

ARMAGEDDON BREAKS – SAMPLE CHAPTER 1

“A force of 10,000 could be on Australian soil within 48 hours – from now. With the northern airfields in enemy hands, reaction of the Australian forces would certainly take many hours. An enemy need do no more – simply sit there and build up forces.”

Air Marshal David Evans, Weekend Australian, March 31 – April 1, 1990

Port Hedland International Airport Control Tower – 24th October – 0500 hrs Western Standard Time (WST)

Harvey Spiers stared sleepily at his radarscope. No aircraft were expected for another hour and it was running late. Flight XH 6166 had landed half an hour before, the regular cargo flight from Perth via Paraburdoo and Karratha.

He hated those early twice-weekly flights. Now with the resumption of the weekly flight from Bali he had three early morning arrivals including the usual domestic flight AN 342 due at 0830 hours. He rubbed his eyes and checked the clock; it would be 1900 hours before he'd get home. By then he'd be too tired for anything but bed with the possible exception of a romp with his wife.

Outside dawn still lingered as a tan and yellow haze seeped into the grey and black sky absorbing the night. He leaned back in his chair and stared out the window across the tarmac at a terminal that would be almost deserted. It was well lit but Harvey knew that at best three people would be working over there until the Customs guys arrived around 0530 hours.

For a moment he fell asleep and dreamed of the child they were expected next year. He was awoken by his co-worker, Colin Boemann, an energetic young man with a 'moustache' that surrounded his mouth and then spread out along his jaw line. "You want a coffee?" Harvey nodded. "Then you watch the scope; seems to be some air activity out there at sea, probably those naval exercises with Indonesia."

Harvey sat up to take a look. The activity was a long way away and didn't really interest them. If the Australian Navy wanted to play war games with its nearest neighbour, that was their business. It might even improve the strained relations that had existed since the East Timor crisis, which had led to the suspension of the late afternoon Bali flight as Indonesia struggled to prevent its empire disintegrating. He could not understand why they had been rescheduled to such an early hour. It was poorly patronised and obviously unprofitable.

Then he saw the Bali flight on his scope, a BAe 146-200 capable of carrying seventy-three passengers. It was perhaps an hour away but off course; it was too far out to sea and headed for the naval exercise.

“Colin!” he murmured. “Take a look at this!”

Colin was putting the kettle on in the nearby tearoom. He returned quickly. “What are they doing? Best call them,” he suggested.

Harvey put on his head set. “This is Port Hedland Tower to ME 451. Do you read, over?” He waited then he repeated the message before a response arrived.

“This is ME 451.”

“ME 451, you have deviated from your flight plan and are headed towards a naval exercise. Please change your heading and get back on course,” instructed Harvey.

“Correcting course, Port Hedland Tower. ME 451, out.”

“He’s switched off,” said Harvey amazed at the abrupt response.

“Seems to be complying,” observed Colin watching the flight change course. “Time for us to have our coffee,” said Colin with a smile as he slapped Harvey on the back and retreated to the coffee room.

Harvey groaned. He had worked with Colin for ten years and always found his energy in the morning infuriating. He checked the ETA as 0615 hours then got up to join Colin in the tearoom.

Port Hedland BHP Port Helipad – 24th October – 0600 hrs WST

‘Rota’ Reed lifted off in his helicopter to deliver the harbour pilot, Tom Daley to a two hundred and eighty nine metre long tanker from Taiwan. Tom’s job was to guide the huge ships along the forty-two-kilometre channel into the Port.

‘Rota’, whose real name was Robert, had been flying helicopters since the Vietnam War. He’d been nineteen then and still retained his fiery red hair, which had expanded into a wiry beard that covered his face. He’d worked for Hamersley Iron in Dampier for more than twenty years after his charter flight business had failed, then joined BHP for better pay at the turn of the millennium. The aviation business had always been a struggle and ‘Rota’ was not one to plan. He was a man of action, reacting on impulse rather than reasoned thinking.

In the area he was well known as a local character, his loud laugh able to penetrate the noisiest background in the company's wet mess. He was also known for his dog 'Red', a Kelpie cross with a striking resemblance to the legendary Pilbara Wanderer 'Red Dog'.

'Red Dog' in the seventies had become a well-known entity in the Pilbara and among workers in the Dampier region. He was well known for his wanderings and had been sighted as far away as Perth managing to hitchhike his way around Western Australia. In Dampier he had his own seat on the local bus which he affectionately protected by licking anyone who sat in it until they moved. When he died a statue was erected in bronze on the road into Dampier.

'Rota's dog would never achieve the fame of his namesake and had no desire to wander. In fact he tended to stick closely to his master. The only time they were parted was when Rota was aloft and then the dog waited patiently at the helipad. Everyone knew when Rota was returning as the Red would prick up his ears and start barking. This morning was no different. Rota bid farewell and climbed aboard, the blades started up and soon his red and white chopper was rising into the sky and heading out to sea.

"There she is," pointed out Rota a short time later as they approached the tanker. He'd had to shout and point to be heard above the noise of his machine.

"Looks a bit high in the water," observed Tom as they came in closer noting the water line was usually around seventeen metres on these thirty metre high structures.

'Rota' just shrugged. It was no concern of his; he had only to deposit Tom on the deck and head home. He contacted the ship, confirmed their identity and went in to land on the ship's helipad.

Tom emerged to be greeted by the Captain who they'd not met before and was led away.

With a wave, 'Rota' lifted off and returned to base, flying over the Customs launch as it left Port to rendezvous with the same ship checking it for contraband and ship safety.

Many a ship had entered this port and found to be rusted out, threatening to break apart on loading, an event that could close down the port for weeks while the ship was salvaged and removed.

Port Hedland International Airport Terminal – 24th October – 0615 hrs WST

An empty tourist bus pulled up outside the terminal. The airport was quiet, the car park full of cars but no one around. The driver emerged from the vehicle and went inside the terminal. He saw two staff at the Departures desk talking to an unarmed security guard who wished him a good morning. He was dark-skinned and Asian in appearance, but his accent testified that he'd been in Australia a long while, a trait he shared with a large number of the Port Hedland population who had migrated from Indonesia.

At the far end of the Terminal was a Café where two women were usually preparing food for the arriving aircraft. He walked that way to confirm their presence. They knew him and offered him a coffee that he accepted. He sat down near the Quarantine exit at one of the Café tables and waited while confirming that the usual two customs men were on duty.

Port Hedland International Airport Control Tower – 24th October – 0615 hrs WST

Harvey was relieved to see the aircraft finally enter their air space after a two-hour flight and come in for a routine landing on their main southeast runway. Once the aircraft had come to a halt they switched off their radar and decided to have one more coffee to wake them up before the domestic flight due at 0830 hours.

“I hope those guys are suitably reprimanded for their flight deviation,” complained Harvey.

“Lighten up, Harve. So they inconvenienced us. There are more important things to worry about, like wasting too much money on those military exercises, and what for? I read yesterday that this Exercise Crocodile is going to cost \$60 million of taxpayers’ money just so we can be friendly with our neighbours. We could use that back here. Why do we want be friends with them anyhow?”

“I suppose you’re right,” said Harvey not really interested.

Colin lay back in his swivel chair with a smug smile on his face. He loved getting a rise out of Harvey. He was so easy to provoke.

Jindalee Operational Radar Network – Alice Springs – 24th October – 0745 hrs Central Standard Time (CST)

The Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN) had been established as a joint venture with Telstra, Australia’s largest telecommunications company. Originally it was costed at \$700 million, but costs blew out to \$1.8 billion by the twenty-first century due to technical difficulties and bureaucratic naivety. Complexes had been built at Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, Longreach in Queensland and Laverton in Western Australia. Defence budget cuts, staff cuts and a general downsizing of the Defence systems had eventually left Longreach and Laverton deserted, while Alice Springs provided an inefficient and under-maintained system that could attract no further funding by politicians who considered it a failure.

Sergeant Jimmy Parker had worked on JORN for nearly four years. When he’d joined the Navy to become a radar technician he’d expected to be at sea, travelling the world with a girl in every port. In reality, he’d been to sea only once before being posted to the desert. Part of a Tri-service exchange program that put JORN under Joint Services Command and left him there for two billets when the norm was one. He had been promised a transfer but that was unlikely until the end-of-year posting cycle commenced.

He sat down at his blue screen outlining the coast to the North West of Australia, his attention on the joint Naval manoeuvres at sea. There was a lot of activity out there but his system failed to provide details. Based on the principle of bouncing signals off the ionosphere, it was supposed to detect approaching craft up to 7000 kilometres away. This was true, except that it was often unable to distinguish what kind of craft they were, due to intermittent signal distortions such as pre-dawn disruptions that naturally took place in the ionosphere.

Jimmy remembered his first false alarm. It had been at dawn eighteen months ago. He'd identified a hostile flock of birds migrating south for the summer. It had taken months for him to live down the ridicule; even now he was nicknamed "Flock".

His attention had been drawn to the fact that the Indonesian Fleet had drifted south in the night away from the exercise area and closer to the NW Coast. He had verified his readings with the NW Cape Communications Centre, formerly a US Base monitoring the Indian Ocean during the Cold War. It had long since reverted to the Australian Navy and served as a supplementary coastal watch monitor. It confirmed his sighting but as the Indo Fleet had notified the Australian Flagship of its intent to move south for some practice manoeuvres; no one took any notice.

Jimmy now detected two aircraft departing Indonesian space on course for the NW Coast of Australia flying over that same Indonesian Fleet. Hesitantly he called the officer-in-charge who came over to take a look.

"Seeing birds again, Flock?" he asked with a smile. The Sergeant was not amused. "Could be anything. The ionosphere has been a little unstable lately and it's too early in the day to be sure," he replied dismissing the sighting. "Watch it and see where it goes. My guess is it will disappear or turn out to be commercial flights." He administered a condescending slap to Jimmy's shoulder and walked off.

Jimmy resumed his observations, his face flushed. He was determined not to raise the matter again.

Port Hedland International Airport – 24th October – 0630 hrs WST

While Jimmy was considering his shadows, Flight ME 415 came to a halt, three ground crew raced forward. One driving up with the disembarkation steps, another to chock the wheels and a third driving under the aircraft with a tractor and trays to collect the luggage. When the steps were connected one of the Customs men emerged from the Quarantine area and approached the steps. A smiling Indonesian man. who introduced himself as the tour guide, asked permission to enter the terminal and liaise with his bus driver.

"Sure! Just go in through the Quarantine door and Jake will fix you up," replied the Customs officer and began ascending the steps. When he entered the cabin he gasped before a bullet crashed into his skull. There was no sound and the body was dragged out of sight.

The Tour guide entered the enclosed Quarantine area and found Jake standing behind the counter preparing his inkpad for endorsing passports. He looked up as the man entered and smiled. "Good morning. You in charge of this group?" asked Jake, a young enthusiastic man who loved to interact with people.

"Yes, that's right. I wonder if I could have a quick word with our bus driver before you begin processing us?" he asked placing his passport in front of the officer.

"Not a problem. Anything to declare before you go through?" asked Jake lightly.

"Only this," he replied withdrawing a 9 mm Browning Self-Loading pistol. It carried twelve rounds of ammunition and was equipped with a silencer. Jake collapsed behind the counter a bullet in the head.

The guide emerged from the Quarantine area and acknowledged the bus driver still drinking his coffee nearby. As he walked off towards the Departure desk, the bus driver returned to the Café. The women smiled as he approached then their expressions turned to terror as he produced his own pistol and fired. He left the bodies hidden behind the counter and joined the guide who had concealed his victims in the office behind the counter. After checking the airport for other personnel and finding none, the guide returned to the aircraft and unleashed his men.

Aboard were two raider platoons of thirty-two men each, under the command of a Major with support staff of a Captain and two Lieutenants. Each man was trained to be unpredictable, swift and deadly. Their aim was to destroy targets, neutralise opposition and secure Port Hedland for occupation by a larger force.

The ground crew was taken out, their bodies placed in the plane as they spread out to clear the terminal of non-military personnel.

Colin was about to comment on Harvey's lack of staying power, still enjoying his reactions to any hint of criticism, when three armed soldiers burst in.

Both men froze. Their coffee cups slipped from their fingers and smashed unnoticed to the floor.

Port Hedland – 24th October – 0630 hrs WST

The Customs Launch pulled up alongside the tanker and the three men aboard climbed up the ladder to the deck of the ship some sixteen metres above the waterline. The Captain, who escorted them to the inspection hatches, greeted them as they commented on the ship riding high as if ballast was a little light on. They entered the first of nine holds to find it filled with soldiers. The Customs men turned to the Captain in surprise but had no time to ask their question. They were stripped of their uniforms, their replacements returning to

the launch to signal the tugs they were clear to assist the ship in completing its journey into port.

On the Bridge, Tom Daley complied with orders at gunpoint as he communicated with the tugs and the ship began its final leg to the docks.

BHP Iron Ore Security Gate – 24th October – 0650 hrs WST

A four-wheel-drive Toyota Hilux five-seater Ute pulled up outside the security gate. The Tour guide, an Indonesian Major still dressed in casual clothes got out and approached the lone guard inside, speaking with an accent that testified he'd been in Australia a long while. "Hey, mate. Can you direct us?" he asked beckoning the guard over.

Tired and bored, the guard complied. After all, it was part of his job to direct people, and he'd recently been told he was an important part of their Public Relations face. This meant he had to be friendly, even to arseholes. He leaned towards the window a painted smile on his face. "A bit early, mate. Where yah headed?"

The response was unexpected and wiped the smile from his face as the driver pointed a gun at his head and fired. There was no sound from the silenced weapon and the guard felt nothing but a moment of certain doom and fear. His body fell back off the chair onto the floor. Another man emerged from the car dressed as a guard and took over his post; the body was left on the floor of the booth.

The Major returned to the car moved it out of sight, passing the tourist bus down the road, which disgorged its thirty commandos from within. Three made their way into the BHP Loading and Storage Compound keeping to the shadows to avoid detection by the video surveillance cameras placed around the area while the others waited under cover for the all clear.

BHP Iron Ore Surveillance Tower – 24th October – 0655 hrs Western Standard Time (WST)

"What was that?"

The other security officer looked up at the monitor indicated as he stuffed a sandwich in his mouth. "Can't see nothin'," he said returning to his station.

"Thought I saw some movement. There it is again!" he shouted.

The other man looked and this time caught sight of a dark-figure, carrying a rifle. "Sound the alarm!"

Instantly an intruder alert sounded across the compound, activated from the Surveillance Tower atop the main ore screening plant. Suddenly the door imploded and the two men died in a hail of muffled gunfire.

At the main gate a police car pulled up in response to the alarm. The constable dressed in brown shorts and short sleeved shirt that was characteristic of the uniform in the Region, leaned out the window. The security guard stepped outside of his booth and approached the car.

“False alarm,” he reported as the alarm cut out. “Sorry about that”

“Not to worry. See you later,” replied the officer and backed out as the signal went out and the remaining commandoes swept through the plant rounding up or shooting all employees on sight.

They were armed with a mixture of M16 rifles; the Indonesian made FN rifle and the Chinese SKS – all silenced. The port, which never closed, was brightly lit at night to facilitate the operation of cranes and conveyor belts loading ore into 230,000 tonne ships. Ships so big that the crew needed to ride motor bikes from one end to the other. Lights were being turned off as the shadows faded and the heat of the day began to settle over the town.

Simultaneously they took the two Iron Ore Piers at Nelson Point, then the Salt Pier, shutting down operations and eliminating surplus labour. Foreign ships were boarded and communications equipment disabled. Across the channel on Finucane Island the remaining wharf continued operation oblivious of events at its sister wharf.

Other teams worked their way down the docks, securing key points from which an alarm could be sounded and ensuring that when it was time, no one could escape the area. If their plan failed teams they had prepared explosives designed to blow up the port.

The Major having replaced the guard at the gate drove off into Port Hedland towards the Port Authority Tower, which had the appearance of a rusted nineteenth century flying saucer suspended on a pole. Possession of this Tower meant they had the ability to monitor all incoming and outgoing traffic on the water for over thirty kilometres out to sea. He and two others parked their car on the private wharf road running parallel to the Esplanade and entered the unguarded tower. A duty officer at the ground floor desk challenged them but was shot as they entered the lift that took them into the tower itself.

There were three men on duty. All stopped in their tracks when one fell dead as a warning. After that no argument was presented and the Indonesian tanker masquerading as a Taiwanese vessel proceeded into port unchallenged as if nothing had happened. Within its bowels over two thousand soldiers and limited equipment were stored ready to be unleashed on the town and its surrounding provinces.

Port Hedland was now under Indonesian control and the population sat unawares finishing their breakfast and preparing for work.

Port Hedland Airport Quarantine – 24th October – 0745 hrs WST

The guarded door opened and two men were shoved into the quarantine area, nearly falling over as they slammed into the rows of chairs knocking them out of alignment.

One of the guys was a heavy set brawny guy who sweated a lot. He looked like he was in urgent need of a Jenny Craig weight reduction program if he was to survive his impending heart attack. “What is this?” he asked angrily as the door shut in his face.

Harvey recognised him as Neville Ashton, part owner of Pilbara Aviation, a charter flight company that operated from a hanger at the airport. He and his partner Dickson had worked out of the airport for years; he’d spoken with them over the radio many times but never met. “We’re guessing we are guests of some terrorist group that’s taken over the airport,” he replied sitting calmly on the counter, a can of Coke from a nearby dispensing machine in his hand.

“This can’t be happening!” responded Neville.

“I hate this,” shouted Colin becoming anxious. He got up and stared helplessly around the quarantine area of the airport, where they were being held under guard.

“Settle down, Colin. There is nothing we can do. The authorities will find out soon enough and negotiate our release,” reassured Harvey.

“But how could this happen? So much for all that money spent on exercises to be friends with the Indos. We get taken over by terrorists instead,” winged Colin. “What do they want?”

“We all wish we knew that. This is Merv, my mechanic,” said Ashton introducing his companion as he sat down. “I’m Neville Ashton, who are you?”

Colin and Harvey introduced themselves.

“So why kill everyone and leave us alive,” complained Colin.

“Because they have a use for us, sonny,” replied Ashton grimly.

“Oh!” groaned Colin. “So what happens now?”

“I wish I knew,” replied Merv noticing Jake’s body behind the counter.

Great Northern Highway – 24th October – 0730 hrs WST

Manny Burk had been looking forward to this holiday for over a year. He had moved from the East Coast to enjoy the peaceful slower pace of the west, but had never left Perth and never seen the real heart of Australia. He and his wife had decided to take two weeks and drive to Broome, take in the scenery and spend some time together. They had been married only four years, having met at Art School, where they had studied graphic art and started their own business.

They were now on the return trip and after a romantic night camping on the Eighty-Mile Beach near Cape Keraudren; they had got up and watched the dawn before deciding to drive into Port Hedland. They were having a good run no traffic; the road was theirs.

Then it all changed.

“What is that?” he asked, noticing something on the road ahead.

His wife who had been observing the mountains in the distance across the expanse of open flat country and turned to view the road in front. They were approaching an intersection of the Highway and the Iron Ore Railway line to Newman. Just before the railway was a small bridge crossing a dried up creek, known as the Nine-Mile Creek. Beyond were a number of cars parked by the roadside. “Looks like rail track problems,” she grunted, resuming her examination of the mountain backdrop.

As he slowed down it was obvious it was a roadblock; military vehicles and soldiers blocked their way. “What’s the problem?” he asked as an armed soldier approached the car.

“Would you step out of the car?” asked the soldier.

“Why? What is the problem?”

“Would you step out of the car?” he repeated.

Manny looked to his wife and shrugged then stepped out. “Now what?”

“If you would follow that soldier over there for a moment. Then you can go on your way,” directed the soldier.

Manny observed a slight foreign accent. He noticed the uniforms seemed different to those he’d seen on television. Then he remembered that they were conducting some exercise in the area – or was that in Queensland? He followed the soldier into the bushes below the bridge, out of sight of the road. At first it didn’t register what he was looking at. Then it hit him. He turned towards the soldier. “What the...?”

He never finished his sentence. Two bullets tore into his chest, the first piercing his heart, the second exploding through the other side of him in an ugly red blotch which ruined his yellow silk shirt. His wife, about to scream, was silenced by a bullet entering her skull from the left side and blasting away the right side of her face. As their bodies hit the ground, another soldier parked their car with the others, off the road.

Their bodies were placed under the bridge and covered with a tarpaulin to keep the flies off.

Tindal AFB – Katherine NT – – 24th October – 0900 hrs CST

Iktah Krat had worked as an aircraft mechanic at the Air Base for over a year. He'd immigrated to Australia from West Timor and joined the company that had won the contract to service all military aircraft in the Northern Territory. No longer did military personnel service military aircraft; it had been considered cheaper and more efficient for Defence to contract out rather than maintain a costly infrastructure. After all, their core business was to defend the country, not to repair aeroplanes. It was also politically appealing to be handing over business to private enterprise on the basis that government should not be performing any function capable of being performed by the business sector.

Iktah walked in through the unguarded gate as he did every morning; even if it had been guarded; he had his pass. He clocked on, opened up his locker, put on his overalls and walked out onto the tarmac, where sixteen FA18 Fighter planes stood fuelled and ready to fly. No one stopped him as he inspected each plane, leaving a small magnetic device on the underbelly of the craft, out of sight of any ground crew.

Once completed, he went to sick bay and complained of feeling unwell. The doctor could detect nothing wrong; so he sent his patient home to rest. Iktah returned to his locker, removed his overalls and returned home through the unguarded gate.

Jindalee Operational Radar Network – Alice Springs – 24th October – 0930 hrs CST

Jimmy studied the yellow images on his blue screen with growing alarm. He had been watching the bulk of the Indonesian Fleet move south to a position adjacent to the North West Coast, while the Australian Fleet remained in the North. He had intercepted radio communications from naval ships making the same observation; no one seemed concerned so he simply logged the incident. Now he was observing a number of aircraft entering Australian airspace from the northwest. He had been watching them for sometime as they entered into range of JORN, which was only set to monitor just outside the territorial waters of Bali, the closest Indonesian island to Australia.

Despite reassurances from Port Hedland International that these planes had lodged flight plans, Jimmy was concerned. Then a RAAF pilot sent out to check on the Indonesian Fleet had reported sighting a squadron of two Lockheed C-130E Hercules aircraft who had failed

to identify themselves when challenged and an unidentified fighter escort which was rapidly overtaking it. Procedure dictated an urgent response.

“Sir! You’d better take a look at this,” muttered Jimmy nervously.

“What, more geese flying south for the summer?” joked the officer as he leaned over the Sergeant’s shoulder. His face lost its humour after only a second. “What are those?” he asked, pointing to some fast moving craft coming in.

Jimmy stared up at the officer, his stomach doing flips as he considered what was happening. “Fighter planes at a guess, given their speed. If they maintain their present course they will be in our air space within ten minutes.”

Karratha Airport – 24th October – 0800 hrs WST

Two hundred and fifty kilometres to the west of Port Hedland, the approaching aircraft ignored all calls from Karratha Control Tower. The six MIG-23 Flogger aircraft broke formation and swooped in on the airport armed with air to surface missiles and bombs. They carefully avoided the control tower and the main terminal, destroying adjacent buildings, hangers and shooting up the ground crew in an attempt to create panic and confusion while the two Hercules planes landed and deposited their cargo.

Each Herc contained a cut down company of ninety-two troops, equipment and two armoured personnel carriers (APCs). The troop carriers landed, their bellies opened up and troops emerged to complete the takeover. They stormed the terminal shooting anyone they saw but captured the Tower crew alive as they had in Port Hedland. Within ten minutes the airport was secured.

Leaving a platoon of thirty men to hold the airport, the balance split into two forces who were loaded into airport transport vehicles – hire trucks, ground vehicles and buses – from around the airport and led by the APCs. One group moved seven kilometres west to Dampier to secure the Port and the main power supply for the region; the other thirteen kilometres to the east to raid Karratha including Taylor Barracks, the home of the Pilbara Regiment.

The convoy thundered through the outskirts of the sleeping towns unchallenged. A police patrol ignored them. A few civilians woke to peer out their windows at the noise so as to take note of whom to complain about the next day. They moved swiftly to the Parker Point Generator that was the main source of power for all the Hamersley Iron towns in the region. It was gas powered but could be converted back to water turbine drive quickly if the gas supply was cut. It was co-located at the Wharf complex in Dampier, which unlike Port Hedland had little or no electronic surveillance. Security relied upon honest employees flashing their ID through a scanner. The invaders simply crashed through the gates and spread out. They had been carefully briefed on which areas workers were to be maintained

alive; all others were to be extinguished. Prisoners only tied up human resources, and until the Fleet arrived, those resources were few.

Little resistance was met in Dampier and soon the force had split again to cross the causeway to East Intercourse Island to secure the remaining wharf. Within half an hour they had secured the port.

This was not the case in Karratha. The Pilbara Regiment, one of the few operational units in Australia was always on alert for illegal immigrants, contraband and other illegal activities that could compromise national security. They worked closely with local customs authorities and the police and were mainly reservist soldiers who during the week had other jobs.

The alert from JORN via the NW Cape Communications facility had given them less than half an hour to mount a defence of their Barracks with a hand full of regular army soldiers that formed the skeleton administration crew. The alarm was relayed to their subordinate units in Newman, Tom Price, Port Hedland, Exmouth, Carnarvon and Pannawonica. Of course no response came from Port Hedland and updates were forwarded to Canberra as they occurred.

The Defence of Taylor Barracks began about 0830 hours, as observers rather than fighters the army defence had little in the way of heavy artillery, no mines as they were banned weapons in this age of civilised warfare. They had only Steyr rifles and courage.

Reinforcements came in the form of the local Gun Club, reservists answering the call with anyone who had a weapon. They wore no military uniforms; they were civilians, port workers, security guards and local police. They attacked the enemy from the rear, a pitiful few deprived of weapons by national gun laws. Out-gunned they were easily pushed aside. The Regiment put up a better fight but the APCs carried 40 calibre weapons that ripped through their protective cover and reduced their defence to one on one combat where they were outnumbered.

Taylor Barracks took forty-three minutes to fall. There were no survivors but they delayed the enemy advance and caused nineteen casualties among the enemy of which fourteen died of their wounds.

By 0915 WST Port Hedland and Dampier had fallen to the enemy, a national alarm had gone out and as the nation sat stunned its Defence Forces rallied eager to hit back but with a growing realisation that they had been caught unprepared.

The roadblock that had stopped Manny Burk and his wife effectively closed the highway from the north; similar roadblocks were placed at the junction of the Hamersley Iron Access Road and the NW Coastal Highway near Dampier. This isolated the Point Samson Peninsula cutting off its population from the rest of the country.

By mid morning the Indonesian Fleet, carrying another two thousand men plus equipment, was entering the Dampier Archipelago along a man made twenty-four-kilometre channel, some fourteen metres deep, into Dampier Harbour – one of Australia's largest tonnage ports was in enemy hands.