

Personnel Rallied To Give Aid

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the efficiency of No. 3 RAAF Hospital.

Nursing sisters from other bases volunteered their services and two RAAF Reserve sisters were also used. Additional medical orderlies had to be requested from other bases.

Aircrews found the scene at Darwin reminiscent of War. Where aircraft were forced to remain on the ground for a prolonged period rest was taken on board so that aircraft took on the appearance of casualty wards.

Throughout the whole period the supporting arms on all bases — the administrative, equipment, medical and technical staffs worked day and night to keep as many aircraft as possible in the air.

Airmen on Christmas leave reported to their bases voluntarily and produced a magnificent effort to keep the aircraft flying.

Typical of the extra effort put out was that of three technicians who worked throughout the night of 1 January at Richmond after a normal days work to get a C130 serviceable for early takeoff.

An Air Traffic Controller at Richmond who had just completed a 24-hour shift in the Tower left for Darwin at 0800 hours in response to a call for volunteers to relieve seriously overworked ATC staff there.

A RAAF medical officer completed two consecutive round trips from Richmond bringing back patients. (About 24 hours of unbroken duty).

Communications Centre at Operational Command on 3 December handled an increase of 448 per cent above its normal load.

At the approach of the cyclone that was to scythe Darwin city to rubble and the RAAF base to a junkyard a controller sat in the cyclone control centre on the base writing up his log. Read now, the laconic words are doubly dramatic.

The log records: . . . 2355 Centre (Cyclone) 277/17 W/V 040/060 30-50 QNH986; 0015 Building 170 — roof lifting northern end CPI CPL Krebs; 018 Sgt Dorney — three stage street alarm (to be treated as false) Coulla and Beltana . . . 110 booster pump fail light on street alarms hangar 124; 017 CPL Gill reported Block

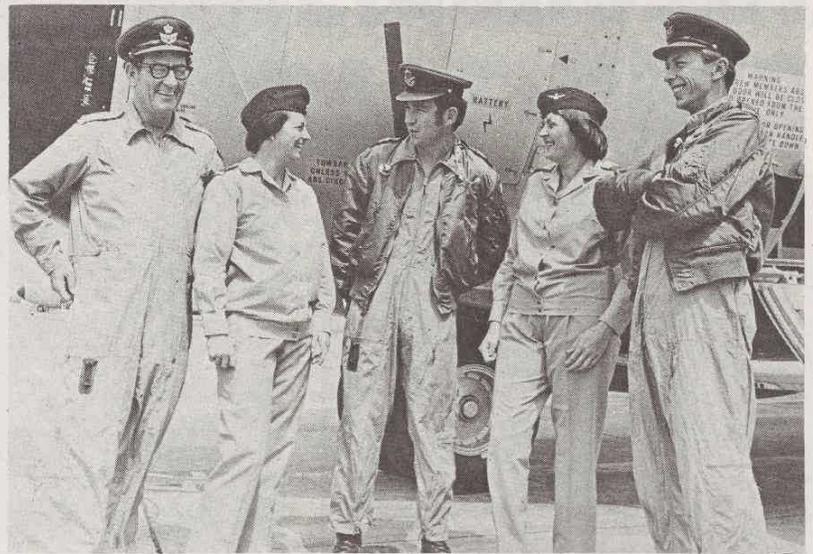
81 roof lifting, nil power, armoury roof lifting, swimming pool — roof lifting off; 0115 Building 587 roof lifting; 0122 . . . wind speed up to 75 Kts, road between swimming pool, cinema impassable . . . 0200, Defence Section collapsed, Sgt Dorney injured; 0210, QNH985, roofs off 81, 83 and 84; 0220 Gusts up to 75 Kts; 0235 Gusts up to 90 Kts-100 Kts; . . . 0300 HQOC advised that all communications except STD lost; 0305 telephone out of service; . . . 0410 some damage inspected; A65-104 (Dakota) located near OC's residence. Possible write off. Chopper re-chained — possible Cat 3 or 4 damage. Kingstrand near Officers' Mess demolished; OC and COBS inspecting damage married quarters; 0530 Wind abating — estimated 30 Kts . . . Note: anemometer in Tower stuck on 142 Kts. . .

The official RAAF Darwin base report continues: . . .

"Up to the power failure the lights in hangar 124 remained on, and from the operations briefing room entrance both the Dakota and Iroquois aircraft appeared undamaged. When the calm arrived at 0350 hours OT/C directed the service police to carry out a rapid survey of the married quarters area then to proceed to the hangar to check the damage to the aircraft. A65 was not in the hangar, having broken apart the tie-down chains and been blown across the tarmac . . . damage provisionally assessed at Cat 5. A2-71 had also broken its chains and had moved several feet. . .

"The wind resumed again at 042 hours, so OT/C and COBS returned immediately to the OCC . . . an attempt was made to contact HQOC to advise the known extent of damage but before the connection was made, the roof blew off the switch room and the switch went out of action . . . conditions precluded safe movement over even short distances.

The three operators on duty (one RAAF and two WRAAF) were directed by morse (flashlight) to stay put. . . "By the time OT/C had returned from his initial tour a large work force had already assembled. A plan of action by now developed, with priority given to cleaning roads to give access to all areas; to search-



ing all areas, and resume operations; and to the establishment of communications. . .

"Preparation for Cyclone Tracy were simplified and recovery efforts more co-ordinated than they might have been, chiefly because reference A (RAAF Base Darwin emergency occurrence orders. Section C and B, Base Squadron Darwin Cyclone Preparation Plan) were available. The response from all ranks was outstanding . . . the operation has produced an exceptionally high level of morale. . .

"In one case an aircraft requiring an engine change was ordered to leave Darwin in its 'engine out' condition. After HQOC approval the aircraft was ferried to Tindal on three engines, and engine change carried out at Tindal. . .

When it was all over the AOC Operational Command said: "Cyclone Tracy and its aftermath stretched personnel and resources to the limit. It was hard work, but it was good for the soul of a fighting formation which showed that it had not forgotten how to operate close to the limits of exhaustion, and to 'make do', where there could be no SOP to point the way.

Of course, one should not be surprised that a well trained force reacted to the emergency so well. Nevertheless it was most gratifying to see it happen."

● The first RAAF medical evacuation team to fly into Darwin on Christmas Day was assembled at extremely short notice and performed a sterling task. The team, pictured above in a moment of relaxation, was (from left): WOFF A. Thompson, FLTOFF C. Marley, SQNLDR P. Brownlie, FLTOFF J. McDonough, SQNLDR R. Stone. The team was drawn from No. 3 RAAF Hospital Richmond which was heavily committed throughout the initial stages of the evacuation of refugees.



● FLTLT Jeff Radbone and FLGROFF Steve Longbottom (above) of 36SQN who were among the first to land their Hercules aircraft at Darwin.

● SQNLDR Stan Hyland (right) manned the operations room at Richmond almost single-handed for several days during the initial stages of the disaster. He has since retired from the RAAF after spending 28 years in uniform.

● FLGROFF Mike Fanderlinden (below) of 37SQN flew the second aircraft into Darwin shortly after the cyclone struck. The first and second Hercules landed in heavy rain with only emergency lighting available for the strip.



● Darwin evacuees (below) queued patiently to board RAAF Hercules for evacuation to southern states on the third day after Cyclone Tracy wrecked their city.

