

MEDIA RELEASE

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High-tech RFDS tourism drawcard opens in Darwin

Two iconic Australian stories will be told together for the first time in the new Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Tourist Facility which will be open to the public from tomorrow (Wednesday) at Darwin's historic Stokes Hill Wharf.

The latest in computer-generated imagery and virtual reality will be used to allow visitors to experience and learn about the RFDS and the Bombing of Darwin.

Work began on the development in February which will be managed by the RFDS in partnership with NT Tourism and the NT Government.

RFDS Central Operations Chief Executive Officer, John Lynch, said the \$4 million investment by the RFDS represents a significant expansion of the organisation's presence in the NT since it opened the Alice Springs Base in 1939.

"This is an outstanding development which depicts two iconic stories that helped to forge the resolve and resilience of the people of the Northern Territory," Mr Lynch says.

"We see this as an important investment by the RFDS in Darwin and one which will generate tourism activity and contribute new jobs to the local economy.

"The new RFDS facility in Darwin continues our commitment to the Northern Territory and comes on top of \$15 million of resource and infrastructure upgrades to our Alice Springs operations."

NT Chief Minister and Tourism Minister Adam Giles said the new facility would raise the profile of Darwin as a centre for military tourism.

"There is no doubt this fantastic new tourism attraction is world-class; some of the technology is so advanced it's the first time it's ever been used," Mr Giles said.

The new facility uses a range of technology to tell the stories including:

- A full-size replica of a Japanese Zero aircraft
- A video floor under the Zero showing Darwin Harbour as it was in 1942
- A retired RFDS Pilatus PC-12 aircraft
- Holograms to bring to life key characters in the stories including war time Prime Minister John Curtin
- A window allowing visitors to look into 1942 and view a recreation of the bombing of Darwin Harbour
- A replica bomb cutaway to show the inner workings
- Touchscreens and story boards telling the RFDS story

The Darwin facility will feature a life-size hologram of Rear Admiral Etheridge Grant, the Commander of the USS *William B Preston* who will tell the remarkable story of his survival and that of his crew during the bombing.

As with the RFDS Alice Springs Tourist Facility, a life-size hologram of RFDS founder Reverend John Flynn will take visitors through the history of the RFDS from its beginnings in Queensland in 1928 until the present as one of the world's most comprehensive aeromedical organisations.

RFDS NT General Manager Michael Toomey said the aim was to excite and educate visitors about two important and compelling Australian stories.

"Visitors will be able to see a recreation of Darwin Harbour in 1942 and, with the assistance of Rear Admiral Grant, will understand the gravity of the day when war came to Australia's doorstep," Mr Toomey says.

Underneath the Zero aircraft will be a video floor showing an aerial view of Darwin Harbour and sounds effects during the recreation of the bombing will include a vibrating floor. There will also be a glass wall depicting Darwin Harbour in 1942.

An added attraction is the RFDS story will feature an actual decommission aircraft which had flown for the RFDS since 1995 until earlier this year.

The retired Pilatus PC-12 aircraft – VH-FMP – or "Papa", clocked up 17,000 flying hours on emergency retrievals, inter-hospital transfers and more recently, NT Clinic Charter flights around Central Australia.

Visitors will be able to look inside the fully medically-equipped aircraft and get a taste of what the average working day is like for an RFDS crew.

The RFDS Darwin Tourist Facility is to be officially opened tonight by NT Chief Minister Adam Giles who will be joined by RFDS Central Operations Chairman David Hills and Mr Lynch.

RFDS in the NT in 2015/16

- The RFDS had assisted 22,556 patients
- There were 6,661 consultations under our Mental Health Services in Rural and Remotes Areas program in Central Australia
- 2,656 patients were evacuated or transferred
- 1,315 GP and other clinics were conducted

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