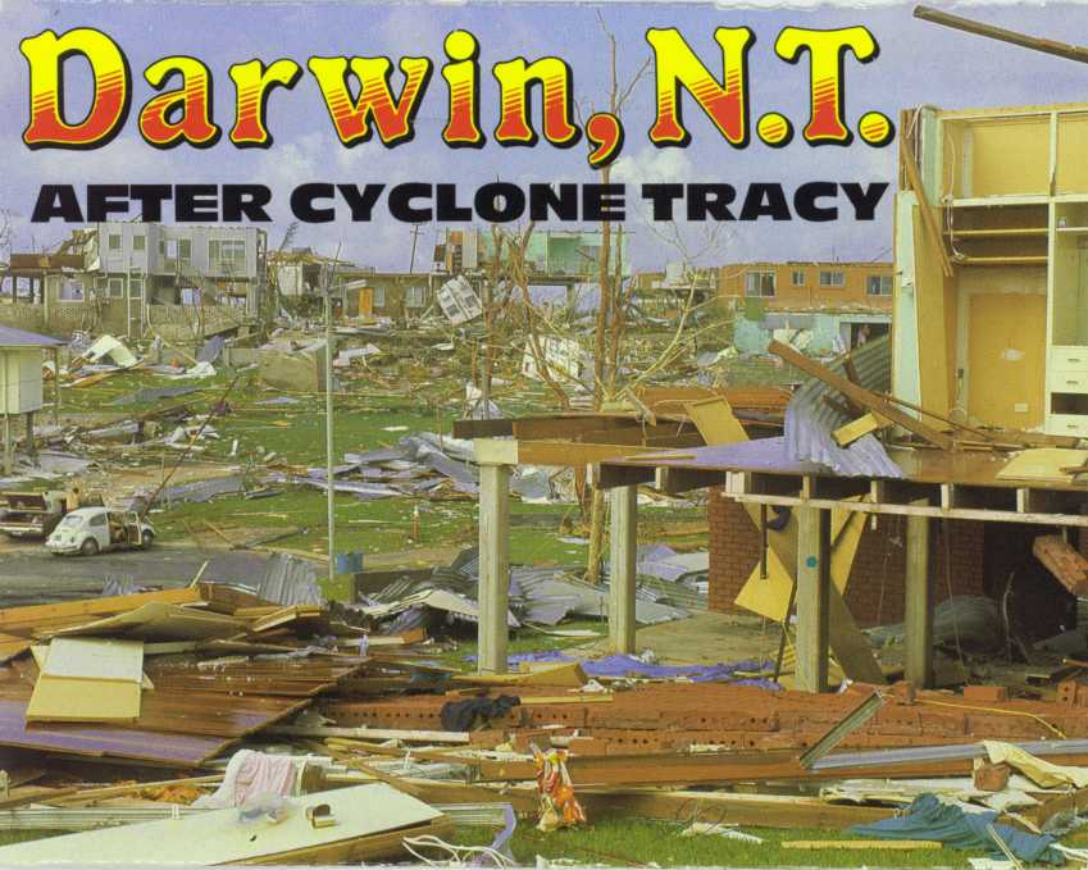
Darwin, N.T.

AFTER CYCLONE TRACY



Smith Street, Darwin.

Three house girders twisted during Cyclone Tracy, now mounted at Casuarina.

A.C.T. Police Rescue Squad on armed patrol.

Cars in the swimming pool of the Travelodge Motel.

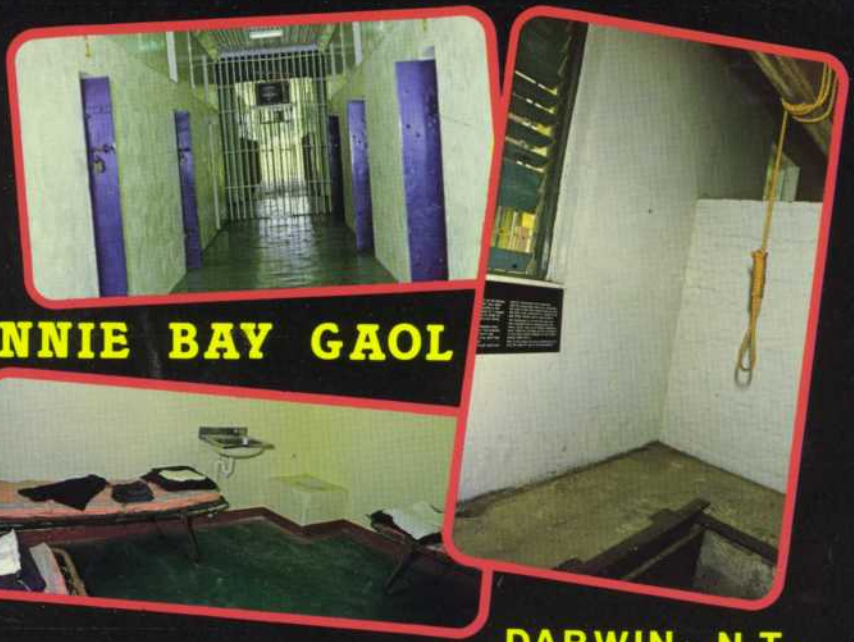
Cavanagh Street, Darwin.

Darwin Airport.

Darwin Harbour.

Fannie Bay Gaol.

A wrecked home in suburban Darwin.



Fannie Bay Gaol partly destroyed by Cyclone Tracy, became a Museum in 1982.

The wreckage in Darwin's northern suburbs.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Darwin, N.T.

after Cyclone Tracy, Xmas 1974.

Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory of Australia, had a population estimated at about 45,000 people in 1974. It was a boom town. The influx of people and money staggered the planners of the city.

In 1974 many of the older residents yearned for the Darwin of the Fifties and Sixties. Those were the days when everyone met in the big saloon bar of the Vic Hotel. However, they built tall, modern hotels and motels around Darwin and the social life changed. The typical Darwin party was a barbecue of buffalo fillet, a dozen cans of cold beer per head, and a few party lights in the back garden. This was the Darwin everyone loved and remembered. This was the Darwin destroyed when Cyclone Tracy roared in on Christmas Eve. The most critical message on that night came from Warrant Officer Maurice Schoer at the R.A.A.F. Cylcone Operations Centre. The message two minutes before midnight on Christmas Eve was brief: "277 degrees 17 miles. Leading edge 3½ miles Charles Point. Indications are will deflect across Charles Point to Darwin." The log of events recorded by the W.R.A.N.S. is probably the most reliable account of the night, when Darwin was clawed and mauled by the most destructive cyclone ever recorded in Australia. At 11.50 p.m. the Met. office said Tracy was travelling south-east 30 km from Darwin. The wind began to howl and sheets of rain pelted down as they huddled in their homes. Many moved into their bathrooms which they were told was the safest place. What they did not know was that at about this time a phenomenon known as "explosive deepening" had begun. Tracy's eye had been large and diffuse. Suddenly the eye started to shrink rapidly, causing an enormous and progressive increase in the ferocity of the wind in the "maximum speed ring" — a band only a few kilometres wide around the eye where the tempest is strongest.

This explosive deepening and possible tornadoes are the explanation for the gross miscalculations of expected wind speeds. There was never any prediction of the severity of winds of more than 300 km/hr. over parts of Darwin.

The W.R.A.N.S. log ends, "04.30. All communications lost. Emergency power available. No knowledge of loss."

Over the next hour, as Tracy moved away to the south-east, the people of Darwin emerged into the rain from their shattered homes to look with disbelief as the dawn illuminated the battered ruins of their city.

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