

Lending a hand to the military



When a deadly relic from World War II was unearthed near Darwin, Customs was ready to assist the military ensure it caused no harm.

Air raids on Darwin Harbour and the surrounding areas lasted almost two years during World War II. Unexploded bombs dropped during these extensive attacks are still being uncovered and need to be disposed of.

At 4pm on 25 July this year, the Australian Defence Forces at Larrakeyah were alerted to a report of an object, its description consistent with that of a WWII aircraft bomb, found on Bear Sandy Island, 65km south-west of Darwin.

Scientists working on the island had reported the object to police.

The object was described as an item of approximately one metre in length with a diameter of approximately 30cm. It had what appeared to be fins at one end and a nose cone of a different metal on the other. The item also had lifting lugs and was covered in oysters.

Bear Sandy Island, at the mouth of Bynoe Harbour, is now a haven for sea turtles. But the island is dented with craters left from previous bomb detonations and also is said to hide the relics of a plane downed during the war.

This rusty relic potentially endangered lives and needed to be examined by bomb disposal experts. Customs was contacted to give assistance.

Customs mission was to transport qualified personnel

to the island, to see that render-safe procedures were carried out and, if required, to assist with the destruction of the bomb.

The Customs Marine Unit needed to transport grade one hazardous substances, that is explosive material and electronic detonators, that the Army explosives specialists required to carry out the task.

Navigation Regulations and Marine Orders were strictly adhered to. Port Authority permission was sought for the loading of the materials. Customs Marine Unit ensured the cargo was stowed securely for safe transportation in consultation with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

All arrangements were in place by 10am the next day and Customs unloaded the Army experts off at the destination by early afternoon on 26 July.

An assessment was made for a controlled detonation. Shrapnel posed a risk so Customs evacuated the island and maintained a tight patrol over the area to make sure no one would be injured. The 200kg bomb was exploded at 2.30pm, sending shrapnel 60m. It was the third unexploded WWII bomb found in three weeks.



top: Leon Pennington (bottom right), from the Joint Ammunition Logistics Organisation, and two other Defence personnel were escorted by Customs marine officers to Bear Sandy Island for the controlled detonation of the bomb. Researchers were evacuated by tender.

bottom: Uncovered on Bear Sandy Island, the object of approximately one metre in length and 30cm in diameter was identified as WWII aircraft bomb.

bottom right: Detonation of the bomb.

