Royal Flying Doctor Service to operate new high-tech tourism attraction at Darwin Wharf

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The Royal Flying Doctor Service will invest more than $3 million in a new tourism attraction at Darwin's Stokes Hill Wharf that will feature a virtual reality and holographic experience of the Bombing of Darwin.

Chief Minister and Tourism Minister Adam Giles said the not-for-profit organisation was the successful proponent of a Northern Territory Government Expression of Interest process to fit-out and operate the major new attraction.

"This new attraction, featuring cutting-edge technology, will be the first of its kind in Australia and will showcase the Northern Territory as a leader in World War II history," he said.

"Military tourism is a growing trend with more and more people visiting war memorials, exhibitions and events in Australia and around the world.

"This new attraction will complement the range of other military experiences on offer in Darwin and establish the Northern Territory as the place to come to learn more about Australia’s war history.

"With competition fierce for the tourism dollar around the world, we need to be innovative and this new high tech attraction will help us stand out from the crowd and put the Territory on the map as a must visit holiday attraction."

The new facility will feature virtual reality as well as holographic technology which the Northern Territory Government is currently developing through Tourism NT with the help of the same company responsible for the high-tech visual effects behind blockbuster movies like Mad Max: Fury Road, The Hunger Games and Iron Man.

Royal Flying Doctor Service Central Operations General Manager Northern Territory Michael Toomey said the new RFDS tourist facility in the Top End would bring together two iconic stories in the one location: the RFDS, which began operations in the NT in 1939 and the Bombing of Darwin in 1942.

"Both of these historic events helped forge the resolve and resilience of the people who live in Australia's Northern Territory," Mr Toomey said.

"This investment continues the RFDS’ ongoing commitment in the Northern Territory and comes on top of the $15 million operational and infrastructure upgrades to our Alice Springs operations, including the award-winning RFDS Alice Springs Tourist Facility.

"This project aligns with our strategic objective to expand the RFDS presence in the NT where our emergency aeromedical crews, primary health care teams and on the ground programs assist 17 Territorians every day."

The holographic technology at the new attraction will tell the little known story of the commanding officer of the USS William B Preston, Admiral Etheridge (Jim) Grant, who observed the attack from the water after being blown from his
tender trying to return to his ship.

In a Hollywood-style production, actors, costumes and make-up will all be used to recreate Admiral Grant so visitors will see the attack through his eyes.

On behalf of his family, Admiral Grant's daughter, Margaret Grant Young said: "We are thrilled, honoured and grateful that my father's story is being told to a global audience through the new Bombing of Darwin Wharf attraction. We are very proud of him and his service during WWII and look forward to a new generation of people learning more about this crucial and significant time in history."

Other highlights of the planned new attraction include:

- A suspended full replica Mitsubishi Zero Japanese war plane of the time;
- A replica bomb (cut away to show the workings);
- A video floor located under the Zero Aircraft showing an aerial view of the harbour. The visitor would stand on the edge of the video floor and experience the "bomb view" and bomb blasting on Darwin along with floor movement and smell;
- A glass wall facing the ocean (harbour projection wall) with imagery projected on to it, giving the visitor a feeling of the harbour in 1942 with the Japanese aircraft flying in bombing the harbour and flying over the facility;
- Mini holograms using ghost host technology to deliver interactivity of Prime Minister John Curtin and an Indigenous person as well as RFDS founder John Flynn and an RFDS nurse;
- A Pilatus PC 12 aircraft, depicting what a fully equipped RFDS flying intensive care unit is like; and
- Touch screen portals that provide an insight into the operations of the RFDS.

Work on the fit-out of the new facility is expected to begin in March with the attraction planned to be open by mid-July this year.

Mr Giles said a thriving tourism industry helped boost local business, create jobs and grow the Territory economy.

"It's all part of the Country Liberal Government's plan to drive the development of North Australia and build a $2.2 billion visitor economy by 2020," he said.

Watch a preview of what the proposed new tourist attraction could look like here: https://youtu.be/O-0vR5NjMTM (Note: this is a concept video only and not historically accurate)

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Photo of Admiral Etheridge Grant (jpg 134.3 kb)