USING ARCHIVE RESOURCES: The Bombing of Darwin

You can use archive resources such as documents and photographs to gather historical facts. Imagine that you are Fred McLaughlin, John Curtin’s private secretary. Use the newspaper report and photographs on the following pages to complete this report for the Prime Minister who is currently ill and in hospital.

Mr Prime Minister,

Urgent news has just come to hand regarding Japanese bombing raids on Darwin.

[Use the newspaper report to help you fill in the missing words] There have been 2 severe air raids on Darwin. The first raid, which took place this morning, lasted about an hour. In this raid there were 72 Japanese bombers accompanied by fighters. In the second raid there were 21 bombers. Only 4 enemy aircraft were brought down. It appears that there was little warning of the Japanese approach. Many of our aircraft were unable to get into the air to engage the enemy.

[Use the newspaper report and look at the photographs to help you fill in the missing words] Reports to hand tell us that the first raid was concentrated on the town and that there was damage to shipping in the harbour. The pier [see photo] was disconnected from the mainland due to bombing damage. Some damage was done to service installations (like water, electricity and gas) but no details are available.

[Look at the photographs to help you fill in the missing words] One of our Darwin staff has reported that some of the bomb crater holes in the streets are as deep as ☐ a dam / ☐ a valley / ☑ a swimming pool [tick one box] and as wide as ☐ a car / ☑ a house / ☐ a paddock [tick one box]. Damage to property is considerable and many buildings will have to be demolished [see photo]. There was also damage at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base with some aircraft being completely destroyed in their hangars [see photo]. We have limited information about loss of life but we do know that 25 people were killed when the Post Office was bombed [see photo].

That’s all we know at this time, Prime Minister.
TWO BIG AIR RAIDS ON DARWIN

93 JAPANESE BOMBERS TAKE PART; FIGHTER ESCORT

Four Enemy Planes Brought Down

Two severe air raids on Darwin were made yesterday by large forces of Japanese twin-engined bombers.

The first raid was made in the morning by 72 bombers accompanied by fighters, and the second in the afternoon by 21 bombers.

Announcing this in a statement which he issued late last night, the Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, said that it was known for certain that four enemy aircraft had been brought down.

"Damage to property was considerable," he said, "but reports so far to hand do not give precise particulars about the loss of life.

"The Government regards the attacks as most grave, and makes it quite clear that a severe blow has been struck on Australian soil.

"In this first battle on Australian soil, it will be a source of pride to the public to know that the Armed Forces and the civilians comported themselves with the gallantry that is traditional in the people of our stock.

"As I have said, information does not disclose details of casualties, but it must be obvious that we have suffered.

"We must face with fortitude the first onset, and remember that whatever the future holds in store for us, we are Australians and will fight grimly and victoriously.

"Let us each vow that this blow at Darwin, and the loss that it has involved and the suffering it has occasioned, shall gird our loins and nerve our steel.

"We, too, in every other city, can face these assaults.

"Let it be remembered that Darwin has been bombed, but it has not been conquered."

A communiqué about the first raid issued by the Minister for Air, Mr. Drakeford, earlier in the day stated that the town, shipping in the harbour, and Service installations were bombed, and there were some casualties.

The raid lasted one hour.

"Some damage" was done to Service installations, but no details were available.

The Postmaster-General, Senator Ashley, said later that cable services would not be interrupted, "even if the cable system were temporarily destroyed." Communication would be carried on through other channels.

The first announcement of the morning raid was made in a statement issued by the Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin, from St. Vincent's Hospital, where he is recovering from an attack of severe gastritis.

Mr. Curtin said that he knew the people would "face it as Australians."

"The statement that has been made is official and authoritative," he said. "Nothing has been hidden. There is no ground for any rumour. If rumours circulate, take no notice of them, and deal sharply with any person who circulates them.

"Total mobilisation is the Government's policy. Until the time elapses when the necessary machinery can be put into effect, all Australians must voluntarily answer the Government's call for a complete giving of everything to the Nation."
Darwin, Northern Territory, 1942-02-19. The main portion of the pier damaged and disconnected from the shore end by the first Japanese air raid. The auxiliary minesweeper HMAS Gunbar, which was employed as a boom gate vessel, is alongside. Two corvettes lie out in the harbour. (Naval Historical Collection).

Darwin, Northern Territory, 1942-02-19. A group of Australian soldiers standing in a bomb crater in front of the 119th Australian General Hospital (AGH), which has been damaged by bombs dropped in the first Japanese air raid on mainland Australian territory.
http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P01791.003


Darwin, Northern Territory, 1942-02. A row of graves of the twenty-five civilians who were killed on 1942-02-19 when the Darwin Post Office was hit by a bomb dropped by a Japanese aircraft, during the first Japanese air raid on mainland Australian territory. http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P01791.005