



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Red Sun On The Kangaroo Paw : Japanese Air Raids And Attacks On Western Australia During World War II* by Kevin Gomm. Helvetica Publishing, Perth, 2009, 3rd Edition, 2012. Soft cover, A4, 310 pages, illustrated, portraits, maps, ISBN 978 0 9782231 11, RRP \$40 (or \$49.99 if postage is required).**

Revised and reprinted as a 70th Anniversary 1942-2012 Commemorative Edition, this book includes photographs, eye-witness accounts, newspaper articles, descriptions, and technical information. The author notes that his 'study concerning Japanese air raids is constant and ongoing'. Research of that sort inevitably reveals holes in earlier work and it is good that errors detected in the previous editions of the book have been corrected. Unfortunately, as is often the case in coverage of WA's wartime events, others have been missed. Some of those errors clearly derive from the sources used to compile *Red Sun* and some seem to come from the compilation process.

Kevin Gomm is a history enthusiast who specialises in WA's WWII history and heritage. The strength of his book is in its encyclopaedic content and its state-wide coverage. A chronology (pages 304–305) shows the raids beginning at Wyndham and Broome (3.3.1942). Those that followed were at Broome and Derby (20.3.1942); Wyndham (23.3.1942); Port Hedland (30.7.1942 & 17.8.1942); Broome (27.8.1942); Exmouth Gulf (20.5.1943, 21.5.1943 & 22.5.1943); Broome and Port Hedland (16.8.1943); Onslow (15.9.1943); Exmouth Gulf (16.9.1943); and then Kalumburu (27.9.1943, the last WA air raid). The Wyndham chapter expands on the chronology, starting on 20 February 1942 with the bombing and strafing of M.V. *Koolama*, which was heading for Wyndham. That attack was the first to affect WA.

A key point in *Red Sun On The Kangaroo Paw* is that WA towns were the target of more air strikes than those located elsewhere in Australia. A total of 16 strikes killed more than 85 people and damaged airfields, aircraft, and fuel dumps. Most of the dead were Dutch East Indies refugees killed when nine Japanese fighter planes strafed fifteen flying boats moored in Roebuck Bay for refuelling.

In the book, the chapters are presented place by place, in more or less the sequence of the air strikes. Wyndham is followed by Broome, Derby, Port Hedland, Onslow, Exmouth Gulf, and Kalumburu (18 months after the first strike). Later chapters cover Port Gregory (a submarine attack), 'Naval Operations', Corunna Downs (a secret airbase for long range aircraft), 'Local Defences' and 'Other Raids on Australia' (a new chapter written for this edition).

Helpful sketch plans in some chapters show the positions of airstrips and towns, and the path by which the aircraft approached. Samples can be seen online at [Digger Press](http://www.diggerpress.com.au) (formerly Helvetica Publishing). There is also a map on the inside back cover of the book showing the Allied Theatre Boundaries on 2 July 1942.

Red Sun On The Kangaroo Paw is available from outlets that include Kimberley Bookshop (Broome), the State Library Bookshop (Perth), the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, and Boffins. If ordering direct from the author, send a \$49.99 cheque or money order to Kevin Gomm at PO Box 2186, High Wycombe, WA 6057.

Cathie Clement (January 2013)