

## **Milingimbi's WWII history: Remembering the bombing of a NT Indigenous community**

ABC News  
31 May 2016

### *Remembering the bombing of Milingimbi*

There are efforts to promote and remember the Japanese bombing raid on the remote NT town of Milingimbi in World War II, writes Alyssa Betts.

Rusted metal wreckage of RAAF bombers destroyed by Japanese air raids in 1943 lie just beside a remote Northern Territory airstrip.

Barely anyone beyond the locals on Milingimbi - an island just off the Arnhem Land coast - knows they are there, or the history behind them.

Milingimbi resident Ganygulpa Dhurrkay used them for toys when she was a kid.

"I remember as a little girl, I used to play on this plane," she said.

"We used to sit and pretend we were passengers."

### **Bombs dropped on Milingimbi**

The Japanese destroyed parts of Darwin during World War II during multiple air raids - the official death count hitting 235 on the first day.

But, 440km east of Darwin, Milingimbi too came under attack in 1943. It was the site of an RAAF airstrip and base.

Ganygulpa Dhurrkay has had it recounted to her that when warnings came through for the community to leave and seek shelter, the men refused.

"When they were asked to flee, grab their wives and children and go to the other side (of the island) ... they said 'no, no, no, we'll just send our wives and our kids, and we'll stay here and fight'," she said.

"Because they thought it was fighting the Aboriginal way, with spears, like opposite you.

"But they soon realised it was a different fight altogether - it was from above."

### **Grant to promote Milingimbi's wartime history**

Bob Baker, who's lived in Milingimbi since 1968 and works for the regional council there, has been gathering any records of the period.

He said the first attack killed a Yolngu man and a European - as well as injuring 15 others.

Over a period of a year, "15 or 16" bombers that took off from Milingimbi were lost in combat or crashed, he said.

"With action over Indonesia, New Guinea, they suffered shell fire from the Japanese, shot down by anti-aircraft fire," he said.

"The fuel would last them for up to six or seven hours - if they didn't, couldn't, get back in that time, well they'd crash into the sea."

He said two Spitfires were lost in Japanese attacks over the Arafura Sea, and two Japanese bombers that also went down have never been recovered.

"In recent years we've had people come back - sons of their fathers that flew out and never came back," Mr Baker said.

"That's been very sad to see them come down on the beachfront and throw flowers in the water ... in memory of their dad who just didn't get back to Australia."

Now the Northern Territory Government has given a \$142,000 grant, which the Chief Minister Adam Giles said was to help the community preserve and promote the story.

'A story that needed to be told'

"I don't think any Australian knows that Milingimbi was bombed, that Yolngu were killed or injured," Mr Giles said.

"Lots of Australians would want to come here and hear your story."

For Ganygulpa Dhurrkay, it's a wartime story that needed to be told.

"This is a story regardless of colour," she said.

"It's a story of a nation standing to protect our land."