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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 28 September 2015 - Defense against Japanese Air Raids in WWII

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(U) Japan's reach in the South Pacific and Southeast Asia was extensive. Japanese Air Forces bombed the northern Australian city of Darwin; it is likely that they intended to invade this sparsely-populated northern area that was in proximity to places in the Southwest Pacific they had already occupied.



(U) Signals intelligence helped defend against the air raids.

(U) One of the Japanese bases from which these raids were launched was at Koepang in West Timor. The Allies bombed this base to good effect many times; in at least two instances, we know that SIGINT had a major part in the successful pre-emptive raids.

(U) The Australian 51 Wireless Section (WS), located at Coomalie Creek near Darwin, monitored and analyzed Japanese air communications. In February 1943, they monitored the movement of Japanese aircraft; the flight pattern fit the past movement of bombers from Borneo to Koepang a day or two before a raid on Darwin. 51 WS informed the local Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) commander of the expected arrival times for twenty Japanese bombers.

(U) Based on this information, the RAAF raided Koepang on February 28, and destroyed twelve Japanese bombers. Nine others were badly damaged.

(U) Central Bureau in Brisbane (CBB) identified another strike against Koepang, in 1944, that was based on SIGINT. SIGINT had reported the movement of "reinforcements" to Koepang, but noted that the Japanese airplanes had arrived too late in the evening for dispersal into revetments. American bombers arrived at dawn the next morning; they destroyed forty-eight out of fifty enemy aircraft.

(U) The CBB report, found recently at the U.S. National Archives, does not note the exact date of this air victory. The story is also told in a book on Australian SIGINT by Geoffrey Ballard, a former officer at 51 WS. Ballard doesn't mention the date either, but he does say the Japanese airplane movements were plotted by traffic analysis.

(U) Ballard's book, On ULTRA Active Service, is a compendium of Australian SIGINT work with British forces in the Middle East early in World War II, and then in Australia later in the war. Noncirculating copies are available in the Center for Cryptologic History and in the library at the National Cryptologic Museum.

(U) The photograph shows some of the members of 51 Wireless Section at a camp near Darwin.

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