

MEDIA RELEASE

WWII Motorcycle returns to Darwin Harbour

A World War II motorcycle will be returned to Darwin Harbour tomorrow (Tues, 30 August), 14 years after it was salvaged from a sunken naval ship.

The rusty remains of the historic 1938 Birmingham Small Arms (BSA) M20 motorcycle will be positioned on the ship wreck of the *Mauna Loa*, which was sunk by Japanese aircraft bombers on February 19, 1942.

Curator of Maritime Archaeology and History of the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT (MAGNT), Paul Clark, said the difficulties in preserving the motorcycle and its rapid deterioration sealed its fate in returning to the ocean.

“Although the motorcycle has been stored in a specially designed tank and kept wet, its composite metal construction has continued to deteriorate over the years,” Mr Clark said.

“With the motorcycle comprising different material types, such as stainless steel, copper, iron, rubber and plastic - its preservation has been difficult, as each material requires specialist treatment.

“To conserve it effectively would require separating each component for individual treatment, and sadly this is no longer possible due to the deteriorated state of the motorcycle.”

The motorcycle was salvaged from the wreck of the *Mauna Loa* in 1991 by Australian Navy Divers and donated to the MAGNT.

It was then used in a 1992 display to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first air raid on Darwin by Japanese aircraft on February 19, 1942 and has intermittently been on public display since.

Mr Clark said it was a fitting end that the motorcycle was to be returned to Darwin’s Harbour.

“Darwin Harbour is unique in Australian maritime history having the highest concentration of WWII ship and aircraft sites in Australia,” he said.

“Since the motorcycle originates from one of these nine historic sites, which are protected under the Heritage Conservation Act 1991, it’s appropriate that it be returned now that its useful museum life is over.

“Our harbour is one of the few places in Australia people can dive and explore this country’s maritime history and these shipwrecks are something that should be visited for generations to come.”

Mr Clark said the motorcycle, made in 1938 by the Birmingham Small Arms (BSA) Company, under orders from the ‘War Office’, was a small, but heavily built motorcycle used for dispatch and scout riding by the British Army and their allies.

Thousands of these robust little motorcycles were built and numerous examples have survived today, including several found in transport museums around the world.

He said it is even still possible to buy a BSA – M20 via the Internet today, or buy a replacement exhaust system for an existing one.

Mr Clark said the wealth of history on Darwin Harbour's floor was immense and the recent discoveries of the vessels the *Booya* and the *Darwin Princess*, both lost during Cyclone Tracy, indicate the harbour still has many secrets to share.

Mr Clark encouraged members of the public to report possible historic sites and objects found in the NT to MAGNT or the Office of Environment and Heritage so long term conservation and management strategies can be implemented.

Media note: for more information contact Paul Clark on 8999 8283

Ends.

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