

## Salvage of the *Peary*

Between 1959 and 1960 the Fujita Salvage Company from Japan fought the strong currents, low visibility and a muddy seabed to salvage much of the *Mauna Loa*, *Meigs*, *Zealandia*, *Kelat*, *Neptuna* and finally the *Peary*.

The salvage rights to the *Peary* underwent a considerable amount of negotiation between various parties over the years, until finally the Northern Territory authorities purchased the wreck from local commercial diver, Carl Atkinson, and then gave it to the Fujita Salvage Company in 1960. Fujita was not paid for the salvage of the wreck, other than the profits from the scrap. Fujita perceived the salvage as a self imposed unofficial war reparation as his country was responsible for the loss of the ship. Local authorities considered the *Peary* and other World War II wrecks as shipping hazards.

## The *Peary* today

Today the *Peary* lies in approximately 27 metres of water on a silty seabed. The twisted remains of this heavily salvaged ship lie in a North-South direction, with very little of the remains identifiable as the proud ship she once was.

The upper portion of the hull and superstructure has been cut away leaving only exposed ribs, bulkheads and portions of the bottom of the hull. Much of the bow and stern steel structure has been removed. The remains of boiler sections, bricks, pipes, gauges and engine room fittings and ladders can still be seen in the middle of the site. Five inch shells can still be located by the observant diver.

Uprights, bulkheads and plating appear in the middle of the site and some semblance of the original structure can be discerned here, whereas the bow and stern sections are not as easy to identify. Many cut off beams and twisted metal are strewn around the site.

The depth of the *Peary* prevents good sunlight penetration. Even on a well-planned neap tide visibility rarely exceeds two metres. The remains of this ship are a memorial to those who lost their lives in the first bombing raid on Australian soil and to those who defended Darwin.

## Protection and Access

The wreck is a protected historic shipwreck under the *Heritage Conservation Act*. Divers may access the site, but it is illegal to damage, interfere with or remove any of the structural remains or movable objects. Please maintain the "look but don't touch" policy. Fishing is permitted.



*This memorial is a 4 inch gun on Darwin Esplanade. This gun was salvaged from the Peary in the 1950s by diver Carl Atkinson (dec.). It was restored by the Royal Australian Navy for the 1992 War Service Memorial Year and now points towards the location where the Peary lies.*

## Contact

For further information on the heritage, conservation and management of the site, contact:

### Heritage Branch

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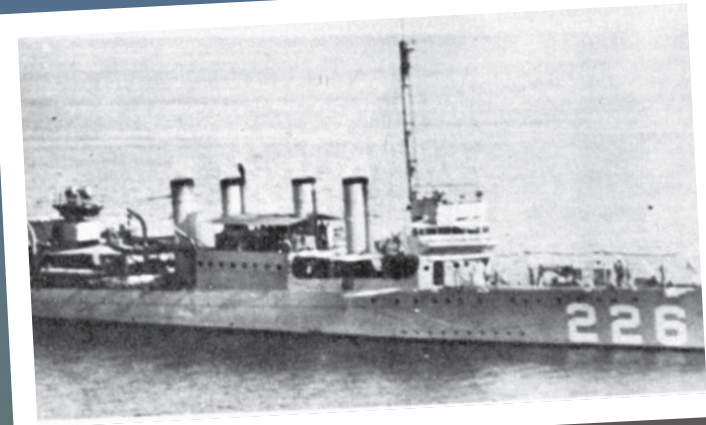
**great  
Territory  
lifestyle**

A Territory Government initiative



Northern  
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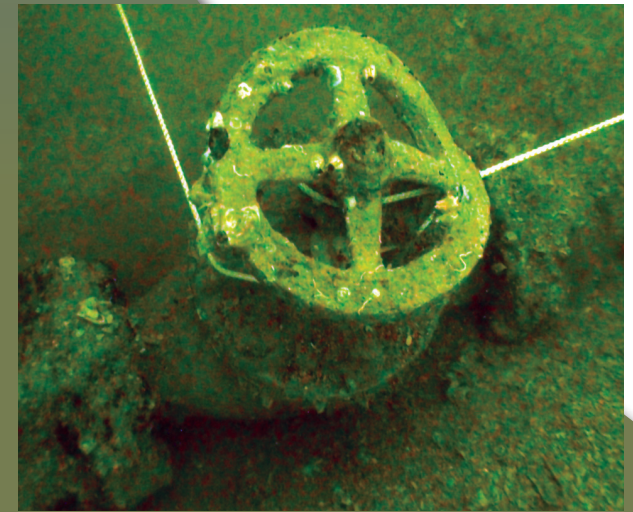
## Northern Territory Shipwrecks



## U.S.S. *Peary*

1920–1942

Sunk during the first Japanese  
air raid, Darwin Harbour  
19 February 1942



The *USS Peary* was a US destroyer sunk by enemy air attack in Darwin Harbour on the 19 February 1942. 92 servicemen died aboard the ship, the greatest loss of life on any of the ships sunk in the attack. Today visiting US naval ships still pay tribute to its fallen. Survivors have their ashes scattered over the wreck, finally returning to their ship and fallen comrades.

## Construction and Working Life

The *USS Peary* was a flush deck, 'four stacked' Clemson class destroyer, commissioned in 1920. A total of 156 Clemson class destroyers were built between April 1918 and September 1920. They were a repeat of the earlier Wicker class destroyers but had more fuel capacity which increased endurance. These Clemson class destroyers were used as U Boat fighters, escort for convoys and various patrols and exercises requiring speed, endurance and manoeuvrability, and were used up to and including World War II.

Class and type:	Clemson class destroyer
Displacement:	1190 tons
Length:	314 feet 4 inches (95.8 m)
Beam:	31 feet 9 inches (9.7 m)
Draft:	9 feet 3 inches (2.8 m)
Propulsion:	geared turbines
Speed:	35 knots (65 km/h)
Complement:	101 officers and enlisted
Armament:	4 × 4"/50 caliber gun 1 × 3"/50 caliber gun 12 × 21" torpedoes
Position	12°28.527S/ 130°49.777E

## Between the Wars

From 1923 the *Peary* served with the Yangtze River Patrol until 1931 where she made annual deployments into Chinese water, protecting American interests up until the outbreak of World War II.

## War with the Japanese

Based in Manila at the beginning of the war, the *Peary* was amongst the last of the fleet to escape the Japanese blockade of the city.

The *Peary* arrived in Darwin on 3 January 1942 and by the 17 January had begun anti-submarine patrols and escort work. On 14 February the *Peary* departed Darwin in a convoy with three other warships and four merchant supply ships, in an attempt to deliver supplies to the garrison in Timor.

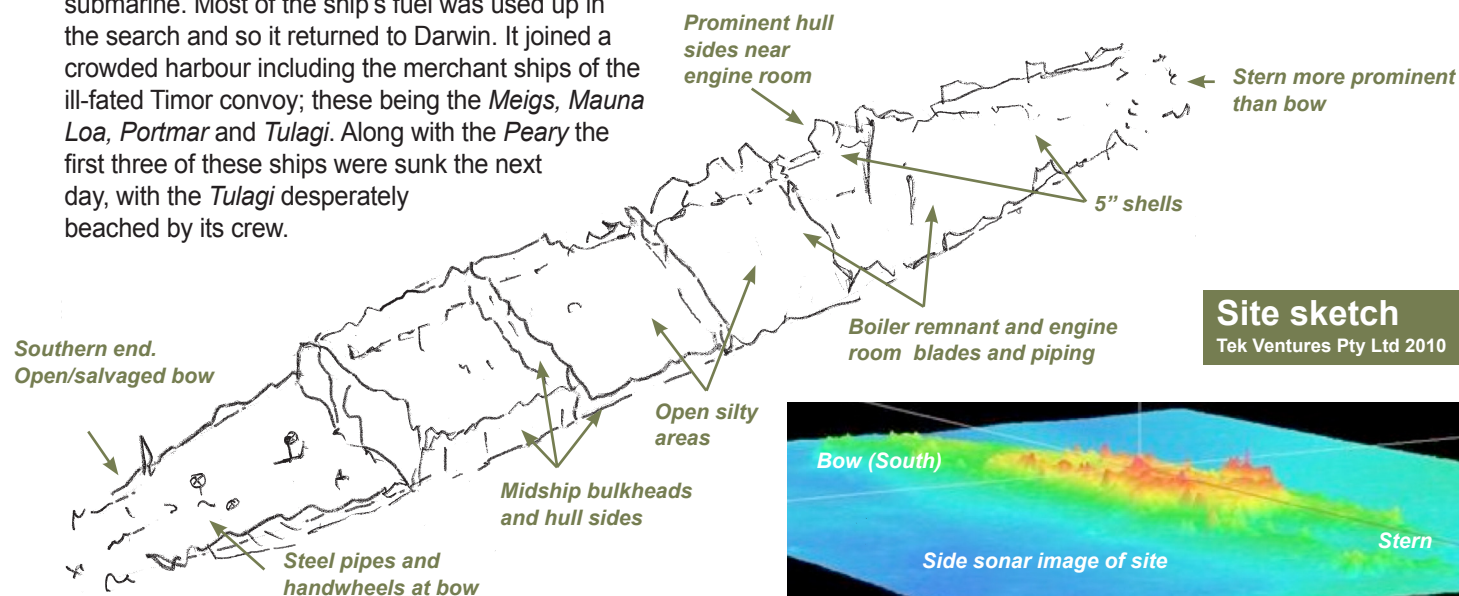
The Japanese discovered the convoy that first day and attacked. The group managed to ward off numerous attacks both that day and the next, but returned to Port Darwin on the 18 February without having delivered its supplies. The two American escorts the *Peary* and *Houston* were then ordered to depart Port Darwin and join the allied fleet on the south coast of Java. However once at sea the *Peary* was sent to investigate a sonar reading, possibly indicating an enemy submarine. Most of the ship's fuel was used up in the search and so it returned to Darwin. It joined a crowded harbour including the merchant ships of the ill-fated Timor convoy; these being the *Meigs*, *Mauna Loa*, *Portmar* and *Tulagi*. Along with the *Peary* the first three of these ships were sunk the next day, with the *Tulagi* desperately beached by its crew.



## 19 FEBRUARY 1942 – DARWIN'S FIRST AIR RAID

The attack on Darwin Harbour began just before 10 am with 188 Japanese aircraft suddenly filling the sky. When the raid commenced the *Peary* was preparing to take on fuel from the tanker, *British Motorist*, and the crew did not have enough warning to raise the anchor and carry out any high speed manoeuvres which may have saved her.

Official records state the *Peary* was hit by five bombs. Only four exploded but it was enough to sink her. *Peary* sank stern first with more than half the crew losing their lives, either killed by explosions, burnt in the blazing oil that surrounded the ship, or drowned. Including the captain, 92 were killed or missing, but only seven of the bodies were recovered. 57 men survived, of which 20 were wounded. There are reports of returning machine gun fire from the crew as she slipped beneath the oily waters of Darwin Harbour. This was the largest and most devastating raid on Darwin. At least 60 raids followed with the last in November 1943.



## Site sketch

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