south. I later learned that my parents and friends realised that they needed to get us out of Darwin asap and the quickest way out was getting us to Alice Springs. My parents along with many others drove out of Darwin and straight through to Alice Springs where we boarded planes south. The men drove straight back to Darwin and I wouldn't see my dad again for four months.

In hindsight we were a very lucky family escaping with minimal damage to our health and minimal residual trauma. My parents stayed in the same house in Nightcliff for many years to come. I do remember how nervous my mum for many years was whenever there was a cyclone watch or warning.

## **Tanya Holliday, Det. Snr Const. 2131 50 Years Later**

My family moved to Darwin in October 1974 and were temporarily staying in a unit on Bagot Road. We were on the second floor. My dad was in the RAAF. I was four years old at the time.

The strongest memory I have is being huddled up in a hallway with lots of people and the mattresses around us. My parents told me that the roof blew off the unit so they and other occupants upstairs broke into the units downstairs. They found people huddled up together and everyone got together and put mattresses in the hallway for protection. The noise is something that cannot be described. I do remember a feeling of dread.

My next memory is driving along a road (I do not know which one or where but thinking it was Bagot Road because of the width of the road). I just remember that there were no houses just rubbish everywhere. We couldn't drive straight down the road. We were dodging stuff. (Something I couldn't really comprehend as a kid). I also remember being in the plane to leave Darwin. I remember a big noisy 'tin' plane is all I can describe it as. I have a photo of my mum, my brother and me on the

airstrip. I asked mum to look for it but unfortunately she couldn't find it. My dad stayed behind as he worked in the RAAF and was assisting in the rebuild of Darwin.

Growing up in Darwin with the big 'knock 'em' down storms I remember regularly being scared when the wind howled and my brother and I would end up under the dining room table.

Ten or so years ago I took my very young kids to the Darwin Museum. We went into the Tracy display. As soon as the sound of the wind and the banging tin started I fell to the floor. I was shaking and crying and couldn't get myself out of there. Some onlookers helped me out. When I think back to that day the tears come to my eyes (just as they are now). I was shocked as I wasn't expecting the reaction.

Even though I was very young I am very aware of how it affected me mentally. As a police officer I am very aware of my fear of cyclones so every time we have one that hits hard I worry about whether I am going to be able to do my job or whether I will just fall in a heap and be useless to anyone.

However, so far so good. I have managed to control myself and get the job done. 😊



**Rob Crowell (Crasher) 'The World Flies In and Darwin Takes Off' P174 By Peter and Shiela Forrest**

Motorcycle policeman Robert ('Crash') Crowell recalled that he 'was asked to be at the airport from Boxing Day, to help with the evacuations. I moved into one of the Ansett buildings and lived there with the Ansett manager, Fed McCue,' Crash said.

'It was hectic at the airport, very hectic. There were planes coming in and out all the time, everything from air force Starlifters and Hercules to Qantas, TAA and Ansett jets, Connair planes, interstate airlines and down to small company planes. The RAAF did an excellent job sorting it all out. A plane would arrive to pick up people, I would go over to meet it, find out where it was going and approximately how many it would take, check that it was ready to load. The best part was that I could have a cold drink while I was there. Then I would ride back to where people were waiting.

They were lined up, one line for Adelaide, another for Brisbane and so on. I would do a quick check over the people who were waiting and just make sure they really entitled to be evacuated at that time.

People were desperate to get out and a few people did desperate things. Some had bogus doctor's certificates saying they had to be evacuated urgently for medical reasons. I would have a look at the certificate and if I hadn't heard of the doctor they didn't get on. A few able-bodied people were in wheelchairs. I saw one bloke wearing a dress, trying to get the priority that was given to women. I fronted him. Told him not to be silly and to go to the end of the line. He got wild and ripped his dress off and threw it down.

People were only allowed to take a small amount of hand luggage and we had a few problems with people who wanted to take their TV sets and things like that. But the vast majority of people were very orderly, very patient, very good.

It was better to be on a commercial jet than on an air force Hercules and people used to try and juggle things a bit. One of the biggest problems was VIPs wanting priority.

It was my job to keep order out there but I didn't have too many problems. The Salvation Army did a really excellent job with soup and drinks and that helped people a lot, made things a lot more comfortable.'

### **'IN THE EYES OF A 5 YEAR OLD ...' Robert Crowell, son of Bob (Crasher) Crowell, is a Serving Career Fireman with NTFRS.**

Although being only 5 years old at the time I have many vivid memories of cyclone Tracy. This is my first recollection of many events which I thought were exciting and interesting at the time - but never frightening knowing the strong and capable parents I had.

Maybe I would have slept through the whole storm, but mum had woken me around midnight to huddle up in the living room. I did think it was odd to have 5 cm of water in hallway but mum said it was nothing to worry about, so I didn't. I watched mum pace back & forth every 30 minutes or so opening and closing windows often letting the rain drive straight through. Again, "Don't worry about it darling".

So we huddled, just me, mum and our Big Jim torch. Dad was at work so I guessed he'd be ok, and he was as tough as nails. There was so much howling, smashing and banging, it was deafening but I got bored with it and crashed out.

I woke to light rain and sunrise with mum still pacing around and packing bags. Now realising this was no normal storm I prepped myself in decent PPE - salvaged by the only present still under the shredded Xmas tree in form of the best cowboy costume ever.

Like many, our C19 house was on stilts and as we opened the living room door I couldn't believe someone had stolen the stairs. We opened the back door to which we found the stairs still there but were twisted like a sculpture. I jumped out and down with mum yelling to stop but she soon joined me.

Looking around, mum & I froze for a minute realising things were not the same from here. This is my first memory of my mother crying if only for a moment.

Around the same time, people - neighbours started appearing and we (mum) checked everyone was accounted for. There was so much shock and bewilderment, but I was busy collecting new Xmas toys from the yards.

Looking back now, our landscape had changed overnight. Our tidy street, shaded with wonderful trees and proud nature strips was a unrecognisable with twisted iron, glass and fibro' sheets. Even the trees were gone but a for few which had every leaf torn off.

Almost every house in the street was wiped off its stilts with only the floor remaining - all but ours. It turns out, mum had been working the windows all night depressurising the house!

I remember sometime later a slight sound of dragging metal became very intense and loud which sent everyone panicking. The sound got louder and closer and was coming straight up our street in Ludmilla. It was my dad in a loader which he'd 'borrowed' from a Halkitis yard.

Dad checked on us & the neighbours', put on a fresh(ish) uniform then disappeared again clearing the streets and Bagot Road with a few helping hands aboard his newly acquired loader while mum managed to cook up some pickled Christmas pork for the gathered few. Robert Crowell



*NT News – date unknown*

### **Lyn and Eric Raeburn, 50 Years Later**

Eric was stationed at Larrimah at the time of Cyclone Tracy. We helped out at the BP Service Station at Larrimah with fuel, tyres, food and other stuff to people who had no money on a voucher system provided by Eric. Most of the towns folk chipped in and helped. A busy few days. We ended up with a wiry little dog that someone left behind our two year old called him good and that's what stuck.



*Daly Street Fire Station and Mitchell St. Busselton-Dunsborough Mail, Busselton WA. Date Unknown*

### **Jenny Gehrig, Retired St John Ambulance NT Paramedic and NSW SES Officer. 50 Years Later**

Who would have thought that as an 18-year-old I would experience and survive one of the biggest events in Australian history – Cyclone Tracy, Christmas 1974 – 50 years ago. I remember it like as if it were yesterday. On Xmas eve of that year I was at home with Mum, Dad and my brother on the RAAF base. It was blowing a gale and raining quite heavily. Power had gone out and then just after midnight there was total silence and silly me thought that it was over, but this was just the “eye of the cyclone”, it was eerily quiet, the rain and wind had completely disappeared. I had no concept that the worse was yet to come. Other neighbours had already experienced serious structural damage to their

homes, so we invited them to bunk in with us. In total fourteen people were in our house. As we settled in to have a hot drink on the gas cooker, I heard what sounded like a freight train heading towards us, and then I noticed the ceiling in the lounge room lifting when Dad yelled “get under the table”. I got under the table so quick and hung on to the kitchen leg as tight as I could. I shut my eyes, held my breath and prayed that we would all be safe – upon opening my eyes, there was no longer a table, more importantly, the whole structure of half of the house was gone. I sought out my mum who was lying flat on the floor and I crawled over to her and the others. We clung on to one another so tightly in fear that we would be ripped out of each other’s arms and become part of the debris flying above us. At one stage I thought that I had lost my dad believing that he had been blown away, but he had managed to crawl further down the hallway looking for a haven for us to ride out the rest of the storm. I’m still mystified where Dad found some essential survival supplies in the way of a flagon of wine and a box of biscuits, but it certainly helped us have a good laugh. No matter how many years have passed, I will never forget that night and the relentless fury this cyclone put us through. Words can never fully describe the everlasting emotions and feelings that one experienced. I can only be thankful that we all survived relatively unscathed. I thank Cyclone Tracy for shaping my future in a way that I devoted over forty years working in the emergency services arena both as a full time employee and volunteer. What saved us all that night I will never know, but it was Cyclone Tracy that helped shape my forty year career working in the emergency services arena as I had found a passion in wanting to help others in their time of need.

### **Esther Murray, Nurse Royal Darwin Hospital, 50 Years Later**

I was on a late shift at Darwin Hospital on Christmas Eve. I arrived for 1.30pm start and found everyone running around busily checking everything. Most areas had louvre windows from ceiling to floor, a lot of them were glass. Staff were taping them up. Beds were being moved away from the windows and staff from the Engineering Team were walking around looking very worried..

I noticed a few items for *unusual* “Emergencies” sitting on a table. Little did we know that this was more serious than any of the previous cyclones we had experienced. My patients were my priority and many of them were already scared. Having come from Ireland I had been through storm so I wasn’t that worried however that certainly was to change as the evening progressed.

The wind was very strong and the windows were creaking and being pushed in. Soon the tape broke open and the winds and noise came through the area. Glass broke and the files and papers were blown all over the floor.

Rain started to come through and landing on the vinyl floor. Patient and staff sustained a number of falls as the rain filled the area.

We had to move so many patients but it was getting hard as other areas of the hospital was experiencing the same issues. About 9pm one of the engineering staff came around to tell us that houses were already blown down close by in Fanny Bay.

We all stayed on duty with me leaving about midnight. At this stage the roads were covered with debris. Electricity wires were jumping around on the road and footpaths.

Luckily my home was at the bottom of Smith St, this usually took me about 5 mins to get home. That night, with the help of John my husband, it took us 30 mins due to flying debris and live electrical wires.

Our home was on stilts and the kitchen and dining room began to disintegrate slowly from about 2am. Moving the dining room table into the bedroom we secured it in the doorless wardrobe.

We placed a tarpaulin over the table and sat under it until 6am. Most of the night the noise was like a roaring lion until around 3.30am when it became very quiet.

But it came back again some minutes later, even worse. At 6am it stopped howling, the rain lightened a bit and we went out to see the damage.

My neighbour was standing next to his fridge - the whole house gone.....We headed back to the hospital only to see the tragedy. I’ll never forget it.

Esther Murray

## **Deb Horrocks, Reg No 916**

I was 16 at the time. Besties with Cynthia McIntosh and lived in Jingili. The family got out of the house during the eye , only just. A huge piece of the neighbours roof lifted off and hit the steel railings to the back stairs while I was still on them. Fortunately the steel was strong enough to deflect the roof section. A huge dent in the railings the next morning. Coming out of our block storeroom shelter the next morning , was like stepping out onto a moonscape. Evacuated out 4 days later and returned in April.

## **Warren Landsey, Ansett Baggage Handler ‘The World Flies In and Darwin Takes Off’ P175 By Peter and Shiela Forrest**

Ansett baggage handler Warren Landsey was part of the team that helped load people on board the aircraft that had flown in. ‘The evacuees waited on their buses or in the terminal until there was a plane to take them. They couldn’t take any luggage, apart from a little hand luggage. There were problems with some men, some were going out onto the runway to try to force their way onto the planes. The police had to get pretty heavy sometimes.

My job was to get into the plane to make sure enough people were loaded on. Where there were three seats we would wedge five people in, we got them in as tight as we could. Because there was no baggage freight we were able to put larger numbers of people on board. That’s how we set incredible records for the numbers of people loaded on the planes. We got 674 people onto one Qantas 747 aircraft on 29 December and that got into the Guinness Book of Records because that aircraft’s normal maximum passenger load was 362,’ Warren said.

## **Joan Ivinson, Evacuee. ‘The World Flies In and Darwin Takes Off’ P175 By Peter and Shiela Forrest**

Joan Ivinson’s harrowing evacuation experience was typical. ‘We went by bus to the airport and we would be in the bus, in the sun, for three hours. It was terribly hot. Then hands came through the windows, it was the Salvation Army people, handing out tins of peaches and cordial. I will never forget them. Finally we flew out in a Hercules. Nine hours to Sydney non-stop, then they took us to Callan Park mental hospital; there were a few jokes about that.

Then in the morning they took me back to Sydney airport, I was flying on to my family in Melbourne. I went inside, I was just dazed, I couldn’t see where to go, I couldn’t read the monitors. Then a woman came over and said “Oh, you are from Darwin? I said “Yes” and she looked after me until I got on the plane. I was asked my date of birth and I couldn’t remember it. They said “Don’t worry about it, we have had some people who can’t even remember their names,’ Joan Ivinson said.

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