

## 1942 TOWNSVILLE BOMBING RAIDS

July 28, 2012 marked the seventieth anniversary of the third bombing raid by Japanese aircraft over Townsville. The first raid had occurred a week earlier but it was the third raid that was to have a marked effect on the history of the School. During that raid a bomb landed close to the School and caused some minor damage. The only other school on the east coast of Australia to suffer war damage is Scotch College in Sydney when a rocket fired from a Japanese miniature submarine in Sydney Harbour landed on their rugby field.

In December 1942, in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Queensland Government closed all coastal schools north of Townsville. On March 24 the Government rescinded their closing of schools but this did not help Grammar because the School had been taken over by the RAAF in January 1942. Undeterred by this setback, the Headmaster, T.B. Whight, re-opened the School in a house in the suburb of Hermit Park. The property was named Rosslea and was close to the river and there was a park situated across the road. It was here that the bomb caused the minor damage to the School.

In a letter written on August 1 to a close friend in Sydney Mr Whight describes the three bombing raids on Townsville. Of the third and final raid he writes as follows: *"The next gave us a thrill. This is my entry in the School daily roll book. Tuesday, July 28. Single plane attacked at 12.40a.m. [sirens at 12.10a.m.]. The plane travelled north to south, dropping bombs in the harbour. Last bomb was probably aimed at Rooney's Mill. Landed in the coconut grove at the Experimental Farm. Light shade in the Hall fell - first Townsville Grammar School war damage. Three to four search lights held plane throughout. Seemed above us when last bomb was released. It was fascinating to see bombs like slowly falling stars illuminated by the searchlights. The noise of the bomb rushing through the air was plainly heard. Boys again behaved perfectly.*

*The Experimental Farm is just across the river from here and the bomb fell about half-a-mile away. Apparently it was not very large, for if it had been, the noise would have been greater and the blast more noticeable. Fighters attacked soon after the bombs exploded - they had been in the air before the bomber arrived of course, and there were a few bursts of tracer bullets.*

*All the bombs were alleged by the ABC to have fallen into the sea. It did not please us to hear a lie broadcast. Townsville so far has been lucky. Just imagine, three raids, no damage, no casualties."*

In a recent email to the School, Colin Kelly [1941-1944], Head Boy, Dux of the School and winner of the Chelmsford Cup in 1944 remembers the night as follows: *"On a cold night the alarm was raised for us to get into the slit trench which would have been, I believe, adjacent to the old garage, our 'science room without a laboratory'. Occupants of the trench included boarders [there were not too many], Headmaster Mr Whight and probably others including Matron and Mr Bliss [teacher]. The searchlights picked up the plane in the west/south-west and held the bomb in the beam for a significant time [I don't think I have dreamt this]. The trajectory of the bomb was [or certainly seemed to be] roughly over our site. Tommy Whight certainly did think so and told us to keep down in the trench. The bomb exploded across the river from us.*

*Joyce Land [nee Grimsey 1939-1942] remembers her time at the School clearly. The daughter of Mr Grimsey who presented the Grimsey Cup in 1940 for Girls' Interhouse sport writes of the year 1942 as follows: "We had air raid drills and slit trenches dug by the boys. After the first bombs fell over Townsville there were quite a few broken nights spent in the trenches."*

The School was situated at Rosslea for three years and in spite of all the difficulties encountered by the move and the difficulties of finding suitable teachers the School flourished. Academic results were outstanding: among the achievers were Geoffrey Woolrych [Rear Admiral in the Australian Navy], Bill Watson [General and Head of Army Medical Corp], Bryan Emmerson [world renowned researcher into kidney diseases], Mat Darveniza [Professor of Electrical Engineering] and Bill Wilson [Queensland rugby union representative and a Churchill Fellowship winner]. The girls were not to be left behind with Pat Shann becoming the first Grammar girl to be awarded a prestigious Queensland University Open Scholarship. Only twenty were awarded on an annual basis. In 1944 Shirley Richards topped the Queensland Junior Public Examination and won the Byrnes Medal and the Thallon Medal.

Mr Whight sums up the three years at Rosslea as follows: *"There were three years of hard work and happiness. All our pupils enjoyed Rosslea-particularly the boarders. The boy boarders will recall with affection, the bonded plywood huts which slept three boys; their ingenuity in lighting them with batteries, old and new; their homemade furniture. Also remembered would be the House Gardens, the Rowland tomatoes, dengue fever, the meals during the floods, concerts; these things I know. I have no doubt that those unknown to me are sweeter to the boys and girls."*



Form VI A 1944 at Rosslea.

Left to Right.

Back Row: C.B. Kelly, K.R. Johnston, Mr T.B. Whight, A. Johnson, G.S. Aslett.

Middle Row: I. Malpas, Z. Burnett, N. Brazier, N. Sundstrup, R.M. Linnett.

Sitting: R.E. Grant.

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