Australian National University

THESES SIS/LIBRARY
R.G. MENZIES LIBRARY BUILDING NO:2
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
CANBERRA ACT 0200 AUSTRALIA

TELEPHONE: +61 2 6125 4631
FACSIMILE: +61 2 6125 4063
EMAIL: library.theses@anu.edu.au

USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes
of private study and research only.
Passages from the thesis may not be
copied or closely paraphrased without the
written consent of the author.

AUSTRALIA AND ALLIED STRATEGY IN THE PACIFIC 1941-1946

by

Major D.M. Horner R.A.Infantry

Volume I

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of International Relations
Australian National University
October 1980

This thesis is my own original work; however some material (less than ten pages in all), in chapters four and seven and appendix three, has appeared previously in my book *Crisis of Command, Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943*, (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978).

D.M. Horner

David Murray HORNER

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of Australian political and military strategy during and after the Second World War. In 1941-42 Australia was faced with a particularly difficult situation, for at a time of great national danger she was beset with a change of government, a change of major alliance partners and a change of geopolitical strategy. The ensuing problems had to be resolved by a small group of political and military leaders and public servants.

They had to operate within close limitations. First, the country had a small population and weak economy, and was largely unprepared for war. Second, strategic decisions had to be made in a framework of coalition war with Britain and America. Third, Australia lacked its own intelligence and diplomatic services. Fourth, attitudes of reliance upon British advice in particular, and external advice in general, were deeply ingrained. Fifth, partly as a result of the above considerations, Australian decision-planners lacked experience in matters of strategy and foreign policy.

Australia's experience during the Second World War revealed a lack of a sophisticated and coherent approach to national strategic decision-making. The Prime Minister, John Curtin, deferred to the Allied Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas MacArthur, on questions which should have been decided by the Australian government alone. The attempts of the Australian Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Thomas Blamey, to advocate a policy designed to serve Australia's national interests were often ignored by the government. And because the government both lacked experience of military affairs and distrusted the military, it relied heavily upon the guidance of the civilian Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Frederick Shedden.

Nevertheless, during the war Australia made important advances in her capacity to make independent strategic decisions and to secure an independent voice and role in allied strategy. An indigenous intelligence organisation was developed, the Department of External Affairs was expanded, and the Australian armed services achieved a high international reputation on the battlefield. Finally, Australia secured leadership of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. The Second World War was a major turning point in Australia's evolution as an independent nation. An important part of that evolution was the development of Australia's capacity to formulate its own national strategic and foreign policies and to undertake independent military action in support of those policies.

Australia's experience during the Second World War provides vital lessons for the present. The principal lesson is the need for adequate organisational machinery for strategic decision-making; and political and military leaders and public servants must be trained and prepared to deal with politico-strategic problems. There are, however, other important lessons; accurate intelligence is crucial, mobilisation procedures need to be examined, principles need to be established and officers trained for inter-allied cooperation, and the Australian forces need to possess the ability to operate independently. Nevertheless, despite changes in science and technology and in the world balance of power, strategic decision-making still relies primarily upon the judgement of individuals. Although there were shortcomings in strategic decision-making in the Second World War, in the long term Australia's interests did not suffer greatly because of them. If similar shortcomings are displayed in the future, the nation may not be so fortunate.

CONTENTS

	Page
List of Illustrations	viii
List of Maps	xii
Abbreviations	xiii
Acknowledgements	xvi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: BEFORE PEARL HARBOUR, September 1939-December 1941	16
1. The Organisation for Strategic Decision-Making in Australia	16
2. Strategic Decision-Making before Pearl Harbour	32
3. The New Government	50
CHAPTER TWO: AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING, December 1941-February 1942	58
1. The Situation in Australia	58
2. Danger in Malaya	64
3. Focus on Washington	69
4. Strategic Analysis versus Politics and Emotion	72
5. The Destination of the 1st Australian Corps	87
6. The Fate of Blackforce	105
CHAPTER THREE: BATTLEFIELD CO-OPERATION WITH THE BRITISH, 1941-1942	115
1. The Role of GOC AIF, Malaya	116
2. British Criticisms of the Australians	122
3. Australian Representation on HQ ABDA Command	129

Page

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGY IN THE SWPA, March 1942-January 1943 135

1. MacArthur's Plans for the Defence of Australia 135
2. MacArthur's Impact on Australian Strategic Policy 151
3. The Command Framework 173
4. Strategic Assessment during the Papuan Campaign 196

CHAPTER FIVE: ALLIED INTELLIGENCE CO-OPERATION IN THE SWPA 214

1. Early Developments in Australia 214
2. Special Intelligence after Pearl Harbour 220
3. Other Intelligence Activities 229
4. Co-operation in Special Intelligence 235

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGY IN THE SWPA, January-December 1943 246

1. Strategic Planning in January 1943 246
2. Changing the Allied Command Structure 256
3. Securing Additional Forces for the SWPA 260
4. MacArthur's Role in Formulating Australian National Policy 272
5. Blamey's Influence on Strategy 282
6. A Divergence of Views 293

CHAPTER SEVEN: BATTLEFIELD CO-OPERATION WITH THE AMERICANS, 1942-1943 312

1. The Impact of American Failure at Buna 316
2. Incidents at Nassau and Tambu Bays 323
3. Planning for Lae 329
4. The Dispute over the Reinforcement of Finschhafen 334

CHAPTER EIGHT: AUSTRALIA AND ALLIED STRATEGY, January-May 1944 342

1. No News from Sextant 342
2. Strategy in the Balance in the SWPA 352
3. Sagacious Advice from MacArthur 355
4. Australian Attitudes on the Eve of Curtin's Overseas Visit 361
5. Developments during Curtin's Journey to England 367
6. Strategic Discussions in London 373

Page

CHAPTER NINE: AUSTRALIA AND THE PHILIPPINES CAMPAIGN, June-October 1944 388

1. The American Debate over the Philippines 388
2. A Serious Miscalculation by General Blamey 390
3. The Basing of United Kingdom Forces in Australia 397
4. Sincerity, *Armour-Propre* and Loyalty 405
5. Uncertain Plans for the Philippines 416
6. The Leyte Landing 423

CHAPTER TEN: THE FINAL ROLE OF THE AMF, October 1944-July 1945 435

1. Uncertainty over the Employment of the 1st Australian Corps 435
2. A Feeling of Being Side-Tracked 441
3. MacArthur's Plans for the 6th Division 446
4. The High Command Organisation for the Final Phase 450
5. The Manila Conference 459
6. The North Borneo Campaign 463
7. Criticism of the Operations of the First Australian Army 469
8. Blamey's Forward Planning 478
9. Blamey's Offensive Policy 484

CHAPTER ELEVEN: AN OCCUPATION FORCE FOR JAPAN, 1945-1946 493

1. Australian Proposals for a Reduced War Effort 493
2. The Commonwealth Contribution to the Invasion of Japan 500
3. The Japanese Surrender and the Question of an Occupation Force 508
4. Securing American Agreement 516
5. The MacArthur/Northcott Agreement 523
6. Problems of Commanding the Occupation Force 523

CONCLUSION 542

APPENDICES 567

BIBLIOGRAPHY 703

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Following Page
Sir Frederick Shedden	26
Three Prime Ministers in Two Months	49
John Curtin	49
J.B. Chifley	53
Dr H.V. Evatt	53
J.A. Beasley	54
F.M. Forde	54
The Governor-General reading the war proclamation	68
V.G. Bowden, Australian Representative in Singapore	68
Commodore J.A. Collins and Major General H.G. Bennett	68
Nelson T. Johnson, US Minister to Australia	87
Admiral Sir Guy Royle	87
General Sir Archibald Wavell	97
Sir Earle Page, Accredited Australian Representative to UK War Cabinet	97
Lieutenant-General V.A.H. Sturdee	101
Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival	128
Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall	128
Major General A.J. Boase	128
Blamey and Lavarack at HQ 1st Army	146
F.M. Forde and Blamey at a military review	146
MacArthur on his arrival in Melbourne	151
MacArthur and Curtin in Canberra	151
MacArthur and Curtin at the Advisory War Council	152
MacArthur with Forde and Chifley	152
Lieutenant-General Richard K. Sutherland	190

	Following Page
Blamey with General Robertson and Brigadier Ferguson	190
Major-General G.A. Vasey	191
Blamey with Lieutenant-General Bennett	191
Lieutenant-General S.F. Rowell	205
Forde, MacArthur, Blamey and Kenney in New Guinea	205
Curtin with Bennett and General Lloyd	209
Curtin inspecting troops	209
Commander R.B.M. Long	219
Major-General C.H. Simpson	219
Brigadier J.D. Rogers	234
Brigadier K.A. Wills	234
Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger	260
Battle of the Bismarck Sea	260
Dr H.V. Evatt in New York, June 1943	268
Sir Owen Dixon, Australian Minister to the USA	268
Curtin and MacArthur, 7 June 1943	279
Advisory War Council, 10 November 1943	279
Krueger and MacArthur at Milne Bay	287
Herring and MacArthur in Port Moresby	287
Blamey and Eichelberger at Buna	321
Eichelberger, Herring and Blamey	321
Vasey and Colonel Jens A. Doe	322
Lieutenant-General R.L. Eichelberger	322
Nassau Bay	323
Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring	323
Major-General S.G. Savige	323
Brigadier-General Stephen J. Chamberlin	334

Following Page

Rear-Admiral Daniel Barbey and Brigadier R.N.L. Hopkins 334

Peter Fraser, Prime Minister of New Zealand 355

Curtin and MacArthur, 17 March 1944 355

Curtin and MacArthur at a Parliamentary dinner 355

Curtin in England 385

Lieutenant-General F.H. Berryman 391

Blamey on the Atherton Tableland 391

Blamey returning to Melbourne 391

Brigadier C.M.L. Elliott 397

The British Service Mission to Australia 397

Commander H.M. Burrell 400

Blamey and Brigadier Rogers 400

Brigadier L. de L. Barham 408

Lieutenant-General H. Lumsden 408

Forward Echelon Land Headquarters 435

Senior staff at Forward Echelon LHQ 435

MacArthur and Kenney at Leyte 436

Blamey and Krueger at Leyte 436

Rear-Admiral Royal, Lieutenant-General Morshead and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock 466

E.J. Ward and Lieutenant-Colonel A.A. Conlon 466

Blamey and Berryman with Major-General J.S. Stevens 477

Senator J.M. Fraser on Bougainville 477

Balikpapan, 1 July 1945 477

The Australian Chiefs of Staff 501

Blamey at a press conference, 9 July 1945 501

Bostock, Lieutenant-General Gairdner and Berryman 501

The Australian delegation to the surrender ceremony 512

	Following Page
Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack	512
Chifley, Shedden and Northcott	534
MacArthur, Chifley and Northcott	534
Lieutenant-General H.C.H. Robertson	538
Lieutenant-General Charles Gairdner	538
Dr H.V. Evatt arriving in Washington	567
Air Commodore Jones and Bostock with Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett	600
Air Marshal Sir George Jones	600
Lieutenant-General George H. Brett	602
Air Vice Marshal Jones and General Kenney	602
Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser and Vice-Admiral C.S. Daniel	632
Admiral Royle and General Blamey	663
Forde with Robertson and Major-General C.E.M. Lloyd	663

LIST OF MAPS

		Following Page
MAP 1:	The ABDACOM Area.	71
MAP 2:	The Japanese Advance Through the Netherlands Indies and to Rabaul.	87
MAP 3:	The Conquest of Malaya.	115
MAP 4:	The Boundaries of the South-West Pacific Area and the Extent of the Japanese Advance.	134
MAP 5:	Axes of Advance, Papuan Campaign.	196
MAP 6:	The Cartwheel Operations.	282
MAP 7:	Operations, Nassau Bay to Salamaua.	323
MAP 8:	The Envelopment of the Huon Peninsula.	334
MAP 9:	The Westward Drive along New Guinea.	354
MAP 10:	The Far East, Possible Strategies, May-June 1944.	372
MAP 11:	The 'Musketeer II' Plan.	416
MAP 12:	The Borneo Operations, May-July 1945.	468.
MAP 13:	Australian Operations in Eastern New Guinea, New Britain, and Bougainville.	472
MAP 14:	The 'Downfall' Plan for the Invasion of Japan, 28 May 1945.	504

ABBREVIATIONS

AAF	American Air Force.
ABDA	American British Dutch Australian (Command).
AGS	Allied Geographic Section.
AIB	Allied Intelligence Bureau.
AIF	Australian Imperial Force.
ALF	Allied Land Forces.
ALP	Australian Labor Party.
AMF	Australian Military Forces.
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit.
ANU	Australian National University.
AOA	Air Officer-in-Charge of Administration.
AOC	Air Officer Commanding.
AOC-in-C	Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Section.
AWM	Australian War Memorial.
BCOF	British Commonwealth Occupation Force.
BGS	Brigadier, General Staff.
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff.
CB	Central Bureau.
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff.
CG	Commanding General.
CGS	Chief of the General Staff.
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief.
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff.
C of S	Chief of Staff.
COIC	Combined Operational Intelligence Centre.

COS	Chiefs of Staff.
CRS	Commander, Royal Artillery (of a division).
DAFP	*Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*.
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff.
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff.
DCOS	Deputy Chiefs of Staff.
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence.
DORCA	Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs.
ISD	Inter-Allied Services Department.
FECB	Far East Combined Bureau.
FELO	Far East Liaison Office.
G2	Intelligence Branch on an American Army headquarters.
G3	Operations Branch on an American Army headquarters.
G4	Supply branch on an American Army headquarters.
GCCS	Government Code and Cypher School.
GHQ	General Headquarters.
GOC	General Officer Commanding.
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief.
GSO1	General Staff Officer, Grade 1.
HMSO	His (Her) Majesty's Stationery Office.
HQ	Headquarters.
JCOSA	Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia.
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff.
LGA	Lieutenant-General-in-charge of Administration.
LHQ	Land Headquarters.
L of C	Lines of Communication.
MIS	Military Intelligence Service.
NEFIS III	Netherlands Forces Intelligence Section, Division III.
NEI	Netherlands East Indies.

NGF	New Guinea Force.
NLA	National Library of Australia.
OCMH	Office of the Chief of Military History.
PRO	Public Record Office.
PRS	Philippine Regional Section.
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force.
RAN	Royal Australian Navy.
RN	Royal Navy.
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve.
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer.
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.
SEAC	South-East Asia Command.
SIA	Secret Intelligence Australia.
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SIB	Special Intelligence Bureau
SLU	Special Liaison Unit.
SOA	Special Operations Australia.
SOE	Special Operations Executive.
SRD	Services Reconnaissance Department.
SWPA	South-West Pacific Area.
USAFIA	United States Army Forces in Australia.
UAP	United Australia Party.
USN	United States Navy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Robert O'Neill, Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, who reviewed the work with meticulous care. I have benefited greatly from his wisdom and advice not only whilst undertaking this study, but over the years from the time when in 1967 he encouraged a young staff cadet, who had never previously studied history, to believe that he might be capable of undertaking post-graduate studies.

I am grateful to Professor Theodore Ropp of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, who read and provided helpful comments on the penultimate draft of the thesis. I also thank Professor F.H. Hinsley, the British official historian for intelligence in the Second World War, Sir Alan Watt, Professor W.E.H. Stanner, Dr P.A. Towle, Brigadier Sir Frederick Chilton, Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Burrell and Air Commodore A.D. Garrison who read and commented upon individual chapters.

By sponsoring my appointment as a Long Term Student the Director of Infantry of the Australian Army made this thesis possible. Both the Army and the Australian National University assisted me to travel widely in Australia and overseas to undertake interviews and study in various libraries and research centres. I would like to record my appreciation to the retired officers who gave generously of their time in replying to letters and sitting through long interviews. Their names are recorded in the bibliography.

I received valuable assistance from the staff of the Australian War Memorial, particularly Mr Peter Holmes, and from the staff of the Australian Archives, especially Ms Jennifer Stokes. Thanks are also due to the staffs of the National Library of Australia, the Imperial

War Museum, the Public Record Office, the US National Archives and the MacArthur Memorial. Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Berryman generously allowed me to take away his private papers.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor J.D.B. Miller and the Department of International Relations for providing an excellent working environment, and to Mrs Shirley Steer and Mrs Lynn McLeod for typing the manuscript. My wife Sigrid, and my children Jolyon and Ingrid, graciously tolerated and unfailingly supported a husband and father who at times must have seemed slightly distracted from the normal demands of the family.

INTRODUCTION

> If the strategy be wrong, the skill of the general on the battlefield, the valour of the soldier, the brilliance of the victory, however otherwise decisive, fail of their effort.
>
> Alfred Thayer Mahan,
> *Naval Administration and Warfare*[1]

This study is primarily concerned with two matters; first, the national direction of war, or strategic decision-making, and second, the problem of strategic co-operation between allies. In other words, the theme is strategy. Jomini defines strategy as 'the art of directing the greater part of the forces of an army on to the most important point of a theatre of war, or a zone of operations',[2] but strategy now has a wider meaning. Liddell Hart describes it as 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy'.[3] The highest level of strategy, which integrates national and alliance policies with operations by armed forces, has been called grand strategy.[4] In Liddell Hart's view, the role of grand strategy is 'to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war - the goal defined by fundamental policy.[5] The unprecedented global and coalition warfare of the Second

---

1. Quoted in John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy, Principles and Practices* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1973), p.237.

2. M. Howard, 'Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought' in M. Howard (ed), *The Theory and Practice of War, Essays Presented to Captain B.J. Liddell Hart* (Cassell, London, 1965), p.16.

3. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, The Indirect Approach*, 4th Edition (Faber and Faber, London, 1967), p.335.

4. E.M. Earle (ed), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1943), p.viii.

5. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, The Indirect Approach*, pp.335, 336.

World War lifted strategy further than ever before out of the purely military sphere into the field of politics and international relations.[6]

To some writers, the Second World War was a major turning point in strategic analysis. For example John Lukacs has written:

> During the Second World War the sharp lines separating war and peace, and soldiers from civilians - distinctions that may have been one of the most important achievements of European civilization after the seventeenth century - were being washed away. Perhaps this was the most important - and ultimately the most barbaric - development of the war.[7]

That is, strategy no longer involved merely the armed forces, but the whole community. And with the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and the onset of the cold war, further definitions of strategy were developed. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff have found Liddell Hart's definitions to be inadequate for the present age, and they have reversed his approach. In his celebrated chapter on 'The Theory of Strategy' Liddell Hart sees 'military strategy' as 'pure strategy' and describes it as 'the art of the general'. Grand strategy is a higher art, and although Liddell Hart recognises it as important, he concentrates on military strategy.[8] The US Joint Chiefs begin their definitions with national strategy, which they describe as:

> The art and science of developing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives.

National objectives are the fundamental aims, goals, or purposes of a nation towards which a policy is directed and efforts and resources of

---

6. M. Matloff, 'Strategy', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 21 (Chicago, 1972), p.289.

7. John Lukacs, *The Last European War, September 1939/December 1941* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977), p.239.

8. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, The Indirect Approach*, Chapter XIV.

the nation are applied. Military strategy accordingly is defined as:

> The art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force, or the threat of force.[9]

The advantage of the US definitions is that they cover equally the states of peace and war. But it might also be argued that since many countries, such as Australia, have no readily discernible national strategy in times of peace, recognition should be given to a field of strategy which falls somewhere between the national and military levels. Perhaps it might be called politico-military strategy. It would embrace strategic decisions and policy which involve the use of arms, diplomacy and perhaps trade, but which stop short of attempting to marshal the full resources of the country.[10] It may well be important to develop a national strategy, but until one exists it is hardly relevant to use the term in attempting to analyse actual strategic policies.[11]

Whatever the current situation, the pressure of the Second World War forced the Australian leaders to plan in terms of a grand or national strategy for at least the duration of the war. And for a study of Australian strategic decision-making during the war Liddell Hart's definition of grand strategy may be considered adequate.

---

9. The US definitions are given in the Australian *Joint Services Staff Manual*, JSP (AS) 101. For an argument that the JCS definitions are more relevant than those of Liddell Hart see Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew P. O'Meara, 'Strategy and the Military Professionals', *Military Review*, January 1980.

10. The Australian services have adopted the US definition of military strategy but not of national strategy. However the Australians do agree with the US definition of strategy: 'The art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychological, and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford the maximum support to policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favourable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat'. Perhaps this definition describes the strategic decisions made by the Australian government.

11. For a discussion of an approach to developing national strategy in Australia see Lieutenant-Colonel J.S. Baker, 'The Requirements of National Strategy', *Defence Force Journal*, No.10, May/June 1978.

Liddell Hart listed some of the elements of grand strategy. These include economic resources and manpower, moral resources, diplomatic, financial, commercial and ethical pressures, and the distribution of power between the services and industry. He noted that grand strategy looks beyond war to peace. 'The sorry state of peace, for both sides, that has followed most wars can be traced to the fact that, unlike strategy, the realm of grand strategy is for the most part *terra incognita* - still awaiting exploration and understanding'.[12]

Just as there are few studies of Australian generalship, so too are there few analyses of Australian strategic decision-making in times of war.[13] Although the tactical battles - the exploits of individual soldiers, units, aircraft and ships - have been well covered in the official histories, unit histories and personal accounts, the great strategic decisions, as they affected Australia, have received less attention. It is true that they are recorded in the official histories, but as a backdrop to the battles and as an explanation of why the fighting took place. There is little attempt to delineate in a comprehensive fashion the development of national war policy and how it meshed with the grand strategy of the allied coalition.

During the Second World War Australian strategic decision-making made two important steps forward. In the first place, unlike during the First World War, Australia demanded some influence over the strategic

---

12. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, The Indirect Approach*, p.336.

13. Australian defence decision-making has been dealt with to some degree in D.M. Horner, *Crisis of Command, Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat* (ANU Press, Canberra, 1978); and J.M. McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence 1919-39* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1976). There are a number of theses on the subject and these are listed in the bibliography. Aspects of Australian strategic decision-making are covered in most volumes of the official war histories, but not in a comprehensive fashion. The best account is in the two civil volumes by Hasluck.

use of her forces. In the second place, Australia had to argue not only with Britain regarding the use of her forces in an imperial context, but also with the leaders of the Grand Alliance in a global context.

As the war progressed the various elements of Australian grand strategy changed in emphasis. At the outbreak of war the overriding consideration was the British connection. Indeed R.G. Menzies, the Australian Prime Minister, set the tone when he announced that because Britain had declared war on Germany, 'as a result, Australia is also at war'.[14] This pronouncement was not quite as forthright as Andrew Fisher's pledge in 1914 to support Britain 'to our last man and our last shilling',[15] because the Australian government had some reservations, Support for the British connection had to be balanced against the development of capabilities to resist the threat posed by Japan to Australia's security. Yet eventually the government agreed to send an expeditionary force to help Britain, the major ships of the RAN were placed under Admiralty control, and the Empire Air Training Scheme was initiated. By early 1940 all three Service Chiefs in Australia were seconded British officers.

After Japan entered the war, national security from direct attack rapidly became the most important element in the Australian government's strategic policy, but it was soon to be matched by the problems of co-operating with the Americans. As the Japanese threat receded, the problems of managing relations with the United States became of increasing importance. Whereas at the beginning of the war the dominant consideration had been the British connection, four years later it was

---

14. Broadcast Message by R.G. Menzies, 3 September 1939, R.G. Neale (ed), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49, Volume II, 1939* (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976), p.221. Hereafter described as *DAFP*.

15. E. Scott, *Australia During the War* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938), p.22.

the American connection, and much of this study is concerned with Australian attempts to influence American strategy. This aim was pursued at two levels: politically in Washington with Roosevelt and the Combined Chiefs of Staff and to a lesser extent through Churchill to the Combined Chiefs; and militarily through the headquarters of General Douglas MacArthur. In the first case Australia had almost negligible influence; but the Canadians, who were geographically closer and on more intimate terms with their larger allies, achieved little more.[16] However in the second case Australia had more opportunity to influence strategy than other minor powers. The Canadians, despite having troops in Italy and north-west Europe, had less access to Eisenhower and Alexander than Curtin and Blamey had to MacArthur. Thus while Australia's influence was limited, it was brought to bear with unusual directness.

A major element of Australian grand strategy was the problem of national resources, particularly allocation of manpower and provision of equipment for the forces raised. This problem persisted throughout the war. It affected Australia's ability to send troops to Malaya and, as the war progressed, became the most important factor in determining the magnitude and hence the location of the Australian military effort.[17] This work does not examine Australian manpower planning except to note the restrictions it placed upon Australian strategy.[18]

There were a number of other facets to the problem of shaping Australian grand strategy. One was the momentum of previous decisions. The Singapore strategy locked Australia into a defence system from which

---

16. It might be observed that of the dominions, Australia and Canada had the most analagous and yet the least comparable experiences during the Second World War.

17. It should be noted that throughout the thesis, except when used as part of the official designation, Australian Military Forces, the term military is used in its broadest sense to include army, navy and airforce.

18. For an account of manpower planning see P. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1941-1945* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970), Ch.5; S.J. Butlin, *War Economy, 1939-1942* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1955), Ch.14; and S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy, 1942-1945* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977), Ch.2 and 14.

she escaped only after the fall of that ill-fated island. Similarly, decisions such as the establishment of the Empire Air Training Scheme, the sending of three divisions to the Middle East, and the formation of the South-West Pacific Command for combined operations under American leadership, affected later strategy in a way which was not perceived at the time. With respect to American strategy, Maurice Matloff has commented:

> As U.S. Military resources poured swiftly into the Pacific, American strategists learned that forces in being had a way of generating their own strategy. Ground and air forces concentrated in Australia after the Japanese sweep through the Western Pacific area could not be left idle.[19]

From the Australian point of view this was a fortunate consequence.

As the war progressed, Australia's post-war aims became an increasingly important element in strategic policy. Whereas American strategic policy-making tended to lose sight of the post-war aims, particularly in Europe,[20] the Australian government became increasingly concerned about the nature of the peace in the Pacific. The United States' failure was caused in part by the Joint Chiefs of Staff who exercised wide powers and applied military criteria to political situations.[21] Military men did not gain similar power in Britain or Australia. Also, the Americans saw something sinister in the nature of the British concern for the post-war order in Europe. But it should be recalled that, as Liddell Hart has emphasised, the aim of Grand Strategy should be

---

19. M. Matloff, 'The American Approach to War, 1919-1945' in M. Howard (ed), *The Theory and Practice of War*, p.237.

20. A more extreme critique of American strategy is found in J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789-1961* (Eyre Methuen, London, 1972), pp.239-310. Maurice Matloff, the US Army's chief historian, agrees that the US was least successful in the area of grand strategy; by contrast with that of military strategy. There was no grand design for war and peace. M. Matloff, 'The American Approach to War, 1919-1945', p.241.

21. S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1957), p.344. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789-1961*, p.273.

to secure peace.[22] Montgomery has observed that if this aim is not understood by statesmen, 'they will throw away the fruits of tremendous sacrifices and all the slaughter will have been useless'.[23]

Effective tactics and military strategy are much easier to design if the general knows the enemy's plans. So too with grand strategy. Hence intelligence is a vital element in decision-making. But how much should be shared with allies? The sharing of intelligence in the Second World War was one of the more remarkable manifestations of allied co-operation.

The organisation for strategic decision-making in Australia during the Second World War is discussed in Chapter One, but two general problems should be mentioned here. After working in a number of allied headquarters during the Second World War, the Australian-born Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry set out to examine the nature of the higher direction of war. He wrote:

> the more I reflected, the clearer it became that Political Direction and High Command are concerned so essentially with personalities and those antinomies of human nature in war or peace that all other considerations are secondary.[24]

This view is highly relevant to Australian higher direction in the Second World War.[25] Indeed the relationship between MacArthur, Curtin and Blamey cannot be understood without examining their personalities.

---

22. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, the Indirect Approach*, p.336. Michael Howard has also stressed this aspect. M. Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (Temple Smith, London, 1970), p.197.

23. Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery, *A History of Warfare* (Collins, London, 1968), p.552.

24. Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, *The Higher Direction of War* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1955), p.13.

25. Most participants interviewed by the author mentioned this factor. Major-General L. de L. Barham, who was Blamey's chief operational staff officer for the last years of the war, stressed that many of the decisions taken could only be understood in the light of the personalities of Blamey and MacArthur. Interview, 11 December 1978.

Nothing illustrates this factor better than MacArthur's statement, 'I shall return'.[26]

Entwined with the problem of personalities is that of the command relationships between the generals and the politicians, and between the different national generals in allied forces. In any discussion of strategic decision-making it is therefore necessary to delineate the chain of command responsibility. With respect to Australia it is important to examine what influence Blamey was able to exert as Commander of the Allied Land Forces.

A word should be said about the general problems of coalition warfare. As one writer has observed:

> Wartime allies, like mistresses, should be selected with circumspection and deliberation. To enter into hasty or emotion-inspired transitory attachments, be they for private or public reasons, is to invite disaster embracing a relationship marked for persistent turbulence that begins with musunderstanding intent and ends with vexatious dissolution.[27]

How much more unstable is an alliance likely to be between two unequally balanced military powers? Since the Second World War a number of books have appeared suggesting that in both the military and political spheres of the war Australian wishes were disregarded by the great powers.[28] Some of their authors assume that Australia ought to have been an equal ally with Britain and the USA and thus have no difficulty in proving fault when they reveal that Australia was not, in fact, an equal ally. Nevertheless, Australia did have a special relationship with the USA

---

26. W. Manchester, *American Caesar, Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Hutchinson, Melbourne, 1979), p.271.

27. J.B. Agnew, 'The Improbable Alliance: The Central Powers and Coalition Warfare 1914-1918', *Parameters*, Vol.I, Winter 1972.

28. For example, Roger Bell, *Unequal Allies, Australian-American Relations and the Pacific War* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1977); P. Firkins, *Australians in Nine Wars* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1971); Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne, Man of Two Worlds* (Heinemann, London, 1965).

and Britain, which gave her unique access to decisions on global strategy. Furthermore, even if Australia could not determine where her forces should be employed, she had every right to have a voice in the matter. And in the final analysis, Australian leaders could always withhold the use of these forces if they disagreed with a proposed operation. In this way Australia had a continuous influence over allied strategy. It is more worthwhile, therefore, to examine how far Australia positively influenced allied strategy, than to catalogue those occasions when Australian wishes were ignored. The test of a coalition is not whether all parties are completely happy, but rather whether or not the coalition works.

In the interests of military efficiency it has been shown to be preferable that power should be concentrated in a committee of alliance representatives, although the smaller the committee the better it is in terms of military efficiency. National sovereignty may have to be sacrificed to keep the committee small. This system, however, is open to the danger that the great powers may make decisions in accord with their own interests and sweep aside those of the lesser powers.[29] They may use the argument of military efficiency to justify retention of supreme authority in their own hands exclusively, as the Americans did in the Pacific from 1942. The only solution to this problem is for the lesser powers, such as Australia, through agitation, to convince the great powers that they are acting contrary to their own long-term interests. In this respect public opinion may play a part, but political leaders must use it carefully in order to preserve the strength of the coalition.

---

29. It is worth observing that in the later stages of the Second World War even the United Kingdom found difficulty in maintaining what it considered its proper status in strategic decision-making against the growing power and assertiveness of the United States. Churchill wrote to Smuts on 3 December 1944, 'it is not so easy as it used to be for me to get things done'. Quoted in C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments, The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1970), p.137, fn.

On balance it appears that Australia's case was well and strongly put to the great powers. Menzies, Casey, Bruce, Curtin and Evatt did not allow Churchill and Roosevelt to forget that Australia had her own special interests. This Australian attitude contrasted with that of Canada under MacKenzie King. However, after the war, British politicians criticised Canadian leaders for not concerning themselves, as Australia had, over the higher direction of the war.[30] There is an old saying that 'the creaking wheel gets the grease'.

If Australia's leaders felt compelled to put their case strongly, they were amply justified in doing so. Not only were they frequently not consulted by Britain and the United States on military matters concerning Australia,[31] but also they were sometimes given little information of the progress of the war. Churchill actively sought to limit the information provided and bullied the Dominions Office to this end.[32] Indeed Churchill preferred that the really important information

---

30. *Ibid.*, pp.186, 187.

31. For example, the Australian government was not consulted before the Dakar operation in September 1940, despite the fact that an Australian cruiser was taking part. The Australian government agreed to the campaign in Greece in April 1941 after it was led to believe by the British government that General Blamey concurred. But Blamey in fact opposed the campaign. During the last years of the war thousands of RAAF aircrew were involved in the strategic bombing campaign over Europe, but the Australian government was not consulted about the wisdom of the campaign, and in fact could have used the aircrews to advantage elsewhere.

32. For example, on Christmas Day 1940 he wrote: 'No departure in principle is contemplated from the practice of keeping the Dominions informed fully of the progress of the war. Specially full information must necessarily be given in respect of theatres where Dominion troops are serving, but it is not necessary to circulate this to the other Dominions not affected. Anyhow, on the whole an effort should be made not to scatter so much deadly and secret information over this very large circle ... While therefore there is no change in principle, there should be considerable soft-peddling in practice. I wish to be consulted before anything of a very secret nature, especially anything referring to operations or current movements, is sent out'. Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume II, Their Finest Hour* (Cassell, London, 1949), p.631.

should be transmitted only on a prime minister to prime minister basis. His concern for secrecy can be understood, but as a Canadian historian has put it:

> One would scarcely think, sometimes, that the communities he is excluding are mature nations having the closest ties with Britain, making enormous contributions to the prosecution of the war and possessing governments of the highest degree of responsibility.[33]

And as the war continued Churchill's attitude scarcely changed.[34]

There are two major levels of allied co-operation: grand strategy, involving political leaders, diplomats and chiefs of staff; and battlefield co-operation. The two interact and at times individuals may find themselves operating in both spheres, as did MacArthur, with his unique independence of action as Commander-in-Chief of the South-West Pacific Area.

Although many volumes have been written on coalition warfare at the highest level, relatively few works deal with battlefield co-operation. For diplomats and politicians, coalition warfare at the highest level is a natural extension of their profession, but the soldier who can manage the forces of a coalition is a rare figure. As Martin Blumenson noted:

> To reach that stratospheric position and remain there, he must be aggressive, bold, ruthless and enterprising - in short, he has to possess all the traditional military virtues. He is then told to do a job that requires tact, tolerance, forbearance,

---

33. Stacey, *op.cit.*, p.154.

34. In a memorandum to the Cabinet secretary on 27 February 1942 he detailed the Cabinet arrangements for the next week: 'Monday, 5.30 PM at No.10, General parade, with the Constant Attenders, the Chiefs of Staff and the Dominions and Indian representatives. Business: the general war situation, without reference to special secret matters such as forthcoming operations; and other appropriate topics'. Churchill, *op.cit.*, Volume IV, p.78.

> with patience - qualities that had little to do with his previous advancement.[35]

For most of the war Australian military leaders were involved in battlefield co-operation with allies. In major campaigns from Libya in 1941 to Borneo in 1945, Australian army commanders either were under the command of an ally, or they themselves commanded allied forces. Australian naval and air commanders invariably found themselves subordinate to allied commanders.

Just as the decisions at the conference table affected the outcome of battles, so too the outcome of battles affected Australia's status in allied councils. For a small power, performance on the battlefield and military credibility influences the notice taken of her military and political leaders. The failure of the Australians to halt the Japanese in the early stages of operations on the Kokoda Trail increased MacArthur's influence over Curtin and Blamey. The abject failure of the Americans at Buna gave Blamey leverage to resist MacArthur's designs. But, when the coalition includes a great and a minor power, the great power can afford failures and retain its dominant position. The lesser power, if its forces do not perform well, suffers an immediate loss of influence.

* * * * *

What is there to learn from a study of Australian strategy and its relationship to allied grand strategy in the Second World War?

---

35. M. Blumenson and J.L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1975), p.244. Wavell also recognised the difficulties of a military coalition when he wrote: 'There is no doubt of the principal stumbling-block to good relations and fruitful combination of resources: it is national pride and susceptibility. And there is also no doubt that the principal agent to resolve the difficulties and to create harmony is the personality of the leading commanders ... It may be seen irrelevant to judge a general on his relations with his Government or his power to deal with his allies, yet these are almost always important factors; and a general who cannot obtain the confidence of his Government, and persuade them of the soundness of his plans or dissuade them from unsound strategy, or who quarrels with his allies, may forfeit both fame and victory'. Field Marshal Earl Wavell, *Soldiers and Soldiering* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1952), pp.84, 85.

Probably Clausewitz's most often quoted dictum is that 'war is a mere continuation of policy by other means'.[36] In his view all wars are to be regarded as political acts and to understand this aspect of war is 'the first, the grandest, and most decisive act of judgment which the Statesmen and General could make'. It is 'the first, the most comprehensive, of all strategical questions'.[37] Any campaign which does not further the aims of national policy is a waste of blood and effort. Therefore, the most fundamental questions concerning a nation's war effort are not those concerned with performance on the battlefield, nor those of national administration, but those relating to the advancement of policy objectives; in other words, the planning and execution of national strategy.

This study is concerned essentially with these matters. General Fuller wrote of the Americans in the Second World War that

> they did not know how to wage war, and in consequence they did not know to make peace. They looked upon war as a lethal game in which the trophy was victory.[38]

Many of the factors which caused this situation in America also existed in Australia, which, like America, had not previously been involved continuously and consistently in international politics. The government had not developed a coherent national strategy for the consistent pursuit of political goals by a combination of diplomatic and military efforts. But except for the period when Australia was directly threatened by invasion, Australia had only a minor role in the lethal game, and

---

36. R.A. Leonard (ed), *A Short Guide to Clausewitz on War* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967), p.57.

37. *Ibid.*, pp.58, 59. See also the edition of Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976), pp.87, 88, 89, which translates the above statements as: 'War is merely the continuation of policy by other means'; 'the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make'; 'the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive'.

38. Fuller, *op.cit.*, p.308.

therefore the government felt it necessary to examine closely the relevance of this role in terms of its own national interest. In the light of these remarks, to what degree could it be said that Australia, like the United States, fell into the trap described above by Fuller; and given Australia's limited resources and influence, how successful were Australian decision-makers in ensuring that the nation received full value for the blood shed by its armed forces.

CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE PEARL HARBOUR, September 1939-December 1941

The Organisation for Strategic Decision-Making in Australia

In a modern democracy Grand Strategy, the highest level of military decision-making, is not the province of military men. As Sir John Fortescue put it:

> Generals with their armies and admirals with their fleets are mere weapons wielded by the hand of the statesman. It is for him to decide when to strike, where to strike and how to strike.[1]

Nevertheless, the greatest problem in the conduct of war lies in the relationship between a government and the technical heads of the service departments. Indeed Lord Haldane wrote that he knew 'of few questions military or constitutional in which such obscurity prevails as in those concerned with the higher direction of war'.[2]

It was not always so. In earlier centuries the difference between civil and military leaders was small, and in fact soldiers and statesmen were usually interchangeable, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Henry V, Gustavus Adolphus, Cromwell and Marlborough are but a few examples. Even when generals such as Wellington in Spain were clearly subordinate and responsible to the government, the length of communications from the political masters to the battlefield ensured a high degree of independence.

---

1. Ford Lecture 1911, quoted in Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1946), p.vii. Alfred Thayer Mahan has also written on this question: 'The office of the statesman is to determine and to indicate to the military authorities the national interests most vital to be defended as well as the objects of conquest or destruction most injurious to the enemy'. *Ibid.*

2. Quoted in F.A. Johnson, *Defence by Committee, The British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885-2959* (Oxford University Press, London, 1960), p.123.

Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Rowell, who in New Guinea in 1942 was sacked as a result of the lack of military understanding by the Prime Minister, observed that:

> It must have been a great relief for Wellington not to be called up by radio-telephone each night by his Prime Minister, and not to have a constant flow of political snoopers arriving by jet aircraft at the airfield nearest his headquarters in Spain.[3]

Perhaps the first modern war where a democratically elected civilian leader could exercise close strategic control over his generals was the American Civil War. President Lincoln has been criticised for abusing this new capability, but undoubtedly by doing so he saved the Union. Nevertheless, he understood completely the different roles of politicians and generals. Thus he wrote to General Ulysses Grant:

> The particulars of your plans I neither know nor seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and, pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you. While I am very anxious that any great disaster, or the capture of our men in great numbers shall be avoided, I know these points are less likely to escape your attention than they would be mine. If there is anything wanting which is within my power to give, do not fail to let me know it.[4]

But while giving freedom to Grant for the execution of military strategy, Lincoln retained control of grand strategy.

The bitter controversy between the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and his Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, in the First World War is a prime example of the difficulties of modern civil-military relations. Perhaps it was the genius of Winston Churchill which made the system work in the Second World War, but the brilliant work of Sir Maurice Hankey between the wars on

---

3. Paper entitled 'Co-operation Between Allies in Time of War', Rowell Papers, AWM.

4. B. Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1970), p.177.

the Committee of Imperial Defence provided a secretariat which eased the tension between the politicians and the military leaders. After the USA, entered the Second World War the Americans took up many (but not all) of the aspects of the British system.

Just as in Britain the development of the machinery for strategic decision-making was dominated by one man, Hankey, so too in Australia. Indeed it is scarcely possible to separate a discussion of the Australian machinery from an account of the work of Sir Frederick Shedden. Furthermore, from his key position within the machinery Shedden was able to influence the direction of strategic policy to a degree which has not been generally recognised.

Shedden was well qualified for his role. He had joined the Department of Defence in 1910 before his seventeenth birthday, and in the First World War he served overseas as a young pay officer with the task of reorganising the AIF pay system. In 1928 he attended the Imperial Defence College where the commandant was Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond.[5] The following year he carried out research on financial administration in London. Then in 1932 and 1933 he was attached to the British Cabinet Office and the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Here he came under the influence of Hankey, and by correspondence and by visits during his trips to London with respective Australian Prime Ministers, Shedden maintained a friendship with both Hankey and Richmond.[6] It is from his relationship with Hankey and Richmond that Shedden developed his belief in 'blue water strategy' and Imperial Defence,[7] and Hasluck

---

5. For a biography of Richmond see Arthur J. Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1960). Richmond's ideas were elaborated in many books; perhaps the best was *Statesmen and Sea Power*.

6. Interview with Mr S. Landau, Shedden's wartime personal assistant, 14 December 1978; Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Volume III (Collins, London, 1974), pp.127, 136, 487, 498, 502, 588, 590-2, 606. When Hankey visited Australia in 1934 Shedden was assigned to him as ADC; MP 1217, Boxes 73, 75, Overseas Personal Correspondence.

7. Landau interview, 14 December 1978.

thought that it was 'due to him, rather than to any other single influence, that Australian defence policy in pre-war years was linked so closely to British thinking ... Shedden worked neatly and assiduously under the guidance of London'.[8] Nevertheless, Shedden claimed that he was an exponent of Australia's sovereign rights in defence matters,[9] and after he visited London with Menzies in early 1941 he was more critical of British policy.

It was not surprising that Shedden's appointment in November 1937, at the age of 44 years, as Secretary of the Department of Defence, heralded a period of 'revolution in the Department's approach to its tasks and a sharp rise in the range and quality of its work'.[10] Significantly, the first matter dealt with by Shedden on his appointment was a rearrangement of his responsibilities so that he could concentrate on the policy side of the department and be freed from administration.[11] Shedden's influence during the war can be gauged by the fact that from the time of his appointment until 1946 (which is the limit of this thesis), when he was still Secretary, there were seven Ministers of Defence,[12] five Chiefs of the General Staff,[13] four Chiefs of the Naval Staff,[14] and four Chiefs of the Air Staff.[15]

---

8. Sir Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness, Australian Foreign Affairs 1941-1947*, (Melbourne University Press, 1980), pp.12, 13.

9. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 4 March 1944, Blamey Papers 154.1.

10. W. Perry, 'Sir Frederick Shedden, 1893-1971, An Appreciation', *The Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol.42, No.3, August 1971.

11. Cabinet Agendum signed by J.A. Lyons as Minister of Defence, 22 November 1937, MP 1217, Box 1021.

12. These were J.A. Lyons, H.V.C. Thorby, G.A. Street, R.G. Menzies, J. Curtin, J.A. Beasley and F.M. Forde. Other ministers acted as Ministers of Defence (or Defence Coordination) at various times.

13. Major-General J.D. Lavarack, Lieutenant-General E.K. Squires, General Sir Brudenell White, Lieutenant-Generals V.A.H. Sturdee and J. Northcott.

14. Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Hyde, Admirals Sir Ragnar Colvin, Sir Guy Royle and Sir Louis Hamilton.

15. Air Vice-Marshal R. Williams, Air Vice-Marshal S.J. Goble, (Acting), Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, Air Vice-Marshal G. Jones.

Acting on his experience with the Committee of Imperial Defence, Shedden initiated work on the War Book, which set out in detail the various measures to be adopted by the armed services and by the departments both in the precautionary stage and in the war stage. Communications, proclamations, plans and Cabinet submissions were prepared and held in readiness.[16] Furthermore, he sought to organise the Australian war administration along the lines established by Hankey in Britain. Although the British system influenced Australia, there were fundamental differences. In Britain there was no separate Deaprtment of Defence, and although there was eventually a Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, the main body for co-ordination was the Committee of Imperial Defence and its various sub-committees. After the outbreak of war the War Cabinet Defence Committee took over the role of the Committee of Imperial Defence, but the sub-committee system remained.[17]

Theoretically the Defence Committee (Operations), presided over by the Prime Minister and attended by selected cabinet ministers and the service chiefs, decided British war policy, but as the war progressed Churchill attended many Chiefs of Staff Committee meetings. It was this latter forum, to which cabinet ministers were invited on an ad hoc basis, which was the focal point of the British war strategy. The work of Sir Hastings Ismay, Churchill's Chief of Staff, representative on the Chiefs of Staff Committee and secretary to the Defence Committee, should not be overlooked, but his role was to oil the machinery, not to provide its impetus.[18] This came from the extraordinary dynamo of Winston Churchill, balanced by the more cautious Chiefs of Staff.

---

16. For a description of the war book in further detail see Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, pp.122-142.

17. For an account of the Defence Committee see F.A. Johnson, *op.cit.*

18. For a personal account of Ismay's role see his autobiography, *The Memoirs of General the Lord Ismay*, (Heinemann, London, 1960). Also James Leasor, *War at the Top* (Michael Joseph, London, 1959), for an account of Ismay's deputy,General Sir Leslie Hollis. See also an untitled chapter by Sir Ian Jacob, Ismay's other deputy, in J. Wheeler-Bennett (ed), *Action This Day, Working with Churchill* (Macmillan, London, 1968).

In Australia, the equivalent of the British Defence Committee was the Council of Defence, which, less the official and service members, on the outbreak of war became the War Cabinet, and this was the controlling body for the higher direction of the war.[19] In was, in effect, an executive sub-committee of the Cabinet in matters relating to the active conduct of the war. The secretariat of the Council of Defence became the secretariat of the War Cabinet, but unlike the Council of Defence the War Cabinet did not incorporate service representatives, although these could be called upon when required. Two defence bodies, however, did provide advice to the War Cabinet. The Chiefs of Staff Committee, which was created on 4 September 1939, consisted of the Chiefs of Staff of the three services, and it gave advice in regard to operational matters and strategic appreciations. A larger body, the Defence Committee, which included the Chiefs of Staff, an officer of the secretariat of the Department of Defence, and on occasions the Controller-General of Munitions, the Controller of Civil Aviation, and the Chairman of the Principal Supply Officer's Committee, gave advice on defence policy as a whole.[20]

Then in October 1940, in an effort to involve the Opposition, another body was formed to offer advice to the War Cabinet. This was the Advisory War Council, which included members of all the parliamentary parties. The party system continued to function as in peace-time, but the Council gave increased stability to the government and enabled Parliament to function more smoothly. Furthermore, experience on the Council proved extremely valuable to Curtin and his senior ministers when they found themsleves forming the government a year later.[21]

---

19. For planning documents indicating that the War Cabinet would include the ministers and secretariat of the Council of Defence see MP 1217, Box 462. See also Cabinet Minute 194, 26 September 1939 and attached documents in *DAFP*, Vol.II, pp.286-293.

20. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.439.

21. Interview with Mr S. Landau, Shedden's personal assistant, 14 December 1978.

Until the arrival of General MacArthur in early 1942, and even then to some extent, the Advisory War Council was the focal point of Australian strategic decision-making. Although it had only an advisory capacity the presence of four or five cabinet ministers meant that Advisory War Council minutes could be and often were accepted as War Cabinet minutes. During the crucial period of the war the important strategic decisions were determined by the Advisory War Council and ratified immediately as War Cabinet decisions. As with the War Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff could be called upon to attend, and General Rowell recalled attending a Council meeting in early 1942: 'I had to contend with three King's Counsel's (sic) in Menzies, Spender and Hughes, and it wasn't roses all the way by any means'.[22]

The above organisation for strategic decision-making in Australia worked tolerably well for the first two years of the war. The Chiefs of Staff offered advice on questions such as the strengths and deployment of the forces, and, when requested, provided appreciations on the defence of Australia. But the fundamental weakness was the absence of an organisation to provide for the high level joint operational command of the forces. The Chiefs of Staff exercised no joint and little service command function. General Blamey, the Commander of the Second Australian Imperial Force in the Middle East, was responsible not to the CGS or even to the Chiefs of Staff, but directly to the Minister for the Army. The lack of high level command machinery did not seem important while the Australian forces were operating overseas under British commanders,

---

22. S.F. Rowell, *Full Circle* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1974), p.104. The Australian system resembled that of Britain in the First World War, the drawbacks of which have been described by General Sir Frederick Maurice: 'The method of having the Chiefs of Staff in attendance at War Cabinet meetings involved great waste of the time of the Chiefs of Staff and they were rarely as ready to speak their minds at War Cabinet meetings as they would be to a Prime Minister with whom they were in close association'. Maurice to Churchill, 14 February 1942, quoted in W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume IV, The Hinge of Fate* (Cassell, London, 1951), p.79.

but when in mid 1941 the government began consideration of the defence of Australia, problems arose. And, as will be recounted, after Japan entered the war the question of high level command became vital.

Although this thesis is concerned with strategic decision-making, it should not be forgotten that strategy and defence were but a part of the overall responsibility of the government. Thus both the Menzies and Curtin governments developed cabinet committees to handle the economic mobilisation of the country's resources. And the Full Cabinet continued to deal with the legislative programme, budgetary proposals and miscellaneous matters.

Nevertheless, domestic questions were dominated by the overriding importance of defence policy which was decided in the War Cabinet. In the Menzies government in 1941, the War Cabinet consisted of Menzies who was the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Coordination, A.W. Fadden, the Treasurer, W.M. Hughes, the Attorney-General and Minister for the Navy, P.C. Spender, the Minister for the Army, J. McEwen, the Minister for Air and Civil Aviation, Senator Foll, the Minister for the Interior and Information and Senator McBride, the Minister for Supply and Development and for Munitions. Of the above ministers, Menzies, Fadden, Hughes, Spender and McBride were original members of the Advisory War Council. McEwen joined in August 1941 and McBride left in October 1941.

Significantly, the Minister for External Affairs, Sir Frederick Stewart, was not included in the War Cabinet or Advisory War Council, and his absence emphasises the lack of influence and importance of the Department of External Affairs.[23] The Australian High Commissioner in London reported directly to the Prime Minister's Department, and in mid 1941 Australia had diplomatic representatives in only four other

---

23. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.7.

countries, USA, Japan, China and Canada. While it is true that John McEwen, as Minister for External Affairs in 1940, played a significant part in Australian efforts to assist the coup in New Caledonia,[24] there is little other evidence to indicate that the Department of External Affairs influenced strategic decision-making before the Japanese attack. By contrast, as P.G. Edwards has observed, the Australian High Commissioner in London, the former Prime Minister, S.M. Bruce, 'was more important in Australian external policy than any of the succession of Ministers for External Affairs between 1939 and 1941'.[25] And if the Department of External Affairs had little effect on strategic and defence policy-making, the other non-service departments had even less.

The change in government in October 1941 brought only a slight change in emphasis. With Doctor Herbert Evatt as Minister the Department of External Affairs expanded its scope and increased in importance, but his suspicion of officers of the Department hindered the efficiency of its operations.[26] For all Evatt's energy, bluster and noise his influence on strategic policy-making was not paramount.

---

24. Margot Simington, 'Australia and the New Caledonia Coup d'etat of 1940', *Australian Outlook*, Vol.30, No.1, April 1976; idem, 'Australia and New Caledonia, October 1940-January 1941: A Case in Australian Foreign Policy Making', *RMC Historical Journal*, No.3, 1974.

25. P.G. Edwards, 'Menzies and the Imperial Connection 1939-1941', in C. Hazlehurst (ed), *Australian Conservatism, Essays in Twentieth Century Political History* (ANU Press, Canberra, 1979), p.207. For an expansion of this point see P.G. Edwards, 'The Rise and Fall of the High Commissioner: S.M. Bruce in London, 1933-1945', in A.F. Maddern and W.H. Morris-Jones, *Australia and Britain, Essays on a Changing Relationship* (Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1980).

26. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.14 and Ch.3.

For the first year or more of the Labor government, the Prime Minister, John Curtin, and Evatt worked closely together, but by 1943 there were increasing signs of both personal and political differences. As P.G. Edwards has observed:

> Two rival centres of [foreign] policy-making were being formed. Curtin, as Minister for Defence as well as Prime Minister, was advised principally by MacArthur, Shedden and the defence establishment, while Evatt drew about him a coterie of friends, and selected members of the Department of External Affairs. The one placed emphasis on smoothing Australian relations with both the United Kingdom and the United States: the other tended to assert Australian independence of the great powers.[27]

As with the Menzies government, ultimate power in the Labor government rested with the War Cabinet which consisted of Curtin, the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Coordination, F.M. Forde, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Army, J.B. Chifley, the Treasurer, Dr Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs and Attorney-General, J.A. Beasley, the Minister for Supply and Development, N.J.O. Makin, the Minister for the Navy and for Munitions, A.S. Drakeford, the Minister for Air and for Civil Aviation, and after 11 December 1941, J.J. Dedman, the Minister for War Organisation of Industry. Of the above ministers, Curtin, Forde, Beasley, Makin and Evatt were members of the Advisory War Council. Although Chifley attended on occasions when other members were absent, he did not become a member of the Council until July 1945, when, after the death of Curtin, he became Prime Minister.

Despite the increasing influence of Evatt and the Department of External Affairs in the area of diplomacy and foreign policy, and despite the impact of the Departments of the Treasury, Post-War Restruction, and War Organisation of Industry on the attempts to balance the

---

27. P.G. Edwards, 'Evatt and the Americans', *Historical Studies*, Vol.18, No.73, October 1979. Later in the war, on 19 January 1944, the UK High Commission reported to the Dominions Office: 'Relations between the Prime Minister and Evatt are not good. It seems that there is a tendency for the two to work in watertight compartments'. Cable 74, PREM 4 42/2.

war effort, the most important department with respect to war policy in general, and strategic and defence policy in particular, was the Department of Defence.[28] It will be of value, therefore, to examine further the role of the department, which for a while was known as the Department of Defence Co-ordination, and of its permanent head, Shedden.

While in Britain there was no separate Department of Defence before the war, in Australia there were no separate service departments. But at the outbreak of war as a result of Shedden's initiative, the Department of Defence was abolished, and the Department of Defence Co-ordination was established to control the newly formed departments of Navy, Army, Air and Supply and Development. The Prime Minister became the Minister of Defence Co-ordination, and Shedden continued as the permanent head of the new department. Throughout the war, under the various Prime Ministers - Menzies, Fadden, Curtin and Chifley - the department was the linch-pin of the Australian war effort. Hasluck has explained how the various groups worked together.

> The Department of Defence Co-ordination (and, after April 1942, the Department of Defence) was in fact the central and, in some respects, the supreme component of the machinery for the higher direction of the war because, throughout the war, the Prime Minister himself held the portfolio of Defence Co-ordination or of Defence; the department was the Secretariat of War Cabinet and all business flowing to and from War Cabinet passed through it; and its organisation embraced the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee for both of which it provided the secretariat, as well as being represented on the Defence Committee.[29]

---

28. In *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.471, Hasluck wrote that the Treasury took 'a lively interest in higher policy and the organisation of the war effort ... On such a question as the production of tanks in Australia Treasury now argued grand strategy ... with the greatest assurance'. Nevertheless the Treasury did not play an important role in strategic decision-making when compared with the Department of Defence.

29. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.443. In fact during the short period when Fadden was Prime Minister R.G. Menzies remained the Minister for Defence Co-ordination. When Curtin died in July 1945 and Chifley became Prime Minister the Minister of Defence was J.A. Beasley.

Sir Frederick Shedden, Secretary of the Department of Defence, 1937-1956.

(National Library of Australia, Negative No.L6626)

When it is remembered that Shedden remained as secretary of the department throughout the war, his great influence can be understood. Furthermore, when, after MacArthur arrived in Australia, the Prime Minister, John Curtin, instituted the Prime Minister's War Conference consisting of himself and MacArthur, Shedden became secretary of that too.

It would be incorrect to equate the roles of Ismay and Shedden, for in Britain the secretary of the War Cabinet was Sir Edward Bridges. As secretary of the Defence Committee Ismay was Bridges' deputy, and although Ismay controlled the various sub-committees, Shedden was head of a much larger and more complex department. If anything, the comparison should be made with Sir Maurice Hankey who, before he retired in 1938 and his job was divided, was secretary of both the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence.[30] Shedden tried to model himself upon that great English civil servant, and attempted to organise the Australian war administration along the lines established by Hankey in the Imperial War Cabinet.[31] Nevertheless Shedden recognised the importance of Ismay, and during the war he established a relationship with Ismay and his deputies Hollis and Jacob, both of whom served in the British Ministry of Defence after the war.[32]

Lacking miltary knowledge and experience Curtin and Chifley as Prime Ministers relied heavily upon Shedden's advice.[33] He scrutinised carefully the propositions put forward by the military chiefs, and his papers contain numerous letters to the chiefs on matters of military

---

30. For an account of Hankey's role see Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Three Volumes (Collins, London,1970, 1972, 1974).

31. On 7 May 1944 Shedden visited Hankey, and afterwards Hankey wrote in his diary that Shedden said 'that he models himself entirely on my methods'. Quoted in Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol.III, p.591.

32. Landau interview, 14 December 1978; MP 1217, Box 15, Diaries 1939-1941.

33. Landau interview, 14 December 1978.

administration. Many of Curtin's letters to the military chiefs and ministers on matters of policy are revealed to have been not only drafted by but initiated by Shedden.[34] Menzies too relied heavily on Shedden, but Menzies had ideas of his own about imperial defence, and since Shedden's views were much the same there was less need for the Secretary to offer strategic advice to his Minister.[35] In the opinion of Sir Percy Spender, Shedden exercised the greatest influence of any person upon the Australian war effort.[36] Shedden himself modestly agreed with this assessment and told Hankey in 1944 that he was 'really the main force for running the war in Australia'.[37] Hard working, balanced, dominating and ambitious, yet shy and eschewing publicity, Shedden was a great Australian public servant.

While not always agreeing with Shedden's approach, senior defence public servants have praised him highly.[38] Yet inevitably such a man has

---

34. MP 1217, *passim*.

35. Interestingly, when Parkhill was defeated at the 1937 election Shedden recommended to the Prime Minister, Lyons, that Menzies should be appointed as the new Minister for Defence. Menzies was not appointed. Shedden Diary, 1941, MP 1217, Box 15.

36. Interview with Sir Percy Spender, a war-time member of the Advisory War Council, 11 October 1978.

37. Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol.II, p.591.

38. Interviews with S. Landau, 14 December 1978, Sir Percy Spender, 11 October 1978, Mr Garry Armstrong, 17 August 1976, Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins, 9 October 1978, Mr J.P. Buckley, 22 January 1979, Air Marshal Sir George Jones, 24 January 1979, Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Burrell, 1 February 1979.

39. Sir Frederick Chilton wrote that Shedden 'had a real presence and powerful personality. He was ruthless with those who crossed him, and devasting with those in his Department who could not rise to his exceptional standards of performance ... Shedden's "forte" was top level policy and its broad application. He was not a good administrator in the sense of leadership of a team ... He ruled by fear - and this stultified initiative. But as head of the small policy Dept of Defence, he was superb'. Letter from Brigadier Sir Frederick Chilton, 28 July 1979. Chilton was Deputy Secretary of the Department from 1950 to 1958 before becoming Secretary of the Department of Repatriation. Another senior defence public servant wrote: 'Shedden's brilliance as a Secretariat Co-ordinator and his tremendous capacity to maintain order in all work with which he was associated, more particularly in the chaos of war, was a very significant factor. From his return from Britain, the Higher Defence Organisation grew in stature, order and precision. Channels of communication became clear-cut;

(cont'd)

his critics. The pre-war CAS, Sir Richard Williams, has written:

> He had been well groomed by [his predecessor M.L.] Shedherd in the art of keeping Chiefs of Staff and others away from the Minister and was not lacking in his appreciation of the Minister's increased dependence on the Secretary by this action.[40]

Other military chiefs respected but did not like Shedden.[41] He kept himself aloof from his department, 'and like other permanent heads he did not always work in an atmosphere of sweetness and light ... in the administration of his Department he could be authoritarian, strong-willed and undeviating'.[42]

Nevertheless some senior servicemen had a high opinion of him. To Sir Thomas Blamey , 'He represented the highest devotion of the Australian Public Service ...'[43] And Sir Sydney Rowell, a later Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, has written that Shedden

> had an unrivalled knowledge of matters associated with Commonwealth defence and he was a tireless and meticulously accurate worker. If it could be said that he had a fault it was in his complete absorption in the work he was doing, leaving little time for outside activities. He had critics both at home and abroad; in the main these were service people who couldn't match his intellect or who were jealous of his power and influence.[44]

---

39. (cont'd)

duplication was cut to a minimum. He was excessively modest, dedicated to work'. Lecture by Mr Garry Armstrong to the Australian Staff College, 8 May 1978, Transcript from Mr Armstrong.

40. Sir Richard Williams, *These Are Facts, The Autobiography of Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, KBE, OB, DSO* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977), p.236. Chilton (letter, 28 July 1979) wrote that he thought that Williams was living in the past here. He thought that Shedden was 'concerned to see that defence advice was fully thought through, coordinated and presented through the appropriate machinery'.

41. For example, Lieutenant-Generals Berryman and Wynter did not like him. Blamey respected him (Berryman interview, 10 October 1978, also Gavin Long Diary, No.1, p.30). Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins had a poor opinion of him (Interview, 9 October 1978). Professor W.E.H. Stanner, research officer for the Ministers for the Army, Spender and Forde, found Shedden to be slow, pedantic and over secretive. (Interview, 4 June 1979).

42. Perry, 'Sir Frederick Shedden, 1893-1971. An Appreciation'. Landau, himself a later departmental head, did not agree with Shedden's administrative methods (Interview, 14 December 1978).

43. Blamey's Memoirs, from Mr T.R. Blamey.

44. Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.194.

Rowell had a happy personal relationship with Shedden.

Despite the critics Shedden's reputation remains high. To J.J. Dedman, he was 'one of the most capable and sagacious of the many public servants I was privileged to be associated with during the eight years I held office as a Minister'.[45] In the opinion of Sir Paul Hasluck, Shedden was 'one of the few outstanding men in the civil side of the Australian war effort. Discretion, orderly arrangement and careful groundwork were so large a part of his training and his method that his achievement was often hidden'.[46]

It is not claimed that Shedden completely dominated strategic decision-making in Australia during the war. Menzies and Curtin were not men to be dominated. But they were busy politicians and were willing to accept, almost without question, the advice proferred by Shedden on strategic matters. Indeed, on many occasions they accepted Shedden's opinions rather than those of the Chiefs of Staff, especially when Shedden demonstrated that the Chiefs were divided in their views. Shedden's position was strengthened by the fact that government administration was divided between Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. After Curtin became Prime Minister the War Cabinet met more frequently in Canberra than in Melbourne which Menzies had preferred. However the Chiefs of Staff remained in Melbourne, and they therefore had to communicate with the Prime Minister through Shedden who established himself in Canberra when Curtin was there.

---

45. John J. Dedman, 'Encounter over Manus', *Australian Outlook*, August 1966, Volume 20, No.2, p.142.

46. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.444. For further comments by Hasluck see *Diplomatic Witness*, pp.12-14.

Despite Shedden's influence, most ideas on strategic policy still emanated either from the Chiefs of Staff, or, after March 1942, from General Sir Thomas Blamey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army, and General Douglas MacArthur, the Allied Commander-in-Chief of the South-West Pacific Area. The military men therefore had a vital role in strategic decision-making, but in most cases their advice had to be filtered through Shedden's Secretariat, and this fact must be born in mind when discussing Australian strategic policy-making in the Second World War.[47]

---

47. The above lengthy description of Shedden's role and personality should not be read to imply that his role was more important than that of Menzies, Curtin, Blamey and MacArthur. But they are all well-known personalities who have been described in numerous books and articles, and it has not been considered necessary to describe them in as much detail as Shedden. Furthermore, the role of senior public servants has not been given sufficient attention. In 1980 Hasluck wrote: 'In writing the civil volumes of the official war history I took the view that the person who bears the political responsibility for action should be credited with having taken the action. Now, in a more personal account of the war years, I take the liberty of passing on most of the credit for war-time administration to the senior public servants'. *Diplomatic Witness*, p.158.

Strategic Decision-Making Before Pearl Harbour

Australian strategic decision-making during the war in the Pacific from December 1941 until September 1945 must be viewed against the background of the events in the first two years of the Second World War. Although Menzies, Shedden and the Chiefs of Staff were all active disciples of imperial defence, it should not be assumed that before Pearl Harbour they gave no consideration to the Japanese threat in the Far East. The threat of Japan had, in fact, formed the focal point of Australian defence planning since before federation in 1901.[48] Between the wars the main point of discussion had been not whether Japan was a threat, but rather how Australia should go about protecting itself against that threat. Should Australia rely completely on imperial defence, or should she plan to resist a Japanese invasion without the help of the empire? With a population of barely 7 million, a small industrial base, a huge coastline, and remote from powerful friends, Australia had little capacity for effective self-defence. But imperial defence in the Far East was based on the British assurance that their main fleet would be located at Singapore, and the Australians were never confident that the British would be able to fulfil their promise.

Australian strategic decisions during the first year of the Second World War were made in the context of the so-called Singapore strategy, and the dilemmas faced by the strategic planners were similar in nature to those

---

48. The Australian fear of Japan and the estimates of the Japanese threat is covered in D.M. Horner, 'Australian Estimates of the Japanese Threat, 1905-1941', in P.A. Towle (ed), *Estimating Foreign Military Power*, (Croom Helm, London, 1981, forthcoming).

dealt with by their predecessors during the previous twenty years.[49] The decisions of 1939 and 1940 also created the framework for Australian strategy during the remaining years of the war. From February 1941 to February 1942 there was constant tension in senior government and defence circles between placing Australian security in the hands of the Empire and the fear that the imperial planners in Whitehall were not giving their full attention to the Far East.

For the first two years of the war Australian strategic and defence policy-making was dominated by the Prime Minister R.G. Menzies. Hasluck described Menzies as:

> A man of fine presence, ease of manner, poise and style, he incurred the suspicion of being vain, of lacking sincerity, and of being aloof. A man of keen intellect he inevitably had often made lesser men seem foolish.[50]

Menzies' words and deeds during his first term as Prime Minister reflect the tension mentioned earlier between fear for the security of Australia and the need to cooperate in imperial defence. For example in June 1939, soon after he became Prime Minister, he had asked the British government for an assurance that in the event of war with Japan a fleet would be sent to Singapore.[51] But despite numerous other expressions of doubt,

---

49. Australian strategic decisions during the first two years of the war have been dealt with by many writers, and this chapter seeks to do no more than touch on a few highlights. Important journal articles for this period include: J.J. Dedman, 'Defence Policy Decisions Before Pearl Harbour', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.XII, No.3, December 1967; Ian Hamill, 'An Expeditionary Force Mentality? The Despatch of Australian Troops to the Middle East, 1939-1940', *Australian Outlook*, August 1977, Vol.31, No.2; J.M. McCarthy, 'Singapore and Australian Defence 1921-1942', *Australian Outlook*, August 1971, Vol.25, No.2; J.M. McCarthy, 'The Defence of Australia and the Empire Air Training Scheme: 1939-1942', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.XX, No.3, December 1974; J.M. McCarthy, 'Australian Responses to the European War 1939-41', *Australian Journal of Defence Studies*,, Vol.1, No.2, October 1977; J.M. McCarthy, 'The Imperial Commitment 1939-41', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.XXIII, No.2, August 1977.

50. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.115.

51. Cable, Menzies to Chamberlain, 24 June 1939, in *DAFP*, Vol.II, p.134.

indeed deep misgivings, about British policy, by instinct and temperament Menzies was an imperialist.[52] And his vision of a united imperial war effort shines through his policies during 1940 and 1941. Even after he became severely disillusioned in London in April 1941 he clung to his concept of imperial defence. Heartened by his enthusiastic reception in London he came to believe that he might have a role to play in the direction of the imperial war effort.[53] Indeed he might even lead it![54] And if that happened then perhaps he could bring some balance to imperial strategy. Menzies' continuing commitment to imperial defence even after Churchill had demonstrated that he did not share the same view was to contribute in part to his resignation from the position of Prime Minister.[55]

Menzies' attitude towards Britain and his belief in the concept of imperial defence were essential parts of Australian strategic decision-making before Pearl Harbour. But leaving aside this unifying theme, strategic decision-making during this period might be divided into three phases. The first phase was from September 1939 to November 1940. During this time the government began to raise and deploy its armed forces to fight an imperial war against Germany and Italy. But the forces were deployed only after much hesitation by the government. It needed a qualified assurance from the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, that Britain 'would undertake to send adequate naval forces

---

52. For a discussion of this question see P.G. Edwards, 'Menzies and the Imperial Connection, 1939-1941'.

53. On 11 June 1941, Ismay wrote to Brooke-Popham that Menzies 'went down very well over here, and there was a large body of opinion which hoped that he might stay as a permanent member of the War Cabinet'. Brooke-Popham Papers V/1, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

54. Shedden wrote in his diary at the time about Menzies: 'Radical as it may sound, why should not a Dominion statesman lead the Empire in war?' MP 1217, Box 15.

55. Menzies realised that only the Australian Prime Minister could be guaranteed a seat in the United Kingdom War Cabinet. Therefore in August 1941 he suggested returning to London. The resulting accusations contributed to his downfall.

to prevent any serious catastrophe',[56] and an announcement from Japan that she would 'not interfere now that war has broken out in Europe but will proceed exclusively towards a solution of the China incident',[57] before the Australian government could freely contemplate sending an expeditionary force to help Britain. Even then the Australian decision was accelerated by an earlier announcement that New Zealand was sending a force.[58] Menzies summed up the Australian position when he wrote to S.M. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London:

> As to Japan - I have had a growing feeling for some time that though the Far East is a major problem to us, it is a relatively minor one to Whitehall.[59]

Despite Australian fears, old attitudes died hard. For example, the new Australian CAS, the British officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, wrote to Air Marshal Drummond: 'I am a Scotsman as you are an Australian, but I am an Imperialist first and foremost'.[60] Soon after the beginning of the war, but not before some misgiving, the government placed the major ships of the RAN under Admiralty control,[61] and the Empire Air Training Scheme, begun in November 1939, was initiated to

---

56. 8th Meeting of Dominion Ministers, 20 November 1939, PRO: CAB 99/1. Cable C38, Casey to Menzies, 23 November 1939 stated that the British War Cabinet approved the following: 'should Japanese encroachment begin, or should Great Britain pass into a state of war with Japan, the Admiralty would make such dispositions as would enable them to offer timely resistance either to a serious attack upon Singapore or to the invasion of Australia and New Zealand. these dispositions would not necessarily take the form of stationing a fleet at Singapore, but would be of a character to enable the necessary concentrations to be made eastward in ample time to prevent a disaster'. *DAFP*, Vol.II, p.429.

57. Cable, Sir Robert Craigie, British Ambassador in Tokyo, to Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary, dated 5 September and received 9 September 1939, E.L. Woodward and R. Butler (eds), *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Third Series, Vol.9, (HMSO, London, 1955), p.525.

58. Cable 301, UK High Commissioner to Dominions Office, 24 November 1939, *DAFP*, Vol.II, pp.431-434.

59. Letter, Menzies to Bruce, 11 September 1939, *DAFP*, Vol.II, p.257.

60. Quoted in J.M. McCarthy, Air Power and Australian Defence: A Study in Imperial Relations 1923-1954, Ph.D Thesis, ANU, 1971, p.243.

61. G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957), pp.73-77.

provide Australian pilots for operations in Europe under RAF control.[62]

Although the government relied heavily on advice from London, these decisions were all made independently by the Australian government. It might be argued that the Australians had few options, and their restricted capacity to make independent decisions was partly their own fault. Having publicly advocated the value of imperial defence they could hardly reject the concept at the first sign of hostilities, especially considering Australia's sentimental attachment to Britain. Furthermore, to support Britain in Europe in 1939 and early 1940 seemed good strategic sense, for if Germany could be held in northern France, as it had been in the First World War, Britain would probably be able to send enough of her fleet to Singapore to deter the Japanese.

The collapse of France, the fall of the Netherlands and the entry of Italy in mid 1940 changed the complexion of the war. On the one hand the danger in the Far East increased, for it seemed that the French colonies of Indo-China and New Caledonia, and the Netherlands East Indies might be tempting targets for the Japanese. On the other hand the loss of the French fleet, and the hostile presence of the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean, meant that the Royal Navy would be unable to reinforce Singapore. And the Italians in Libya and Abyssinia threatened the Suez Canal - a traditional link in imperial defence - and the oil fields of the Middle East. So the events of mid 1940 added two extra areas of conflict or potential conflict to the strategic map, the Middle East and the Far East, and both made demands on the Empire's scarce military resources. The result was that Australia eventually decided in September to reinforce the Middle East with a second division, and in November offered to send a brigade to Malaya with the understanding that it might eventually go to the Middle East.

---

62. D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942*, (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962), pp.86, 87.

The decision to send the 7th Division to the Middle East focusses attention on the Australian decision-making process and the Australian concept of imperial defence. On 29 June the United Kingdom government asked if the Australian government could provide a division for the defence of Singapore, pointing out that:

> ... we can no longer concentrate upon the defence of Singapore Island entirely but must consider the defence of Malaya as a whole, particularly the security of up-country landing grounds. For this reason and because we cannot spare a fleet for the Far East at present, it is all the more important that we should do what we can to improve our land and air defences in Malaya.[63]

Since Australia had only one division (the 6th) in the Middle East, and the others were not yet trained and equipped, this proposal was resisted, but it should have served as a warning to the Menzies government. J.J. Dedman has noted that: 'The whole issue of the relative importance of home defence, now aligned with the holding of Singapore as against assisting the United Kingdom to retain control of Egypt and the Suez Canal [was] here brought to a head'.[64]

At that time the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Colvin, and the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Burnett, were officers seconded from the British services, while the Chief of the General Staff was the 63 year old Sir Brudenell White,who had been called out of retirement earlier in the year. He was one of Australia's most distinguished soldiers, but he was out of touch with modern warfare.[65] He was a firm supporter of imperial defence and advocated sending forces to the Middle East.[66]

---

63. Cable 228. Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Commonwealth Government, 28 June 1940, *DAFP*, Vol.III, pp.517, 518.

64. J.J. Dedman, 'Defence Policy Decisions Before Pearl Harbour', p.339.

65. C.E.W. Bean, *Two Men I Knew* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1957),pp.215-220.

66. W.M. Hughes recalled that in the War Cabinet White said: 'Our strategy is based on the navy being here to help us when it is needed. Our strategy is based on us holding in the Middle East, holding the canal; on us holding Singapore; on Japan *not* coming into the war'. Gavin Long Notes No.45, 20 February 1944, AWM. See also War Cabinet Minute 345,18 June 1940, *DAFP*, Vol.III, p.452.

Furthermore, there was a widely held attitude that Australian forces had an important role to play on the battlefield and would not be suitable for garrison duties.

Menzies supported these views, and even when the Chiefs of Staff changed their mind and presented a report on 23 August stating that Singapore was more important than the Middle East,[67] War Cabinet apparently did not agree.[68] The Chiefs of Staff had received a British appreciation that the defences in the Far East were dangerously understrength and had advised that the 7th Division should be sent to Malaya. By this time White had been killed in an aircrash and had been temporarily replaced by Major-General J. Northcott. The following month Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee was appointed CGS, and he was to retain the appointment for two more years, including the vital period of early 1942.

Apparently the decisive factor in the government's decision that the 7th Division should proceed to the Middle East,[69] was a cable sent by Churchill as a 'foreword' to the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff appreciation with the aim of inspiring the Australians 'with a much greater degree of confidence'.[70] Churchill promised that:

> If ... contrary to prudence and self interest, Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale, I have explicit authority of Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid, sacrificing every interest except only the defence position of this island on which all depends.[71]

---

67. Report by the Australian Chiefs of Staff, 27 August 1940, CRS A2071, item 186/1940.

68. War Cabinet Minute 459, Melbourne, 28 August 1940, *loc.cit.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. WM (40)222, 8 August 1940 quoted in W.J. Hemmings, Australia and Britain's Far Eastern Defence Policy 1937-42, B.Litt Thesis, University of Oxford, 1977.

71. Cable 262, Churchill to Menzies, 11 August 1940, MP 1217, Box 533.

This promise was militarily worthless, for if Japan so dominated the seas as to be able to invade Australia on a large scale there would be little that Britain could do. By then Singapore would have fallen. But the reaction of the Australian government shows that it had not yet learnt to be sceptical towards the British Prime Minister. Australian strategic decision-makers might theoretically have had the authority and capacity to act independently, but in practice, till November when they offered Britain a brigade for Malaya, they scarcely did so. The decision to offer the brigade in November was a direct result of the report of the October conference in Singapore which revealed grave deficiencies in men and equipment.

The second phase in strategic decision-making was from November 1940 to June 1941. This period was one of growing disillusionment with British strategic policy, realisation that Australia had little influence over that policy, and vigorous, though unsuccessful, attempts to alter the policy and to secure a measure of influence. By the end of 1940 Australia had almost exhausted its ability to make independent force deployments for the defence of Australia. In March 1941 the government decided to assist the Netherlands East Indies with the defence of Dutch Timor and Ambon, and in June 1941 agreed to a British request to send another brigade to Malaya, but in essence the government was locked into the strategy it had pursued in 1939 and 1940.

It would not be exact to mark November 1940 as the starting point of disillusionment with Britain. After all, a year earlier Menzies had suspected Britain of treating Australia like a colony.[72] In May 1940 the government had viewed with caution the British plan to redirect the

---

72. Cable, Menzies to R.G. Casey, 1 December 1939, *DAFP*, Vol.II, pp.441, 442.

AIF convoys to Britain,[73] and in September Menzies had expressed his dismay over the lack of information on the Dakar debacle.[74]

Nevertheless, it was in November 1940, after the receipt of the discouraging report of the Singapore Conference, that Menzies decided to go to London to press the case for the reinforcement of the Far East.[75] The events of the first half of 1941 were to confirm Australian suspicions that for Churchill the Empire stopped at the Suez Canal. The victory of the Australians in Cyrenaicia in January was a smoke-screen which, for the moment, clouded the true strategic picture. With a minimum of consultation with the dominions, Churchill sent the Australian and New Zealand forces to certain defeat in Greece. Despite six months' preparation the defences of Crete proved to be inadequate, and in the Western Desert the untrained, ill-equipped 9th Australian Division provided the only substantial resistance to Rommel's advance on Egypt. British strategic direction in the first six months of 1941 did not inspire confidence.

Menzies' efforts to influence British strategy in the Far East were singularly unsuccessful. He was unable to secure a firm commitment from the British to send a fleet to the Far East. They argued further that they were not able to offer a guarantee to the Netherlands East Indies, and pointed out that the reinforcement programme for Malaya was many months away from completion. Even the air strength planned for Malaya would be less than that recommended by the commanders in the Far East,

---

73. Cable 228, Commonwealth Government to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 17 May 1940, *DAFP*, Vol.III, p.305.

74. Cable, Menzies to Churchill, 29 September 1940, CRS A1608, item F 41/1/7.

75. Advisory War Council Minute 39, Canberra, 25 November 1940, CRS A2682, Vol.1.

and the air defence of Malaya was based on the assumption that the Japanese air force was less effective than that of the Italians.[76]

Australia's lack of influence was emphasised by the outcome of the Anglo-American staff talks in Washington in early 1941 where it was decided that in the event of war with Japan the first priority would be the defeat of Germany. The Australian government was shocked to learn that if Japan attacked only the Netherlands East Indies or British possessions the American President thought that his country would not approve a declaration of war against Japan. And if the Americans did join the war they would have to fight a 'holding war' in the Pacific.[77] The Acting Prime Minister, Arthur Fadden, wrote later that 'If Australia were to be abandoned by these two great powers until the war in Europe was decided, we and our countrymen might well be pulling rickshaws before long'.[78]

The final straw came on 1 May when Menzies in London learnt that, without consulting him or his government, the British government had advised the American government that they supported the US plan to move a large part of the US Pacific fleet to the Atlantic.[79] The Australian government had little option but to concur,[80] and its claims that it succeeded in having the plan modified to leave considerable forces in the Pacific were probably an exaggeration. Thus, by the time Menzies returned to Australia on 24 May 1941 it was clear to the Australian government that it could have little influence on allied strategy.

---

76. COS (41)230, 11 April 1941, MP 1049/5, item 1855/2/394; MP 1217, Box 625; PREM 3 156/4 and CAB 99/4.

77. Cable 114, Watt to Department of External Affairs, 12 February, received 13 February 1945, CRS A2671, item 64/1941.

78. A.W. Fadden, 'Forty Days and Forty Nights: Memoir of a War-time Prime Minister', *Australian Outlook*, Vol.27, No.1, April 1973, p.6.

79. COS (41) 154th Meeting, 1 May 1941, MP 1217, Box 626.

80. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.346.

The third phase in Australian strategic decision-making is from June to December 1941, which although it spans three governments, still marks a period of relatively constant policy and attitude. With the decision on 11 June to send the only uncommitted AIF Brigade to Malaya Australia had all but exhausted its strategic options.[81] After the British defeats in the Middle East and his experiences in London where he found British strategic direction to be dominated to a dangerous extent by Churchill, there is little wonder that Menzies supported the requests of the Australian commander in the Middle East, General Blamey, to evacuate the 9th Division from Tobruk. Australia's request was not motivated by internal political considerations nor unreasoned bloody-mindedness, but was a result of a lack of confidence in the British approach to strategy and grand strategy.[82] Menzies' attitude was maintained by the two following governments.

From the point of view of grand strategy the Australian government was now in a position of extreme difficulty. It knew that the British government could do little more either to strengthen the defence in Malaya or to provide Australia with more arms and equipment. Yet the strategic situation in the Middle East was precarious; the only Australian formations not actually in action were those recovering from their ordeals in Greece and Crete, and even several of their battalions were soon involved in bitter fighting in Syria. The German attack on Russia on 22 June added a further complication for it released Japan from the fear of war with Russia and enabled it to expand southwards, initially into southern Indo-China. All Australia could do was support Anglo-American diplomatic moves, while at the same time trying to improve the home defences.

---

81. War Cabinet Minute 1145, Melbourne, 11 June 1941, CRS A2671, item 189/1941.

82. For an account of the episode see Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, Appendix 10; Barton Maughan, *Tobruk and El Alamein* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1966), Ch.8; Sir Percy Spender, *Politics and a Man.* (Collins, Sydney, 1972), Ch.15.

Menzies returned to Australia and called for 'an unlimited war effort', and there was a substantial reorganisation of the government. Belatedly, the Defence Committee was ordered to prepare joint operational plans to meet attacks on specific areas of Australia.[83] On 11 July the War Cabinet decided to recall Major-General Sir Iven Mackay from the Middle East to become GOC-in-C of the Home Forces.[84] But when it came to grand strategy the government could do little. Hasluck described one meeting of the Advisory War Council as a 'straw-clutching discussion of diplomatic possibilities'.[85]

When Japan threatened Thailand in early August the Australian government urged Britain to take a firm stand and emphasised that the 'early despatch of capital ships east of Suez would itself be the most powerful deterrence and first step'.[86] There is no evidence that this plea was the deciding factor in Churchill's eventual decision to send the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* to the Far East. More likely he was influenced by the Americans; in August he signed the Atlantic Charter with President Roosevelt.

A further reaction in Australia to the belief that it could do little to influence events was the expression of the view that Australia should be represented in the United Kingdom War Cabinet. Menzies himself hoped to go to London, but was politically embarrassed and resigned, and the new government led by Arthur Fadden selected a former Prime Minister, Sir Earle Page, to represent Australia in the British War Cabinet and specifically to seek the reinforcement of Singapore. There was no guarantee that he would be able to achieve any significant influence.

---

83. War Cabinet Minute 1136, Melbourne, 10 June 1941, CRS A2673, Vol.7.

84. The appointment was announced on 5 August. War Cabinet Agendum 146/1941, Supp 4, 29 October 1941, CRS A2671, item 146/1941.

85. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.530.

86. Cable, Menzies to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 10 August 1941, quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.531.

For a while there was a mood of optimism that war in the Far East could be averted. The British Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, visited Australia in mid October and presented an encouraging picture of the situation in Malaya.[87] The new Labor government led by Johh Curtin demonstrated a wishful optimism about events in the Far East exemplified by the decision during November to reinforce the AIF in the Middle East. John Dedman summed up the policy of the government in which he was a minister:

> So long as it thought that there was a possibility that Japan would not go to war, [the government] was unwilling to weaken the British position in the Middle East, where the second western desert offensive was about to be launched.[88]

Despite the experiences during the period from October 1940 to June 1941, the Menzies, Fadden and Curtin governments continued to be unduly influenced by the opinions expressed from London. The different manner in which Australian and British authorities interpreted Japan's intentions is illustrated by the comments of the Australian DCGS, Major-General S.F. Rowell, who, in the emergency had been recalled from the Middle East in September. In mid 1941 the War Office had told the Australian Liaison Officer in London that Australia was tending to over-estimate the capacity of the Japanese and to under-estimate the Australian powers of resistance.[89] Rowell replied to this 'ill-informed criticism by the protagonists of the blue-water school' with considerable feeling:

> Rightly or wrongly we are not prepared to gamble on the period which may, or may not, elapse between the commencement of operations in the Far East and the stage when it is 'our turn next' ...

---

87. Advisory War Council Minute 533, Melbourne, 16 October 1941, CRS A2682, Vol.3.

88. J.J. Dedman, 'Defence Policy Decisions before Pearl Harbour', p.346.

89. Letter, Colonel A.W. Wardell to DCGS, 30 July 1941, AWM 425/11/7, Part 2.

> It is difficult to understand the War Office motive in suggesting that we are overdoing the defence of this country. They should appreciate that the AIF, the only force we can legally send out of the country, is a volunteer force and goodness knowswe are doing our best to make it as large as possible even though it has had very profound effect on the AMF by draining it of the best personnel.
>
> We **certainly have retained a few AIF units,** some being for external commitments in the NEI to which they are the only troops we can legally send. It may be noted that despite the serious deterioration of the Far Eastern situation we willingly sent another Brigade Group to Malay recently even though we were aware that it brought the strength of infantry there above the figure fixed as adequate by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff. Incidentally, we cannot help contrasting the keenness to get AIF troops in Malaya with the general complacency of the place where it is very much a '9 to 5' war with ample time off for sport.
>
> In brief it can be said that even if the blue water school could reduce us to a state of great complacency vis-a-vis Japan they would not be able to get any more out of us.[90]

To the Australian defence planners the information now coming in from all sources revealed Japan's increasing preparations for war.[91] On 6 October the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (COIC) reported that Japan's preparations for war were considered to be almost complete. On 27 October it was reported that the Japanese Navy is now fully mobilised on a war footing', and on 1 December, 'Japan is now ready to strike in any direction from Indo-China at any moment'.[92]

---

90. Letter, Rowell to Wardell, 2 October 1941, AWM 425/11/7, Part 1.

91. During 1940 and 1941 Australia had established her own intercept organisation under Captain T.E. Nave RN. Originally an RAN officer he had joined the RN, and before returning to Australia in early 1940, had headed the intercept component of the Far East Combined Bureau (FECB). As well as breaking some Japanese naval codes, Nave's organisation was able to intercept the traffic of the Japanese Consul-General in Australia.

92. COIC Weekly Intelligence Summaries, June-December 1941, AWM 423/11/2. The COIC was an organisation, staffed by members of the three services, with the task of preparing intelligence summaries for joint headquarters and for the War Room at Victoria Barracks.

General Rowell was convinced that a Japanese attack was imminent, and the fact that the information contained in the COIC summaries was taken seriously is indicated by an army planning directive which began: 'The general situation is such that war between the British Empire and Japan must be regarded as a probability'. The directive anticipated that the possible Japanese courses, in order, would be:

1. Attack on Malaya with the object of seizing Singapore.
2. Attack on the Netherlands East Indies and British North Borneo.
3. Invasion of Australia or New Zealand.[93]

On 29 November R.G. Casey, the Australian Minister in Washington, reported that a Japanese task force of five divisions was assembled for a southward advance.[94] On 4 December news was received from Vice-Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich, the C-in-C of the Netherlands East Indies Navy, that the Japanese Navy had begun to move.[95] The Dutch cryptanalysts had also broken the Japanese codes.[96] On 6 December Casey reported:

> I was told by a secret but reliable source today that the Japanese Government had instructed Japanese Embassy at Washington

---

93. Operation Planning Directorive No.1, possibly written November 1941, by General Rowell, AWM 243/6/5.

94. Cable 1049, Casey to Department of External Affairs, 29 November 1941, CRS A981, Japan 185, Part III.

95. L. Farago, *The Broken Seal, The Story of 'Operation Magic' and the Pearl Harbor Disaster* (Barker, London,1967), p.350. The Australian official historian recorded: 'On the 4th December, the day the Japanese Pearl Harbour force reached its south-eastward turning point, Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence, signalled to the Captain on the Intelligence Staff (COIS) Singapore: "Information received 1800 GMT 3rd December 4am 4th December Melbourne time from reliable Dutch source Menado that eight transports twenty warships left Palau proceeding towards NEI". Singapore replied soon after noon, Melbourne time, on the 5th: "No information here" ... Actually this force did not leave Palau until 6-8 December, and then for the Philippines. But its presence at Palau was correct, and its constitution was approximately as reported'. Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, p.474. Farago states (p.351), although no other evidence has been discovered, that Casey was ordered to take the information to the White House.

96. E.R. Thorpe, *East Wind, Rain* (Gambit, Boston, 1967), p.51.

> yesterday afternoon to begin destruction of papers and records. Please regard this information as completely secret.[97]

Clearly this was 'Magic' information.[98]

To the Prime Minister, Curtin, this news would have come as no surprise, for in late November, Kawai, the Japanese minister, had reportedly told him that the momentum towards war was too great to be stopped. Soon after that Curtin had learnt that Kawai's staff were burning their papers.[99]

Yet to the last some Australians seemed to think that there would be no outbreak of war. General Rowell, the DCGS, recalled that Colonel Hodgson, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, told him on the evening of 8 December that until two days before the attack they thought that war in the Far East could be averted.[100] Rowell has written that Army Headquarters was 'forbidden to issue any instructions to Commands that war with Japan was inevitable', but that he wrote personal letters to the GOCs warning them of approaching war.[101] Furthermore, Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, would not allow the Japanese representative's quarters in Melbourne to be 'bugged'.[102]

Few important independent strategic decisions affecting the defence of Australia were made by the Australian government during 1941. In

---

97. Cable 1090, Casey to Department of External Affairs, 5 December 1941, received 6 December 1941, CRS A981, Japan 185, Part VI.

98. 'Magic' was the name given by the Americans to information received by intercepting and breaking the codes of Japanese diplomatic communications.

99. Curtin to Gavin Long, April 1942, in Gavin Long Diary, No.3, p.27.

100. Interview with Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Rowell, 26 June 1974.

101. Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.100.

102. Rowell interview. However they were 'bugged', and when this was revealed Evatt said, on 26 November 1941, that it 'was a serious breach of diplomatic privilege'. Advisory War Council Minute 570, Canberra, 26 November 1941, CRS A2684, item 570.

March the government decided to send troops to Ambon and Dutch Timor in the event of war with Japan. In June it decided to send an additional brigade to Malaya, and just before the outbreak of war the government decided to send forces to Portuguese Timor. Australian representatives also took part in the Singapore conference with the aim of increasing cooperation and coordination in the Far East. Australian strategic planners, however, had little room for manoeuvre, for they found themselves locked into a strategic policy which had been decided the previous year. Once the troops in the Middle East had been committed it was not politically acceptable to recall them to Australia. Perhaps the only strategically viable option would have been to renegotiate the Empire Air Training Scheme to ensure greater autonomy for RAAF units in Britain and therefore make it easier for Australia to have a say in their deployment, but this move was unlikely to be suggested by the CAS, Sir Charles Burnett, who was an RAF officer and a fierce proponent of imperial defence.

In the terms of organising the country for war the achievement of the Menzies government was notable.[103] Most of the government departments and many of the directors-general - departmental heads with exceptional powers of direction, control and expenditure - remained unchanged during the Curtin government. Nonetheless the organisation of the Home Army showed the danger of trying to maintain forces beyond the capability of the country. The militia was seriously depleted in men and equipment so as to maintain the AIF. Clearly the defence chiefs did not envisage the rapid Japanese successes between December 1941 and February 1942, and they assumed that when Japan decided to attack there would be many months for the militia to mobilise.

---

103. The third volume of Shedden's manuscript on Australian defence policy is titled, 'The Notable War Record of the Menzies Government'.

Australia's efforts to influence allied strategy were singularly unsuccessful. During his visit overseas Menzies did not persuade Churchill or his Chiefs of Staff to increase the defences of Malaya, nor even to promise to defend the Netherlands East Indies. Fadden has claimed that his and New Zealand's representations ensured that less US capital ships were transferred to the Atlantic than had been planned; but some senior American naval officers held similar views and may have had greater influence in this issue.[104] There is no evidence that Page's overseas mission influenced Churchill's decision to send the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* to Singapore. Perhaps the constant pressure from Australia during 1940 and 1941 made Churchill aware of the need to send ships, but probably the Americans influenced him just as much.[105]

Only in the Middle East, where there were three AIF divisions, was Australia able to influence military strategy to some degree. And even there Australia had little influence over the campaigns in which her troops formed the majority of the forces taking part.

Liddell Hart has observed that considering the threat to Britain in the latter half of 1940, and Churchill's courageous decision to reinforce the Middle East, it 'would be unjust to find fault with the provision made for Malaya during this period ... it was remarkable that the garrison was reinforced by six brigades during the winter of

---

104. For example Admiral Kimmell, C-in-C, US Pacific Fleet, thought that if more ships were sent to the Atlantic it would invite Japan to attack. Cable 421, Casey to Department of External Affairs, 8 June 1941, CRS A3300, item 123.

105. On 12 August, the UK Chiefs of Staff decided to give considerations to 'what steps could be taken immediately to improve the position in the Far East'. (Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vol.1, p.554). The Chiefs had considered Menzies' cable of 11 August and also one from Churchill foreshadowing the signing of the Atlantic Charter. The British Chiefs were aware of America's disappointment with Britain's failure to ascribe the Royal Navy any initial major role in the defence of the Far East.

Three Prime Ministers in two months, Curtin, Fadden and Menzies.

(AWM Negative No.42826)

John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia, 1941-1945.

(AWM Negative No.3870)

1940-41'.[106] However he is critical of Churchill in 1941 regarding his neglect of the Far East. Moreover, in the second half of 1941, 600 modern aircraft were sent to Russia while few reached Malaya. No long range bombers arrived in Malaya while hundreds nightly bombed Germany in raids that were 'palpably futile at that stage of the war'.[107] Australia had no say in those decisions, and the reactions of the Australian government, people and military leaders in early 1942 must be understood against the background of the lack of consultation and the weaknesses in British strategy during the previous two years.

The New Government

When Japan attacked on 7 December (Australian time) the Labor government had been in power for two months. It remained in power for the remainder of the war, under the leadership of John Curtin for almost the whole period as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.[108]

A former union organiser and editor of the *Westralian Worker*, Curtin was now aged 56. He had led the party since 1935, had restored coherence to it and prepared it for war-time responsibility. Although he was loyal to the party, politically skilful, honest and approachable, he, like

---

106. B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (Cassell, London, 1970), p.231.

107. *Ibid.*

108. There have been three unsatisfactory biographies of Curtin: A.Chester, *John Curtin* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1943); Irene Dowsing, *Curtin of Australia* (Acacia, Blackburn, Victoria, 1969), and Lloyd Ross, *John Curtin, A Biography* (Macmillan, Melbourne, 1977). The latter is the most detailed study, but it has many errors of fact. Curtin's war-time papers have not survived. The closest papers are those of F.G. Shedden, and Ross completed his book before they became available.

his party, lacked experience in government.[109] Fifteen of the nineteen new ministers including Curtin had not held office before. Yet Curtin had some unattractive features. Shy, tense, unforgiving of criticism, Arthur Calwell observed that one his 'weaknesses was his habit of spurning his colleagues'.[110] Some members of his cabinet remained implacable enemies. Nevertheless even Curtin's political opponents have praised his performance during the war. Sir Percy Spender believed that while Curtin was austere and detached, he 'stood above' all of his ministers: 'a kindly, warm hearted man, despite a rather prim and somewhat cold appearance; he was an outstanding wartime leader'.[111] Fadden, from whom he had taken over as Prime Minister, thought that 'there was no greater figure in Australian public life in my lifetime ... clear in mind and expression, firm in principle ... he was a man of unusual political courage'.[112] Menzies wrote that, 'confronted by a practical and difficult world, [Curtin] grafted a pragmatic approach on to the historic dogmas of his party, and so made a fine place in Australian history'.[113]

---

109. Tennant described Curtin as 'a political virtuoso who could judge the temper of his associates and keep them all running smoothly together ... He could smell plotters and rebels and he had wonderful timing'. Kylie Tennant, *Evatt, Politics and Justice* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1970), p.130. Calwell wrote that Curtin accepted power 'with profound humility and exercised it with an agonizing sense of personal responsibility which ultimately killed him'. *loc.cit.*, p.135.

110. A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not* (Lloyd O'Neill, Melbourne, 1972), p.48. Ross, *op.cit.*, p.24, wrote that 'The stand-offishness that some acquaintances noted was the defence of a timid man who offered friendship which was too often abused'.

111. Spender, *op.cit.*, p.146.

112. A.W. Fadden, *They Called Me Artie* (Jacaranda, Brisbane, 1969), p.80.

113. R.G. Menzies, *Afternoon Light* (Cassell, Melbourne, 1967), p.130.

It is paradoxical that during the 1930's the defence policy of the Labor Party had followed more closely the thinking of senior army officers than had the UAP, for since the turbulent days of the anti-conscription campaign the Labor Party had represented all that these army leaders mistrusted. Few of the new ministers had served in the forces, most were anti-conscriptionist and unsympathetic towards the military, and a number held beliefs which members of the Staff Corps believed to be hostile towards their position in the army. Not only was the new ministry unsuited by training, experience and prejudice to control the armed forces, but also it had few qualifications to tackle matters of foreign policy and world affairs. Few ministers held university degrees, but they were all hardened politicians, sensitive to the electorate, and often ruled by principles established by years of class struggle in the depression of the 1920s and 1930s and even earlier.

Curtin was characteristic of this image. Gaoled for anti-conscription activities in the First World, he had developed an early hatred of militarism. Yet, unlike many of his contemporaries, he had tried to familiarise himself with matters of defence and foreign policy. But in a party which included many men who believed war was promoted by capitalism, Curtin could only move slowly. The result was an emphasis on the land and air defence of Australia and a basic policy of 'non-participation in foreign wars'. The Second World War further modified these views. Thus although in 1937 he said that the chief strength of Australia's defence had to lie with aviation,[114] by mid 1941 he seemed to realise that it would lie with seapower.[115]

---

114. *Daily Mirror* (Sydney), 21 September 1937.

115. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.357.

His constant probings in the Advisory War Council, balanced by a rational and responsible approach, enabled him to influence, if only marginally, the direction of Australian policy during 1941 before he became Prime Minister. In July 1941 the Acting British High Commissioner reported on the 'discreditable behaviour' of some Labor Party people like J.A. Beasley,but spoke of Curtin as 'restrained'.[116]

During his second visit to Australia in October 1941, Brooke-Popham had to deal with the new Prime Minister, and 'was very favourably impressed by him'. Brooke-Popham wrote that Curtin gave him 'the impression of being straight' and was 'honestly full out to do all he [could] to push on with the war'.[117] The official historian, Gavin Long, was even more to the point when he wrote in his diary that 'the tortoise Curtin would not be outstripped by the hare Menzies on any course'.[118]

Some commentators have claimed that the mainspring of Curtin's government was what was described as 'the big four', Curtin, Chifley, Evatt and Beasley.[119] This was not the case. The powerful inner group on important policy discussions was Curtin, Chifley and J.H. Scullin.[120] Scullin, the former Prime Minister, was not in the Cabinet but he was a wise counsellor. Chifley, the Treasurer was Curtin's loyal lieutenant, friendly, warm, tolerant and shrewdly practical. If he lacked Curtin's intellect and vision, he provided quiet strength. While Curtin was

---

116. Despatch from R.R. Sedgwick, Acting High Commissioner, 14 July 1941, WP (41) 198, CAB 66/18.

117. Letter, Brooke-Popham to Street, 28 October 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers V/2.

118. Gavin Long Diary No.4, Canberra, 26 April 1944.

119. Whitington, *op.cit.*, p.94. Allan Dalziel, *Evatt the Enigma* (Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1967), p.28.

120 Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 4, Chapter 57, p.4. See also J.R. Robertson, *J.H. Scullin; a political biography* (University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1974), pp.462, 463. Robertson asserts that Scullin had no influence on strategic policy. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.127, mentions Scullin's influence.

J.B. Chifley, Treasurer 1941-1945, Prime Minister 1945-1949.

(AWM Negative No.10013)

Dr H.V. Evatt, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs 1941-1949.

(AWM Negative No.10014)

concerned with winning the war, Chifley, a doctrinaire socialist was concerned with post-war social order. While Curtin worried about matters of grand strategy and defence policy, Chifley concentrated on the economy.

Nevertheless the other senior Labor ministers should not be overlooked in discussing strategic policy. The Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs, Dr Herbert Evatt, has been mentioned.[121] Formerly the youngest Justice of the High Court of Australia, he had a tremendous capacity for work and application. Insatiably ambitious and occasionally ruthless, he was an outstanding Australian, but he could be exceedingly rude and at times had difficulty restraining himself.

The Minister for Shipping and Supply was J.A. Beasley, who, like Chifley and Forde, had held office in the Scullin government which he had helped bring down. Thereafter he had led the Lang Labor Group - the Non-Communist Labor Party - in Federal Parliament, and in that capacity had served on the Advisory War Council. After the Non-Communist Labor Party reunited with the ALP in February 1941 Beasley's loyalty toward Curtin never wavered.[122] Spender has left an incisive impression:

> Beasley was a fighter - an in-fighter - with a bitter, caustic tongue when he wanted to use it. He could be quiet and disarming, friendly and easy, but if a discussion was not going his way, the mask would be removed, revealing a determined, relentless man with a keen mind who asked and gave no quarter, and was not over-scrupulous in debate. Only the most courageous sought to do battle with him ...
>
> I did not find Beasley a person of much personal attraction. Friendly today, you could never be sure he would not tear a few strips off you tomorrow. But he was a first-class administrator, and a tower of strength to the Labor administration. He served Australia well in the war years. When he became first Resident Minister in England, and then High Commissioner for Australia in London, he was less successful.[123]

---

121. For a biography of Evatt see Tenant, *op.cit.* and Dalziel, *op.cit.* See also Spender, *op.cit.*, Sir Alan Watt, *Australian Diplomat* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1976) and P.G. Edwards, 'Evatt and the Americans' and Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp.14-16 and Ch.3.

122. Whitington, *op.cit.*, p.95.

123. Spender, *op.cit.*, p.184.

J.A. Beasley, Minister for Supply and Shipping, 1941-1945, Defence, 1945, High Commissioner for Australia in UK 1946-1949.

(AWM Negative No.4513)

F.M. Forde, Minister for the Army 1941-1945, Defence 1946, Deputy Prime Minister, July 1945.

(AWM Negative No.10012)

Throughout the war 'Killer' Beasley worked in close cooperation with Dr Evatt.[124]

Curtin's Deputy Prime Minister was Francis Michael Forde, whom he had defeated by one vote in the 1935 election for leadership of the party. Forde was a masterly politician with long service to the party. He had been elected to the Queensland Parliament in 1917 at the age of 27 and to the Federal Parliament in 1922. In the Scullin government in 1930 and 1931 he had held the portfolio of Trade and Customs. Now he was Minister for the Army.

Forde's most valuable characteristic was loyalty. Indeed one historian noted that 'he repeatedly allowed his own opinions to be submerged under those of his Party'.[125] S.M. Bruce described him as 'quite a decent little man without any very great capacity',[126] and this comment summed up the views of most of Forde's contemporaries.[127] The problem was that Forde had absolutely no knowledge of military matters and at times sought expert military advice from non-military sources.[128]

---

124. Tenant, *op.cit.*, p.135; Dalziel, *op.cit.*, p.28.

125. D.A. Gibson, quoted in Colin A. Hughes, *Mr Prime Minister, Australian Prime Ministers 1901-1972* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1976), p.135.

126. Notes by Bruce on conversation with Forde, 2 April 1943, CRS M100, April 1943.

127. Interviews with Sir Percy Spender, 11 October 1978, Professor W.E.H. Stanner, Forde's research officer, 4 June 1979, E.H. Cox of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, 20 November 1978, B.J.F. Wright, PA to the CGS, Sturdee, 12 October 1978, G. Armstrong of Forde's staff, 17 August 1978. See also Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.170. In his autobiography *Politics and a Man* Spender described Forde as 'a ranter, a disclaiming speaker expressing himself extravagantly' (p.210).

128. Blamey Memoirs, Chapter 9, pp.10, 11. On 20 April 1943 Major-General R.H. Dewing, the British Liaison Officer in Australia, reported to the War Office that he was amazed to find how little Forde seemed 'even to attempt to understand and master problems of his department. His knowledge of army problems is so meagre as to make it quite impossible for him to speak with either understanding or authority for his own ministry'. WO 106/4839.

When Blamey became Commander-in-Chief of the Army in March 1942 he tended to ignore Forde.[129] Hasluck observed that Forde 'had a negligible influence on policy in spite of his seniority'.[130] Yet Forde tried to do his best and considering the powers granted to Blamey, General Rowell doubted whether anyone could have handled the position better.[131]

The only senior minister with military experience was J.J. Dedman of the Department of War Organisation of Industry, and although he played a crucial role in balancing the war effort between military operations and production, he did not play an important part in strategic decision-making.

Like his senior ministers Curtin lacked expertise in defence policy matters. He had little understanding of military discipline or the duties and responsibilities of commanders, and he never attended meetings of the Chiefs of Staff.[132] His decisions, therefore, depended on the advice tendered by the government's professional advisers, particularly Shedden.

Curtin began discussions with Shedden immediately after taking office, and was advised to read a paper that Shedden had prepared in 1929 entitled 'An Outline of the Principles of Imperial Defence with Special References to Australian Defence'.[133] In essence, the paper stated that, because Australia was an island continent, its first line of defence was seapower. In a war against Japan alone the United Kingdom with an adequately defended Singapore base would deploy a Far Eastern Fleet to defend Australia against invasion. If the United Kingdom was at war with Japan

---

129. Cox interview, 20 November 1978.

130. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.19.

131. Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.165.

132. Interview with Air Marshal Sir George Jones, 24 January 1979.

133. Shedden had written the paper whilst in England, soon after completing the course at the Imperial Defence College. A copy is in MP 1217, Box 39. For information on Shedden's advice to Curtin, see Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 2, Ch.16, pp.6, 7.

and a European power, the United States would be likely to give support as an ally. From the beginning Shedden established himself as Curtin's main adviser on strategy, but like many other careful public servants he was cautious in giving his minister unwelcome advice. Whereas with Menzies he had stressed imperial defence, with Curtin he emphasised the reliance upon America and the need to maintain Australian sovereignty. In a letter written shortly before he died in 1971 Shedden wrote:

> With the entry of Japan into the war, Defence Policy emerged from a subordinate role in British Commonwealth Co-operation, to the assertion of Australian sovereignty in the control of its own forces when the security of the country was at stake.[134]

The events of the following months were to prove the validity of that statement, and both Shedden and Curtin were to play important roles in the process of change. However their success in maintaining Australia's sovereignty in the period after March 1942 is another matter.

---

134. Letter, Shedden to Mr W.A. Wood, Director of the ANU Press, unsigned and undated due to Shedden's death, Shedden Manuscript, Box 1.

CHAPTER TWO

AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING, December 1941-February 1942

During the three months following the outbreak of war in the Far East a number of principles were demonstrated about the way a small country such as Australia could influence the strategic decisions of her powerful allies, Britain and America. Several facts were outstanding. Australia was not involved nor consulted during the discussions between Churchill and Roosevelt over the priorities and direction of global strategy. Australian representations for reinforcements were not heeded; after balancing the needs of other theatres Britain sent what she could to the Far East, but Australia's claims made little difference. Furthermore the American forces were sent to Australia initially to provide a base for the Americans in the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), not for the exclusive defence of Australia. Despite the extreme dissatisfaction of Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, control of the new ABDA Command[1] remained firmly in British and American hands. Only by using the ultimate weapon of the denial of her forces was Australia able to influence allied strategy, and this effect was achieved only after two months of frustrating attempts to influence the councils of power against the background of mounting fears for the safety of the Australian mainland.

The Situation in Australia

Throughout the early months the Australian government grappled with a large number of problems on different levels. There were what

---

1. This was the joint American, British, Dutch, Australian Command which covered the Burma, Malaya, Netherlands East Indies area. It operated from 15 January to 25 February 1942.

might be termed the civilian problems; that is the changes in industrial, commercial and social life brought about by total war. Then there was the strategic problem which also had many aspects. At the highest level was the world-wide strategy for the conduct of the war, and the question of Australian representation and consultation. At a lower level was the problem of determining the strategy to be followed for the defence of Australia, and interacting with this and the allied global strategy was the decision over the employment of the 1st Australian Corps. A further defence problem was that of organising the Australian forces, particularly the army, to meet the increased threat.

It is not necessary to deal here with the problems of organising the Australian Army,[2] but the problems of defending Australia should be explained briefly to understand why, and with what background, the Australian leaders sought to influence allied strategy. Indeed the outbreak of war in the Far East elevated the defence of Australia from a local matter to one which directly affected allied strategy, and the Australian defence planners were forced to re-orient their thinking from a situation where they had been on the periphery of global strategic decision-making, to one where, at least in their own eyes, they had a vital role to play.[3]

---

2. For a discussion of this topic see the author's book, *Crisis of Command*, Chapters 3, 4, 5.

3. This process did not take place overnight, and indeed during 1941 it had been increasingly realised by Australian planners that the defence of Australia was important to allied strategy. The Japanese attack finally confirmed these views. The changed circumstances have been described in another way: 'Australia was now viewed as the central focus of the regional framework. The ability to concentrate purely on Australia as the regional pivot enabled its local, forward and regional defence planning to be potentially rationalized into a comprehensive overall scheme'. Carolyn A. O'Brien, 'The Historical Evolution of Australian Strategic and Defence Thinking', *World Review*, Vol.18, No.1, April 1979. See also C.A. O'Brien, 'Oceans Divide, Oceans Unite: The Concept of Regional Security in Australian Defence Planning', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.XXV, No.2, August 1979.

For the Prime Minister, Curtin, the impact of Japan's attack was an ordeal, and his reliance upon Shedden and the Chiefs of Staff was demonstrated quite early. At the War Cabinet meeting on the morning of 8 December 1941 the Chiefs of Staff outlined the emergency measures being taken, including the despatch of troops to Koepang (Timor).[4] The three Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, were experienced officers, but in Shedden's view their efforts were disappointing, and he advised Curtin that:

> the information they had to present as to preparedness for this emergency was, I thought scrappy and meagre, and I almost gathered the impression that this new and nearby threat to Australia was merely another incident in the present war, in which we had added to our enemies by one, though, of course, we had gained another ally.
>
> I think the Government must press it right home that *this is a new war* ...

Shedden recommended that the Chiefs of Staff prepare an appreciation covering defence capabilities and the likely forms that an attack on Australia might take.[5] Curtin agreed and the Chiefs were so ordered.[6]

At the same time the United Kingdom was asked for an up-to-date appreciation.[7] The British reply, which was received on 12 December, stated that events were moving too quickly for a general review. However it was 'not considered that there was any immediate large-sclae threat' to Australia. The Australians were referred to the British Far East Appreciation of 12 August 1940. An interesting comment in the cable was that 'We must not forget that Germany ... is still the main enemy'.[8]

---

4. War Cabinet Minute 1557, Melbourne, 8 December 1941, CRS A 2684, item 586/1941.

5. Letter, Shedden to Curtin, 8 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 555.

6. Letter, Curtin to Shedden (written by Shedden), 8 December 1941, *loc.cit.* Also Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 1, Ch.7, p.4.

7. Cable 778, Curtin to Dominions Office, 8 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 571.

8. Cable 817, Dominions Office to Curtin, 11 December 1941, *loc.c.it.*

On 11 December the Australian Chiefs of Staff presented their appreciation to the War Cabinet. Shedden was now pleased with the work of the Chiefs, whom he said later 'showed extremely sound judgment in anticipating that the Japanese would first attack the vital links in the South and Southwest Pacific Area, of the island line of communications from the United States to Australia'.[9] The appreciation stated that the attack on Malaya 'might well be a first step in the Japanese plan for a major attack on Australia', and that 'the possibility of a direct move on Australia via the islands to the north and North East must now be considered'.

This attack would start, it was argued, by attempts to occupy Rabaul, Port Moresby and New Caledonia, from which bases the attack on Australia could be launched. Therefore the Chiefs recommended that to hold these areas a minimum of a brigade group with anti-aircraft and coastal defences should be stationed in all three localities as well as on Timor. If Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies were occupied, and the bases to the north were captured, then the Japanese would be in a position to invade Australia. All these situations were possible and they advised that it was 'necessary to establish and train now the forces that would be required to prevent and to meet an invasion'. One would have thought that this would have been an admirable aim a year earlier. The appreciation also recommended that proposals for a joint US-Australian effort to defend Rabaul should be accelerated.[10]

On 15 December the Chiefs of Staff recommended that Darwin should be retained as a fleet operational base, that the garrison of Port Moresby

---

9. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 1, Ch.8, p.1.

10. Defence of Australia and Adjacent Areas - Appreciation by Australian Chiefs of Staff - December 1941, CRS A 2671, item 14/301/227. Also AWM 243/6/15.

should be increased to one brigade group, that Rabaul should be left with its existing garrison of one battalion group, and that an independent company should be sent to New Caledonia 'to enhance the morale of the [French] ... and for demolition purposes'. They realised that the Rabaul garrison of one battalion would be too small to resist an invasion successfully, but they considered it essential, 'to maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at the first threat'.[11] In view of the almost non-existent navy and air force available in Australia, and the untrained and ill-equipped militia, which formed the only available military force, the decision of the Australian Chiefs of Staff not to reinforce the north-eastern approaches seems unchallengeable.[12]

It is also important that the psychological situation effecting the government and the defence planners is understood. Professor W.E.H. Stanner, who was one of the personal assistants to the Minister for the Army, F.M. Forde, recalled that Forde tended to panic during this period. Stanner had been an assistant to Spender, the previous Minister, and although during 1941 he had not formed a particularly high opinion of the CGS, he was now impressed by Sturdee's calm approach.[13]

One indication of this tendency to panic was a memorandum from F.R. Sinclair, the Secretary of the Department of the Army, to Forde on 9 December 1941. Sinclair suggested the formation of a guerilla army and urged Forde to meet Major Irvine-Andrews VC, who was supposed to

---

11. Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, 15 December 1941, War Cabinet Agendum No.418/1941, 18 December 1941, CRA A 2671, item 14/301/227.

12. This subject is discussed at more length in the author's book, *Crisis in Command*, Ch.3. An interesting view offered by Whitington, *The House Will Divide*, p.99 is that Curtin overruled the Chiefs of Staff, who wanted to make a stand at Rabaul. Whitington provides no evidence of this view which does not appear to be supported by the documents.

13. Interview with Professor W.E.H. Stanner, 4 June 1979.

be an expert on guerilla warfare.[14] Sturdee was surprised and told the Minister:

> The general attitude of the writer of this paper is one of complete defeatism. In his despair he is forced into misleading and inaccurate statements ...
>
> I feel bound to state that it is a matter for regret that so highly placed an officer should, in these critical times, have seen fit to produce a proposal in such despairing terms without consulting any of the Government's military advisers.[15]

In his own defence Sinclair pointed out that the memorandum was written at the request of the Minister, and in doing so Sinclair claimed that he was exercising his rights as a free citizen of the Commonwealth.[16]

Other observers also misunderstood the resolve of the government, and leaders such as Sturdee, to deal with the problem in a calm, reasoned manner. Thus the US defence attaché in Melbourne advised Washington in early January 1942 that:

> the major idea among Australian chiefs of defence departments, except the Navy, is that the first mission of defence personnel and equipment is to protect areas not at present threatened, instead of forwarding them for offensive operations in areas already under attack or threatened.[17]

That the Australian Chiefs of Staff were fully alive to the need for strengthening the north-eastern approaches is indicated by their appreciation of 15 December 1941. It was as a result of this paper that the garrison of Port Moresby was increased to a brigade group, which was the limit of the maintenance capacity, and the decision was taken neither to reinforce nor to withdraw the Rabaul garrison. While certain

---

14. Memorandum, Sinclair to Forde, 9 December 1941, Blamey Papers, DRL 6643, item 'Secretary and Public Service Miscellaneous'.

15. Memorandum, Sturdee to Minister, 30 January 1942, *lo.cit.*

16. Memorandum, Sinclair to Minister, 2 November 1943, *loc.cit.*

17. Memorandum, Brig-Gen. Raymond E. Lee for Assistant Chief of Staff, WPD, 9 January 1942. Quoted in US Official History, Draft Chapter 1, AWM 492/4/38.

aspects were to prove unfortunate, it might be argued that the overall strategy outlined in the appreciation has withstood the test of events.[18]

Thus throughout December the Chiefs of Staff were under constant pressure to produce appreciations for a worried government, but these appreciations had to be read in conjunction with events taking place around the world, and from the beginning it was realised that Australia would have to rely on British and American support. Requests for support took two forms: for the reinforcement of Malaya, and for the provision of naval and air forces to combat an anticipated Japanese thrust towards Australia's line of communications with America. Furthermore, in a determined, but often vague fashion, the government sought representation in the allied decision-making machinery.

Danger in Malaya

Although the Australian defence planners realised that the greatest threat to Australia would ultimately come from the north-east approach, the events in Malaya focussed their early attention. After all, the Australian defence policy for the previous twenty years had been based on the security of Singapore. The Australian commander in Malaya, Major-General H. Gordon Bennett, was already making efforts of his own to influence allied strategy, and on 13 December, before his troops had been in action, he wrote to the Minister for the Army to express his concern at the lack of air support.[19] In a letter to Army Headquarters he reiterated this point: 'I fear another Crete'.[20]

On 11 December Curtin had reminded the Dominions Secretary that Menzies had been assured by the Secretary of State for Air in April 1941

---

18. See *Crisis of Command*, pp.35, 36.

19. Letter, Bennett to Forde, 13 December 1941, MP 729/6, item 13/401/402.

20. Letter, Bennett to Army Headquarters, 13 December 1941, Bennett Papers MSS 807-19 item 2. Mitchell Library.

that in the event of war in the Far East there would be an immediate review of air resources with a view to their redisposition to meet the dangers on all fronts. He had emphasised that this contingency had now arisen.[21] Bennett's plea spurred him, and the Advisory War Council which met on 16 December, to again cable London, and the next day Curtin told Churchill:

> We have consistently emphasised the need for strengthening the air defence of Malaya, Mr Menzies having fully discussed the subject during his visit to London.

Curtin suggested that the British Chiefs of Staff opinion, that 336 aircraft would be sufficient and that Japanese standards were lower than those of Italy, needed urgent revision.[22]

At the same time a cable was received from Britain that the naval reverses and the loss of the forward aerodromes in Malaya as the Japanese had advanced southward, had created for the land forces a situation which had not been contemplated. In the Advisory War Council on 18 December Menzies said 'that this was a fatuous statement,as a battleship force for the Far East had only recently been made available. It was always clear, in view of the shortage of an equipment, that the Japanese would have temporary Naval and Air superiority'.[23] Menzies probably had in mind the British pre-war statement that Singapore would have to be prepared to withstand an attack for 90 days before the British Fleet arrived.

Obviously some members of the Advisory War Council were becoming disenchanted with the British approach. This attitude would not have been helped by a message from Sir Earle Page, the Accredited Australian

---

21. Cable 795, Curtin to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 11 December 1941, CRS A 981, item Defence 59, Pt.2.

22. Cable Johcu 9, Curtin to Churchill, 17 December 1941, PREM 3 142/6.

23. Advisory War Council Minute 602, Canberra, 18 December 1941, CRS A 2682, Vol.III.

Representative in London, which, although it stated that the British Chiefs of Staff were anxious to reinforce Singapore 'in every possible way if they could find physical practical means of doing so', added that 'their recommendations seem to baulk at immediate means'.[24]

Meanwhile, Bennett was becoming even more concerned by the rapid Japanese advance, and on 17 December he cabled Sturdee requesting reinforcement by an Australian division from the Middle East.[25] The next day Major-General Northcott, who was passing through Malaya after visiting the Middle East, cabled Sturdee and recommended the immediate despatch of a machine-gun battalion.[26] The government reacted vigorously to these recommendations and Sturdee took up the question with Brooke-Popham.[27] Churchill was informed of the deliberations, and he was reminded that the Australian government had 'long pressed the United Kingdom Government on the provision of the strength considered necessary'.[28]

Brooke-Popham agreed that the situation was grave and that reinforcements were urgently required, but although he said he would be delighted with another AIF division, he did not press for it,[29] and Sturdee explained to the Minister for the Army that it would take from eight to ten weeks to move a division from the Middle East.[30] The result was that the government decided to despatch a machine-gun battalion, the last of the trained AIF battalions in Australia,plus almost two thousand largely un-trained reinforcements to Malaya.

---

24. Cable P16, Page to Curtin, December 1941, CRS M100, item 12.

25. Cable, Bennett to Sturdee, 17 December 1941, received 18 December 1941, AWM 553/2/3.

26. Cable, Northcott to Sturdee, 19 December 1941, AWM 553/2/3.

27. War Diary HQ FE, 19 December 1941, WO 112/15.

28. Cable Johcu 10, Curtin to Churchill, quoted in Historical Note on Malayan Compaign, MP 1217, Box 578.

29. Cable, Brooke-Popham to Sturdee, 20 December 1941, WO 112/15 and AWM 285/3/10.

30. Memorandum, Sturdee to Minister, 21 December 1941, AWM 285/3/10.

Although the government viewed the situation in Malaya with increasing alarm, what capacity did Australia have to influence events within Malaya? Soon after the outbreak of war the British government had decided to establish a War Council in Singapore to be chaired by Duff Cooper, who became the Resident British Minister with Cabinet rank. The British announced that Bennett would be invited to attend,[31] but the Advisory War Council in Australia felt that Australia should be represented by someone with the status of a Minister. A Minister was not available, but Mr V.G. Bowden, the Australian Trade Commissioner at Singapore,was appointed.[32]

Apparently the government's decision was not made clear to Bennett, who wrote later that he 'was not aware of the highly important part [Bowden] was playing. He never came near AIF HQ for any information'.[33] Bennett attended the first two meetings of the War Council but, like the other fighting commanders, he could not afford the time to continue, and only later did he learn that Bowden was attending on behalf of Australia.[34] Bowden was not, however, completely suited to represent Australia on such a body. Before his appointment to Singapore he had been the Australian Trade Commissioner at Shanghai and had been absent from Australia for many years. Nor was he properly briefed by the

---

31. Cable M453, Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs to Prime Minister, 12 December 1941, received 13 December 1941, CRS A 1608, item G33/1/2.

32. Advisory War Council Minute, No.609, Canberra, 18 December 1941, CRS A 2680, item 149/1941.

33. Letter, Bennett to Long, 14 February 1954, Bennett Papers, MSS 807-5, Mitchell Library.

34. Letter, Bennett to Long, 31 January 1954, *loc.cit.*

government.[35] Bennett was quite definite about Bowden's role: 'Bowden may have represented the Australian Government but he did not represent the AIF'.[36]

Clearly Bennett felt that he was more qualified than Bowden to advise the government on the situation in Malaya, but within a few days of each other they both sent important messages to the Australian government. The first was from Bennett, who on 19 December wrote a long letter to Forde describing the rapid withdrawals down the Malay peninsula and his belief that the senior commanders had shown a 'lack of drive and determination'. Bennett was anxious that his letter should not be used without his approval since 'I would probably find the door closed to me, if it were discovered that I was criticising the higher command'.[37]

A few days later Bowden followed with a cable received in Australia on Christmas Eve. He said that the deterioration of the position in Malaya was 'assuming landslide proportions'. He believed that without air reinforcement Singapore would fall and that the need for decision and action was a matter of hours not days.[38] Curtin and the Australian

---

35. Letter, Lionel Wigmore to Long, 22 May 1944, Gavin Long Notes, 51. Before Bowden's appointment Curtin sought the advice of Sir John Latham, a former leader of the National Party and the recently returned Ambassador to Japan. Latham wrote that Bowden 'is a competent man and has much commercial experience. Without in any way reflecting upon his capacity, I think it must be admitted that he has not the standing or the prestige which would enable him to make any representations to the authorities at Singapore upon any question of high strategy'. (Latham Papers, NLA MS 1009/65/639.) On Bowden's appointment Evatt cabled to Duff Cooper that 'We have confidence in his judgment and coolness'. (CRS A 1608, G/33/1/2)

36. Letter, Bennett to Long, 31 January 1954, Bennett Papers MSS 807-5, Mitchell Library.

37. Letter, Bennett to Forde, 19 December 1941, AA 1974/398. Bennett's diary indicates that he did not send the letter until the following day after pondering whether to send it. Gavin Long Correspondence, Gordon Bennett Diary, Part 1.

38. Cable 73, Bowden to Evatt, 11.51 p.m., 23 December 1941, received 24 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 571, L. Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957), p.182, claims that this cable was received in Australia on 25 December.

The Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, reading the proclamation announcing that Australia is at war with Japan. Standing is Mr F. Strahan, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department. Seated is Forde and Curtin.

(AWM Negative No.43287)

Mr V.G. Bowden, Australian representative on the Singapore War Council. His reports 'were grave and proved true'.

(AWM Negative No.10309)

Commodore J.A. Collins, RAN, Commanding China Force and Major-General H. Gordon Bennett, GOC AIF (Malaya).

(AWM Negative No.10103)

War Cabinet were convinced that Bowden was correct.[39] Whatever the doubts some observers might have had about Bowden's suitability, he continued to provide sound advice to the government. In respect to this message, Churchill had to admit that Bowden's views 'were grave and proved true'.[40]

Focus on Washington

It had not taken the Australian government long to realise that the entry of the USA into the war added a new dimension to strategic planning. Thus on 13 December Curtin had sent a message to President Roosevelt welcoming the opportunity of cooperating with America, and offering the use of Australian facilities. He also sought American help in securing New Caledonia.[41] When Casey delivered this message Roosevelt asked him to tell Curtin that the Americans had already started sending forces to the area. Casey requested that Australia be represented at the forthcoming conferences and was given some encouragement, but he was less successful with his pleas for Singapore, and reported that the Americans were more interested in the Philippines.[42]

---

39. Memorandum, Casey to US Under-Secretary of State, 24 December 1941, CRS A 3300, item 101.

40. Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p.4.

41. Cable 153, Evatt to Casey, 13 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 538. This cable was prepared by Shedden as Secretary to the Advisory War Council. Cable 154, Evatt to Casey, 17 December 1941, CRS A 816, item 31/301/136. Memorandum, Casey to Roosevelt, 13 December 1941, CRS A 3300, item 124. Menzies later claimed that he had suggested sending the cable at an Advisory War Council meeting. At first his proposal had been received as audacious, but when he had explained that he had done such things before, his suggestion had met with ready acceptance. Cable 10, British High Commissioner to Dominions Secretary, 9 January 1942, PREM 4 50/2A.

42. Cable 1162, Casey to Curtin, 17 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 538; CAble 1170, Casey to Curtin, 18 December 1941, CRS A 816, 31/301/136; CAble 1185, Casey to Curtin, 20 December 1941, *loc.cit.*

With the arrival of Churchill in America for discussions over the means of controlling the strategy of the now global war, the focus of decision-making moved firmly to Washington. On 22 December Casey reported that Roosevelt might press to have an American accepted as the Commander-in-Chief of a Pacific and Far East theatre and that General MacArthur, the American commander in the Philippines, might be nominated. 'I understand', said Casey, 'that although not devoid of human frailities, he is a good man'. Casey suggested that it might be advantageous for the Australian government itself to suggest an American Commander-in-Chief.[43]

The Advisory War Council, which met on 23 December, agreed that the future of Australia was bound up with the conversations in Washington,[44] and that day Curtin cabled Roosevelt and Churchill appealing for more reinforcements for Singapore. At the same time Curtin told Roosevelt that if the US government wished, Australia would gladly accept an American commander in the Pacific area.[45]

As soon as Bowden's warning arrived in Australia, Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, forwarded a copy to Casey and it was received in Washington on Christmas Eve.[46] The next day Churchill replied at considerable length to the Australian requests for the reinforcement of Malaya, stating that he did not share the Australian view that there was a danger of an early reduction of what he called the 'Singapore fortress'. He listed the reinforcements on the way to the Far East, but emphasised that he did not want to take forces away from Auchinleck,

---

43. Cable 1188, Casey to Curtin, 22 December 1941, MP 1217, Box 535.

44. Advisory War Council Minute No.623, Canberra, 23 December 1941, *loc.cit.*

45. Cable 1103, Curtin to Roosevelt, 23 December 1941, *loc.cit.*

46. Memorandum, Casey to US Under-Secretary of State, 24 December 1941, CRS A 3300, item 101.

the British Commander in the Middle East, who had victory over Rommel 'within our grasp'. He promised to send more definite news in the next day or two.[47]

In the meantime the Australian Chiefs of Staff had been examining the British plans in detail. They believed it was not a question of what Auchinleck could spare, but what the emergency in the Far East demanded 'to avert devastating blows' to the allied situation in Malaya. With this in mind the government now directed Casey to try once more: 'Please understand that stage of suggestion has now passed. Continuous over-statements by British Far Eastern Commands as to degree of preparedness have produced a very serious effect on public opinion ... This is gravest type of emergency'.[48] But Casey was unsuccessful with Churchill, his Chiefs of Staff and with the Americans,[49] and Churchill told him, 'You can't kick me round the room, I'm not kickable'.[50]

It is obvious that by now the Australian government was becoming intensely frustrated by the apparent lack of response from Churchill over the reinforcements for Singapore. At the same time the government continued to urge the Americans to send reinforcements to Australia. This frustration was given vent in Curtin's article in the Melbourne *Herald* of 27 December in which he stated that Australia looked to America 'free of any pangs' of kinship with the United Kingdom. Roger Bell in *Unequal Allies* has analysed the effect of this article, and has concluded that despite comments to the contrary, in the long run it had little

---

47. Cable, Churchill to Curtin, 25 December 1941, quoted in Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p.4.

48. Cable 164, Evatt to Casey, 26 December 1941, A 3300, item 101.

49. Cable 1220, Casey to Department of External Affairs, 26 December 1941, CRS A 3300, item 101, and item 123.

50. Lord Casey, *Personal Experiences, 1939-1946* (Constable, London, 1962), p.81.

MAP 1

From: Morton, *op.cit.*, p.162.

impact on Australian relations with America.[51] But it had an unfortunate effect on Churchill who, in a bitter cable to Curtin spoke of the Australian 'mood of panic' and offered to broadcast to the Australian people.[52] Thus after three weeks of war in the Far East the Australian government felt that it had achieved little sympathy in London or Washington for the strategic position facing Australia, and they were convinced that both Malaya and Australia were in great peril. In the face of these threats the tone of the government's telegrams became increasingly sharp - the stage of gentle suggestion had passed indeed.

Strategic Analysis versus Politics and Emotion

The events of January 1942 have been covered in detail in a number of books. Hasluck has explained Australia's claims for reinforcements which continued from those made earlier in December 1941, and he has described Australia's largely fruitless efforts to secure a voice in the higher direction of the war.[53] Wigmore has covered the formation of the ill-fated ABDA Command and Australia's effort to achieve representation on the headquarters staff.[54] These topics have also been discussed and analysed by Bell, particularly in respect to Australia's relationship with America.[55] In addition, the British and American official histories have described the important Arcadia conference in Washington when it

---

51. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.49.

52. Cable, Churchill to Curtin, 29 December 1941, PREM 4 50/15.

53. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, Ch.1. Although Churchill and Roosevelt in Washington opposed Australia's wish to be represented in the 'joint body', the British Chiefs of Staff, in London, thought otherwise, and on 29 December 1941 they reported: 'We think that it would be necessary to have representatives on this joint body of those Allies and of the Dominions interested in the South-West Pacific Area'. CAB 66/20, WP (41) 307.

54. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, Ch.10, 13.

55. Bell, *op.cit.*, Ch.2, 3.

was agreed that the European war should have first priority, and also the establishment of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, the body which was to be responsible for the allied direction of the war.[56] Churchill has reproduced in his war memoirs many of the bitter cables between himself and Curtin stemming from his anger over Curtin's article of 27 December and culminating in Curtin's 'inexcusable betrayal' cable of 23 January.[57] Furthermore, the American official histories have described the decision to send American troops to Australia, initially to form a base to reinforce the embattled forces in the Philippines and ABDA Command, but eventually to establish a base for an offensive northwards against Japan.[58] It is not necessary to recite once more all the developments during a period which was vital for inter-allied relations.

Despite strong representations by the Australian government throughout January, little real influence was obtained. The achievement of Australian representation in the British War Cabinet,and the formation of the London Pacific War Council, did not, in the long run, provide for consultation in the formulation of Allied strategy. Partly as a result of Australian argument Darwin was included in the ABDA Command and the Anzac naval area was established, but these were relatively minor concessions. Similar results might well have eventuated without Australian representation.

But if little was achieved during January, attitudes were developed which were to have an important impact during the remaining months of

---

56. M. Matloff and E.M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (OCMH, Washington, 1952), Ch.6, 7. J.R.M. Butler, *Grand Strategy, Volume III, June 1941-August 1942*, Part II (HMSO, London, 1964).

57. Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, Ch.53.

58. Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942*, Ch.6, 7. S. Milner, *Victory in Papua* (OCMH, Washington, 1957). L. Morton, *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years* (OCMH, Washington, 1962).

1942. Thus, in a memorandum to the Prime Minister on 9 January 1942, Shedden discussed the advantages of concentrating the AIF in the Pacific theatre. He dealt firstly with the military advantage which included a strengthening of the defences in the area and a shorter line of communication for reinforcement and supplies. He went on to add that the concentration of the AIF in the theatre would 'have a stimulating effect on the spirit of the Australian people'. However, Shedden's final argument showed an awareness of the problem of allied cooperation:

> ... the concentration of the AIF in the Pacific threatre would greatly increase the proportion of Australian Forces in a theatre so vital to us. It ensures the unity of direction and operation of the AIF. It greatly strengthens our claim to a voice in the higher direction of operations in this region and makes undeniable our claim for a Joint Allied Council for the Pacific theatre. By developing USA cooperation in Australia through the machinery recently approved and by winning the Americans to an understanding of the strategical position in the South-West Pacific as we see it, we can get inside the President's mind more readily through his Commanders here. Every opportunity is thus presented for the Commonwealth to develop, by weight of hard facts, a position which will render the Government largely independent of the ineffectual pleadings hitherto necessary with Mr Churchill.

Curtin minuted that he endorsed 'the submission as a whole'.[59]

Here was the blueprint for Curtin's later relationship with MacArthur, and it reveals the important role of Shedden. Not only did he look beyond the military aspect, on which he suggested Curtin should seek further advice from the Chiefs of Staff, but also he correctly interpreted the attitudes of the Prime Minister.

The discussions during January 1942 also raise questions of Australian strategic decision-making which have not been examined in other works. During December 1941, January 1942 and February 1942 the Chiefs of Staff produced nine appreciations and seventeen reports for

---

59. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 9 January 1942,with Curtin's handwritten comments of the same date. MP 1217, Box 573. Shedden did not realise that MacArthur would find it exceedingly difficult to 'get inside' the mind of a President who heartily disliked him.

the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet.[60] In these appreciations they dwelt at length on the defence of Australia and allied strategy in the Far East and Pacific. Royle, who barely six months earlier had been the British Fifth Sea Lord, had no hesitation in vigorously attacking the Admiralty's appreciation. After examining the United Kingdom Far East Appreciation of 23 December, the Australian Chiefs of Staff commented that the situation disclosed was 'most unsatisfactory ... In other words, the United States Pacific Fleet,on which we had based great hopes is unable or unwilling to assist'.[61]

Although most of Curtin's cables were drafted by Shedden, they were often based on the views of the Chiefs of Staff, two of whom, Royle and Burnett, were British officers. At least once the Chiefs found it necessary to keep Evatt from jumping to conclusions. When Evatt suggested that Casey had 'gone off on a frolic of his own' over the area of the South-West Pacific for which the US Navy would be responsible,[62] the Chiefs pointed out that they agreed with Casey's proposal.[63]

The most contentious issue during January was the 'inexcusable betrayal' cable sent to Churchill on 23 January, resulting from the increasingly deteriorating situation in Malaya, where the Australians had at last been in action. On 19 January Bennett reported to Sturdee that the Indian troops had not stood firm and that the British units were inexperienced in local conditions. Further withdrawals could be avoided only if all units fought as well as the Australians.[64] The next day

---

60. A list of these appreciations and reports is in MP 1217, Box 573.

61. Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff, 29 December 1941, CRS A 2671, item 445/1941.

62. Teleprinter message No.59, Evatt to Shedden, 4 January 1942, CRS A 816, item 31/301/136.

63. Teleprinter message M 28, Wilson to Shedden, 5 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

64. Signal, Bennett to Sturdee, 19 January 1942, AWM 553/2/3.

Sturdee received a cable from Bennett that two of the Australian battalions had been cut off and that the '45 Indian Infantry Brigade was a burden, not an assett'.[65] Another message received on the same day said that relief for the Australian battalions was 'impracticable'.[66] Further pessimistic messages were received on 21, 22 and 23 January,[67] and on the 23rd Bowden reported that the position was 'desperate and possibly irretrievable'.[68]

These cables were considered at a War Cabinet meeting in Melbourne on 23 January, presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister, Forde, in the absence of Curtin who was in Western Australia. After discussing the serious position in Malaya with the Chiefs of Staff, who were present, it was decided that strong representations should again be made to Churchill, with particular reference to the lack of support for the AIF in Malaya, and to the employment of Indian troops who had not proved suitable for the type of warfare under the conditions in Malaya.

The meeting was also advised that the Japanese Navy had attacked Rabaul that morning, although it was not yet certain if the town had been captured. Admiral Royle said that he thought Japan had 'so much on her hands' that Australia 'did not offer a very attractive target', but he could not discount the possibility of an attack on Port Moresby.[69]

Meanwhile Churchill too had been receiving pessimistic reports from Malaya. On 19 January General Wavell, the newly appointed Supreme Commander of ABDA Command, warned Churchill that he doubted whether

---

65. Signal, Bennett to Sturdee, 19 January 1942, received 20 January, CRS A 816, item 31/301/136.

66. Signal, Bennett to Sturdee, 20 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

67. Signal, Bennett to Forde, 20 January, received 21 January 1942, to Sturdee, 21 January 1942, to Forde, 22 January, received 23 January 1942, to Forde, 23 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

68. Cable 66, Bowden to Curtin, 23 January 1942, quoted in draft cable Johcu 21 of 23 January 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

69. War Cabinet Minutes 1741, 1942, Meeting Melbourne, 23 January 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.X.

Singapore could be held for long once Johore was lost,[70] and the next day he advised,as previously mentioned, that the whole of the 45th Indian Brigade and two Australian battalions had been cut off.[71] Churchill reacted by preparing a paper for the Chiefs of Staff Committee in which he suggested that the evacuation of Singapore and the diversion of reinforcements to Burma should seriously be considered.[72]

Churchill's paper, which Page described as a 'defeatist note',[73] was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting at 10.30 a.m. on 21 January, but there was no definite conclusion.[74] At the meeting of the Defence Committee that evening the CIGS insisted that the decision should be left to Wavell, as Allied Supreme Commander.[75] Page, who attended the Defence Committee meeting, vigorously opposed the suggestion, and he told the War Cabinet meeting, which followed the Defence Committee, that 'Australia would never stand our men being deserted ... the course [Churchill] proposed would be more fatal and injurious to the lives and fortunes of the army and the war than standing and fighting at Johore on the line that was there'.[76] As a result of

---

70. Cable, Wavell to Churchill, 19 January 1942, quoted in Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, pp.46, 47.

71. Cable, Wavell to Chiefs of Staff, 20 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

72. Memorandum, Churchill to Ismay, 21 January 1942, Churchill, *op.cit.* Vol.IV, pp.48, 49. Also PREM 3 168/6. The CIGS, General Brooke, was harbouring similar thoughts and on 20 January wrote in his dairy: 'News from Far East is bad and I am beginning to be very doubtful whether Singapore will hold out much longer'. Diary, 20 January 1942, 5/5, Alanbrooke Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

73. Page's Diary, 21 January 1942, Page Papers AWM.

74. Minutes of Meeting of Chiefs of Staff Committee, 21 January 1942, CAB 79/7.

75. War Cabinet, Defence Committee (Operations), Meeting 10.00 p.m. 21 January 1942, PREM 3 168/6; also CAB 69/4.

76. Page's Diary, 21 January 1942, Page Papers, AWM. The minutes of the meeting in PREM 3 168/6, contain no record of Page even speaking, although he is listed as being present.

these discussions nothing was done, and Wavell continued to rely on the previous instructions from Churchill, which emphasised that Singapore was to be defended to the last.[77]

By this time the first brigade of the 18th British Division had reached Singapore, but the remainder of the division was still in its convoy crossing the Indian Ocean.[78] The officer responsible for the escort of the convoy from the Sunda Straits was an Australian, Commodore J.A. Collins, who had been appointed Commodore Commanding, China Force.[79] Collins' appointment emphasised the differences between British naval attitudes towards the RAN and British Army attitudes towards the Australian Army. RAN and RN officers were on a common Admiralty list and there was nothing remarkable about an Australian naval officer being given a command in a British force. It is unlikely that this would have occurred quite so freely in the army. On the other hand RAN officers had not been educated to feel any particular responsibility towards the Australian government. Thus the senior Australian army officer in the ABDA Command, General Lavarack, reported at length to the Australian government, while it never occurred to Collins, the senior Australian naval officer in the area, to do likewise.[80] If Collins felt dissatisfied with his instructions from the ABDA Command HQ or ABDA Float (the naval component of HQ ABDA Command), he had the right of direct appeal to the Admiralty.

During this period the British Chiefs of Staff had become anxious about the security of the convoys proceeding to Singapore, and on 19 January they reminded Wavell that if Collins was not satisfied with the

---

77. Cable, Churchill to Wavell, 20 January 1942, Great Britain Cabinet Office, *Principal War Telegrams and Memorandum, 1940-1943* (KTO Press, Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1976), hereafter *Telegrams Far East*.

78. Gill, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.527.

79. J.A. Collins, *As Luck Would Have It* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965), p.107.

80. Interview with Collins, 9 October 1978.

'escort arrangements he should represent the matter to you'.[81] Collins was not, in fact, happy with the arrangements and told Wavell that he could not guarantee the safety of the convoys, and that he was worried about the reports of disorder in Singapore. Wavell told Collins that the highest authority demanded that the convoy should get through, and when Collins hesitated Wavell added that if it did not, "I shall have to tell the world that the Royal Navy had lost Singapore'. This was enough to 'quieten' Collins who said later that perhaps he 'should have had more guts and pressed Wavell'.[82] The last convoy carrying the remaining troops of the 18th Division was bombed between Sunda Strait and Singapore and the *Empress of Asia* (16,909 tons) was sunk, but the troops were taken off and the convoy reached Singapore on 5 February.[83] The Australian government never learned that its senior naval officer in the area had advised against the convoy proceeding.

The government did, however, receive advice that the British had considered evacuation of Singapore, for on 23 January Page reported that at the Defence Committee meeting on the evening of 21 January the question had been raised as to whether 'evacuation should not now be considered'. Page said that this would cause 'irreparable loss of prestige and I think irreparable damage to the allied cause'. He told the Australian government that it had been decided to wait for a couple of days to see if the Australians and Indians could fight their way back to the main army.[84]

This news was received in Australia after the War Cabinet meeting which had decided to send the cable to Churchill making strong

---

81. Cable G 5240, (MO 10). Chiefs of Staff to Wavell, 19 January 1942, *Telegrams Far East*.

82. Interview with Collins, 9 October 1978.

83. Gill, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, pp.527, 528.

84. Cable P29, Page to Curtin, 9.35 p.m., 22 January 1942, received 23 January 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

representations on the defence of Malaya. But now, in the absence of Curtin, Evatt amended the third paragraph of the cable, which had asked for Wavell's assessment, to read:

> Page has reported the Defence Committee has been considering evacuation of Malaya and Singapore. After all the assurances we have been given, the evacuation of Singapore would be regarded here and elsewhere as an inexcusable betrayal. Singapore is a central fortress in the system of Empire and local defence ... we understood that it was to be made impregnable and in any event it was to be capable of holding out for a prolonged period until arrival of the main fleet.[85]

In a separate cable to Page, Evatt asked him to inform the Australian government as to where the suggestion had arisen since this knowledge would be helpful in formulating the Australian view.[86] A few days later Page explained that Wavell's appreciation had not raised the question of evacuation, but had mentioned the difficulties associated with a prolonged siege of Singapore Island.[87]

At the War Cabinet meeting on 24 January Evatt referred to Page's telegram advising that evacuation was being considered, and said that that government had made strong representations that Singapore should not be evacuated. The minutes noted that 'the Chiefs of Staff concurred in this view'.[88] The next day the Advisory War Council also endorsed the cable and apparently there was no discussion.[89] Nevertheless, later

---

85. Cable Johcu 21, Curtin to Churchill, 2301 hours, 23 January 1942, Second Draft as revised by Dr Evatt and the Chief of the Naval Staff, MP 1217, Box 571. The amendments made by the CNS referred to naval disposition in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the telegram. See also CAB 60/21, WP (42) 34.

86. Cable 11, Curtin to Page, 25 January 1942, CRS M100, January 1942.

87. Cable P33, Page to Curtin, 28 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

88. War Cabinet Minute 1748, Meeting Melbourne, 24 January 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.X. The meeting was chaired by Forde.

89. Advisory War Council Minute 709, Meeting Melbourne, 26 January 1942, CRS A 2681, Vol.IV.

in the year Spender asserted that both Menzies and McEwen had dissented from the government's reply. Shedden claimed that neither he nor the minute secretary, Quealy, had any record of this dissent.[90]

Churchill took immediate exception to the cable and he informed Curtin that the 18th British Division and some *Hurricanes* were on the way. He continued:

> In such circumstances I really cannot pass without comment such language to me as 'inexcusable betrayal'. I make all allowances for your anxiety and will not allow such discourtesy to cloud my judgment or lessen my efforts on your behalf.
>
> It would however make it very difficult for your representative to be present at our most intimate and secret councils if ex parte accounts of tentative discussions are to be reported to you and made the basis for the kind of telegrams you have sent me.
>
> ... You have made it clear in public that you place your confidence in the United States. I have some recent and I believe true knowledge of the view they take, and I doubt very much whether they would share your opinion ... The great idea over there is China. We are very glad you should consult with them and set up any arrangement necessary for that purpose. Pray continue to invoke our assistance in securing attention to your views.[91]

In the War Cabinet on 26 January Churchill expressed regret that Page had not informed his government of the Defence Committee's decision to give highest priority to the defence of Johore and Singapore.[92] Page wrote that Churchill 'then went off the deep end about the Australians generally, and said if they were going to squeal he would send them all

---

90. Minute, Shedden to Curtin, 3 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

91. Cable 109, Churchill to Curtin, 25 January 1942, PREM 3 150/3. The first draft of the telegram began: 'You really have no right to use such language to me as "inexcusable betrayal"'. The amendment was made by the Dominions Secretary, Lord Cranborne. Some difficulty has been encountered in determining whether this cable was sent. At the War Cabinet meeting on 23 January Churchill said that he did not propose to answer Curtin's telegram. On the other hand Churchill's formal reply on 31 January to the technical points in Curtin's telegram began by referring to Cable 109 of 25 January. Cable 139, Dominions Office to Australian Government, 31 January 1942, PREM 3 168/6.

92. War Cabinet Minutes, 26 January 1942, CAB 65/29.

home again out of the various fighting zones'. In reply Page said that rather than looking after themselves the Australianshad been looking after the Empire, 'and if anybody had been looking after themselves it was the chaps this end'.[93] Finally, on 31 January, Churchill sent an assurance to Curtin that all possible support was being given to the Australian troops and that there was no evidence that the performance of the Indian troops had 'been discreditable'.[94]

Subsequently Churchill wrote that Curtin's message did not decide the issue: 'If we had all been agreed upon the policy we should ... certainly have put the case "bluntly" to Wavell'. Churchill realised the effect which a British 'scuttle' would have had on American opinion; nevertheless he acknowledged that there was 'no doubt what a purely military decision should have been'.[95]

But Churchill felt that the Australians could not escape some responsibility for the decision, and he emphasised this to Curtin a month later when Singapore had been lost and he was trying to persuade the Australians to allow the 7th Division to reinforce Burma.[96] Churchill

---

93. Page's Diary, 26 January 1942, Page Papers, AWM. These exact words were not used in the War Cabinet minutes which recorded Page's view that Curtin probably had in mind 'that since the beginning of the war Australia had never been unwilling to send her Imperial Forces overseas. In doing so she had denuded herself to a dangerous extent'. CAB 65/29.

94. Cable 139, Churchill to Curtin, 31 January 1942, PREM 3 168/1.

95. Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, pp.81, 82. Brooke agreed with Churchill and wrote later: 'Looking back on our decision to send 18th Division to Singapore, in the light of after events I think we were wrong to send it to Singapore, and that it would have served more useful purposes had it been sent to Rangoon'. Notes on My Life, 19-23 January 1942, 3/A/V, Alanbrooke Papers.

96. Cable 233, Churchill to Curtin, 20 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4 and CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

wrote in his war memoirs that 'it was not for Mr Curtin, after taking so strong a part in the discussion, to feel that he had no more share in it'.[97] Churchill was aware of the paradox that in January 1942 Australia continued to urge reinforcement of a threatened area without stopping to think whether the reinforcement could achieve anything, while a month later, when the reinforcements consisted of the Australian Corps, every consideration was given to their effective utilisation.

There was much strength in Churchill's argument. Although there can be no disagreement with the Australian appeals for reinforcements from early December until the battles in Johore, if the situation was as bad as Australia claimed it should have been obvious that a point would be eventually reached when the campaign was lost. It was the duty of the Australian Chiefs of Staff to make some effort to determine that point. After the news of disaster on 19 January, the Australian government apparently did not weigh carefully the question of whether the evacuation of Singapore might then have been the correct military decision, even if it might have been politically impossible.

On 16 January the Chiefs of Staff had stated categorically that if Malaya were lost then Australia would be vulnerable to attack.[98] This opinion was still held on 21 January when Curtin reported the views of the Chiefs to Churchill:

> So long as we retain a foothold in Malaya and the islands of the Malay Barrier remain in our hands we do not consider that Japan will attempt a major attack against Australia ... It is a race against time in Malaya in which the enemy will do everything possible by air and submarine attacks to prevent our reinforcements getting through.[99]

---

97. Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p.145.

98. Chiefs of Staff Paper No.3, 16 January 1942, CRS A 2670, item 32/1942.

99. Cable, Curtin to Churchill, 21 January 1942, CRS A 816, item 31/301/136.

Apparently the Chiefs did not take into account that if Singapore became a beleaguered fortress, Britain would not have the ships or planes to relieve it, and thus Japan would not be prevented from operating elsewhere at will.

Although the Australians did not receive Wavell's personal messages to Churchill, they were kept informed by Wavell's situation reports, and by messages from Bennett and Bowden. Neither of the Australian representatives actually suggested evacuation, but it was a question which should probably have been put to them. When the US Chief of Staff read Curtin's message he commented that it would be 'criminally negligent' not to make plans for evacuation in advance.[100]

Late January was therefore a time requiring clearly considered decisions, and was not the time for scoring points off the British government which, it must be admitted, had previously deceived Australia over the security of Singapore.[101] There almost certainly was an 'inexcusable betrayal',[102] but that fact should not have clouded the judgment of the Australians.

Australia's firm stand over the non-evacuation of Singapore emphasises the point that it is relatively easy for a small power to offer advice to a great power, secure in the knowledge that the great power must bear the responsibility for the final decision. If the point could be considered as somewhat academic it did not prove to be the

---

100. Cable 49, Casey to Department of External Affairs, 25 January 1942, CRS A 816, item 31/301/136.

101. There is an extensive body of literature on this topic. See, for example, McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence*; Hemmings, Australia and Britain's Far Eastern Defence Policy 1937-42; Ian Hamill, The Imperial Commitment, The Singapore Strategy in the Defence of Australia and New Zealand 1939-1942, MA Thesis, ANU, 1974.

102. C.A. Vlieland, the British Secretary of Defence in Malaya from 1938 to 1941, in a typescript 'Disaster in the Far East, 1941-2', held in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, agreed with Curtin that it was an 'inexcusable betrayal'.

following month when the destination of the 1st Australian Corps was discussed.

Comment must be made about the role of Dr Evatt, whom Menzies described as 'a seething mass of frustrated ambitions'.[103] Shedden observed that 'Evatt sought to take the initiative in drafting replies to the personal cables from Churchill to Curtin, and this led to difficulties between the Defence draft [prepared by Shedden for the Minister of Defence] and those of Evatt'.[104] Despite the terse nature of the telegrams between Curtin and Churchill before 23 January, it is unlikely that Curtin would have used the terms 'inexcusable betrayal'. In Curtin's absence Evatt, not the Deputy Prime Minister, Forde, seized control of policy-making, and gave vent to his prejudices against the British government and his nationalistic ambitions.

The new British High Commissioner in Canberra, Sir Ronald Cross, tried to give Churchill some idea of the political situation in Australia. He believed that there was a

> lack of appreciation of the war as world-wide, involving world-wide strategy, that makes Ministers feel entitled to some prior claim on Great Britain for their local defence needs in Malaya...

---

103. Menzies, *Afternoon Light*, p.52.

104. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 4, Chapter 57, pp.6, 7. Shedden has claimed that a relatively innocuous decision made in late 1941 that the decoding and encoding of the personal cables between Curtin and Churchill should be handled by the Communication Section of the Department of External Affairs, rather than by the Prime Minister's Department, 'proved to be unwise', for it gave Evatt the opportunity, denied to other Cabinet Ministers, of reading all the messages, sometimes before they reached Curtin. Yet it should have been Curtin's prerogative to decide what he wished to put to the War Cabinet. On the other hand a scrutiny of the personal cables between Curtin and Churchill, and also the cable register shows that they continued to be handled by the Prime Minister's Department. Nevertheless there is no doubt that Evatt did read the cables and often took the initiative in drafting replies. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp.10, 11, has written that the Department of External Affairs did not secure control of all external communications until 1944.

> Lack of experience of the world's affairs, moreover, is a factor which contributes importantly to Australia's great sensitiveness about her nationhood.
>
> In this connection, however, one must also look for the hand of Dr Evatt. Australia's sensitiveness about her status is a reality and Dr Evatt may well trade on it for his own ends. He is an able man, reputed to be a most ambitious careerist, anti-Whitehall if not prejudiced against the Home Country (or he might be described as Australian nationalist), and may be quite ready to seek his personal advancement through asserting Australia's right to plough her own furrow. He and Mr Beasley are the two most prominent members of the left wing faction in the Labour Party. They are not 'Curtin men' though they possess great influence with the Prime Minister. For the moment they run in double harness, but if the Prime Ministership became vacant the harness would snap as both raced for the throne.[105]

Cross continued to have a high opinion of Curtin, but he thought that Curtin had failed' to resist his left wing leader Evatt and he probably cannot do so'.[106]

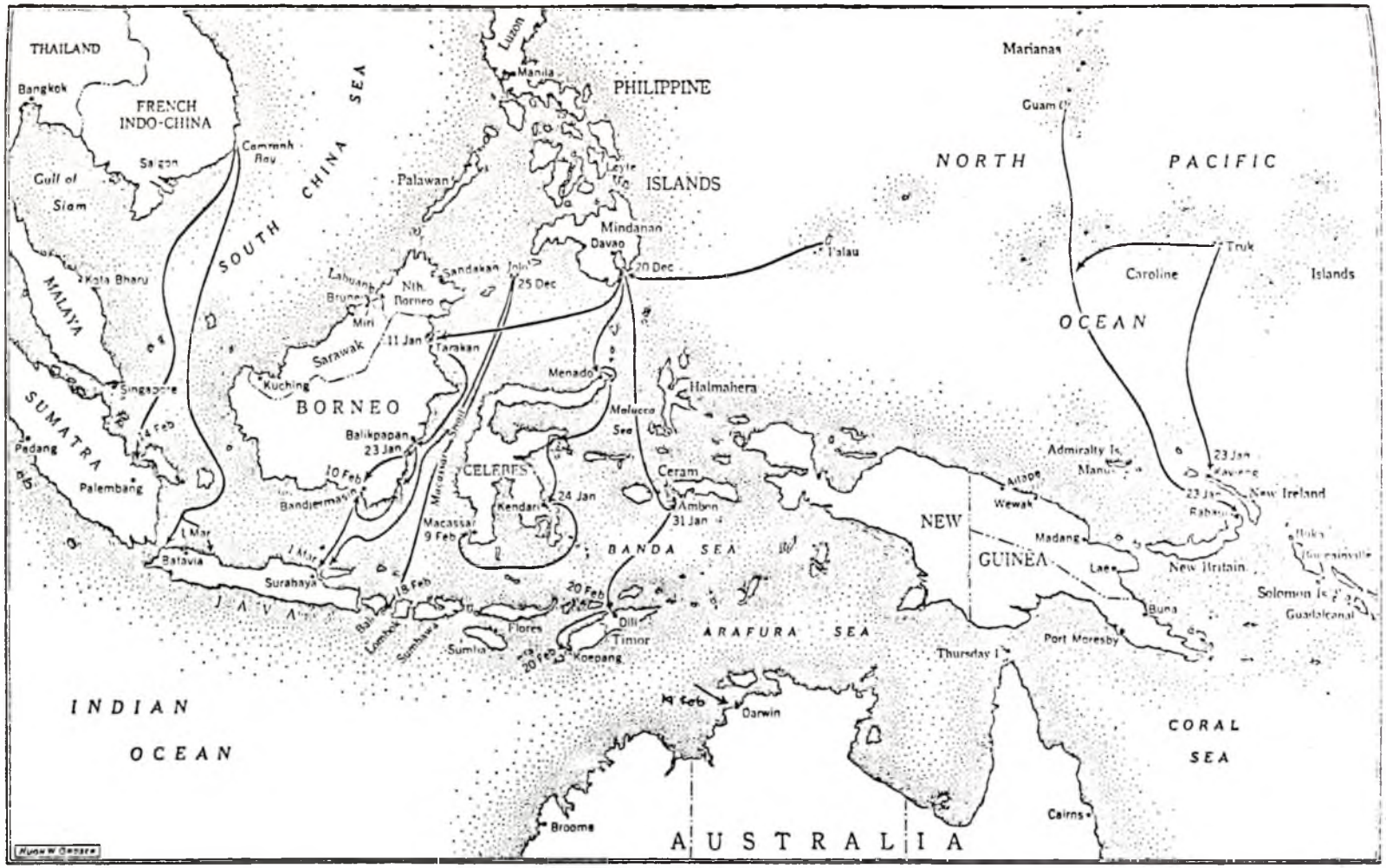
But Curtin claimed that the pressure for a strong approach to Britain came not just from within his own party. He said that on one occasion Hughes, the leader of the United Australia Party, had sent him a telegram telling him that he should reply to Churchill in 'peremptory' terms. After the receipt of one of Churchill's telegrams, Menzies had said 'Tell him to think up another', and Spender, the former Minister for the Army, was always urging him to 'demand' representation. Curtin said 'that he was the one always endeavouring to use moderate language'.[107]

---

105. Cable 10, Cross to Dominions Secretary, 9 January 1942, PREM 4 50/7A. See also Cable 37, Cross to Dominions Secretary, 14 January 1942, CAB 66/21, WP (42) 29.

106. Cable 53, Cross to Dominions Secretary, 21 January 1942, *loc.cit.* Also CAB 66/21, WP (42) 33. Cross suggested applying economic or financial pressure to Australia,but this idea was rejected by the British government. Minute, Dominions Secretary to Churchill, 22 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

107. Memorandum by Cross, 5 February 1942, *loc.cit.*



MAP 2

The Japanese Advance Through the Netherlands Indies and to Rabaul.

From: Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.393.

Colonel Van S. Merle-Smith, US military attaché, Mr Nelson T. Johnson, US Minister to Australia, Mr Arthur Fadden and the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie.

(AWM Negative No.9595/10)

Admiral Sir Guy Royle, Chief of the Naval Staff and First Member of the Naval Board, 1941-1945.

(AWM Negative No.17725)

Not only was it the most important example of the way Australia could, if only in a negative fashion, influence Allied strategy, but it emphasised a number of other problems inherent in coalition warfare. These included the problems faced by national military commanders in an international force, and the difficulties confronting the defence planners of a minor country seeking to play a part in the Allied war effort.

The incident has been described in detail in a number of books,[111] but it is necessary to recount briefly the outline of the story. On 26 January 1942 Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack, the GOC of the 1st Australian Corps, and his senior staff officers, arrived in Java as the advance party for a force which was then preparing to leave the Middle East.[112] The situation in the Netherlands East Indies was fraught with uncertainty, but Lavarack was soon convinced that the situation was 'grim', and he believed that the Japanese might seize southern Sumatra before the main body of his corps could arrive.[113] He knew that he did not have full knowledge of the intentions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but on 6 February, in a letter to Sturdee, he warned the Australian government that the plans for the Australian Corps might need to be changed.[114]

Major-General C.E.M. Lloyd, the Australian Deputy Intendant-General of the ABDA Command,had no such reservations, and he felt that Lavarack

---

111. See, Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, Ch.2, Wigmore, *op.cit.*, Ch.20, Churchill, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, Ch.9, Butler, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, Part II and Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963).

112. Berryman Diary, 26 January 1942.

113. Appreciation by Lavarack's senior intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Colonel K.A. Wills, 2 February 1942, AWM 703/3/21.

114. Letter, Lavarack to Sturdee, 6 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4; MP 1217, Box 573.

was not strong enough in the 'Alice in Wonderland situation in Java'. On 8 February he wrote to Sturdee's deputy, Major-General Rowell, urging that the proposal to keep the corps in Java was completely unsound.[115]

Lavarack, however, believed that there would still be time for a decision when the convoys reached Ceylon,[116] but by 12 February there was news that a fast personnel-carrying ship, the *Orcades* with 3,400 Australian troops, had been sent ahead of the main convoy, and would soon by arriving at Oosthaven in Southern Sumatra.[117] That night Lavarack prepared an appreciation recommending that the AIF should not be landed in the NEI, and the next morning he showed the appreciation to Wavell.[118] During the morning conference the news was received at Wavell's HQ that Singapore was expected to fall within 24 hours,[119] and Wavell asked Lavarack to delay sending the appreciation while he prepared a similar one to send to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the War Office.[120] The cables,which were despatched on 14 February, recommended that the AIF should not land in the NEI.[121] Wavell suggested that there were 'advantages in diverting one or both divisions of the AIF to Burma or Australia'.[122] Like Malaya, Burma also had been invaded by the Japanese.

---

115. Lloyd to Gavin Long, 16 May 1943, in Gavin Long Notebook, No.1, p.27.

116. Berryman Diary, 9, 12 February 1942.

117. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.454. The *Orcades* formed a one-ship convoy, JS2, Convoy JS1, which arrived at Oosthaven at about the same time as the *Orcades*, carried mainly equipment for the troops on the *Orcades* plus the 1st Squadron of the 3rd Hussars, Gill, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, pp.563, 570, 575.

118. *Java Interlude*, an account prepared by the military History Section based on *Java Adventure*, by Captain Curtis Wilson, who was Lavarack's ADC, AWM 556/2/1.

119. Lewis H. Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries* (William Morrow, New York, 1946), p.90.

120. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.444.

121. Cable SD 5649, Lavarack to Sturdee, 14 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4. Cable 01157, Wavell to Curtin, 14 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

122. *Ibid.*

On 16 February, with the news that Singapore had surrendered the previous day,[123] the Australian Chiefs of Staff reviewed Wavell's appreciation plus a paper which Sturdee had prepared before the receipt of Wavell's and Lavarack's cables.[124] The Chiefs recommended that 'if possible, all Australian forces now under order to transfer to the Far East from the Middle East should be diverted to Australia'.[125] The next morning, after a night of agonising over the decision,[126] Curtin cabled Churchill, Page, Wavell and the New Zealand Prime Minister, requesting that urgent arrangements be made for the diversion of the AIF to Australia.[127] This cable was confirmed as government policy at a War Cabinet meeting on 18 February.[128]

Meanwhile, on the evening of 17 February in London, the Pacific War Council discussed a personal message from Wavell to Churchill advising that it would be 'extremely precarious' to land the AIF Corps in the NEI, and recommending that at least one Australian division should be diverted to Burma.[129] The Pacific War Council agreed,[130] and in two cables despatched from London early on the morning of

---

123. Cable OPX 1786, Wavell to Curtin, 15 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

124. Paper by the Chief of the General Staff on Future Employment of AIF, 15 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4.

125. Teleprinter message, M 668, Wilson to Shedden, 16 February 1942m MP 1217, Box 573.

126. Ross, *op.cit.*, p.260; also interview with E. Harold Cox, 20 November 1978.

127. Cable 127, Curtin to Churchill, 17 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 53/302/112.

128. War Cabinet Minute 1896, Sydney, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

129. This message dated 16 February from Wavell to Churchill was sent to Australia in Dominions Office cable 219, 18 February 1942 and received on 19 February, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142; also PREM 3 166/5.

130. Minutes of Pacific War Council Meeting, 17 February 1942, CAB 99/26.

18 February, Page urged the Australian government to endorse this recommendation.[131] Bruce also sent a cable supporting Page.[132]

On Thursday 19 February, the day Darwin was bombed for the first time, the Advisory War Council met to discuss the destination of the 7th Division. Despite the disagreement of the non-government members of the Council the War Cabinet decided that the government's decision would remain unchanged.[133]

Meanwhile, during the day other information became available. Page, who claimed to have been 'staggered' by Curtin's reply,[134] cabled from London pointing out that the Australian government had not received Wavell's appreciation of 16 February and requesting that a final decision be deferred.[135] Wavell cabled from Java that Lavarack agreed with his view that the Corps should be used to reinforce Burma,[136] and Lavarack himself cabled that he agreed with Wavell. He added, however, that he was not personally in a pcsition to judge the home defence situation in Australia.[137] But there was little chance of the government changing its mind, and late on 19 February two cables, drafted by Evatt, were despatched to Page emphasising that the decision was unchanged.[138]

---

131. Cables P43 and P44, Page to Curtin, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

132. Cable 31A, Bruce to Curtin, 18 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

133. Advisory War Council Minute No.777, Sydney, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142. Also Spender, *op.cit.*, pp.148, 149.

134. Page's Diary, 18 February 1942, Page Papers AWM.

135. Cable P46, Page to Curtin, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

136. Cable OPXO 1529, Wavell to Curtin, 18 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

137. Cable o1538, Lavarack to Sturdee for Curtin, 18 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4.

138. Cables 28, 29, Curtin to Page, 19 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142. Tenant, *op.cit.*, p.135, claims that the despatches were written by Evatt. Notes on cables in MP 1217, Box 573 show which ones were drafted by Evatt, and when they were submitted to Curtin, who after a week without sleep, was in hospital. See also Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, p.198.

After receiving the first of these two cables Page made a final appeal to the Australian government, adding that the US government had decided to send a division to Australia and that Australia should reciprocate by allowing one Australian division to go to Burma.[139] But after a secret session of parliament on 20 February Curtin again confirmed the decision.[140]

Before the receipt of Curtin's final confirmation Churchill had seemed willing to accept the Australian decision,[141] but at 9.00 p.m. on 20 February he ordered the Admiralty to tell the convoy to steam northwards,[142] and ten minutes later he cabled an appeal to Curtin. He did not mention that the convoy was heading towards Burma, but emphasised that the Australian force was the only one which could reach Rangoon in time to prevent its loss.[143] At the same time, Churchill urged Roosevelt to appeal to Australia,[144] which he did in cables directly to Curtin, and through Churchill and Casey to Curtin.[145]

After a special War Cabinet meeting on 21 February the Australian government again confirmed the decision,[146] which reached Churchill on the morning of 22 February.[147] However the convoy no longer had sufficient

---

139. Cable P47, Page to Curtin, 19 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

140. Cable 30, Curtin to Page, 20 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

141. Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 1.00 p.m. 20 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4.

142. Memorandum, Ismay to Churchill, 23 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

143. Cable 233, Churchill to Curtin, 20 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

144. Cable, Churchill to Roosevelt, 20 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4.

145. Cable 326, Casey to Curtin, 20 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142; cable 72, Roosevelt to Curtin, 21 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 573; cable, Roosevelt to Churchill, 21 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4.

146. War Cabinet Minute 1915, Canberra, 21 February, 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.X.

147. Cable 136, Curtin to Churchill, 22 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4.

fuel to sail directly to Australia, and Churchill explained the situation to the Australian government in a message sent on the afternoon of 22 February. Since there was to be a three or four day delay before the convoy could sail for Australia, Churchill again asked the Australian government to change its mind.[148] However, in a reply sent on 23 February the Australian government stated that it was 'quite impossible to reverse a decision which was made with the utmost care and which we have affirmed and re-affirmed'.[149] That day Churchill informed Curtin that the convoy would proceed to Australia.[150]

This was not, however, the end of the incident, for no sooner had it been finally agreed that the 7th Australian Division was not going to Burma, than the possibility of diverting the convoy to Ceylon was raised. In view of the Australian decision regarding Burma, the British government was not willing to approach the Australian government, but both Page and Bruce urged Curtin that it was important to Australian security to hold Ceylon, which was threatened by the Japanese fleet in the Indian Ocean.[151] Furthermore, it was suggested that to assist with the defence of Ceylon would 'create an atmosphere of goodwill' after Australia's refusal to reinforce Burma.[152] The Australian Chiefs of Staff agreed that Ceylon occupied an important strategic position,[153] and the Australian government offered the two brigades of the 6th

---

148. Cable 241, Churchill to Curtin, 22 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142; PREM 3 63/4.

149. Cable 139, Curtin to Churchill, 23 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

150. Cable, Churchill to Curtin, 23 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

151. Cable 34, Bruce to Curtin, 23 February 1942, cable P51, Page to Curtin, 24 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

152. Cable 36, Bruce to Curtin, 27 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

153. Report by Chiefs of Staff, Defence of Ceylon, 28 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

Division which had not yet departed from Suez.[154] Churchill thanked Curtin 'most cordially' for his 'proferred help'.[155]

The controversy over the destination of the Australian Corps brings into focus the problem of strategic decision-making in coalition warfare. Ismay was convinced that there could be no real joint decision-making; the best a minor country could do was to exercise its veto over the employment of its troops. He cited the convoy disagreement as a prime example of this principle.[156] Churchill's reluctance throughout the war to allow Australia any real opportunity for consultation meant that Australia had little alternative but to apply a veto.

Although the Pacific War Council could only make recommendations to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the Australians had been told that it would enable them to have a voice in strategic decision-making. The Australians had doubted the value of such a body being established in London, and the episode with the convoys proved that the doubts were well founded. During the dispute it became clear that Churchill had no desire to include Australia, or any other minor country, in the decision-making process, and that representation would have to be made independently to each of the great powers. It is easy to understand why Curtin sought to establish direct and close relations with MacArthur once the South-West Pacific Area command was established a month later.

Nevertheless, these clear lessons were confused by the role of Page, and Dedman has perceptively pointed out that the controversy was probably caused by Page's and perhaps Churchill's misreading of Curtin's cable of 17 February. Dedman noted that the first part of

---

154. Cable 160, Curtin to Churchill, 2 March 1942, *loc.cit.*
155. Cable 256, Churchill to Curtin, 4 March 1942, Page Papers AWM.
156. Ismay, *op.cit.*, p.245.

the cable contained merely the opinions of the Chiefs of Staff, while the second part stated the government policy, which explicitly requested the diversion of the AIF to Australia. He argued that Page took as government policy the one sentence of the Chiefs of Staff opinions which stated that they were 'mindful of the fact that the strategic position of Burma may necessitate some reinforcement there until other troops were available from elsewhere'.[157]

Undoubtedly Dedman was right. In his memoirs Page quoted only the first paragraph of the cable,[158] and he remained unshakeable in his belief that the first paragraph actually represented government policy.[159] Furthermore, in an explanation cabled to Curtin on 27 February Page claimed that he acted in conformity with the first paragraph which he took as 'a definite instruction'.[160]

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that his task in London had become too much for Page. Indeed Dedman believed that Page's 'failure to master his brief ... precipitated the controversy'. Dedman did not think that Page had wilfully deviated from his instructions, but he thought that if Page had not pressed the case for Burma then the Pacific War Council would not have recommended the diversion.[161]

Even when the Australian government had made its position unmistakably clear to Page, he continued to work for the reinforcement of Burma. Thus on 19 February he had a conversation with Churchill in which he

---

157. John J. Dedman, 'The Return of the AIF from the Middle East', *Australian Outlook*, Vol.21, No.2, August 1967.

158. Page, *op.cit.*, p.335.

159. *Ibid.*, p.346.

160. Cable P54, Page to Curtin, 27 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

161. Dedman, 'The Return of the AIF from the Middle East'. On 17 March 1943 Page's military adviser, Colonel A.W. Wardell, told Shedden that Page 'had created a deplorable impression' - people had been unable to discover what he wanted to do, and he had exerted little influence. Shedden replied that he gathered this 'from the incoherent nature of the cables we have received and the non-observances by ... Page of instructions which had been conveyed to him'. Notes of Discussions, MP 1217, Box 14.

said that if he could be given certain assurances about the position in Burma he thought that he could secure Australian consent.[162] These assurances could not be given, but Page went so far as to withhold Curtin's reply to Churchill in the hope that the Australian government would change its mind.

Obviously Page had developed a substantial personal commitment to reinforcing Burma. He had been sent to Britain to establish a system for Australian representation in strategic decision-making, and after the Pacific War Council meeting of 17 February he had felt satisfied that he had at last achieved this aim. Curtin's cable had arrived mid-way through the meeting,[163] and perhaps Page had read what he wanted to see, for he wrote later that he 'felt certain that Burma was the place'.[164]

Page's own writings indicate his lack of understanding of the situation:

> The Pacific War Council could have been an executive body if the Australian Government had backed up its decisions, but when its recommendations had been made after definite advice by Wavell, backed by Roosevelt, supported by the Army Chiefs in Australia, and finally agreed by the Pacific War Council, then turned down by one constituent Government, the Council automatically becomes advisory and the laughing-stock of the Services.
>
> ... though I got the instructions and acted on them, the Australian Government repudiated them and the Council became quite nugatory.[165]

Much of this was plainly untrue. The Australian Army chiefs did not support the recommendations. Both Sturdee and Blamey[166] opposed them

---

162. Page's Diary, 19 February 1942, Page Papers, AWM.

163. Cable P54, Page to Curtin, 27 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

164. Page's Diary, 17 February 1942, Page Papers, AWM.

165. Paper written by Page in early 1942 - no date. Page Papers, AWM.

166. Blamey Memoirs.

and Lavarack's support was qualified by his claim that he did not know the situation in Australia. At no stage did the government repudiate its instructions. But the statement shows Page's commitment to making the Pacific War Council an executive body and therefore his desire that Burma should be reinforced.

With regard to the Ceylon garrison, Page also created the wrong impression when he wrote that the government 'dilly-dallied with the matter for several weeks till the first divisions had passed Ceylon, and finally just managed to send back, after being a day out, everything being loaded and reloaded again, two brigades of the 6th Division'.[167] It was only five days from the receipt in Australia of Page's request until the government offered the troops to Britain, and the two brigades were not sent back. Rather they had not yet left Suez. But perhaps Page himself gave some indication of his difficulties when he wrote in April 1942 to Curtin: 'I went through since January the worse period of acute mental distress of my whole life'.[168]

Although Page must bear much of the responsibility for the controversy, the role of Churchill must not be overlooked. It is true that Page, and the British High Commissioner, Sir Ronald Cross,[169] both encouraged Churchill to believe that an appeal to Curtin would be successful, but on 20 February, the day of his appeal to Curtin, Churchill admitted to the Chief of the Naval Staff that further appeals

---

167. Paper written by Page in early 1942 - no date. Page Papers AWM. In his memoirs Page wrote that he advised Churchill to leave two brigades of the 7th Division in Ceylon in anticipation of the government's approval. (Page, *op.cit.*, p.348.) There is no evidence that Churchill did so, and having been once bitten, it is unlikely that he would have done so.

168. Letter, Page to Curtin, 24 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 475.

169. Cable 160, Cross to Dominions Office, 21 February 1942, PREM 3 63/4.

Sir Earle Page, Accredited Australian Representative to the United Kingdom War Cabinet, 1941-1942.

(AWM Negative No.4146)

General Sir Archibald Wavell, Supreme Commander ABDA Command, January-February 1942.

(Imperial War Museum, Negative No.E1569)

were not likely to affect the Australian decision.[170] Churchill's cable was less than candid, creating the impression that the convoy was at that time sailing towards the NEI and would soon be headed in the opposite direction from Rangoon.[171]

When the Australian government rejected this appeal Churchill hoped that during the delay created by refuelling the ships the situation in Burma would develop in such a way as to provide him with further grounds for a request to Australia.[172] But the Australians were not willing to give the matter further consideraton, and Page took umbrage at Churchill's request,[173] writing to him immediately to complain that he had previously been given advice that the convoy's destination had not been varied.[174] At the same time Page sent off a hurried telegram to Curtin urging that, notwithstanding the government's natural resentment, recriminations should be avoided as they could only harm the objective of 'maximum cooperative effort in the allied cause'.[175] Bruce was appalled by Churchill's cable and its possible repercussions, and he cabled urgently to Curtin. He acknowledged that Churchill's message was 'arrogant and offensive and contradicts the assurances given to Page', and that any reaction would be justified, but he urged restraint in the Australian reply. Bruce said that he held 'no brief

---

170. Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 20 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

171. Cable 233, Churchill to Curtin, 20 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

172. Cable, Churchill to Wavell, 22 February 1942, PREM 3 166/4.

173. Page wrote in his diary that he received news by phone of the telegram which Churchill had 'stupidly sent to Australia', Page Papers AWM.

174. Letter, Page to Churchill, 22 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

175. Cable 1613, Page to Curtin, 0125 hours, 23 February 1942, received 23 February, MP 1217, Box 571.

for the Prime Minister',[176] nonetheless 'a crisis in the relations between Australia and the United Kingdom arising out of the action of one man must be avoided'. Bruce reported that a senior Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, had said that Churchill was 'so near the end of his tether ... that allowance must be made for the tone of his telegram'.[177]

But the Australian reply was already on the way. Curtin, whom Evatt described as 'greatly shocked' by Churchill's action,[178] complained that it appeared that Churchill had treated Australian approval 'to this vital diversion as merely a matter of form'.[179] Nevertheless, Page 'was pleased to note the restrained tone of' Curtin's reply to Churchill, which he believed would 'assist future relations between' the governments.[180] Furthermore, after receiving an explanation from Ismay, Page was convinced that the delay in informing Curtin of the diversion of the convoy was due 'to inadvertence'.[181]

In simple terms the dispute was a reflection of the differences in strategic perspective between Canberra, London and Washington.[182]

---

176. The feeling was mutual, for Churchill disliked Bruce. On 12 February 1943 after the 9th Division had returned to Australia from the Middle East, Churchill wrote to Attlee. 'The position of Mr Bruce is highly anomalous. The Australians have now moved their last troops away from the general war zone to their own affairs ... I think he should be brought up with a round turn'. PREM 4 50/11. This also gives some idea of the degree of importance Churchill attached to the defence of Australia.

177. Cable 33A, Bruce to Curtin, 0110 hours, 23 February 1942, received 23 February, CRS M100, item February 1942.

178. Evatt, 'Churchill versus Curtin: Burma and the AIF', in Tenant, *op.cit.*, p.366.

179. Cable 139, Curtin to Churchill, 23 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

180. Cable 1637, Page to Curtin, 24 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

181. *Ibid.*

182. Brooke later wrote: 'The outlook prevailing in Australia at that time was definitely parochial and centered solely on its own direct personal security. Doctor Evatt was certainly the worst propagandist of this policy'. Notes on My Life, 22 February 1942, 3/A/V Alanbrooke Papers.

Even if the Australian government was willing to accept that it could not be represented in the decision-making bodies, it believed that its voice should be heard when matters concerning Australian defence and troops were being discussed. What Australia needed was evidence that her voice was being heard. Attlee, the British Deputy Prime Minister, had to agree with Bruce that if Australia had been advised of intentions to recognise the importance of Australia as a vital base, and if the time and scale of reinforcements had been indicated, Australia might have approached the problem of the diversion to Burma more sympathetically.[183] In the absence of this sort of information the Australians felt that they had little option but to look to their own defences.

From the outbreak of war with Japan the Australian Chiefs of Staff had emphasised the vulnerability of Australia and the fact that this vulnerability would increase if Singapore were captured. In particular, the CGS, Sturdee, had argued consistently during the previous ten years that the event might occur, so it is not surprising that he took the lead in advising the government that the convoys should return to Australia.[184] At the Chiefs of Staff meeting of 16 February the burden was squarely upon Sturdee, for the other two chiefs, Burnett and Royle, were British officers. They felt that any advice they might offer could be biased, and consequently they told Sturdee that they would unreservedly support him.[185] This is not to suggest that the

---

183. Cable 35, Bruce to Curtin, 27 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

184. On 14 February Sturdee prepared a paper recommending the diversion of the convoys to Australia, and on the morning of 15 February he telephoned the Prime Minister to urge him to order the diversions.

185. Interview with B.J.F. Wright QC, 12 October 1978. Wright was Sturdee's ADC and later MA. Wright was not present at the Chiefs of Staff meeting but was told these details by the late Douglas Menzies, the Secretary to the Defence Committee.

other chiefs were in any way disloyal to the Australian government. Indeed Curtin said that although Colvin, Royle's predecessor, always echoed Admiralty opinion, Royle was more independent. As Royle said of his attitude toward the Admiralty: 'Frankly I think that my superior [RN] officers are wrong and I am right'.[186] But the documents show that throughout the period Sturdee was the main spokesman for the chiefs. General Rowell, Sturdee's deputy, wrote that this was 'the most fateful recommendation [Sturdee] had to make in his service'.[187] When the Chiefs of Staff met the War Cabinet on 18 February to discuss their recommendations, Sturdee informed the ministers that he would tender his resignation if the AIF was not returned to Australia.[188]

Curtin, however, agreed completely with Sturdee; indeed before the receipt of Sturdee's paper on 15 February, Curtin, or perhaps Shedden, had prepared a cable to Page and Curchill which followed much the same lines as Sturdee's paper.[189] It will be recalled that on 9 January Shedden had advised Curtin that the AIF, then in the Middle East, should be returned to Australia.[190] When Menzies told Curtin on 14 February that the troops should be sent to Burma,[191] Curtin reminded him that he had long advocated a policy of defence of Australia.[192]

But at times some ministers acted in a less rational fashion. Spender has left a vivid recollection of the emotional reaction of some

---

186. Curtin to Gavin Long, Sydney, 2 October 1943, Gavin Long Diary No.1, AWM.

187. S.F. Rowell, 'General Sturdee and the Australian Army', *Australian Army Journal*, August 1966, p.9.

188. Letter from Colonel J.P. Buckley, 20 August 1974, and interview, 22 January 1979. Buckley is Sturdee's son-in-law and was an officer of the Department of Defence until he retired recently. War Cabinet Minute 1896, Sydney, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

189. For a draft of the cable see MP 1217, Box 573.

190. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 9 January 1942, MP 1217, Box 573.

191. Letter, Menxies to Curtin, 14 February 1942. *loc.cit.*

192. Letter, Curtin to Menzies, 16 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

Lieutenant-General V.A.H. Sturdee photographed on his appointment as Chief of the General Staff, October 1940. (AWM Negative No.3657)

Sturdee at a dinner in Melbourne soon after his return from Washington, 31 March 1944. With him is Major-General C.E.M. Lloyd, Blamey and Herring.
(AWM Negative No.65309)

members of the Advisory War Council at the meeting on 19 February, and described how during the discussion one minister, Beasley, left the room briefly. 'Suddenly he returned, bursting into the room in a very agitated state. Loudly he proclaimed, as I recall his words, "The Japs have bombed Darwin! That settles it!" It was an odd performance'.[193] During this period Cecil Brown, a journalist from the Columbia Broadcasting System, interviewed Curtin, Evatt and Forde. Brown found Evatt passionately biased against Britain,[194] and he wrote that Forde proved to be 'one of the most incredible men I have ever encountered in political life ... In his office in Parliament House he acted as harassed as if a Japanese division were chasing him. His manner was to keep saying, "Yes, yes, yes", whether you were saying anything or not'.[195] When Curtin became ill Evatt drafted a number of cables sent to Churchill, and Evatt's draft of the Australian government's final reply to Churchill of 22 February was more strongly worded than that finally despatched by Curtin.[196]

Not only was Australia's decision carefully considered by the Chiefs of Staff and the political leaders, but events were to prove that they had judged correctly. This question was examined in detail by the official historian, Lionel Wigmore, who concluded that it was highly doubtful whether the 7th Division could have saved Rangoon. At best it could have helped in the withdrawal from Pegu and would have taken part in the long retreat to India:

---

193. Spender, *op.cit.*, pp.148, 149. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp.43, 44 provides further evidence of the government's nervousness and the agitation in the Advisory War Council on 19 February 1942. Hasluck wrote that although 'as a war historian I tried to deal fairly with the Curtin government, I now record that my personal observations of the Australian Ministers, including the Prime Minister, at the time of the crisis in early 1942, was that they were lacking in fortitude. They were in a state of jitters when bad news came'. (p.43)

194. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.524. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.42 also noticed Evatt's distrust of Britain.

195. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.519. See also Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p.148, for a similar description of Forde.

196. See MP 1217, Box 571. The final draft was probably prepared by Shedden and was approved by Curtin.

> In that event it could not have been returned to Australia, rested, and been sent to New Guinea in time to perform the crucial role it was to carry out in the defeat of the Japanese offensive which would open there in July. The Allied cause, therefore, was well served by the sound judgment and solid persistence of General Sturdee, who maintained his advice against that of the Chiefs of Staff in London and Washington; and by the tenacity of Mr Curtin and his Ministers who withstood the well-meaning pressure of Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt.[197]

Wavell's biographer thought that it was 'a hard but surely a just decision'.[198]

The problems faced by the defence planners in Australia highlight a further question. What information did they have to work on? They were not given complete access to the decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and in the absence of this information they had to rely on whatever could be elicited by the Australian representatives in London and Washington, and at that time there was no senior full-time military officer in either capital.[199]

The best advice would come from the Australian commander on the spot, Lavarack, and he had no knowledge of either the situation in Australia,[200] or of the plans of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Yet although he had a responsibility for the safety of his corps, he did not want to appear to be complaining just because the situation was grim; as his BGS, Brigadier Berryman put it, it was their 'duty to be cheerful'.[201]

---

197. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, pp.464-465.

198. John Connell and Michael Roberts, *Wavell, Supreme Commander* 1941-1943 (Collins, London, 1969), p.196.

199. The senior military officer in London was Colonel A.W. Wardell. General Smart arrived in Washington in April and moved to London in September when he was replaced by General Sturdee.

200. Cable SD 5649, Lavarack to Sturdee, 14 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4. Letter, Lavarack to Sturdee, 19 February 1942, Lavarack Papers in the possession of Dr J.O. Lavarack.

201. Berryman Diary, 9 February 1942.

It appears that Lavarack was somewhat hesitant about pressing his views on the government. On 2 February his senior intelligence officer prepared a paper which concluded that if part of the corps arrived before the Japanese attacked it could be lost.[202] On 6 February Lavarack warned Sturdee of the potential problem, but it was not until the night of 12 February, with the serious situation on Singapore Island, that he prepared an appreciation to be sent to the Australian government.[203] Even then the despatch of this cable was delayed until 14 February while Wavell prepared a similar one to be sent to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the War Office. Nevertheless, Lavarack's advice arrived in Australia in sufficient time for a decision to be made before the convoy left Ceylon. Lavarack had stated earlier that that was the time when a decision would have to be made.[204]

Again on 16 February Lavarack urged that the AIF should not be sent to the NEI,[205] and he put the same view on 18 February. In this last cable he supported Wavell's argument that the corps should be used to reinforce Burma, but he added that he was not personally in a position to judge the home defence situation in Australia.[206] Only then did Lavarack, who had been absent from Australia for over eighteen months, receive a cable from the Australian government that the home defences were 'far from satisfactory'.[207] On balance, therefore, it is difficult to criticise the attempts made by Lavarack to advise the government in Australia, and it seems possible that he developed a realistic

---

202. Appreciation by Lieutenant-Colonel K.A. Wills, 2 February 1942, AWM 703/3/21.

203. Letter, Lavarack to Sturdee, 6 February 1942, AWM 541//14.

204. Berryman Diary, 9 February 1942.

205. Cable, Lavarack to Sturdee, 16 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

206. Cable 01538, Lavarack to Sturdee, 18 Febraury 1942, AWM 541/1/4.

207. Cable 5, Curtin to Lavarack, 19 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

approach to the situation earlier than the Supreme Commander, Wavell.

The Fate of Blackforce[208]

Despite its strongly stated views, the Australian government did not achieve all its demands about the destination of the 1st Australian Corps, and Lavarack in Java was faced with a further problem which, although minor in terms of global strategy, was nonetheless of great importance to Australia. This concerns the fate of Blackforce, and needs to be retold in some detail, for it brings together in microcosm all the problems of allied cooperation in war, particularly those problems faced by a small country.

It will be recalled that on 12 February Lavarack had received news that the fast liner *Orcades* was expected shortly, and orders had been issued for the troops on board to land at Oosthaven in Southern Sumatra.[209] Late on 15 February the troops began to disembark,[210] but following the surrender of Singapore that day, Lavarack succeeded in persuading Wavell that they should be re-embarked, and the *Orcades* proceeded to Batavia.[211] Wavell made this decision during a conference with the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies, Admiral Helfrich and General Ter Poorten. He felt bound to warn the Governor-General that in the circumstances the Australian government might be reluctant to allow their troops to land in Java.[212] To the Dutch, however, the arrival of the *Orcades* was an indication that the allied promises

---

208. The composite brigade of Australians on Java was known as Blackforce, after its commander, Brigadier A.S. Blackburn VC. It had an approximate strength of 2,920 personnel.

209. See p.89.

210. Wigmore *op.cit.*, pp.454, 455. The troops included the 2/3 MG Battalion and the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion.

211. Letter by Berryman in *Army Journal*, June 1971.

212. Despatch on Operations in South-West Pacific, January 15th-February 25th 1942, by General Sir Archibald Wavell, CRS A 816, item 37/301/267.

of help would be kept, and they urged Wavell to order the disembarkation at Batavia of the 3,400 Australian soldiers aboard.[213] Both Lavarack and Lloyd opposed this action,[214] and Lavarack sent a 'most immediate' cable to Sturdee:

> Have represented they should not be disembarked Java. Supreme Commander not in agreement and anxious to avoid appearance precipitate change plan which might compromise relations Dutch and prestige generally. Also wishes use them protect aerodrome in Java.

Lavarack also took the opportunity to urge that the remainder of the AIF should not be sent to the NEI.[215]

In Sturdee's view the troops from the *Orcades* were 'merely the advance party of the whole movement'. He realised that if they were distributed in Java it would be 'extremely difficult, if not impossible, to withdraw them eventually', and recommended that the matter should be considered by the War Cabinet which was meeting on 18 February.[216] Meanwhile the *Orcades* lay an anchor at Batavia, and referring to the lack of decision over the ship, Berryman wrote in his diary, 'Rome burns while Nero fiddles'.[217] However, the War Cabinet considered that since the troops were now within the ABDA Command, Wavell should be asked what he intended to do with them,[218] and later that day Curtin

---

213. Notes of interview with Lloyd by Gavin Long, Melbourne, July 1948. Long Correspondence - Lloyd, AWM.

214. *Ibid.*, and letter Lavarack to Curtin, 5 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 573.

215. Cable Lavarack to Sturdee, 16 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142. An original copy of this cable has not been located, and the above copy is in the body of a teleprinter message from Sturdee to Shedden on 17 February. Berryman's letter in *Army Journal* says the signal was sent on 17 February, but his diary indicates it was on 16 February, as also does Lavarack's letter to Curtin on 5 September 1943.

216. Teleprinter message, Sturdee to Shedden, 17 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

217. Berryman Diary, 17 February 1942.

218. War Cabinet Minute No.1896, Sydney, 18 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

cabled Wavell: 'Would be glad to know urgently what are your own plans in regard to these men'.[219]

Wavell was also in receipt of the recommendations of the Pacific War Council to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, which included the statement that 'Java should be defended with the utmost resolution by all forces at present in the island. There should be no withdrawal of troops or air forces of any nationality, and no surrender'.[220] Using this as an instruction, and taking Curtin's cable as advice that the matter was in his hands, Wavell ordered the disembarkation of all men except those without personal weapons. The next day he informed Curtin that the men were needed for aerodrome defence, and were being disembarked.[221]

It will be recalled that Lloyd had claimed that Lavarack was not strong enough in Java,[222] and he told the official historian that if Blamey had been there the AIF troops would never have landed from the *Orcades*.[223] This view has been supported by A.J. Sweeting, a member of the staff of the Australian official war historian, who claimed that: 'the landing of any part of the Australian Force in Java was a blunder which probably would never have occurred had Blamey been present at the time'.[224] But Berryman has fervently denied Lloyd's claims,[225] and later wrote:

---

219. Cable 34, Curtin to Wavell, 18 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

220. Cable No.22, Chiefs of Staff to Wavell, 18 February, *Telegrams Far East.*

221. Cable OPX 1560, Wavell to Curtin, 19 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

222. See p.88, 89.

223. Lloyd to Long, 16 May 1943, in Gavin Long Notebook, No.1, p.27.

224. A.J. Sweeting, review of F.K. Norris, *No Memory for Pain* in *Army Journal*, March 1971.

225. Berryman was irritated by Lloyd, whose manner he described in his diary (20 February 1942) as 'a cross between a smirk and greasy patronage'. Perhaps Berryman, who had been a brigadier when Lloyd was a lieutenant-colonel, and had much more experience, was put out that Lloyd was now a major-general.

> As Chief of Staff to Lavarack, I wrote the reports and signal messages with strong recommendations against our troops being landed in Java, and I consider the part we played, was our most important contribution to our army during the war. Furthermore, I submit, no General could have done more than Lavarack ...
>
> I submit that Blamey could not have done more than Lavarack ... great credit should go to Lavarack for the strong recommendations and reports which we forwarded to our Government, and for Lavarack's refusal for any of our troops to be landed until told by our Government to obey Wavell's orders.[226]

Perhaps if it had been Blamey rather than Lavarack who had made the representation to the government, they might have supported him, rather than put the question back to Wavell. Perhaps Blamey would have disregarded Wavell's instructions and ordered his troops to stand fast. But that is speculation. Lavarack had every right to feel that he had not received complete support from the government and he wrote later:

> In my opinion at the time, no useful military purpose could possibly be served by landing these almost helpless units and I represented this strongly to the Government. The Government, unfortunately in my opinion, referred the matter back to General Wavell, with whom I had already disagreed, and he decided to land the men.[227]

Lavarack's ADC wrote that 'all that General Lavarack could do was express dissent and obey'.[228] There was one more action to be taken. Another fast personnel ship, the *Mount Vernon* carrying three to four thousand men of the AIF, was steaming ahead of the main convoy, but

---

226. Letter by Berryman in *Army Journal*, June 1971. Berryman felt very deeply about this matter and, on 29 April 1971 wrote to Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Daly, the CGS, 'This is the first time I have gone to print over any matter regarding the 2nd AIF'. (Berryman Papers).

227. Letter, Lavarack to Curtin, 5 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 573. Shedden closely checked Lavarack's letter against departmental records, but could find nothing to contradict the above statement. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 9 September 1945, *loc.cit.* See also MP 1217, Box 266.

228. *Java Interlude*, AWM 533/2/1.

Lavarack was successful in having the ship conform to the movements of the main convoy, thus diverting it from Java.[229]

The Australian government was not pleased when Wavell reported on 19 February that the troops had been disembarked, and when on 21 February the government confirmed its decision that all the AIF should be returned immediately to Australia, Sturdee cabled Wavell that this meant that Lavarack and his staff should be evacuated from Java to Australia as soon as possible. He also urged Wavell to evacuate the troops who had been disembarked from the *Orcades*.[230] Sturdee's message crossed a message from Lavarack that arrangements were in train for their evacuation once a final decision had been taken about Java.[231]

But a final decision had been made. Wavell had received the recommendations of the Pacific War Council on 18 February, and instructions from the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) on 20 February. Now on 22 February came further instructions from the CCS that all men of fighting units for whom there were arms had to continue to fight without thought of evacuation.[232] In view of this, Wavell replied to Sturdee that the troops could not be evacuated although preparations were being made to do so if the policy were to be altered. He also informed Sturdee that Lavarack had left for Australia by plane and that the AIF Corps staff had sailed on the *Orcades*.[233] Wavell added to the draft of his reply the comment that 'Lloyd concurs', but Lloyd said that he definitely did not and Wavell struck out the words.[234]

---

229. Letter, Lavarack to Curtin, 5 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 573; Cable, Lavarack to Sturdee, 18 February 1942, AWM, 541/1/4.

230. Cable 5128, Sturdee to Wavell, 21 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4.

231. Cable 1858, Lavarack to Sturdee, 21 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

232. Cable 0059Q/22, Combined Chiefs of Staff to ABDA, *Telegrams Far East*.

233. Cable 02006, Wavell to Sturdee, 22 February 1942, AWM 541/1/4.

234. Lloyd to Gavin Long, 16 May 1943, Gavin Long Notes No.1, AWM.

In the view of the government, however, the troops who had been disembarked from the *Orcades* were advance parties of the 6th and 7th Divisions. They were 'part and parcel of [the] AIF formations being diverted to Australia and should rejoin them'.[235] Hence on 24 February Page and Casey were instructed to inform the British and American governments of the Australian government's insistence that Wavell should be given the necessary authority to evacuate the troops.[236] The Australian government informed Wavell of this message, and requested that should the situation deteriorate before the receipt of these orders, he should arrange the evacuation.[237]

Page in London was 'very angry' at this latest demand which he described as 'craven'.[238] On the evening of 24 February he replied to Curtin that he had informed him on 18 February of the recommendations of the Pacific War Council and on 22 February of further recommendations. He now thought that it was 'quite impossible' for the Pacific War Councils in Washington and London 'to do more at this point of time or at this distance'.[239]

Wavell also indicated that he had no intention of bowing to the wishes of the Australian government, and he sent back what his Chief of Staff, Pownall, described as 'a pretty warm telegram'.[240] He referred to his orders from the Combined Chiefs of Staff and concluded:

---

235. Cable 237, Department of External Affairs to Casey, 24 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

236. Cable 32, Curtin to Page, Cable 43, Evatt to Casey, 24 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

237. Cable 39, Curtin to Wavell, 24 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

238. Memorandum, Ismay to Churchill, 24 February 1942, PREM 3, 166/4. Ismay and Bridges told Page that they could not understand any government making his 'path so hard'. Page's Diary, 24 February 1942, Page Papers.

239. Cable P52, Page to Curtin, 9.55 p.m., 24 February 1942, received 25 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

240. Brian Bond (ed), *Chief of Staff, The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, Volume 2, 1940-1944* (Leo Cooper, London, 1974), p.90.

> Do not consider these orders give me any discretion to remove fighting troops. Their removal would have most unfortunate effect on Dutch not to mention opinion of our own troops.[241]

Pownall was even more explicit, and he wrote in his diary:

> To the last the Australian Government kept up their damnable attitude ... Now the Australians have shown up their true colours. Not so much the troops and commanders themselves (though some of the latter have very distinct signs of 'separatism') as their Government, activated presumably by a mixture of public opinion in Australia and common funk.[242]

It was now clear that there had been various interpretations of the recommendations of the Pacific War Council. The Australian government had emphasised the instruction that there should be no attempt to land the Australian Corps in the NEI, and that the Australian policy of taking all of their forces back to Australia was accepted. Wavell had emphasised the instruction that 'strenuous resistance should be maintained in Java by forces already available there'. But while the troops were aboard the *Orcades* were they 'already available there'? In ordering the disembarkation Wavell was technically in breach of the instruction that no attempt should be made to land the Australian Corps, of which the troops were a part. But the cable of 18 February, the day the troops landed, contained recommendations only. The instructions, which were the same as the recommendations, came two days later.[243] A critic of Wavell could be excused if he claimed that as soon as Wavell received Curtin's message requesting information on his plans he ordered the men to be disembarked, thus presenting the government with a *fait accompli*.

---

241. Cable OPX 02409, Wavell to Curtin, 25 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142; MP 1217, Box 573.

242. Bond, *op.cit.*, pp.90, 91.

243. Cable, CCS to ABDACOM, 20 February 1942, *Telegrams Far East*

Part of the reason for the dissatisfaction of the Australian government was that it did not receive copies of the instructions issued by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The Pacific War Council had been established to give the Australian government a voice, but the Council could only make recommendations. When Wavell quoted CCS instructions to the Australian government, Sturdee had to contact the American General Brett, who had just flown in from Java, to find out what those instructions were.[244]

In ordering the Australian troops to disembark, perhaps Wavell was making the sort of decision which only a Commander-in-Chief can make. The ship had brought almost 3,000 experienced fighting men, and there were about 6,000 RAF and unarmed personnel to evacuate, not to mention women clerks who had been evacuated from Malaya. Even Lloyd had to admit that the net loss to the allied cause of disembarking the Australian troops 'was nil'.[245] Furthermore, the decision was in line with Wavell's view of the necessity to fight hard for Java. Lavarack was convinced that Wavell was seriously contemplating a last-ditch defence, and on 19 February he wrote that Wavell 'talks of himself and myself shouldering a musket, though I don't see that two old gentlemen like us could be of much use'.[246]

To Lloyd, who remained for a few days after Lavarack departed, it was 'a clear case of the evil of political influence on military dispositions'. Blackforce, he said later,'was in fact sacrificed to the cause of Dutch friendships ... I personally thought it was nonsense and still think so'. Lloyd had high praise for Wavell, but he believed

---

244. Memorandum, Shedden to Secretary, Department of the Army, 26 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

245. Lloyd to Gavin Long, 16 May 1943, Gavin Long Notes, AWM.

246. Letter, Lavarack to Sturdee, 19 February 1942, Lavarack Papers, in possession of Dr J.O. Lavarack.

that the 'strain of 1941 made him so tired that in 1942 in Java he was very stale and apt to stress the political implications of military operations, or lack of them, too much'.[247] Yet over a year later Wavell was still convinced that his action had been correct, and he wrote to Lavarack:

> I have never doubted your perfect straight forwardness and loyalty to me. That was a very difficult decision for everybody ... I have always regretted that I had to land [the troops] who had finally to be left in Java; but in the circumstances at the time I do not feel that we could have acted otherwise. We had to support the Dutch so long as there was any possible hope.[248]

On 25 February the Australian government was still concerned about Blackforce. After re-examining the cables, Sturdee was of the opinion that if the government wanted to press for the evacuation of the force, then a request would have to be made to the Dutch for preferential treatment for the Australian troops. By now the ABDA Command had been dissolved and command in Java had reverted to the Dutch. A possible basis for such a request would have been that the troops were particularly valuable as they were an integral part of an Australian division, and they were troops who should never have been disembarked in the NEI.[249] The Prime Minister decided that the matter should be considered by the War Council,[250] but in the meantime Lavarack, who was now in Melbourne, advised Sturdee that he did not think that it would be practicable to evacuate the troops.[251] At the War Cabinet meeting on 2 March Curtin recalled that, despite his message to Lavarack on 19 February ordering the AIF to be evacuated, Wavell had over-ruled Lavarack. However,

---

247. Letter, Lloyd to Wigmore, 14 July 1948, Long Correspondence - Lloyd, AWM.

248. Letter, Wavell to Lavarack, 22 December 1943, Lavarack Papers, File Java Part 1.

249. Teleprinter message, M896, Sturdee to Shedden, 25 February 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

250. Memorandum, Shedden to Secretary of the Department of Army, 26 February 1942, *loc.cit.*

251. Memorandum, Sturdee to Shedden, 2 March 1942, MP 1217, Box 573.

the government now decided that it would not press for the return of the troops, although it decided to send a message to Java requesting that, in the event of resistance becoming impossible, they should be afforded an opportunity to escape.[252] But on 5 March General Sitwell, the British army commander in Java, reported that evacuation was now impossible owing to a shipping shortage,[253] and on 12 March the allied force in Java surrendered. Of the 2,920 Australians in Blackforce, 36 were killed and the remainder captured. Approximately one third of these men died in captivity.[254]

---

252. War Cabinet Minute 1932, Melbourne, 2 March 1942, *loc.cit.* That day Sturdee cabled General Ter Poorten in Java to pass on the government's request. He wished Ter Poorten 'every success in the arduous and noble duty of defending Java'. CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

253. Cable 29, Sitwell to Sturdee, 5 March 1942, *loc.cit.*

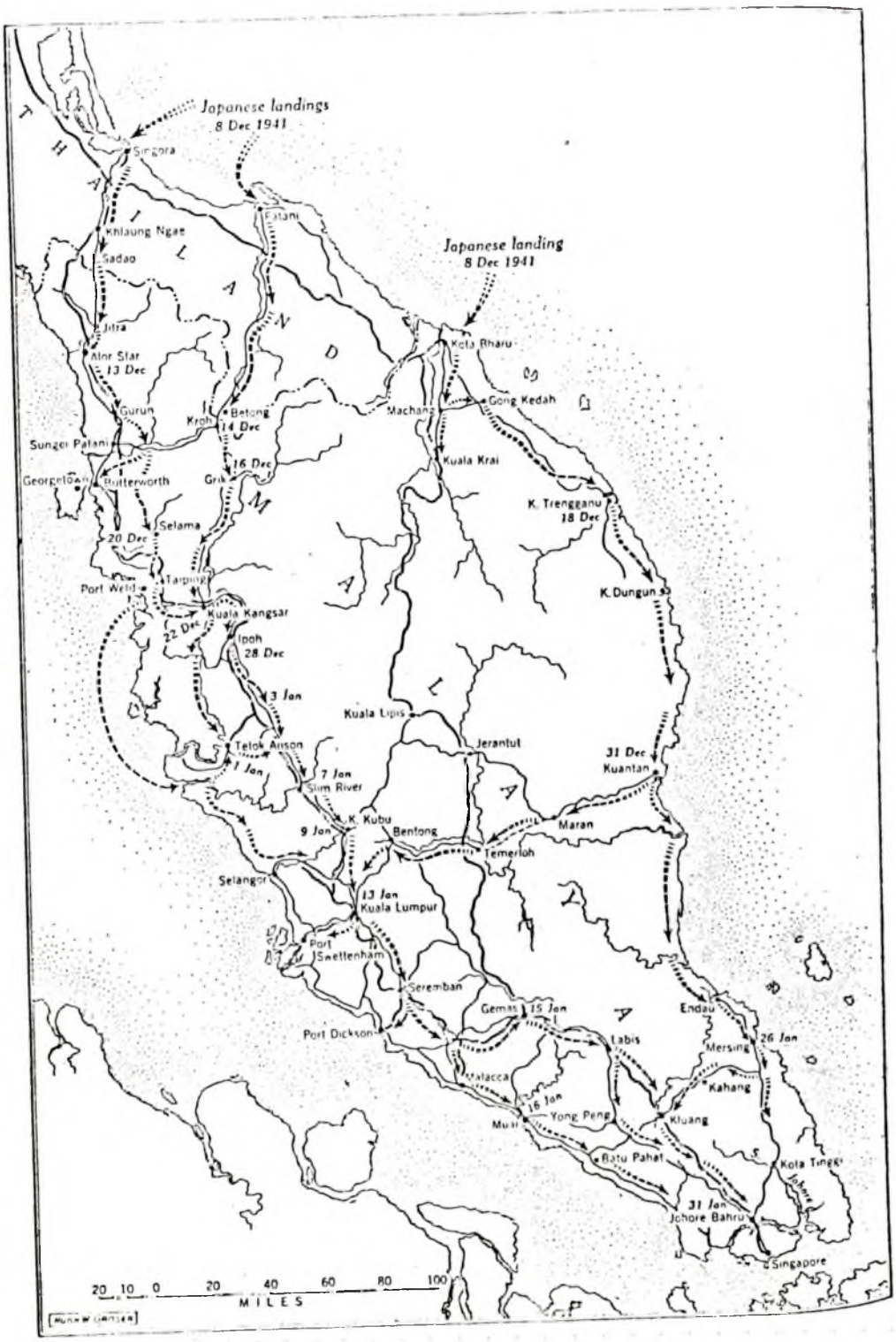
254. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, pp.506, 642.

CHAPTER THREE

BATTLEFIELD COOPERATION WITH THE BRITISH 1941-1942

The most important aspect of international relations dealt with by the allied leaders was that of military relations with respect to grand strategy and strategy. The tone, and indeed the substance, of these relations was governed by many factors, the personalities of the national leaders, geographic location, national power, and the previously perceived roles of the countries, which developed from their past experience, that is, their history. To these influences must be added a further determinant of allied strategy, performance on the battlefield, and the problems of cooperation at the military level. Therefore, if the commander of the forces of a minor country was to have any influence on the course of allied strategy, he could achieve that influence through the performance of his troops and by demonstrating his own military ability. Furthermore, the capacity for cooperation displayed by the commanders and staff at all levels could directly affect the influence of the minor military power.

The importance of these factors was demonstrated during the fighting in Malaya and Java, for during this period British and Australian relations reached one of their lowest points. And the attitudes of the military men in Malaya and Java directly influenced those of the politicians in Australia and England. Therefore to understand the shaping of allied strategy in early 1942 it is important to appreciate the problems of battlefield cooperation at that time.



MAP 3

The Conquest of Malaya.

From: Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.280.

The Role of the GOC AIF, Malaya

Much of the controversy concerning relative performances in the Malayan campaign centres on the role of the GOC AIF (Malaya), Major-General H. Gordon Bennett. Like Blamey, and later Morshead, in the Middle East, Bennett had a directive which set out the well-established principles for the employment of the Australian troops. These were that the force was to retain its Australian identity, that no part of the force was to be employed apart from the whole without Bennett's consent, and that if the GOC Malaya insisted in an emergency on dispersing the Australian force, Bennett was to register a protest, comply with the order and report immediately to Army Headquarters, Melbourne.[1]

The British army commander in Malaya, Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival, claimed in later years that when he took command in May 1941 he asked the Commander-in-Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, whether there were any instructions defining his authority over the AIF. He was informed that there were no such instructions. Percival claimed that Bennett never showed him his directive.[2]

Percival was, however, aware of the special responsibilities of the GOC AIF, and in conversations with Bennett he agreed that he would make every effort to retain the AIF as one force. Bennett conceded that, if circumstances demanded it, the AIF might be split up.[3] Thus when the 27th Brigade arrived in Malaya in August 1941, bringing Bennett's force to two brigades, Percival gave Bennett the role of defending Southern

---

1. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.65.

2. Letter, Percival to Maj-Gen F.E. Simpson, 29 October 1945; Notes by Lieut-General A.E. Percival on certain Senior Commanders and other matters; Percival Papers, Imperial War Museum (IWM). See also Despatch by Major General A.E. Percival CB, DSO, OBE, MC, 8 December 1941-15 February 1942, CRS A816, item 37/301/330.

3 Notes by Lieut-General A.E. Percival etc., Percival Papers.

Johore. This provided the Australians with a more responsible role and made it more likely that the division would fight as a formation under its own commander.[4]

But Percival remained uneasy about the arrangement. He was aware that Bennett was communicating with his own government and acknowledged Bennett's right to do so. He was not sure, however, what would happen if Bennett declined to cooperate. If such a situation arose, wrote Percival, the position would 'be quite impossible'. Percival did not claim that Bennett had made things difficult, but wrote later that,

> I had to pull him up once or twice on such matters as direct communication with the Australian Press on defence problems but, generally speaking, we tried to tackle the rather uneasy situation with commonsense and dealing with each problem as it arose.[5]

Bennett continued to keep his directive in mind, and on 13 December 1941, before his division has been in action, he wrote to the Minister for the Army, assuring him that he would do his 'utmost' to resist any attempt to divide the AIF:

> Should any requests come to you to force me to disgorge a portion of my force to assist British troops I do hope that you will stand by me. I am quite convinced from the tactical and strategic point of view that it would be unsafe to take any of our troops to any other portion of Malaya.[6]

Another exmaple of the type of problem facing the commander of a national force occurred on 27 December 1941 when a War Office directive was forwarded to Bennett forbidding any requests to the Australian government for manpower. Bennett replied that he had a responsibility to

---

4. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.98.

5. Letter, Percival to Simpson, 29 October 1945, Percival Papers.

6. Letter, Bennett to Forde, 13 December 1941, MP 720/6, item 13/421/402. Part of this letter is reproduced in H. Gordon Bennett, *Why Singapore Fell* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1944), p.69, but the above quoted part is not reproduced there.

the Australian government to keep them informed, and he forwarded a copy of the correspondence to Australia.[7] Bennett said later that he thought that his cables were intercepted and read by HQ Far East.[8]

On a number of occasions after the fall of Singapore Bennett claimed that the relations between himself, his staff and Malaya Command, were 'most friendly throughout',[9] but Bennett's GSOI, Colonel Thyer, has asserted that relations with Percival, Heath, (3rd Indian Corps), Key (11th Indian Division) and Simmons (Singapore Fortress) were 'strained'. Thyer thought that Bennett was incapable of subordinating himself to Malaya Command, or of cooperating whole-heartedly with other commanders. He recognised that Bennett may have been merely battling for the 'rights and entity' of the AIF, but the result was 'a denial of unity of command and integration of effort'. When the 3rd Indian Corps was fighting in northern Malaya Bennett at no stage suggested that AIF troops could be sent to help the resistance.[10] Nevertheless, when Bennett was given responsibility for the defence of Northern Johore on 8 January 1942, he agreed to the separation of his force between Eastern and Western Johore.[11] In Thyer's opinion that was 'a most unfortunate decision, both in principle and in the light of subsequent tactical failures'.[12]

---

7. Bennett, *op.cit.*, p.85.

8. Letter, Bennett to Long, 15 January 1954, Bennett Papers, ML MSS 807-5. Percival claimed that he did not see any of Bennett's despatches. Percival's comment on Official History, Percival Papers, Box 2.

9. Letter, Bennett to Secretary of Military Board, 27 March 1942, Blamey Papers 33.21; letter, Bennett to Gavin Long, C. 1956 Bennett Papers, ML MSS 807-5.

10. Operations of the 8th Australian Division, Malaya, 1941-42, by Colonel J.H. Thyer, from a narrative prepared by Colonel C.H. Kappe, CAB 106/162. Frank Legg, *The Gordon Bennett Story* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965), p.173, claims that Bennett got on well with the British, but that the firmness with which he implemented his directive possibly created the impression 'of a lack of cordiality'.

11. Cable, Bennett to Sturdee, 10 January 1942, AWM 553/2/3.

12. J.H Thyer, 'Foreword to the Grim Glory of the 2/19 Battalion AIF', in *Army Journal*, June 1976.

Bennett's special responsibilities as GOC AIF were not the only cause of friction, for he never hesitated to openly criticise British methods in Malaya.[13] Although there was much truth in Bennett's criticisms, his personality made it difficult for the British to accept his criticism. The official Australian war correspondent in World War I, C.E.W. Bean, had observed during that war that Bennett was 'hot in anger, yet had a chilly manner'. He was jealous and critical of his superiors and contemporaries. General Glascow said 'Bennett is a pest'.[14] The journalist, Ian Morrison, in Malaya in 1941, found Bennett to be

> a rasping bitter, sarcastic person given to expressing his views with great freedom. As a result he quarrelled with a good number of people. But he did have a forceful personality. He was imbued with a tough, ruthless, aggressive spirit.[15]

Bennett's downfall was his ambition and ego, which had been exacerbated by a belief that he had been over-looked earlier in the war.[16] In May 1940 General Sturdee had observed that Bennett had pressed for a senior appointment in the army because of 'his opinion that he was capable of making improvements in the Army's efficiency'.[17] When Bennett was thwarted in his ambitions he blamed the Staff Corps, and in Malaya this was manifest in his disagreement with his GSOI, Colonel Rourke.[18] Rowell

---

13. For an example, see an interview with Cecil Brown of the Columbia Broadcasting System, in Brown, *Suez to Singapore*, pp.211, 213. Bennett himself described his attitude at a press conference as 'somewhat bitter and critical'. Bennett, *op.cit.*, p.144.

14. Bennett to Long, 3 December 1945, Gavin Long Notes, 103, AWM.

15. Ian Morrison, *Malayan Postscript* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1943), p.157.

16. See letters in the Bennett Papers, ML MSS 807-2. For a discussion of these questions see A.B. Lodge, Decline and Fall: The Second World War Career of Lieutenant-General H.G. Bennett, MA(Qual) Sub-thesis, University of NSW, RMC Duntroon, 1980.

17. Letter, Sturdee to Adjutant-General, 9 May 1940, Military Board Proceedings, P & S, 65/40.

18. Letter, Kent Hughes to Gavin Long, 18 June 1953, Bennett Papers 807-4; Gordon Bennett Diary, July 1941, Gavin Long Correspondence, AWM.

later wrote: 'Having spent a week with [Bennett] in Malaya on my way home in [August] 1941 I'm sure he was somewhat out of balance'.[19]

The previous chapter has described the reaction in Australia to Bennett's criticism of the poor performance of the British and Indian troops during the Muar battles.[20] Bennett also vented his criticism to HQ Malaya Command, and said that if the two Australian battalions cut off at Parit Sulong were lost, 'all Australia would know the reason'.[21] British staff officers agreed that the Australians had been 'badly let down' by the 45th Indian Brigade, and that as a result of the performance of the British troops in the battle 'British and Australian troops were as sulphuric acid is to water'.[22] Percival, however, thought that the battles had shown that Bennett's 'technique in the conduct of operations was very much out of date'. Furthermore, Percival believed that from about 25 January onwards Bennett's 'personal ambitions dominated his outlook to the detriment of his duties as commander AIF. He was not a man to contemplate with equanimity the possibility of spending the rest of the war as a POW and he probably knew that his rival, Blamey, was due to return shortly to Australia from the Middle East'.[23]

On 27 January 1942 Bennett wrote a long letter to the Minister for the Army, Forde, which gives a valuable insight into his mood at the time. He began by stating that he considered that it was time 'Australia took a firm stand and set about wrecking the effete conservatism and arrogance on which the English army system is based'. He said that

---

19. Letter, Rowell to Hetherington, 13 July 1971, Hetherington Papers AWM.

20. See Chapter Two, p.76, 77.

21. Report from LO Westforce (Major A. Arbuthnot), 0830 hours, 20 January 1942, Appendices to War Diary HQ Malaya Command, WO 172/20.

22. Information about certain aspects of the HQ MC during the last few days in Singapore, by A/Major W.R. Waller, GSO2, HQMC, WO 172/16.

23. Notes by Lieut-General Percival etc., Percival Papers. On this day Percival informed Bennett that he had decided to withdraw to Singapore. Bennett, *op.cit.*, p.148.

Australia would have to 'cut the painter completely with the War Office, otherwise there will soon be no War Office to follow slavishly, as we do'. He then went on to criticise the Indian troops who had 'run away' and the British troops who had 'lacked fight'. He was critical of Percival, but even more so of Lieutenant General Heath, and added that he would 'not allow the AIF to be slaughtered on the altar of Heath's inefficiency'.

Bennett believed that the British leadership was at fault and that the only solution was that 'Australia should persist that the higher commands be given to Australians'. The British would oppose this idea because it would take away their jobs, but Bennett said 'frankly that they are more interested in job-getting than in winning the war'. He thought that he should have been promoted to lieutenant-general when he had been given command of Westforce as the 'English officers respect rank - and little else'.

Bennett explained that to restore the position would require two good assault divisions and he hoped that two AIF divisions would soon arrive. He then brought up another matter:

> are you going to send a Corps Commander with them, or are you going to give me command? I know local conditions. I have had experience in fighting the Japanese. When the war commenced, I was senior to both Blamey and Lavarack and was superseded, not on account of inefficiency, but merely because of jealousy. Also, certain people wanted to see a permanent soldier and not a citizen soldier at the head. If you bring anyone else here to command the Australian Corps when it arrives, I will ask to be relieved. I will take it as a note of lack of confidence in me. I was a Major General when Lavarack was a Lieutenant Colonel.

Bennett concluded by warning Forde to treat the letter as personal and confidential. He did not want the local command to know that he had 'been so scathing about them', as he had to work with them, and he said that he was 'on quite friendly terms - in spite of my hostile attitude on some matters'.[24]

---

24. Letter, Bennett to Forde, 27 January 1942, Personal Papers of F.M. Forde, AA 1974/398.

The Australian government did not know quite what to do about criticism of Percival from both Bennett and Bowden,[25] and in the end Forde asked Bruce to make confidential enquiries about Percival.[26] Bruce replied that a reliable source had told him that Percival's manner was 'not good and he had no power of expressing himself'. Bruce said that the matter was one for Wavell to handle and he 'did not think in present atmosphere it would be advisable for me to take any action here'.[27]

British Criticisms of the Australians

Without a doubt the critical attitude displayed by the Australians before and during the fighting irritated the British high command.[28] And it was not just Bennett who was critical. His chief administrative staff officer, Colonel J.R. Broadbent, described the British organisation on 28 January 1942 as 'punk'.[29] The result was that some British observers sought every opportunity to find fault with the Australians. For example, General Pownall wrote on 13 February 1942 that 'Not even the Australians, from all that they started so cock-a-hoop and critical of others, put up a good showing in the end'.[30] A staff officer from HQ Malaya Command

---

25. On 28 January 1942 Bowden wrote to Hodgson,Secretary of the Department of External Affairs: 'The trouble in this again is that [Percival] while doubtless very able, is not a forceful or resourceful character ... when faced with one of the Governor's agile arguments, [he] stammers and hesitates. Resolution or ruthlessness don't seem to be in the man. If they were, perhaps our defences would be in a different position today, in spite of the poor and inadequate material the Imperial Government has given him to work with'. CRS A981, Far East 14A.

26. Cable 762, Forde to Bruce, 28 January 1942, CRS M100, January 1942.

27. Cable 18A, Bruce to Forde, 29 January 1942, *loc.cit.*.

28. For example on 4 January 1942 Bennett told Percival that he did not like the idea of his force in Eastern Johore having its flank protected by the 3rd Indian Corps. Conversation recorded in War Diary, HQ FE, January 1942, WO 172/16. Also Bennett, *op.cit.*, pp.93, 94.

29. Letter from Colonel J.R. Broadbent, 28 January 1942, Gavin Long Correspondence - Broadbent, AWM.

30. Quoted in Bond, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.85. Pownall also wrote that the 'RAAF did *not* show up well ... they showed signs of not being at all gallant'. *ibid.*, p.97.

commented that he did not 'realise to the full extent to which the AIF had been blowing [their] own trumpets (without justification) till they were seen at closer quarters on the Island'.[31]

British files contain many reports of the ill-discipline of some of the Australians on Singapore Island. One British officer wrote that the Australians 'were a very poor lot, except for having a lot of say for themselves'.[32] The HQ Malaya Command War Diary on 11 February reported 200 unarmed Australians attempting to force their way onto evacuation craft.[33] The editor of the *Straits Times*, wrote that 'there were desertions'. Australians were heard to boast in Singapore 'that they had come down the line because they were fed up with being plastered! ... There were cases of looting and rape'.[34] An RN officer said that the 'Australians were affected by promises made after Crete that they would never again have to fight without air support'.[35] Devastating criticism came from a British anti-aircraft major who wrote of the RAF ground staff: 'They were yellow in the extreme and ... left a lot of equipment ... in my opinion they were as bad as the worst Australians, which is saying a good deal'.[36] Another senior staff officer reported that he 'saw five Australian soldiers, naked except for a pair of dirty

---

31. Comments by Lieut-Colonel F.N. Cobley on notes by Percival, Percival Papers.

32. Letter by an officer named Ampthill to his family, 7 March 1942, WO 106/2550 A.

33. War Diary GHQ Malaya Command, 11 February 1942, WO 172/21.

34. Notes by Mr G.W. Seabridge, Editor of the *Straits Times*, WO 106/2550 A, and ADM 205/22A.

35. Notes of an interview with Lieut-Commander H.B.C. Gill, 30 April 1942, *loc.cit.*

36. Report by Major G.A. Rowley-Conwy, 30 Heavy AA Battery, 3rd Heavy AA Regiment, in HQ FE War Diary, January 1942, WO 172/16.

shorts, no boots or socks, lying and sprawling in the gutter of one of the main throughfares leading west from Singapore on February 10th. They had their rifles and were drinking from bottles'.[37]

More responsible British officers, however, such as Lieutenant-Colonel I.M. Stewart, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, tried to present a more balanced view.[38] And Percival in his despatch wrote:

> it would be very wrong to judge the performance of the AIF by these stragglers. The action of these men must be judged in relation to the existing conditions. They were not long-service soldiers and discipline was not deep-rooted. They had volunteered for service and had been sent to Malaya to defend the Naval Base. The Naval Base was no longer of any use but Australia, their homeland, was being threatened. Many of them belonged to units which, after heavy casualties on the mainland, had been reorganized but had not time to regain their full fighting efficiency. They had fought well throughout a long night against heavy odds and were exhausted. That is the true picture and should be judged on its merits. Active and effective measures were quickly taken by Headquarters Malaya Command and by Headquarters AIF to deal with the situation by means of reinforced stragglers posts and officers' patrols in the Town area.[39]

General Callaghan, who took over from Bennett after the latter escaped, and Colonel Thyer, had to admit that Percival's report was 'factually correct', and they were 'grateful to Gen. Percival for presenting this

---

37. Personal observation of Lieut-Colonel B.H. Ashmore, GSO2 Ops and Trg, GHQ, Malaya Command, Percival Papers, file 49. It is not quite clear how Ashmore identified the soldiers as Australians. It would certainly not have been from their clothing; of which, apparently, they had only their shorts.

38. Comments by Lieut-Colonel I.M. Stewart, WO 106/2550A, and ADM 205/22A. See also I.M. Stewart, *History of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 2nd Battalion* (Nelson, London, 1947), p.104. Major A.P. Thomas, whom Wavell detailed to report on the campaign, concluded that the Australians had begun the campaign very well, but their morale and discipline had deteriorated towards the end. He pointed out that the Australians in Singapore were the only troops in the entire campaign to come under sustained artillery fire. Report 30 March 1942, WO 106/2574 A.

39. Percival's Despatch, Percival Papers Box P23.

episode in a way that, while admitting that something of the sort did take place, previous criticism is rebuked and the fighting reputation of the Australians in Malaya is left unsullied'.[40]

The trouble was caused by the arrival on 24 January of almost two thousand untrained Australian reinforcements, some of whom had not had seven days of serious training in Australia, and many had never fired a rifle.[41] General Sturdee said later that, 'Subsequent to the commencement of hostilities events moved so rapidly and disastrously that it was not possible to create an organisation for training the reinforcements'.[42] While commanders like Percival understood this situation and made allowances for it, it did offer other observers the opportunity to criticise Australia.

It has already been related that General Pownall, Wavell's Chief of Staff, was critical of the Australians.[43] After the collapse of ABDA Command he became the Army Commander in Ceylon. When Major-General A.J. Boase, the commander of the Australian division in Ceylon, reported to Pownall, he was warned that, due to the misbehaviour of drafts of the AIF who had previously passed through Colombo, the reputation of the AIF among the local population was at a low ebb. Boase pointed out that it was unfair to condemn the whole for the misdeeds of the few. He drew attention to 'the mischievous rumours' which were being circulated in Colombo regarding the behaviour of the AIF at the capitulation of Singapore and

---

40. Memorandum, Callaghan and Thyer to DMO & P (for CGS), 28 January 1947, CRS A816, item 52/302/133A.

41. Interview with Major C.B. O'Brien, 2/18 Battalion by Captain G.H. Nicholson of the Military History Section, 23 September 1945, AWM 553/5/14.

42. Notes by CGS (Sturdee) in Memorandum for the Minister by Shedden, 20 February 1947, CRS A816, item 37/301/330.

43. See p.110, 111.

requested that steps be taken to 'have them stamped out without delay'.[44] When the AIF left Ceylon in August 1942 their reputation was very high,[45] but the incident showed how allied cooperation could be affected by previously formed views of national forces.

Events in Malaya also had an impact in Java. General Lloyd, the Australian Deputy Intendant-General on ABDA Command Headquarters, recalled receiving a signal from Singapore that the *Empire Star* had been boarded by about 200 Australians. Lloyd met the ship off Batavia and found the forecastle held by the Australians. The Master of the ship said they had stormed the gangway at the last moment before departure from Singapore. The men said it was 'a bugger's muddle in Singapore, and they had had it'. Lloyd arranged for the men to be taken off to gaol, but when Brigadier Blackburn took charge of the force landed from the *Orcades*,[46] he offered to take the deserters in his force, hoping that he could improve their morale and training.[47] Unfortunately the men proved a bad influence in their new units.[48]

Bennett's confident statements about his own ability and that of his troops resulted not only in criticism of the Australian troops, but

---

44. Letter, Boase to Secretary, Department of the Army, 7 April 1942, AWM 549/3/1. Also present during the interview was Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, who after leaving Singapore became C-in-C (RN) Ceylon. Like Pownall, Layton too was critical of the Australians, and wrote to the First Sea Lord on 20 March 1942: 'there can be no doubt of the bitterness felt and expressed on the subject of the Australian troops by many of the Naval officers who got away from Singapore'. ADM 205/22A.

45. See letters, Boase to Secretary, Department of Army, 12 May 1942, 2 August 1942, and letters of appreciation from General Pownall, Air Marshall D'Albiac and General Gracey, AWM 549/3/1.

46. See Chapter Two.

47. Letter, Blackburn to Lavarack, c. 26 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 573. Also interview with Brigadier M. Austin, 12 June 1979.

48. Lloyd to Long, Canberra, 19 July 1948, Gavin Long Correspondence - CEM Lloyd, AWM.

also criticism of his own performance. As mentioned, Percival thought that from 25 January onwards Bennett was thinking of a way to escape. General Callaghan and Colonel Thyer commented later that in his report Percival 'very generously glossed over' two instances where British officers were severely critical of Bennett. These instances were the orders to the 45th Indian Brigade at Muar, and the effect of the withdrawal of the 27th Brigade on 10 February on Singapore Island.[49]

In private, however, Percival expressed intense dissatisfaction with Bennett. At Muar he thought Bennett erred in ordering the Indians to hold both sides of the river.[50] On Singapore Island he thought Bennett 'ceased to take an interest in the operations' and through issuing confusing orders to Brigadier Taylor, allowed the latter to withdraw the 22nd Brigade, which was a 'direct disobedience' of Percival's orders.[51] Percival thought that 'the Australian Government must be held responsible for putting Gordon Bennett in command of their troops'.[52]

General Kirby, the British official historian, has criticised Bennett for allowing the withdrawal of the 27th Brigade on Singapore. He thought that Bennett placed his headquarters too far to the rear and made no attempt to go forward to see for himself.[53]

---

49. Memorandum by Callaghan and Thyer, 28 January 1947, CRS A816, item 52/302/133A.

50. Notes by Percival for Official History, Percival Papers, Box 21. See also Major-General S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1. The Loss of Singapore* (HMSO, London, 1957), p.344.

51. Notes by Percival, Percival Papers, Box P20. See also Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.337; Kirby, *The Loss of Singapore*, p.384.

52. Notes by Percival for Official History, Percival Papers Box 21.

53. Major-General S. WOodburn Kirby, *Singapore: The Chain of Disaster* (Cassell, London, 1971), p.238. This criticism is also mentioned in Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.322, fn.7. Thyer wrote later about the Australian official history: 'the watering down and other modifications do not worry me. The discerning person will read between the lines'. Letter, Thyer to Percival, 13 December 1956, Percival Papers, Box 20. See also a paper entitled 'Tactical Errors in AIF Sector Singapore', no author, in CAB 106/162.

It is not the purpose of this work to try to determine the validity of the criticism of Bennett. Naturally, after defeat, many observers are quick to search for scapegoats, but in the case of Bennett there is the feeling that his earlier pronouncements, and his later criticism of everyone except the Australians, resulted in many British officers subjecting the conduct of his operations to close examination.[54]

To these criticisms must be added the matter of Bennett's escape from Singapore. The question was not examined until the end of the war, and most of the British and Australian officers with strongly held views spent the remainder of the war as Japanese prisoners. However, Major M. Austin, who was one of the small group of Australian officers at HQ ABDA Command, recalled the cold attitude of the British officers on the headquarters when it was learnt that Bennett had left Singapore.[55] The moral appears to be that if military leaders are to indulge in open criticism of their allies, their own conduct must be above reproach. Anything less is not only counter productive, but, when coming from a minor ally, might damage any chance the minor ally has of influencing the major ally.

Undoubtedly the Australians had no more to be ashamed of in Malaya than their allies, for between 12 and 22 per cent of the allied soldiers killed in action were Australian, and they formed about 13 per cent of the total force.[56] Furthermore, the fall of Singapore was due to the British failure to take the defence of Malaya seriously while Australia had argued for increased air and naval forces. But the defeat seriously damaged the

---

54. Bennett's report was examined in detail by the Directorate of Military Operations at the War Office, and the errors of fact and inconsistencies of argument were carefully highlighted. WO 106/2569. See also WO 106/2674A for the comments of Major H.P. Thomas who Wavell detailed to report on the campaign.

55. Interview with Brigadier M. Austin, 12 June 1979.

56. The total Empire killed varies from 8,000 (Kirby, *The Loss of Singapore*, p.473) to as high as 15,000 quoted by Japanese sources. 1,789 Australians were killed. For analysis of the figures see Stanley L. Falk, *Seventy Days to Singapore*, (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1975), pp.274, 275.

Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival, GOC Malaya, 1941-1942.

(AWM Negative No.7900)

Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, C-in-C Far East, December 1941-January 1942, Chief of Staff ABDA Command, January-February 1942, GOC Ceylon, 1942-1943.

(AWM Negative No.11284)

Major-General A.J. Boase, GOC AIF (Ceylon) March-September 1942.

(AWM Negative No.22780)

prestige of the Australian armed forces,and the Americans in particular tended to judge the quality of the Australian troops by this failure. The impact of this attitude will be covered in later chapters but suffice to say that it contributed to the dismissal of General Rowell in New Guinea and to the subsequent command crises.[57]

Australian Representation on HQ ABDA Command

Problems of allied cooperation were also present in the ABDA Command. On 3 January 1942 Wavell's Chief of Staff, Pownall, cabled Sturdee requesting 'a really good head Q officer to plan and run [a] large administrative layout'. The officer had to be 'a thinker' and Pownall stressed that the task 'may concern Australia very materially'.[58] Sturdee replied that he had no-one with previous 'Q' experience, but he suggested Major-General H.C.H. Robertson: 'There is a good deal of ego in his cosmos but he had always got the best of those working under him. He would be quite ruthless in gettting things done'. Sturdee was not, however, sure that the government would release Robertson, who was about to take command of the 1st Cavalry Division.[59]

On 4 January Wavell cabled Curtin requesting his ideas on Australian representation on the ABDA Headquarters.[60] Presumably the Australian point of view should have been presented by the CAS, Air Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, at a conference 'to review the whole command position' with Wavell and other Allied Commanders at Batavia on 10 January.[61]

---

57. When General MacArthur telephoned Curtin and urged him to send Blamey to New Guinea, he said that he saw 'a duplication of what took place under Percival in Malaya'. Note of Secraphone Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 17/9/42, MP 1217, Box 532.

58. Cable, Pownall to Sturdee, 13 January 1942, War Diary HQ FE, January 1942, WO 172/16.

59. Cable, Sturdee to Pownall, 4 January 1942, *loc.cit.*

60. Cable, Wavell to Curtin, 4 January 1942, AWM 243/5/33.

61. Gillison, *op.cit.*, p.300.

However Air Commodore Hewitt, an Australian officer who took the minutes of the meeting, thought that Burnett seemed 'terribly uninterested',[62] and Wavell later claimed that he received no reply to his request for Australian ideas on their representation.[63] It seems that all that Burnett discussed was the staffing of the administrative side of the headquarters, and as a result Wavell sent a further request to Australia for staff officers.[64]

Sturdee did not think that it was possible to supply the appropriate officers from Australia, and Blamey was requested to select the officers from his force in the Middle East and despatch them to Batavia.[65] As a result Colonel C.E.M. Lloyd was promoted to Brigadier and sent to Java where he arrived on 28 January.[66] General Brett, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, insisted on Lloyd being promoted to temporary Major-General, and after an embarrassing argument between Wavell and Lavarack, the Australian Corps commander, this was finally approved after Lavarack had referred to Blamey and Sturdee.[67]

---

62. Interview with Air Vice-Marshal J.E. Hewitt, 12 July 1978.

63. Bond, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.81; Memorandum, Hollis to Churchill, 25 January 1942, PREM 3 166/5; Cable 00279, Wavell to Churchill, 23 January 1942, *Telegrams Far East.*

64. Cable OPX 43, Wavell to Sturdee, 12 January 1942, AWM 243/5/33. The minutes of the conference show that Burnett contributed little and that the staffing arrangements 'were approved in general'. Notes of Meeting of Commanders and Staff of the ABDA Command, 10 and 11 January 1942, WO 106/2551.

65. Cables, Forde to Blamey, 13 January 1942, Sturdee to Wavell, 13 January 1942, Wavell to Auchinleck, 11 January 1942, AWM 243/5/33.

66. On 16 January 1942 Blamey wrote to Wavell that Lloyd 'is very able, has a broad outlook, and his staff work is carried through with the greatest smoothness and tact. He has much experience on the "Q" side'. Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 10 A [8], AWM.

67. Letter, Lloyd to Wigmore, 14 July 1948, Long Correspondence - Lloyd, AWM. See cables, Sturdee to Wavell, 3 February 1942, Lavarack to Blamey, 6 February 1942, Wills Papers, Folder 8, AWM.

In the meantime, at the request of the government, Blamey gave his views on the command situation in the ABDA Command. He pointed out that by the time the 6th and 7th Divisions arrived Australia's commitment would be 'apparently greater proportionally to British than it has been' in the Middle East. He thought that the Australian commander should be given status that would admit him to full consultation on all operational and administrative plans. This was 'particularly important in view of British propensity for dispersing organisations'.[68]

On 14 January the Australian government received the proposed organisation of Wavell's HQ. The only senior position to be filled by an Australian was that of Deputy Intendant-General, for which Lloyd was selected.[69] Burnett should have already informed the government of these proposals, but perhaps he had omitted to do this, for the government now acted as though it was hearing them for the first time. At the Advisory War Council on 20 January Curtin presented a note, which had been prepared by Shedden, stating that:

> The appointment of a Higher Commander in the South-West Pacific area and the organisation of the staff of the Supreme Commander is another sidelight on the attitude of the United Kingdom towards Australian participation in the higher direction of the war in an area in which we are vitally interested.

The note implied that Wavell was not necessarily better qualified than Blamey for the command, but added that while there could be no question of criticising the appointment,

> apparently no Australian can expect consideration for a high command even though Australia may supply the largest share of the fighting forces as in the case of Greece and Malaya.

---

68. Cable, GOC 229, Blamey to Curtin, 8 January 1942, Blamey Papers 24A.

69. Cable 58, Dominions Secretary to Curtin, 14 January 1942, CRS A816, item 31/301/136. Also AWM 243/5/33.

The fact that the only Australian representative was to be the deputy of the administrative branch was considered to be 'unjustifiable'. A 'vital principle' was at stake as much as 'the question of a share in the political higher direction'.[70]

The Australian government put these views to Britain in a cable despatched on 21 January. The proposals were described as 'unacceptable', and it was urged that the GOC AIF should be given a status that would ensure that he was fully consulted in regard to all plans affecting the AIF.[71]

Wavell pointed out to Churchill that he had asked for 'Australian ideas on representation' on 4 January, but had received no reply.[72] Churchill then directed Wavell to communicate directly with the Australian government,[73] and on 28 January Wavell explained to Sturdee that the headquarters of the Australian corps would be within easy reach, and that Lavarack would be taken into consultation whenever necessary. Wavell suggested that the CGS of the Land Forces branch could be an Australian, but he 'would have to be a man of wide experience and tact as well as capacity, since work affects British and Indian troops, American and Dutch'. If a suitably qualified man was available Wavell would accept him. Wavell made it quite clear that there was no possibility of Blamey becoming his deputy, as he had been in the Middle East. This position was held by the American General Brett.[74]

---

70. Note to Advisory War Council Minute 681, Melbourne, 20 January 1942, titled General Wavell's Headquarters and written on 19 January, MP 1217, Box 553.

71. Cable 65, Curtin to Dominions Secretary, 21 January 1942, CRS A816, item 31/301/136; PREM 3 166/5.

72. Cable 00279, Wavell to Churchill, 23 January 1942, *Telegrams Far East*.

73. Cable, Dominions Office to Australian Government, 24 January 1942, PREM 3 166/5.

74. Cable 00467, Wavell to Sturdee, PREM 3 166/5; *Telegrams Far East*.

The Australian government was still not happy, and sought the advice of both the CGS and Blamey in the Middle East.[75] Both agreed that it would be satisfactory if the GOC AIF had direct access to General Wavell and senior members of his staff on all proposals affecting the AIF.[76]

Meanwhile Menzies, who although out of the government was still a member of the Advisory War Council, had suggested to the British High Commissioner that Blamey should be given command of all British troops in the area. It would remove 'the possibility of blaming United Kingdom generals for reverses and would put the Australians wholly on their mettle'.[77] This was not, however, the view of the government,[78] and on 13 February Wavell was informed that Australia would be happy with the right of consultation.[79]

By this time the question had become academic, since Wavell now suggested that the AIF should be diverted from the NEI. But the incident shows the problems of representation on a multi-national headquarters. Furthermore, the impact of Australia's complaint can be gauged from the 25 January entry in the diary of General Pownall:

> The Australians, as was inevitable, have now started to register, saying they are not adequately represented on the staff here. We have got their Col. Lloyd to be a Major-General ... As such he will have everything to say in looking after the well-being of the Australian forces ... However, that's not good enough for them apparently and they want more of a say so. I fancy

---

75. Memorandum, Sturdee to Forde, 3 February 1942, MP 729/7, item 2/421/44; cable, Curtin to Blamey, 7 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 552.

76. Memorandum, Sturdee to Forde, 3 February 1942, MP 729/7, item 2/421/44; cable 0030, Blamey to Curtin, 10 February 1942, MP 1217, Box 552; MP 729/6, item 2/401/221.

77. Cable 133, Cross to Dominions Office, 12 February 1942, PREM 3 166/5.

78. *Ibid.*, also War Cabinet Agendum 31/1942, 5 February 1942, MP 729/7, item 2/42/44.

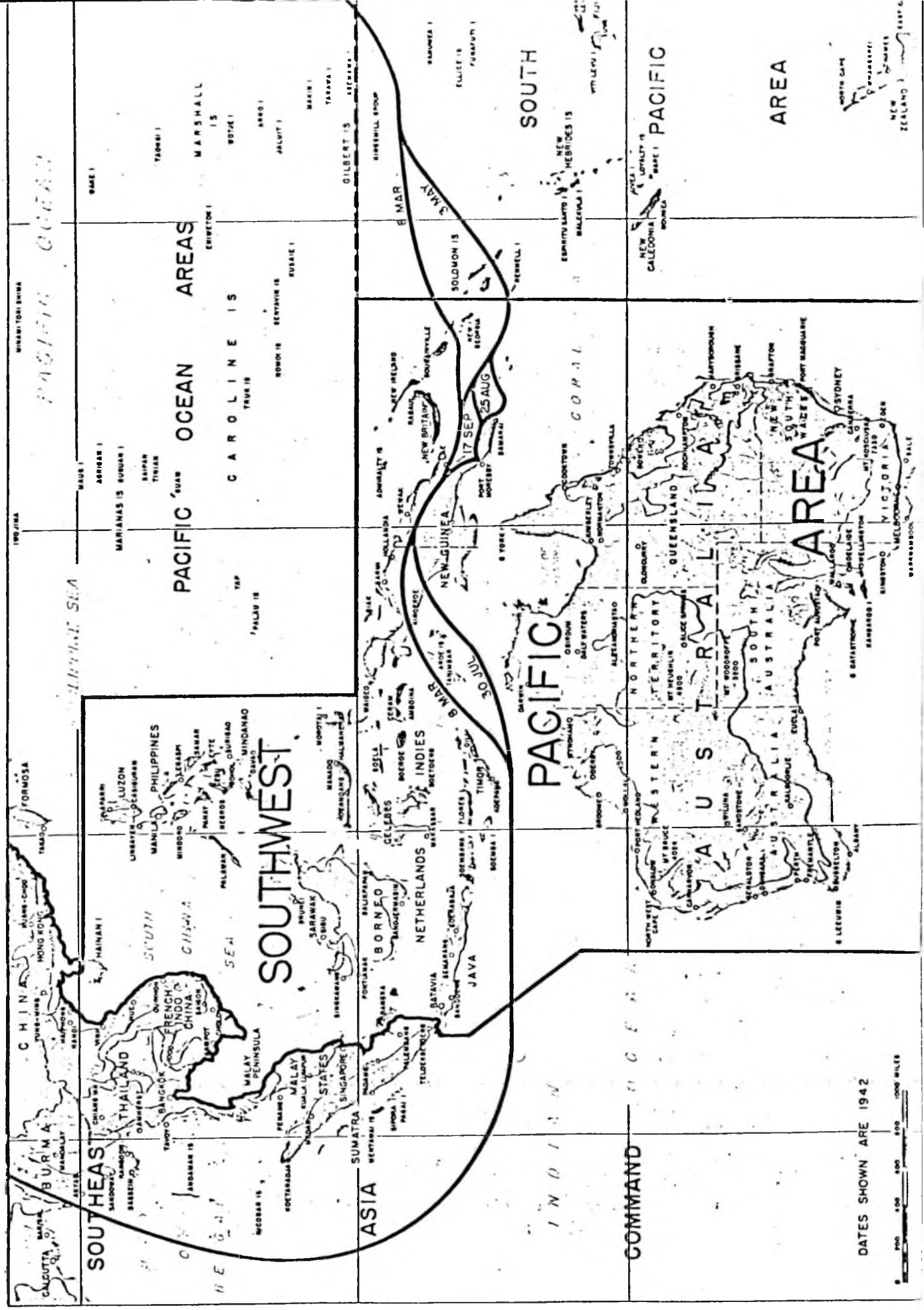
79. Cable 27, Australian Government to Wavell, 13 February 1942, PREM 3 166/5. On receipt of this Churchill initialled 'Good' and ordered Cross's telegram not to be distributed.

> its really Blamey trying to make a job for himself ... Well he can't be 'deputy' here ... Wavell said when he was first appointed that the Australians would be the most difficult of our allies. Very likely, indeed the telegram from Canberra was distinctly rude.

Pownall said that the Dutch were very good allies: 'They're grand, and what a contrast to the French and the Belgians and the Russians - not to mention the Australians and the Chinese!'[80] At least Australia appeared to have been accepted as an independent ally and not as an obedient British colony.

---

80. Quoted in Bond, *op.cit.* Vol.II, pp.79, 80, 81.



MAP 4

The Boundaries of the South-West Pacific Area and the Extent of the Japanese Advance

From: *Reports of General MacArthur,*

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGY IN THE SWPA, March 1942-January 1943

So much has been written about events in Australia it would seem superfluous to retell the story. The American, and particularly the Australian, official histories provide good overall accounts, the problems faced by the Australian military commanders have been examined in *Crisis of Command* and Bell in *Unequal Allies* has dealt with the dispute over allied global priorities as they affected Australia. This chapter, therefore, seeks to concentrate on a number of controversies concerning allied strategy in the South-West Pacific Area during 1942.

MacArthur's Plans for the Defence of Australia

The main historical debate about the strategy employed in Australia during 1942 has revolved around the later claims of General Douglas MacArthur that the the Australians had a 'largely defeatist conception' of defending their country from the 'Brisbane Line'. The debate began after MacArthur's views were expressed by his Public Relations Officer in a press conference in early 1943, and the argument was kept alive by unsubstantiated allegations made by a Labor Minister, E.J. Ward, that the previous government had approved plans to withdraw behind a 'Brisbane Line'. The Australian government denied both MacArthur's and Ward's claims. The events of the period, especially MacArthur's plans for defending Australia in April 1942, reveal the over-simplification of his contention that it was he who, after his appointment as the Allied Commander-in-Chief, decided to take the fight to the Japanese in New Guinea, and that it was never his 'intention to defend Australia on the mainland of Australia'.[1]

---

1. MacArthur's statement of 18 March 1943 is reproduced in Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane 25-31 May 1943, MP 1217, Box 2. See also MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, (Fawcett Crest, New York, 1965), p.162. MacArthur's claims have reappeared in many books, the most recent being Manchester, *American Caesar* (Hutchinson, Melbourne, 1978), p.296. For Ward's allegations see E. Spratt, *Eddie Ward, Firebrand of East Sydney* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1965).

When MacArthur arrived in Melbourne on 21 March the Japanese had occupied the main areas of the Netherlands East Indies and had established footholds on the north coast of New Guinea. Although the Americans in the Philippines were still resisting, the initial objectives of the Japanese High Command had been achieved. Australia stood on the defensive, expecting an attack any day. What then were the plans which MacArthur described as 'defeatist in outlook'?[2]

On 27 February the Australian Chiefs of Staff had completed an appreciation, which began by noting that after her successes in the Netherlands East Indies, Japan was 'now at liberty to attempt an invasion of Australia should she so desire'. A possible Japanese line of approach was through Port Moresby, but the Chiefs recognised that there was no prospect of reinforcing Port Moresby until the sea lanes were secure. The garrison would have to hold out 'and exact a heavy toll from the enemy if he should attack it'.[3] Similarly, it was not possible to increase the Darwin garrison beyond its existing strength of two brigade groups. It was recognised that Western Australia's garrison would have to be increased.

The appreciation was based on the assumption that only the troops available in Australia could be used. However, it was realised that two AIF Divisions and one US Division would soon be arriving in Australia, and when they arrived the garrisons in Darwin, Western Australia and Tasmania could be increased.

Nevertheless the main worry was the lack of air and naval protection, and the appreciation observed that:

---

2. MacArthur's statement of 18 March 1942, see fn.1.

3. After the war Rowell and Sturdee wrote: 'As the Australian Chiefs of Staff saw the position at this stage of the war (and it is suggested that the events of history amply confirmed their judgement) the problem of the defence of Moresby was not so much an increase in its land garrison, as the provision of adequate naval and air support'. Comments on US War History, Vol.1, Chapter 1, by Lieutenant-General V.A.H. Sturdee and Lieutenant-General S.F. Rowell, early February 1948, AWM.

> If there were adequate naval and Air Forces for the defence of Australia, an army of the numbers that would be required could nearly be met from Australia itself although a great deal of equipment would be required from abroad. Until such time as adequate Naval and Air Forces are available, it is estimated that it would require a minimum of 25 divisions to defend Australia against the scale of attack that is possible. This would mean that 10 fully equipped divisions would have to be supplied by our Allies.[4]

Despite his later claims, on 11 May MacArthur told Curtin that the only thing he disagreed with about this appreciation was the necessity for 25 divisions if there was not adequate naval and air power. In these circumstances not any strength of land force would be adequate, and therefore both seaborne and land based air forces were vital.[5] This emphasises the problem of politicians not knowing the right questions to ask, and the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Royle, wrote later: 'I always resent having those 25 Divisions pushed down my throat. The Defence Committee was asked a silly question, i.e. how many divisions would be required to defend Australia if there were no Naval or Air forces. I agree it would have been much better if we had answered in the same way as General MacArthur'.[6]

Yet if MacArthur agreed in general terms with the appreciation, when it was presented to the Advisory War Council on 5 March the Council was not satisfied. The minute noted that there was 'inadequate treatment in this appreciation of strategic possibilities'.[7] The government had been attempting to develop a strategy covering the whole South

---

4. Appreciation by Chiefs of Staff, 27 February 1942, CRS A 2670, item 96/1942.

5. Prime Minister's War Conference Minutes, 11 May 1942, MP 1217, Box 11.

6. Letter, Royle to Shedden, 7 November 1944, MP 1217, Box 605.

7. War Cabinet Agendum No.96/1942, 5 March 1942, CRS A 1670, item 96/1942. General Gordon Bennett has written: 'During early March 1942 the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, asked my opinion on this matter, expressing Cabinet's doubts of the wisdom of the recommendation. Unhesitantly I told him that the Japanese must be fought to the death in New Guinea and must not be permitted to set foot on Australian soil. He expressed great relief at hearing this opinion which, he said would be welcome news for the Cabinet which was greatly worried'. Memoirs, misc. draft, item 3, p.52, Bennett Papers, MS 307/22, Mitchell Library.

Pacific area. On 26 February the Australian and New Zealand Chiefs of Staff and the Commander of the US Army Forces in Australia (Brett) had reviewed the situation in the Pacific and had emphasised the need to plan an offensive with Australia and New Zealand as bases. They recommended the establishment of an 'Anzac Area' with an American as Supreme Commander. This was to replace the naval 'Anzac Area' and was to be extended to include most of the Western Pacific, New Guinea, Ambon, Timor and the sea to about 500 miles around Australia. These proposals were accepted by the Advisory War Council at which two New Zealand ministers were present,[8] and the decisions were transmitted to London and Washington on 4 March.[9] At the same time the Australian government decided that it would welcome as Supreme Commander, General Brett, who had recently returned to Australia from the ABDA Command.

In seeking support for the establishment of an 'Anzac Area' Curtin cabled the Dominions Secretary that 'The Advisory War Council representing all political parties in Australia regard the whole matter as one of overriding urgency'.[10] Yet this was not just a last plea for help in a desperate situation. It is true that Curtin pointed out that Australia was threatened, but his main argument was that if Japan were to be defeated, then Australia and New Zealand were 'the only bases for offensive action by the Allied nations against the Japanese from the Anzac Area'.[11]

Thus John Dedman, a member of the War Cabinet, has proudly pointed out:

---

8. The New Zealand ministers were the Rt. Hon. J.G. Coates and the Hon. D.C. Sullivan.

9. Cable 166, Curtin to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 4 March 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

10. Cable 168, Curtin to Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs, 4 March 1942, CRS A 816, item 14/301/223 A.

11. *Ibid.*

> It was the Australian Government which took the initiative in proposing a *strategy* for the war in the South Pacific; it was not based on the continental defence of Australia and the decisions were reached some three weeks before General MacArthur arrived here.[12]

Other observers, however, did not see it quite the same way. The British High Commissioner reported that at the Advisory War Council meetings on 26 and 28 February the New Zealand ministers had to overcome the wariness of Evatt and Beasley. Nevertheless, 'in the end the Ministers swung around and not only adopted but stole the New Zealand plan'.[13]

On 5 March the Australian DCGS, General Rowell, produced another appreciation which concluded that the Japanese might attack as follows:

a. Upon Port Moresby in the Middle of march;

b. Upon Darwin in early April;

c. Upon New Caledonia in the middle of April;

d. Upon the east coast of Australia in May.[14]

---

12. J.J. Dedman, 'The Brisbane Line', *Australian Outlook*, Vol.XVII, No.2, August 1968, p.148.

13. Cable 248, Cross to Secretary of State for Dominion's Affairs, 9 March 1942, WO 106/3527. Cross wrote: 'You are aware that Evatt and Beasley dominate the Cabinet and it appears that these two and to a lesser extent Curtin began by scouting the whole idea. I do not know the reason but Evatt and Beasley are almost certainly frightened of air raids and they may very possibly have feared that New Zealand was trying to form some Anzac unbrella which would in effect give her a share of Australia's defence resources ... Coates told me that [the Australians] cared nothing for New Caledonia. In any case New Zealanders stuck to their guns, hard words were exchanged and Coates I gather bitterly criticised Australia's lack of realism ...' Cross added that Admiral Leary of the US Navy, General Brett and the Australian Chiefs of Staff strongly supported the New Zealand plan, and W.M. Hughes urged that it be accepted.

14. Probable Immediate Japanese Moves in the Proposed New Anzac Area, 5 March 1942, CRS A 2684, item 905. Also RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

Unlike Brett who expected an attack from the north-west,[15] Rowell saw the main threat as coming the north-east.

In this regard Rowell had gauged correctly the Japanese intentions, for on 2 February the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters had ordered the capture of Lae and Salamaua, and, at the proper time, Port Moresby. On 8 March Japanese forces landed at Lae and Salamaua. On 15 March Imperial General Headquarters debated whether to attack Australia. The result was a decision to capture Port Moresby and the Southern Solomons, and then 'to isolate Australia' by seizing Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia.[16] Japan was now poised to strike at the islands to the north-east of Australia, but events elsewhere were to divert her attention until May. The Japanese High Command never really agreed to invade Australia.[17]

The Japanese plan was not, of course, known at the time, and the prospect raised by Rowell alarmed the Americans in Australia. Brett had already radioed Washington that the successful defence of Australia was doubtful unless immediate efforts were made 'to formulate and

---

15. Milner, *op.cit.*, p.12. See also Cable, Brett to War Department, 4 March 1942, RG 319, ABC 381 (Australia 1-21-42) National Archives. A memorandum by Brigadier-General F.S. Clarke, US Army to Brett, 15 March 1942, outlined the differences between the Australian and US estimates. AWM 625/5/20.

16. Milner, *op.cit.*, p.13.

17. This issue is dealt with in the following sources: M. Fuchida and M. Okumiya, *Midway, The Battle that Doomed Japan* (Ballantine, New York 1955), pp.60, 63; N. Ike (ed), *Japan's Decision for War - Records of the 1941 Policy Conference* (Stanford, California, 1967); D. Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (Pan, London, 1971); Morton, *op.cit.*, p.214 and Appendix B; T. Hattori, *Complete History of the Greater East Asian War* (Tokyo, 1953), microfilm copy in AWM; D.C.S. Sissons, 'Australia and New Guinea in Japanese Post-Mortems of the Pacific War', *Australian Army Journal*, September 1957; L.C.F. Turner, 'The Crisis of Japanese Strategy, January-June 1942', *RMC Historical Journal*, Vol.1; C.A. Willoughby, *et.al.* (comp.) *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.II, *Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area*, Part I (Washington 1966). Compiled from Japanese Demobilization Bureaux Records. Hereafter cited as *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.II.

implement detailed plans'.[18] General Barnes, who was acting as Brett's deputy, later wrote that 'The entire situation in the South West Pacific area had reached the stage where successful defence of Australia itself was questionable...'[19]

By this time the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff had produced another appreciation which stated that the immediate object should be 'to stabilise the situation so as to ensure the security of bases and points vital to our prosecution of the war'.[20] The Australian Chiefs of Staff thought this assessment was too defensive and recommended taking the initiative against the Japanese, with sea and air attacks against their forces at Rabaul and in the Netherlands East Indies. They urged the formation of an allied force of British and US naval units to conduct an offensive policy.[21]

In the light of this information, on 18 March the Advisory War Council again reviewed the defence of Austalia.[22] They affirmed that Darwin and Port Moresby should be defended to the fullest possible extent, and that every effort should be made to provide forces for these areas. They also decided to move troops from Victoria to south Queensland, reinforce Fremantle, and increase the tempo of building up the air force, especially in northern Australia.[23]

---

18. Brett to AG, War Department, Washington, 4 March 1942, AWM 423/11/202.

19. J.R. Barnes, 'Report of Organisation and Activities, U.S. Forces in Australia', December 7 1941-June 30 1942, held CMH, Washington.

20. Appreciation of Situation in Far East submitted to HM Government in the United Kingdom by their Military ADvisers. War Cabinet Agendum, Supplement No.1 to Agenda No.146/1942, CRS A 2680, item 904.

21. War Cabinet Agendum, Supplement No.2, *loc.cit.*

22. Maj-Gen. Rowell (DCGS) attended this meeting as Sturdee was ill. He recorded that with three King's Counsels, in Menzies, Spender and Hughes, to contend with 'it wasn't roses all the way'. Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.104. Air Marshal Sir John McCauley, who as DCAS attended some of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council meetings, recalled that it was almost like a courtroom discussion. Interview, 31 August 1979.

23. Advisory War Council Minute No.842, 18 March 1942, CRS A 2670, item 96/1942.

Clearly Australia's intention was to carry the fight to the Japanese just as soon as forces became available to do it. At this stage, however, only the first troops of the 7th Australian Division had arrived in Australia. The 41st US Division had not yet arrived, but a further US division had been offered to replace the 9th Australian Division which was to remain in the Middle East. Until these forces and American air forces arrived, Australia would have to remain on the defensive. This did not mean, as E.J. Ward and MacArthur later claimed, that the Australian Army planned to withdraw behind a Brisbane Line. Indeed on 3 June 1943 General Mackay wrote to General Vasey: 'Did you ever hear of the "Brisbane Line" till lately ... my letter to the Minister of 4 February 1942 has been pulled about by one Eddie Ward and is now used as a political weapon by the government against the opposition'.[24] Mackay described MacArthur's statement that there had been a defeatist policy in Australia until he took over and began to fight the Japanese in the islands, as 'a piece of skite'.[25] The true Australian position is revealed by a letter written by Vasey to an American general, possibly Julian F. Barnes of the staff of the US Forces in Australia, on 20 March 1942:

> I hope you realised from our conversation that what we told you was our *present* plan; but that as more troops become available, we shall continually revise it. Like your colleague of yesterday I feel that we are only deluding ourselves if we make and *count on* future plans which we have not the means of carrying out.[26]

On 20 March the UK government advised that it could not disregard other risks and duties to undertake a naval offensive operation,[27] and

---

24. Letter, Mackay to Vasey, 3 June 1943, Vasey Papers 3/3 NLA. Vasey had been Mackay's chief of staff when he was GOC-in-C Home Forces.

25. Mackay to Gavin Long, 4 June 1943, Gavin Long Notes, AWM 577/7/32.

26. Letter Vasey to U.S. General, 20 March 1942, AWM 243/6/60.

27. Supplement No.2 to War Cabinet Agendum No.146/1942, CRS A 2684, item 904.

confirmed that Australia would simply have to hold on until American support arrived. On a number of occasions the government had expressed its willingness to accept an American Supreme Commander in the area, and had pressed London and Washington to appoint one. On 7 March Earle Page, the Australian representative, cabled from London that the British and Americans had tentatively reached agreement to divide the world into areas of strategic responsibility. Two days later the government agreed to send Dr Evatt to Washington. Meanwhile Australia held her breath.

The Americans in Australia now expected an attack in the Darwin area by three enemy divisions before the end of the month,[28] and the Australian Chiefs of Staff forecast an attack on Port Moresby during the same period.[29] By the middle of March an air of panic or desperation hung over the government, including the Prime Minister, and also over some quarters of the Australian population.[30] There is, however, no evidence to suggest that this panic was shared by the Australian

---

28. GHQ, SWPA Report on Organisation and Activities, USAFIA, 7 December 1941-June 30, 1942, AWM 16/3/5. As late as 20 March 1942 Brett believed that the main threat was in the Darwin-Broome area. (Agendum for Consideration by Chiefs of Staff, the Commander of the Anzac Force and the CG USAFIA, 20 March 1942, AWM 243/6/119.

29. Probable Immediate Japanese Moves in the Proposed new Anzac Area, 5 March 1942, CRS 1684, item 905.

30. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp.43, 44. Hasluck recorded that Sir Owen Dixon described the Ministers as 'a pusillanimous crew'. Also impression gained by Brigadier J.D. Rogers, who returned from the Middle East in February 1942 to become Mackay's Chief Intelligence Officer (25 June 1974). Herring had the same impression and thought Curtin was very frightened (29 June 1974). Sir Kingsley Norris did not have the impression that the despondency was widespread, although he felt the government was frightened (27 June 1974). Brig-Gen. Hurley, an influential US politician then visiting Australia, reported to America: 'The people do not appear to be aware of the critical situation confronting them. The newspapers the day after the raid [on Darwin], and on Saturday, had much more news concerning horse racing than they did concerning the raid on Darwin. This is not a criticism of Australia. They give about as much space in their newspapers to racing as we do to glamour, sex appeal and the figures of almost naked beautiful women. The point I am trying to convey is that the serious situation confronting this great continent of Australia has not fully aroused the populace and the military establishments seem to be too complacent and self assured'. (Hurley to Marshall, 21 February 1942, OPD 381 SWPA, RG 165, National Archives (Wash.).)

Chiefs of Staff. Nor is it easy to support MacArthur's assertion that the Australian plans were defeatist. Rather, in the absence of outside support, and with an almost non-existent navy and airforce, it is hard to imagine a more offensive plan.

MacArthur put forward his strategic views when he met the Advisory War Council in Canberra on 26 March. He doubted whether the Japanese could undertake an invasion of Australia, believing that it would be a blunder for them to do so, but he recognised that they 'might try to overrun Australia in order to demonstrate their superiority over the white races'. He thought the main danger was from raids and that the Japanese might attempt to secure air bases in Australia. Therefore, MacArthur stated that the 'first step was to make Australia secure'. After this was accomplished Australia could be organised as a base for an offensive towards the Philippines. The offensive was dependent primarily on the rapidity with which US men and equipment could reach Australia.[31]

About this time General Sir Thomas Blamey, who in the emergency had been recalled from the Middle East, was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army. He soon established a close working relationship with MacArthur, and during the next two weeks, before their appointments as Commander-in-Chief, and Commander, Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific Area respectively, had become official, they turned their minds to the immediate problem of the defence of Australia. In his memoirs Blamey recalled that:

---

31. Advisory War Council Minute, 369, Canberra 26 March 1942, CRS A 2684, item 967. An American reporter summed up MacArthur's situation another way: MacArthur 'advised me to remain in Australia for at least a month - until April 30. "By that time", he said, "either I'll hit the Jap up in New Guinea, or he will hit me, or there will be a stalemate". As events turned out MacArthur didn't have anything to hit the Japs with'. Clark Lee, *They Call it Pacific* (Viking, New York, 1943), p.284.

> From the outset it had been decided between General MacArthur and myself that as soon as possible we would move to the offensive against Japan as far north as we could proceed. But it was essential first to ensure that the defence of vital areas should be secured.[32]

Thus, on 31 March Blamey presented proposals to the War Cabinet, basing his plans upon those already prepared by Sturdee and Lavarack.[33] These proposals envisaged two armies, covering eastern and southern Australia, a corps in Western Australia and the reinforcement of Darwin with the 19th AIF Brigade now arriving in Australia.[34]

Meanwhile, the Joint Planning Staff under the chairmanship of General Barnes (US Army) was examining the situation.[35] Then, a little later, on 4 April, the Australian Chiefs of Staff and MacArthur's Headquarters produced a joint estimate. They expected a Japanese attack on

---

32. Blamey's Memoirs, Chapter 3, p.10.

33. War Cabinet Agendum, 16 March 1942, Not presented to Cabinet, MP 729/6, item 19/401/151. Letters, Forde to Blamey, 19, 24 March 1942, MP 729/6, item 2/401/79.

34. War Cabinet Minute 2053, Melbourne 31 March 1942, and attached papers, CRS A 2670, item 186/1942.

35. The Joint Planning Staff consisted of Barnes (U.S. Army) as Chairman, Brig-Gen. Clark (U.S. Army), Commander Kelly (USN), Col.Eubank (USAF), Commander Nichols (RAN), Gp-Capt. Hancock (RAAF), Col. Hopkins (DMO, LHQ), and Lt-Col. Booker (DD Plans, LHQ). They concluded that the scale of attack was unlikely to exceed two divisions against either Darwin or the north-east coast of Australia, but that the attack on Darwin could take place at any moment and on the north-east coast not before 15 April. They believed that to defend the Brisbane-Melbourne area adequately the area north of Brisbane should be held to ensure air security. They concluded that Townsville should be developed as a fortress area and that the forces there should be increased to one division as soon as possible after the arrival of the 41st U.S. Division in Australia. They also suggested sending an AMF brigade group to the Hughenden-Cloncurry area in case the Japanese landed in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Second Report of Joint Planning Staff, 28 March 1942, AWM 242/6/119.

'Australia's supply line and against Australia itself' in the very near future. They recognised that the 'critical point' was Port Moresby, and that if sufficient naval and air forces could be found Australia could be defended there.[36] Therefore, as Rowell observed later, 'in the joint appreciation of 4th April General MacArthur seems largely to confirm the Australian appreciation of 27th February'.[37]

With the arrival in Australia of the four brigades of the AIF late in March, and of the 41st US Division in early April, ground forces were now available to bolster the forward defences. On 9 April Blamey issued further orders for the defence of Australia. The 7th Division (AIF) was located in New South Wales and Queensland and the troops in Western Australia were brought up to a full division.[38] In addition US anti-aircraft and engineer troops were sent to Darwin, a squadron of heavy bombers and a US anti-aircraft regiment were ordered to Perth, a US anti-aircraft regiment and an additional Australian infantry brigade went to Townsville, and the remainder of the US anti-aircraft troops were grouped in Brisbane. The air force concentrated most of its striking force in the Townsville-Cloncurry area, where airfields were becoming available.[39]

These dispositions were executed with MacArthur's concurrence, but he later asserted that 'he had wished to locate the American troops in the northern part of Australia'. The 41st Division had been located in Victoria and the 32nd, when it arrived in mid May, in South Australia.

---

36. Milner, *op.cit.*, p.25.

37. Letter, Rowell to Major-General Orlando Ward, Chief of Military History, US Army, 7 March 1951, Rowell Papers, File 11, AWM.

38. Weekly report to PM by CGS for week ending 11 April 1942, CRS A 2670, Agenda No.201/192. AHQ Operation Instruction No.50, 9 April 1942, signed by Major-General G.A. Vasey, Deputy CGS, Blamey Papers 12.

39. Milner, *op.cit.*, p.25.

General Blamey and Lieutenant-General Lavarack at Lavarack's HQ at Toowoomba, June 1942. Lavarack was responsible for the defence of the Northeast coast of Australia.

(AWM Negative No.12418)

The Minister for the Army, F.M. Forde, and General Blamey at the 1st Armoured Division review, Puckupunyal, June 1942.

(AWM Negative No.12692)

MacArthur claimed that he had been dissuaded by the Australian military authorities 'on the basis that the defence plan provided for the main concentration further south and that was where the American troops should be located'. MacArthur said that 'he was sorry that he had not been more insistent on [the] acceptance [of his wishes] at the time, but some of these arrangements had been put in hand before his arrival or shortly thereafter'.[40] There might well have been an element of truth in MacArthur's claims, but he seems to have overlooked the fact that the U.S. Divisions were only part-trained, and that accommodation and training facilities were more plentiful in southern than northern Australia.

On 10 April Blamey issued his first Operation Instruction to the GOC of the First Army. While recognising that the retention of the Newcastle-Melbourne area was vital to the continuance of the war effort, Blamey did not, however, think that it was likely that the enemy would attack the area on a major scale because they were occupied in Burma and the Netherlands East Indies, and because of the growing air and naval strength in Australia. He considered that the enemy's first southward effort would be directed at capturing Port Moresby, and this would be followed by a landing on the north-east coast of Australia with a view to advancing southwards covered by land-based aircraft. It followed that Brisbane had to be held since its occupation by the enemy would give them suitable airfields for land-based aircraft to attack Newcastle and Sydney. It was important to hold Townsville, but it was recognised that it was not possible to hold the area between Brisbane and Townsville, although 'as our resources increase it is intended to hold progressively northwards from Brisbane'.[41]

---

40. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 20-26 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 3.

41. GHQ (Australia) Operation Instruction No.1, to GOC First Army, 10 April 1942, Blamey Papers 12; also AWM 243/6/121.

Meanwhile the Australian government received advice that the UK Chiefs of Staff considered it was 'necessary to remain strategically on [the] defensive'. Offensive action was to be limited to raids in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.[42] These views were discussed by the Advisory War Council on 16 April, and Curtin said that on 20 April he would be discussing with MacArthur 'the fundamental basis of the strategical appreciation to which it should be our objective to obtain the assent of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the United States Chiefs of Staff'.[43] As a result of his discussion with MacArthur,[44] Curtin sent a cable, with which MacArthur agreed, to Evatt in Washington, repeating the argument of the UK Chiefs of Staff that for the present the Allies were forced to remain strategically on the defensive in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.[45]

Throughout the latter half of April 1942 MacArthur began to receive increasingly definite intelligence that the Japanese were about to undertake an important attack, probably against Port Moresby.[46] He ordered his forces to remain on the defensive, and on 25 April his headquarters issued Operation Instruction No.2 detailing the role and responsibility of the Allied Land Forces. This directed that:

> a. The Allied Land Forces, South West Pacific area will prevent any landing on the North East coast of Australia or on the South West of New Guinea.
>
> b. The Allied Land Commander responsible for the areas in the vicinity of Port Moresby and along

---

42. Cable Churchill to Curtin, 6 April 1942, CRS A 2684, item 904.

43. Advisory War Council Minute 905, 16 April 1942, CRS A 2670, item 96/1442.

44. Prime Minister's War Conference Minutes, 20 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

45. J.J. Dedman, 'The Brisbane Line', p.154.

46. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, pp.77-79. See also Memorandum, Brigadier-General C.A. Willoughby, G2, to Brigadier-General S.J. Chamberlin, G3, 21 April 1942. The title of the memorandum was 'Japanese offensive expected end of April/early May'. Papers of Charles A. Willoughby, G2 Admin File, US Army Military History Institute.

> the North East Coast of Australia to include Brisbane will immediately perfect plans for the co-ordination of all the defensive forces in their respective areas.[47]

It can be seen that MacArthur's defensive plan envisaged holding the area with the troops already deployed. These instructions were based on 'Plan A' for the defence of the north-east coast of Australia and Port Moresby, which had been issued the previous day.[48]

There is no doubt that MacArthur was far from satisfied that the forces available to him in Australia were adequate for the defence of the country, let alone for an offensive. He hoped to obtain more troops from America, but the Japanese gave him no breathing space to amass these additional forces. During April the Japanese continued their advance southwards through the Solomons. Plan A, issued on 24 April, indicated that it was likely that a Japanese force of three aircraft carriers and five cruisers might strike the north-east coast of Australia between 28 April and 3 May. Naval forces of the SWPA and SOPAC (South Pacific Area) were concentrating to meet this threat, and land based aircraft from Townsville were preparing to attack the enemy convoy.[49] A few days later General Milford in Townsville was warned: 'An early attack on Port Moresby is probable and this may be followed by a landing on the northeast coast with a view to a progressive advance southwards covered by land based aircraft'.[50]

Even if it was MacArthur's intention to base his defence on New Guinea, he was not able to reinforce that area substantially before the

---

47. GHQ Operation Instruction No.2, 25 April 1942, Blamey Papers 12.
48. Copy of extracts from G3 Journal, 25 April 1942, AWM 243/6/61.
49. Plan A, 24 April 1942, Blamey Papers, 43.5, Part I.
50. First Army Operation Instruction No.6, 4 May 1942, AWM 243/6/133.

Japanese were ready to strike. Moreover, his orders during April reveal a commitment to defending Australia on the Australian mainland. In fairness to MacArthur, and to the Australians before him, it was not easy to reinforce Port Moresby, for the allies had not secured control of the sea, and the air bases in Port Moresby were very inadequate. In an attempt to rectify this situation, in early April an Australian light anti-aircraft battery from the Middle East arrived. In late April US engineers and anti-aircraft units were ordered to Moresby, and also by late April US bombers based in Townsville were using Moresby to attack Lae, Salamaua and Rabaul.[51]

In anticipation of a victory in the Coral Sea, on 1 May MacArthur suggested to Blamey that there might be a chance of taking 'a limited initiative' by raiding Lae and Salamaua.[52] But these tentative moves hardly represent a major strategic initiative on MacArthur's part. Indeed the Australian official historian noted that:

> So hesitant had General MacArthur and General Blamey been to send reinforcements to New Guinea that on the 10th May, the day on which the Japanese planned to land round Port Moresby, the defending garrison was not materially stronger than the one which General Sturdee had established there early in January.[53]

It was not until mid May that the 14th Brigade was ordered to New Guinea and it was not concentrated in Port Moresby until late June.[54]

---

51. Milner, *op.cit.*, p.25.

52. D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area - First Year* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959), p.86 quotes MacArthur as suggesting a 'limited offensive'. The author possesses a photostat of the carbon copy of the letter stating 'limited initiative', from RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

53. D. McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.82.

54. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.85. The hesitancy of Blamey and MacArthur to reinforce New Guinea is revealed in the minutes of a General Staff Conference at Land Headquarters on 9 May 1942. General Vasey, the DCGS, told the conference that 'If the action in the Coral Sea has been as successful as reports indicate it is probable that 14 Inf Bde will reinforce 30 Inf Bde instead of relieving it'. AWM 213/3/21.

By then MacArthur was talking not of defending Australia in New Guinea, but of using New Guinea as a springboard for an offensive against the Japanese. Like the argument over the plans for the defence of Australia, MacArthur's plans for operations in New Guinea in late 1942 have also been the source of considerable controversy. The truth appears to be that MacArthur did alter allied strategy in the South-West Pacific Area, but only after he began to receive American troops and planes, and after the successes in the Coral Sea and at Midway. And as for MacArthur's statement about the Brisbane Line, Shedden, who was in an excellent position to know, has the last word: 'It was a flamboyant utterance for, as indicated earlier, no such plan existed'.[55]

MacArthur's Impact on Australian Strategic Policy

In *Unequal Allies* Bell provides a fine, perhaps the best, analysis of the American reaction to Australian efforts to alter Allied global priorities throughout 1942. He concludes that 'the pragmatic changes in America's policies and objectives in the Pacific resulted from altered military circumstances in all theatres of the war, not from political power exerted by any power'.[56]

Yet admirable though Bell's account might be, he makes no real effort to determine why Australia continued its efforts to alter Allied strategy. Did Curtin himself have a comprehensive strategic plan, or did he rely on the views of his advisers? Did Curtin react in a fit of pique at having not been consulted, or were his demands conditioned solely by concern for the defence of Australia? And if the latter was the case, how was he to determine when Australia was secure? Some of these questions

---

55. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 3, Chapter 34, p.5.

56. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.86.

General MacArthur on his arrival at Melbourne station, 21 March 1942. On the right is Lieutenant-General George H. Brett.

(AWM Negative No.11867)

MacArthur and Curtin conferring in Canberra, 26 March 1942.

(AWM Negative No.42774)

cannot be answered adequately, and Bell acknowledges that MacArthur and the Australian government shared 'common military priorities and aspirations',[57] but what was MacArthur's real impact on the government's conduct? How also, did MacArthur and the government react to the changing strategic situation as it affected Australia?

From the first day of his arrival in Melbourne, General MacArthur had an important impact on the government. For example, the Deputy Prime Minister, F.M. Forde, who met MacArthur at the railway station in Melbourne on 21 March, was tremendously impressed.[58] Forde recalled that faced by 'the greatest catastrophe that could have happened' the country looked to America. The government 'felt that ... MacArthur was the man who would influence his government along the right lines'.[59] According to Forde, MacArthur told him that:

> although the war clouds are black I feel absolutely confident that with the backing and cooperation of the Government and people of my country, and the wholehearted support and cooperation of the Government and the people of Australia, in the very near future naval vessels and aeroplanes, fighting personnel and weapons of war will be in Australian waters ...[60]

On 26 March MacArthur put these views to the Advisory War Council in Canberra. He said that there were two schools of thought on strategy, the European and the Pacific, and he urged Australia to 'stand firmly by its view that the Pacific is the predominant theatre'. The first step was to make Australia secure, but after that was accomplished, Australia would be the base for a counter-offensive towards the Philippines. He

---

57. *Ibid.*, p.105.

58. Transcript of interview with F.M. Forde, 4 March 1971, TRC 121/8, NLA.

59. Forde interview with E.D. and A. Potts, St. Lucia, 19 December 1973, copy in MacArthur Memorial.

60. Letter, Forde to Hetherington, 29 September 1970, Hetherington Papers, AWM.

MacArthur and Curtin at the Advisory War Council, 26 March 1942. On the left, Major-General Sutherland. On the right, Fadden, Chifley and Beasley. MacArthur told the War Council that the first step 'was to make Australia secure'.

(AWM Negative No.136225)

MacArthur with Forde and Chifley.

(AWM Negative No.42777)

said that he could ask Curtin 'to help him to obtain from the United States whatever assistance that country can give'.[61] In reply Curtin assured MacArthur that the Australian government would give him all the assistance it could, and that they 'would endeavour to influence the United States Government to grant General MacArthur's requirements'.[62]

For the moment, however, Evatt, who was in Washington, was seeking MacArthur's assistance in supporting the government's case. Thus on 22 March Evatt informed Curtin that MacArthur's first appreciation had reached General Marshall: 'The stronger these representations are couched the better, as the public would condemn the United States Government unless MacArthur is sufficiently supported'.[63] Evatt followed this by advising on 31 March, that 'confidentially, pressure should be continued by MacArthur as intense competition here from all sources'. He warned against issuing optimistic statements from Australia as these could be 'seized upon by other contenders for supplies as a reason for cutting down ours and increasing their's'.[64]

While the arrival of MacArthur had a remarkable effect on the depressed morale of the government,[65] it is important to observe that he caused no substantial alteration in Australian policy. As related, he was not able to change the plans for the defence of Australia.[66] Nor did he cause

---

61. Advisory War Council Minute 869, Canberra, 26 March 1942, CRS A 2684, Minute No.967.

62. Draft of Minute 869, Advisory War Council Meeting, 26 March 1942, *loc.cit.*

63. Cable PM2, Evatt to Curtin, 22 March 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

64. Cable PMS 18, Evatt to Curtin, 31 March 1942, MP 1217, Box 229.

65. The US Minister in Australia wrote that after MacArthur's arrival and the return of the AIF, 'The rebound was almost as sudden as the slump in public morale' during the preceding month. Letter, Johnson to Roosevelt, 12 October 1942, quoted in P.G. Edwards (ed), *Australia Through American Eyes 1939-1945* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1979), p.50.

66. See pp.135-151.

the government to alter its determination to change global strategy and increase the priority of the Australian area. Just as the Australia-New Zealand Conference of late February showed that the government was looking beyond the mere defence of continental Australia before MacArthur arrived, so too did the decision of 9 March to despatch Evatt to Washington and London set the tone for increased representations.[67] It is true that Evatt consistently used the argument that if reinforcements were not sent Australia might fall, but before leaving Australia he had mentioned the need to attack.[68] Hasluck noted that the Australian arguments sometimes emphasised the peril to Australia, and sometimes the need to prepare for an offensive: 'They were conducting a debate as well as forming a policy'.[69]

But if MacArthur's arrival caused little change to the direction of Australian policy, it added confidence to the government and increased its capacity to put its case to America. After speaking to Evatt, Field Marshal Dill, the British Military Representative in Washington, recorded that 'Evatt is conscious as we are that MacArthur will be a suction pump for reinforcements and military supplies to Australia. It is this quality rather than his generalship which makes him attractive in Australian eyes'.[70] The first part of the statement was absolutely true; in early January Shedden had advised Curtin that the US Chiefs could be approached via the American commander in Australia.[71] Moreover when, on 4 April, Curtin learnt that his government was to have no share

---

67. Evatt's efforts overseas in 1942 are covered in Appendix 1.

68. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.157.

69. *Ibid.*, p.156.

70. Cable JSM 137, Dill to British Chief of Staff, 24 March 1942, WO 106/3427.

71. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 9 January 1942, MP 1217, Box 573.

in deciding the policies and plans which MacArthur would be instructed to carry out,[72] the Prime Minister realised that the only way of influencing the policies was by using the channels open to MacArthur. But contrary to Dill's assertion, the Australian government was also attracted by MacArthur's qualities of generalship, and there is no doubt that from his arrival in Australia the government looked to him for military advice. An early example of this was the employment of the 9th Australian Division.

Following the decision to return the 7th and part of the 6th Divisions to Australia, the Australian government believed that there was an 'understanding' that the 9th Division would return. However, at the end of March Churchill advised Curtin that it would be a 'mistake' to recall the division. If Australia were heavily invaded by, say, eight or ten Japanese divisions, two British divisions rounding the Cape would be diverted to Australia, but Churchill thought that this eventuality was unlikely.[73] Curtin decided to seek the views of MacArthur and Blamey,[74] and at the War Cabinet meeting on 31 March Blamey advised the recall of the Division 'as soon as it can be replaced in the Middle East and the necessary shipping is available'.[75]

On 4 April MacArthur told Curtin that if the naval and air strength asked for in the Chiefs of Staff appreciation of 3 April were provided, he thought that the 9th Division could be allowed to remain in the Middle East, and that any agreement to its retention there should be made conditional

---

72. Cable 522, Evatt to Curtin, 3 April 1942, received 4 April, MP 1217, Box 474. Evatt's cable, which contained the instructions to MacArthur, stated that the Combined Chiefs of Staff would exercise general jurisdiction over grand strategic policy and that the US Joint Chiefs of Staff would exercise jurisdiction over operational strategy.

73. Cable, Churchill to Curtin, 30 March 1942, PREM 3 151/1.

74. Cable 16, Curtin to Evatt, 1 April 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

75. War Cabinet Minute 2053, Melbourne, 31 March 1942, CRS A 2670, item 186/1442.

on the earlier possible provision of the required naval and air strength. MacArthur considered that the present land forces available in Australia, including the two promised American divisions, would, after a very brief period of further training, be adequate to deter any major operation by Japan. The provision of the naval and air strength requested would enable his forces to be built up for an offensive.[76] At a meeting with Curtin on 8 April MacArthur and Blamey agreed that the 9th Division should return to Australia as soon as conditions permitted.[77] As a result Curtin informed Churchill that the 9th Division could be retained until it could be replaced in the Middle East.[78] Churchill replied, thanking Curtin and assuring him that 'you have always been and will be perfectly free to decide the movement of all your troops'.[79] Thus, as Shedden observed, Churchill 'belatedly acknowledged the Australian Government's power to decide the movement of its own troops'.[80]

MacArthur's optimism was probably a result of receiving the details of his directive as Supreme Commander, SWPA. These included instructions to hold the key military region of Australia as a base for future offensive action against Japan, and to prepare to take the offensive.[81] Obviously MacArthur thought that this would mean an increased flow of men and equipment. He was soon to be disappointed.

D. Clayton James has perceptively observed that during his stay in Melbourne 'two contradictory images of MacArthur emerged'. The more

---

76. Memorandum, '9th Division, AIF - Return from Middle East', by Shedden, 4 April 1942, MP 1217, Box No.3.

77. Prime Minister's War Conference Minutes, 8 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

78. Cable 245, Curtin to Churchill, 14 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 474, also CRS A 2670, item 275/1942.

79. Cable 367, Churchill to Curtin, 15 April 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

80. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 2, Chapter 20, p.8.

81. Radio 1065, Marshall to MacArthur, 3 April 1942, OPD Exec 10, item 7a. RG 165, National Archives. MacArthur's Directive is reproduced in Appendix 9.

public image was one of a supremely confident general who was about to lead his forces to victory. But in private he appeared tired, bitterly disappointed and at times seized by a mood of despair.[82] After the war Shedden stated that there were two major crises in the relationships between Curtin and MacArthur. Shedden claimed that in both cases he acted as a go-between, putting proposals to each so as to minimise disagreement. The first crisis was in April 1942 when MacArthur discovered how few forces he had in Australia, 'lost heart and wanted to give his job up'.[83]

MacArthur's depression was exacerbated by the delay in formalising his appointment. On 1 April he complained that with the Australian forces he was 'functioning by coordination and cooperation',[84] and the receipt of the draft directive on 4 April was not followed immediately by the final directive. The delay was caused when the Australian government, mindful of previous experience in the Middle East and the ABDA Command, sought and obtained the right of the Australian commanders to have unhindered access to their own government.[85]

MacArthur continued to fret, and finally on 14 April requested Shedden, in the absence of Curtin, to call on him urgently at his headquarters.[86] Shedden recorded that he found MacArthur

---

82. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, pp.171, 172.

83. Extracts from Gavin Long interview with Sir Frederick Shedden, 31 January 1946, AWM 577/7/52. The second crisis was in late 1943 when Australia decided that manpower would have to be subtracted from the fighting services and put into industry. This incident is dealt with in Chapter Six.

84. Letter, MacArthur to Douglas Menzies, Secretary, Defence Committee, 1 April 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

85. Cable 31, Curtin to Evatt, 7 April 1942, and Cable 537, Evatt to Curtin, 12 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

86. On 10 April 1942 Curtin had written to MacArthur: 'if I should not be readily available, Mr Shedden has my full confidence in regard to all questions of War Policy'. MP 1217, Box 2598.

> somewhat depressed, as he had been in Australia for some time but had received no advice of the terms of his directive from the American Government. He seemed in doubt as to the cause of the uncertainty of his status. He suggested that, if it were in any way due to inhibitions which might be held by the Australian Government regarding an American officer commanding its Forces, he was quite willing to abolish the Supreme Command and confine his activities to the command of the American Forces, whilst at the same time relying on co-operation with the Australian Forces to conduct the campaign. Having been reassured regarding the Australian Government's warm support of the principle of the Supreme Command, he appeared to be much happier at the conclusion of the interview.[87]

As a result, the next day Curtin wrote to MacArthur that the directive had been approved by the President and that the Australian government would be assigning its forces to his command. He continued:

> You have come to Australia to lead a crusade, the result of which means everything to the future of the world and mankind. At the request of a sovereign State you are being placed in Supreme Command of its Navy, Army and Air Force, so that with those of your own great nation, they may be welded into a homogeneous force and given that unified direction which is so vital for the achievement of victory.
>
> Your directive, amongst other things, instructs you to prepare to take the offensive. I would assure you of every possible support that can be given you by the Government and people of Australia in making Australia secure as a base for operations, in assisting you to marshal the strength required to wrest the initiative from the enemy and, in joining with you in the ultimate offensive, to bring about the total destruction of the common foe.
>
> We hope and pray that your military efforts may be crowned with great success.[88]

Accordingly, at midnight, Saturday, 18 April 1942 all combat units of the Australian defence forces were assigned to MacArthur's command.[89]

---

87. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with General MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 14 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 3.

88. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 15 April 1942, RG 3, MacArthur Memorial.

89. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 17 April 1942, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial. The assigned forces did not include those serving in the European and Middle East theatres.

These developments emphasise again the role played by Shedden, who always seemed pulled between self-effacement and a desire that his importance should be recognised. Thus he later stressed that there was an

> important aspect which should not be overlooked. It is the part that has been played by the Defence Department as the agency of all higher policy questions dealt with between the Prime Minister and General MacArthur ... On General MacArthur's appointment, the Defence Department assumed that responsibility for handling all matters on the policy level ... By reason of the fact that the Secretary of the Defence Department is also Secretary to the War Cabinet, which is the Ministerial body responsible for the direction of the Australian War Effort, the Defence Department was in a focal position in the machinery of Government to facilitate the working of the unique set-up in the Southwest Pacific Area.[90]

The mainspring of the machinery for the higher direction of the war was the Prime Minister's War Conference, which consisted of the Prime Minister, MacArthur, and any ministers or officers whom the Prime Minister wished to summon.[91] The Defence Department provided the secretary, and this was nearly always Shedden himself. Shedden's minutes of the conferences therefore provide a unique and vital view of decision-making process.[92] Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that these minutes were not made available to the official historians.[93]

---

90. Letter, Shedden to Brigadier-General C.A. Willoughby, 6 January 1945, MP 1217, Box 289.

91. Changes in Machinery for Higher Direction of War, 14 April 1942, signed by Curtin, Military Board Minutes, misc. 41/1942.

92. Original and carbon copies of the minutes are contained in black folders in the Shedden Papers, MP 1217, Box 1.

93. The official historians relied upon reports of the conferences given by Curtin to the Advisory War Council. When specifically asked, Shedden, who was Secretary of the Department of Defence until 1956, produced copies of the conversations, for example the secraphone conversation of 17 September 1942. Shedden probably retained the files with the express purpose of including the information in a four-volume history of Australian defence policy which Curtin had requested him to write, and which at Menzies' direction he subsequently did. The manuscript has not been published.

The first Prime Minister's War Conference was held on 8 April, and it was here that MacArthur made his wishes known with respect to the higher direction of the war.[94] He was adamant that he should deal directly with Curtin alone and vice-versa, and as a result on 14 April Curtin produced a memorandum formalising the arrangements.[95] Subsequent letters between Blamey and Curtin made it clear that in his capacity as C-in-C of the Australian Military Forces Blamey also would have direct access to the Prime Minister on matters of broad military policy.[96]

Thus the whole structure for strategic decision-making was revised. Whereas previously the Chiefs of Staff had been the government's principal advisers on strategy, they were now replaced by a foreign general. Furthermore, individually, if not collectively, the Chiefs of Staff previously had been responsible for the operations of the forces in defence of Australia. Now this responsibility rested with MacArthur. It is true that Curtin was still able to receive advice from the Australian Chiefs of Staff, particularly Blamey, but the Prime Minister, supported by Shedden, looked to MacArthur as the main source of advice.

It might be argued that Curtin had no option but to rely on MacArthur because only the latter had access to information from the Combined Chiefs of Staff through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This problem would have been overcome if Australia had been represented on the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but that did not prove possible.

---

94. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 8 April 1942, present: Curtin, MacArthur, Blamey, Admiral Leary, General Brett and Shedden, MP 1217, Box 1.

95. Changes in Machinery for Higher Direction of War, 14 April 1942, signed by Curtin, Military Board Minutes, Misc. 41/1942. An attached diagram showing the machinery for higher direction is reproduced in Appendix 14.

96. *Ibid* and letters, Blamey to Shedden, 15 April 1942, Shedden to Blamey, 23 April 1942, Curtin to Blamey, 25 April 1942, Curtin to Blamey, 28 May 1942, Curtin to Blamey, 19 August 1942, *loc.cit.* See also Blamey Papers 23.7 and MP 1217, Box 1598.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to see why Blamey, in a capacity such as Chairman of the Australian Chiefs of Staff, could not have attended the Prime Minister's War Conference on a regular basis. Curtin would then have had the benefit of Blamey's military experience in his negotiations with MacArthur, rather than having to rely solely on Shedden. The explanation may well be that Shedden preferred Blamey to be excluded, thus strengthening his own position.

Despite the fact that the Prime Minister's War Conference normally consisted only of Curtin, MacArthur and Shedden, its composition was flexible. When the conference met on Monday, 20 April, both Blamey and MacArthur's Chief of Staff, Major-General Sutherland, were included in discussions to hammer out 'the fundamental basis of the strategical appreciation' for which they planned to obtain the assent of the authorities in Washington and London. In Curtin's view, this would be 'the essential starting point from which to build up the flow of reinforcements and equipment'.[97] The Conference decided that MacArthur and the Australian Chiefs of Staff would work out the requirements, and that these would be sent simultaneously by the Prime Minster through Evatt to the Pacific War Council in Washington, and by MacArthur to Marshall.[98]

Clearly there was a mood of optimism, for the previous day Evatt had advised Curtin that MacArthur had the right and duty of demanding what, in his opinion, was necessary to carry out his directive. All

---

97. Cable PM 46, Curtin to Evatt, 17 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 474.
98. Prime Minister's War Conference, 20 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

he need do was requisition for his requirements: 'If this course is boldly and consistently pursued', the 'claims will be irresistible'.[99] Curtin replied that MacArthur would be making a submission simultaneously with the government. He agreed with Evatt that MacArthur would be 'responsible for demanding what he requires ... to fulfil the strategical objectives laid down in his instructions'.[100]

By now allied cryptanalysts had discovered the outline of the Japanese plan to seize Port Moresby and threaten northeast Australia,[101] but MacArthur was in a confident mood, and on 23 April he told the Prime Minister's War Conference (which on this occasion included the state premiers) that 'a large scale attack on Australia was possible, but not probable. There might be predatory raids, but he did not think a major attack likely'.[102]

The optimism ended on 24 April with news from Evatt that America planned to send a total of only 95,000 army and airforce personnel to Australia. First line aircraft would be limited to 500. 'I have been assured', added Evatt, 'that if [the] situation should develop against us, forces would be greatly increased'.[103] The next day, at the request of the Prime Minister, Shedden discussed Evatt's cable with MacArthur, who was 'bitterly disappointed with the meagre assistance promised'.[104] In his view the forces were insufficient for the defence of Australia. Yet Marshall had requested him to reduce his earlier

---

99. Cable ES 10, Evatt to Curtin, 18 April 1942, received 19 April, CRS A 663, item 056/1/110.

100. Cable SW 29, Curtin to Evatt, 22 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 474.

101. S.E. Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, May 1942-August 1942* (Little Brown, Boston, 1967), p.13. See also signals Sutherland to CG US Air Forces, 16 April 1942, and Sutherland to Commanders AAF, ALF, ANF, CG USAFIA, 22 April 1942, AWM 423/11/202.

102. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 23 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

103. Cable ES 17, Evatt to Curtin, 23 April 1942, received 24 April, MP 1217, Box 229 and Box 571.

104. Cable SW 34, Curtin to Evatt, 28 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

demands. MacArthur stated that he had no intention of doing so and asked that Evatt should seek in Washington information about the programme for sending forces to the SWPA. Furthermore he asked Curtin to request from Churchill an aircraft carrier, the temporary diversion of the two British divisions rounding the Cape, and a further allocation of shipping.[105]

The substance of MacArthur's observations was embodied in cables to Evatt and Churchill on 28 April.[106] To Evatt Curtin added a few extra comments:

> MacArthur says that if Japan is not attacked elsewhere we can certainly look for an attack here. Speaking from the Australian viewpoint, I think that if we were thrown back on the defensive against a heavy attack, the effect on public morale might well be disastrous, if it became known that we did not have the forces considered necessary by the Commander-in-Chief for the defence of the Commonwealth.[107]

MacArthur also made strong representations to Washington, requesting information on the size of force to be eventually allocated to his area.[108]

Thus was established the procedure of close collaboration between MacArthur and the Australians over the strategic view to be presented to London and Washington. It brought MacArthur a quick rebuke from Marshall,[109] but MacArthur was less than candid in his reply. He said that Curtin had asked his opinion on many specific questions and he had

---

105. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with General MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 25 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 3.

106. *Ibid.*, Cable SW 34, Curtin to Evatt, 28 April, MP 1217, Box 571; Cable 267, Curtin to Churchill, 28 April 1942, PREM 3 151/1.

107. Cable SW 34, Curtin to Evatt, 28 April 1942, MP 1217, Box 571.

108. Radio AG GHQ 384, MacArthur to Marshall, 1 May 1942, AWM 423/11/202, Pt.1.

109. Radio 8, Marshall to MacArthur, 30 April 1942, *loc.cit.* The US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson wrote in his diary on 13 May 1942 that MacArthur 'is ... really egging the Australians on to try to make the Australian theater the main theater of the war, and to postpone what we are trying to do in regard to fighting Hitler first ... He has been doing it in a very disloyal way'. Stimson Diaries, Library of Congress.

had 'no idea that it was for other purposes than his own personnel information!' MacArthur defended his right to provide this information and said that he had 'no idea of bringing pressure to bear through any channels open to the Australian Government'.[110] But there can be no doubt about Australian intentions; as Curtin explained, when the Pacific War Council 'failed to function, we achieved our objective by establishing a direct link between the Australian Government and the Commander-in-Chief'.[111]

When the government received a negative reply from Churchill,[112] MacArthur showed that he had no intention of qualifying his advice. For example, on 2 May Shedden discussed Churchill's reply with MacArthur and recorded that the Commander-in-Chief

> seemed somewhat disillusioned in regard to his earlier expectations of support in the Southwest Pacific Area and his attitude could be expressed as one of determination to have a 'show-down' with Washington about the precise terms of his directive and the forces which were to be provided to enable him to fulfil it. He emphasized that it would be a weak course for him to allow the President and Mr Churchill to leave him with a directive which sounded grand but had no backing behind it.

MacArthur felt 'impelled' to ask the government to press for the return of the 9th Division as early as possible.[113]

These views were passed to Evatt, who was now in London,[114] and in turn he urged MacArthur to argue strongly with Marshall and refuse 'to be satisfied with anything short of' the necessary force.[115]

---

110. Radio 151, MacArthur to Marshall, 3 May 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

111. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Vol.179, p.35, 17 July 1944.

112. Cable 390, Churchill to Curtin, 30 April 1942, received 1 May, PREM 3 151/1.

113. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with General MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 2 May 1942, MP 1217, Box 3.

114. Cable PM 57, Curtin to Evatt, 6 May 1942, CRS M100, item May 1942, and MP 1217, Box 471.

115. Cable E4, Evatt to Curtin, 8 May 1942, received 9 May, *loc.cit.*

In the meantime Curtin had asked MacArthur for more 'positive suggestions' to help Evatt,[116] and on 10 May MacArthur replied suggesting that Evatt concentrate on a general plan of reinforcement which he outlined in the letter.[117]

MacArthur continued to influence the government in its attempts to alter allied strategy. On 11 May at the Prime Minister's War Conference he spoke of the necessity for increased naval and air power.[118] The following day, with more definite news of the results of the Coral Sea battle, MacArthur gave Curtin a gloomy estimate of the general strategic situation in the Pacific. He pointed out that the Japanese successes had continued in Burma and that they were now able to release the divisions that had been occupied in the Philippines. The Americans there had surrendered on 6 May. MacArthur continued:

> Despite the reverse suffered in their recent move against New Guinea the Japanese Navy has not been opposed in force and is in a position to undertake further offensive efforts. The availability of these forces makes possible a strong enemy offensive effort of themost dangerous possibilities. The entire history of the conduct of the war by the Japanese leads to the belief that the Japanese will continue their offensive action.

He believed that the next Japanese offensive would be in the South-West Pacific Area and that this was where a Second Front should be opened. He concluded by emphasising the need for haste in developing a 'defensive bastion' in Australia. 'We have ... in this theatre at the present time all the elements that have produced disaster in the Western Pacific since the beginning of the war'.[119]

---

116. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 8 May 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memor

117. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 10 May 1942, MP 1217, Box 229.

118. Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 11 May 1942, present: MacArthur, Curtin, Shedden and Sutherland. MP 1217, Box 1.

119. *Ibid.*

As a result of MacArthur's advice, Curtin again appealed to Washington and London for further reinforcements, but without success. To Evatt, Curtin added that he had found MacArthur to be

> in general agreement with the views we have been expressing since the outbreak of the war with Japan and all of which I have mentioned earlier. However I would resummarise them as the basis on which ... we as a government must ceaselessly argue until MacArthur is satisfied ...[120]

During this period there was one slight disagreement with MacArthur. At the Advisory War Council on 13 May the Chiefs of Staff reported on the operations in the Coral Sea, and disappointment was expressed that heavy losses were not inlficted on the enemy. It was felt that not enough land-based aircraft had been concentrated in the north-east.[121] When he heard of this criticism, MacArthur wrote to Curtin that he felt 'a sense of disappointment' with the Council. He thought that it had been 'a very brilliant effort ... which undoubtedly saved Australia from a definite and immediate threat ...'. He did admit, however, that he was a little disappointed with the effort of the air force.[122]

The receipt on 28 May of four important cables from Evatt provides further insight into the strategic decision-making process in Australia. Evatt told Curtin that he had previously suspected that the agreed strategy was 'beat Hitler first', and that now he had discovered to his surprise that there was a 'written agreement'. However, as part of the general strategy it had been decided that the security of Australia

---

120. Cable 62, Curtin to Evatt, 13 May 1942, MP 1217, Box 571; CRS M100, item May 1942; CAB 66/24 WP(42) 210 and PREM 3 151/4.

121. Advisory War Council 938, Canberra, 13 May 1942, CRS A 2670, item 228/1942. This was the first meeting of the Advisory War Council attended by Air Vice-Marshal Jones as CAS. Jones recalled that Hughes wanted to know why the RAAF had taken no part in the battle. Jones said that he 'found Hughes a very sharp-tongued individual, and initially I was no match for his overbearing attitude. I was much too diffident to these senior politicians'. Memoirs of Air Marshal Sir George Jones.

122. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 18 May 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

had to be maintained. Evatt pointed out that Australia had not been consulted and that a strong case could be made against the agreed strategy. Moreover, America and Britain had an obligation to provide MacArthur with the forces to execute that part of the grand strategy which was outlined in his directive. There was some good news. Evatt had persuaded Churchill to send three *Spitfire* squadrons to Australia.[123]

Curtin replied to Evatt the following day and expressed his surprise that neither Page nor Casey 'had been acquainted with the decision to treat Germany as the primary enemy'.[124] He agreed with Evatt that they would have to 'strive most strenously to help MacArthur get the forces'.[125]

On Monday 1 June 1942, Curtin met MacArthur in Melbourne to discuss Evatt's cables, but the first item to be discussed was the previous night's Japanese submarine raid on Sydney Harbour. MacArthur advised the release of a communique. He then criticised Britain for promising aid only if Australia were heavily attacked. In his opinion, this promise 'was an extremely weak reed on which to rely, as it would be impossible to come to the assistance of Australia in sufficient strength and early enough if Japan had air and sea superiority to carry out such an attack'. He therefore urged Curtin to seek the return of the

---

123. Cable ET 30, Evatt to Curtin, 28 May 1942, MP 1217, Box 474, Box 231, Blamey Papers 1.2 and CRS A 3300, item 228. Cable ET 31 of 28 May contained the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreement, Cable ET 32 of 28 May was a Combined Chiefs of Staff Aide-Memoire on Strategy and Cable ET 33 quoted a letter from Ismay to Evatt confirming the latter's discussions with Churchill, *loc.cit.*

124. Thorne, *op.cit.*, p.256, has pointed out that Page was present at a UK Defence Committee meeting in January 1942 when Churchill referred directly to the strategy. Page's Diary in his Papers does not mention Churchill's comments on the strategy, but in his entry of 8 March 1942 Page wrote that Churchill 'read long cable from R which showed that R was still firmly convinced that major enemy was Germany, that major effort had to be made against Germany, but was still prepared to direct a very considerable part of his resources against fighting the Japs'. AWM.

125. Cable PM 76, Curtin to Evatt, 29 May 1942, CRS A 300, item 228, Blamey Papers 1.2.

9th Division and the allocation of aircraft carriers to the South-West Pacific Area.[126]

The next morning Curtin and Shedden met with Blamey, Royle, the CNS, and Jones, the CAS, to discuss a report they had prepared the previous day.[127] Although the service chiefs agreed broadly with the grand strategy, they thought that Japan had become 'a much greater menace than the framers of the policy appear to consider'. Therefore they recommended an offensive against Japan; after all,twelve allied divisions were contained in Australia, while the Japanese were almost completely free for operations elsewhere.[128] British and American naval forces needed to be concentrated in the Pacific.[129] At the conference Curtin accepted these views, and Blamey urged the return of the 9th Division.[130]

At the Advisory War Council on 3 June Curtin read Evatt's cables, the notes of his discussion with MacArthur, and the report by the Australian service chiefs. The Council recommended that the conclusions should be embodied in a cable to Evatt, but that the draft should be

---

126. Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 1 June 1942, present: Curtin, MacArthur, Shedden and Sutherland, MP 1217, Box 1.

127. Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 2 June 1942, present: Curtin, Shedden, Blamey, Royle, Jones, *loc.cit.*

128. It is difficult to follow the Chiefs of Staff's argument about the twelve divisions. Of the thirteen divisions then in Australia, only one was described by Land Headquarters as fit for offensive operations. And of the 36 brigades or equivalent in Australia, only 10 were fit for offensive operations. Of those, only four were experienced, and three were American and they proved in November 1942 that they were not yet ready for offensive operations. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, pp.302-304.

129. Report by General Blamey, the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff on Cablegrams ET 30, 31, 32 and 33 from the Minister for External Affairs, 1 June 1942, MP 1217, Box 574 and Blamey Papers 1.2.

130. In a letter to Curtin on 30 May 1942 Blamey had already stated that it was a matter of urgency that a decision on the 9th Division should be made as there was a need to organise reinforcements, MP 1217, Box 574.

submitted to MacArthur: 'The views of the Australian Advisers are to be expressed as those of the Government'.[131] The Council accepted that a large-scale invasion of Australia was unlikely and urged an early offensive against Japan. Planning and preparation would take some months, but additional forces should be sent to Australia.[132] The following day Curtin sent the draft cable to MacArthur for his comments.[133]

The decisive defeat of the Japanese fleet at Midway in early June had an important impact on strategic planning in Australia. Indeed, when the results became known MacArthur realised that his dreams of an offensive could now become reality. Thus on 8 June he urged Marshall to send him troops trained in amphibious operations for an immediate offensive,[134] and Evatt, now in Washington, advised Curtin that the time was right for MacArthur to make personal representations to Marshall.[135]

MacArthur's optimism was confirmed when on the morning of 11 June he told Curtin that 'the security of Australia had been assured. It would now be merely interpreted as a timid cry for help if we were to persist in demands for assistance for the defense of Australia'. In view of the changed strategic situation he advised that the draft telegram should not be sent and he recommended that Evatt should return to Australia.[136] Later in the day Curtin repeated these views to the Advisory War Council which agreed that they should review the position

---

131. Advisory War Council Minute 955, Canberra, 3 June 1942, CRS A 2682, Vol.V.

132. G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy, 1942-1945* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1968), p.107, and letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 4 June 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

133. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 4 June 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

134. Radio AG 913, MacArthur to Marshall, 8 June 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

135. Cable ES 65, Evatt to Curtin, 10 June 1942, MP 1217, Box 474.

136. Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 11 June 1942, present: Curtin, MacArthur, Shedden and Sutherland, MP 1217, Box 1. Eleven days earlier, at the Prime Minister's War Conference on 1 June, MacArthur had said that Evatt should return. *loc.cit.*

once they had received MacArthur's revised appreciation.[138]

On 17 June MacArthur addressed the Advisory War Council and reaffirmed his views. In his opinion there had been a complete transformation of the war situation as it affected Australia. Internally there had been a tremendous accomplishment, not only in the services, but in the general war effort. After surveying the improvement in the navy, army, airforce and productivity, MacArthur then turned to the external situation. He claimed that the Battle of the Coral Sea had been

> the most crucial incident of the war insofar as Australia was concerned ... Australia was in grave danger up to the time of the Coral Sea action. The results of that action and successes gained at Midway Island has assured the defensive position of Australia.
>
> From the strategical point of view, we should take the initiative and not wait results in other theatres. Our aim should be to strike at Japanese bases in the islands to the north and throw the enemy bomber line back 700 miles.
>
> The greatest weakness of the present set up is that there is too much strategical control in London and Washington. General MacArthur said that if the decision were left to him he would attack now, even in the face of a tactical defeat, in order to destroy the Japanese psychology of initiative.

The remainder of MacArthur's speech was, in essence, a plea for support for his theory that the Second Front should be initiated in the South-West Pacific Area, and if given the necessary troops and arms, he would undertake an offensive to retake Rabaul and New Guinea.[138]

It was probably after this meeting that Menzies told Sutherland, who had been present, that he would like to 'throttle MacA' because of his exaggerated praise of the government. He agreed that MacArthur had stiffened morale and had gained considerable equipment when people

---

137. Advisory War Council Minute 960, Melbourne, 11 June 1942, CRS A 2682, Vol.V.

138. Advisory War Council Minute No.967, 17 June 1942, CRS A 2682, Vol.V.

had turned a 'nasty colour', but he felt that the 'Germany First' decision was the right one.[139]

While the government must have welcomed MacArthur's statement that Australia was secure, they would not afford to tell the public. They could not allow the tempo of the war effort to slacken. On 11 June Forde said that Australia was about to enter the worst period of the war.[140] On 17 June, in a national broadcast, Curtin said that it was possible that Australia could be lost,[141] and on 25 June he again spoke to the nation and said that Japan still had the initiative.[142]

But what of the decision over the return of the 9th Division? Just as the situation in the Pacific had seemed to improve, events elsewhere were causing Allied leaders around the world to have grave fears. The German U-boats in the Atlantic were engaged in their most successful battle so far. With the fall of Tobruk (20 June) and Sevastapol there was concern lest the Germans would link up in the Middle East. General Marshall thought it was 'a very black hour',[143] and Curtin was 'very disappointed' with the unexpected reverses in the Middle East.[144]

In these circumstances, on 23 June Shedden saw MacArthur and Blamey, and both advised against the recall of the 9th Division for the present.[145]

---

139. Colonel G.H. Wilkinson's Journal, quoted in C. Thorne, 'MacArthur, Australia and the British, 1942-1943: The Secret Journal of MacArthur's British Liaison Officer (Part 1)', *Australian Outlook*, Vol.29, No.1, April 1975. MacArthur later claimed that Menzies had said to Sutherland that the Commander-in-Chief was working in too much with the government. Sutherland had replied, 'What do you want him to do - fight with them? He would work just as closely with any other Government'. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 20-26 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 2.

140. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1942.

141. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.168.

142. *Ibid.*, p.173.

143. J. Toland, *The Rising Sun* (London, 1970), p.348.

144. F.T. Smith Reports, 1 July 1942, MS 4675, NLA.

145. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 23 June 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/142.

That same day Curtin signed a War Cabinet Agendum with that recommendation,[146] and it was endorsed by the War Cabinet (30 June)[147] and the Advisory War Council (1 July).[148] During the same period the British government advised that the promised delivery of the *Spitfire* squadrons would be delayed, and the Australian government very reluctantly concurred.[149]

Meanwhile MacArthur's staff had prepared grandiose and fanciful plans to capture Rabaul in two weeks.[150] Finally, on 2 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive ordering offensive operations with the ultimate object of seizing and occupying the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area.[151] At the Prime Minister's War Conference on 17 July MacArthur said that his own plan was better than that resulting from the JCS directive,[152] but he was nevertheless preparing to advance to the north coast of Papua, and on 20 July he opened his headquarters in Brisbane to take charge of the offensive.[153]

It can be seen that during his first four months in Australia (17 March to 17 July) MacArthur had an important impact on Australian strategic decision-making. On 20 July the CGS, General Sturdee, described the situation:

---

146. War Cabinet Agendum 275/1942, 23 June 1942, CRS A 2670, item 275/1942.

147. War Cabinet Minute 2215, 30 June 1942, *loc.cit.*

148. Advisory War Council Minute 979, 1 July 1942, CRS A 2682, Vol.V.

149. Advisory War Council Minute 975, 1 July 1942, *loc.cit.*

150. Morton, *op.cit.*, pp.297-298. One of MacArthur's biographers wrote that: 'For a while in June it seems that euphoria was unrestrained both in Washington and Melbourne probably because of the Midway triumph and the desire to follow up quickly before the Japanese recovered their balance'. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.188.

151. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.619.

152. Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 17 July 1942, MP 1217, Box 1. See also F.T. Smith Reports, 17 July 1942, MS 4675 NLA.

153. *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.I, p.55. When MacArthur's headquarters moved to Brisbane a branch of the Department of Defence was established at his headquarters to act as a liaison office between MacArthur and Shedden. (Prime Minister's War Conference, 17 July 1942, MP 1217, Box.1.) The liaison officer was Mr A.D.G. Adam who remained in Brisbane until December 1942 when he was replaced by a clerk.

> There is a very close collaboration between the Australian Prime Minister and General MacArthur on matters of broad strategic policy affecting the South West Pacific Area, and if the Austalian Chiefs of Staff submitted an appreciation to obtain Australian War Cabinet agreement, such appreciation would, no doubt, be referred for General MacArthur's views, and possibly a rather awkward position would arise, as two of the Australian Chiefs of Staff are regarded in the Allied set up in this area almost entirely as housekeepers. We naturally do not wish to take any action which would upset the present harmony and cooperation which exists with General MacArthur's Headquarters.[154]

During these four months there had been little alternative but for the allies to remain on the defensive. In such a situation strategic discussion revolved around ways to persuade Washington and London to send additional forces, rather than about the disposition of forces within the SWPA. But with MacArthur's decision to embark on offensive operations, confirmed by the JCS Directive of 2 July, matters of strategic deployment became important, and a question was thereby raised as to how much the Australians should attempt to influence this aspect of strategy. Since MacArthur had become the government's principal military adviser, there was little role for the Australian Chiefs of Staff. Curtin had stated that 'military matters [were] for military men and neither the Government nor the Parliament [would] override their decisions'.[155] MacArthur was therefore in a position of supreme power, and the only advisers in a position to present different views to Curtin were Blamey and Shedden.

The Command Framework

Australia could influence allied strategy in a number of ways. At the topmost level the government could seek to alter allied global

---

154. Letter, Sturdee to Smart, 20 July 1942, AWM 425/11/12.

155. Quoted in *Bulletin*, 8 April 1942, p.6.

strategy and priorities by diplomatic approaches in London and Washington. Often these approaches were in support of similar attempts by MacArthur. At a lower level, the Australian Prime Minister could attempt to persuade MacArthur to follow a particular course of action. As mentioned, Curtin looked to MacArthur for advice, and it was not until later in the war that he attempted to influence MacArthur. Finally, at the level of execution, Australian military men could attempt to persuade MacArthur and his staff of the wisdom of a particular proposal. But the effectiveness of this line of approach depended to a large degree upon the framework of command.

On 18 March, the day after he arrived in Australia, MacArthur was informed by General Marshall in Washington that as Supreme Commander he would not be eligible to retain direct command of any national force. It was intended that General Brett would command the allied air forces, Admiral Leary would command the naval forces, and an Australian officer would command the ground forces.[156] However, MacArthur planned to keep the Australian and American ground forces separated under their own commanders, and he foreshadowed the method of operations which he was to eventually institute the following year. He planned to create task forces 'to meet tactical requirements'.[157] Marshall strongly opposed the suggestion for separate commands and advised MacArthur that since the Australians formed the majority of his land forces an Australian should be given command of both American and Australian forces.[158] MacArthur agreed, and General Blamey was appointed Commander of the Allied Land Forces, but the events of the following years showed that MacArthur never intended that Blamey should exercise command over American forces.

---

156. Signal 739, Marshall to MacArthur, 18 March 1942, quoted in A.D. Chandler Jr. (ed), *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower. The War Years*, Vol.1, (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1972), pp.189-191.

157. Signal 3, MacArthur to Marshall, 21 March 1942, OPD Exec 10, item 7D, RG 165, National Archives.

158. Signal 810, Marshall to MacArthur, 22 March 1942, OPD Exec item I, *loc.cit.*

MacArthur also resisted Marshall's efforts to ensure that General Headquarters (GHQ) South-West Pacific Area was a truly allied headquarters. MacArthur's directive was modelled upon that issued for the ABDA Command, and Wavell's headquarters had included British, Dutch, Australian and American staff officers from three services. But of the eleven senior positions on MacArthur's headquarters staff, all were filled by American army officers, and of those, eight had come out of the Philippines with MacArthur. This 'Bataan Gang' resented the intrusion of outsiders,[159] and as one senior staff officer noted, they formed 'an exclusive little coterie'.[160] The leader of the group was the Chief of Staff, Major-General Richard K. Sutherland, and MacArthur proposed to promote a number of others to fill important positions on his new headquarters. When he put this to Washington, General Marshall, who had been astonished that MacArthur had taken most of his staff from the Philippines, leaving no senior staff officer with General Wainwright,[161] replied that the President felt 'that a number of higher positions on your staff should be occupied by Dutch and particularly Australian officers'.[162] There was nothing in MacArthur's directive specifically requiring him to appoint Australian officers, and Marshall's urging had little effect. He told Marshall that there were no 'qualified Dutch officers' in Australia and that the Australians did not have enough staff officers for their own rapidly expanding army: 'There is no prospect of obtaining qualified senior staff officers from the Australians'.[163]

---

159. C. Lee and R. Henschel, *Douglas MacArthur* (Henry Holt, New York, 1952), p.166.

160. Thorpe, *East Wind, Rain*, p.91.

161. W. Frye, *Marshall, Citizen Soldier* (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1947), p.307.

162. Radio, Marshall to MacArthur, 9 April 1942, quoted in Chandler, *op.cit.*, p.232.

163. Signal, MacArthur to Marshall, 15 June 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 10, item 7D, National Archives.

At this early stage the influence of the brusque, short-tempered, capable but autocratic Sutherland can already be detected.[164] General Blamey commented later that MacArthur had said that he wanted an integrated headquarters but that Sutherland was against it.[165] There is no direct confirmation of this view, but in later months and years there is ample evidence to show that senior American staff officers opposed an allied concept, while MacArthur seemed willing to tolerate it.[166] It was true that the Australians were hard-pressed to provide staff officers for their own army, but since the Australian government had made a point of providing staff officers for Wavell's command, it is hard to believe that they would not have done so for MacArthur. Moreover, there is no record of MacArthur having asked for senior Australian staff officers.

Nor, it seems was MacArthur enthusiastic about plans that Blamey's Land Headquarters (LHQ) should have an allied staff. Blamey wrote later that his 'requests for American officers to establish a joint staff were met with face-saving acceptance that was completely ineffective'.[167] MacArthur realised that the senior Australian staff officers had vastly more experience than their American counterparts, and he warned Washington that the despatch to Australia of poor officers would result

---

164. MacArthur's airforce commander, General Kenney, wrote that MacArthur said to Sutherland, 'The trouble with you, Dick, I am afraid, is you are a natural-born autocrat'. G.C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (New York, 1949), p.152. Years later Kenney commented about Sutherland: 'He was an arrogant, opinionated and very ambitious guy ... I don't think Sutherland was ever loyal to MacArthur. He pretended that he was and I think MacArthur thought he was, but I wouldn't trust him'. (Interview quoted in James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.201.) For further comments about Sutherland see the author's *Crisis of Command*, pp.65, 66.

165. Interview with General Blamey, 21 July 1947, Gavin Long Notes, 110, AWM.

166. In particular see Chapter Nine, p.429.

167. Letter, Blamey to Shedden, 19 February 1945, Blamey Papers, 23.11 and MP 1217, Box 570, File No.2. This letter is reproduced in more detail in Chapter Ten.

in a 'black eye for US when placed with experienced and capable Australian officers'.[168]

Yet despite MacArthur's comments, it seems that generally speaking the Americans had a low opinion of Australian staff work and on 2 July MacArthur asked Marshall to send qualified staff officers for service with the Australian forces.[169] These proved to be fine officers, but General Eichelberger recalled that when he was introduced to his Australian Army commander, General Lavarack, the latter 'laughed about the fact that General MacArthur had felt it necessary to assign American staff officers to Australian staff. He pointed out that the senior officers were veterans of World War I ... and that three regular Australian divisions had returned from the Middle East where they had been in combat against the Germans'.[170]

The only concession to the Australians was the appointment of a liaison officer at GHQ, but, in the early days at least, the Americans, with some justification, looked upon the officer as an Australian spy.[171] One American described GHQ as a dumping ground for poor Australian officers,[172] and the Australians at Land Headquarters did not seem to be prepared to use the GHQ staff.[173] On the other hand the senior staff

---

168. Signal AG 152, MacArthur to A.G. War, 8 April 1942, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department, National Archives.

169. Radio, MacArthur to Marshall, 2 July 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

170. Eichelberger Dictations, Book 2, 11/1-19. From Professor Jay Luvaas. By 'regular' he was referring to the volunteer AIF divisions.

171. Interview with Colonel W.L. Rau, Australian Senior Military Liaison Officer, GHQ, 1943-1944, GHQ, 30 June 1943, Gavin Long Diary No.2, AWM. The first Australian liaison officer was Colonel J.D. Rogers, a capable, diplomatic staff officer who had served as Blamey's chief intelligence officer in the Middle East. Gavin Long wrote in his notebook: 'It has been said that [Rogers] could have contributed more than he did to cooperation between LHQ and MacA's HQ. "I see the fine Italian hand of Rogers in this", said [MacArthur's public relations officer] Diller'. Gavin Long Notebook N27/31.

172. Interview with Brigadier L.C. Lucas, Deputy Engineer-in-Chief, Australian Army, 20 February 1975.

173. Interview with Mrs Beryl Daley, General Kenney's wartime secretary, 24 July 1974.

officers at GHQ rarely sought out the Land Headquarters staff. This situation was not helped by the fact that the commanders of the Allied Air and Naval forces were in the same building as GHQ (the AMP Building in Brisbane), while Land Headquarters was some twelve kilometres away at St. Lucia.[174]

Later there were a few Australians in junior positions at GHQ, and an Australian was, for a while, head of one of MacArthur's planning teams,[175] but there was never any attempt to organise an allied staff like that of Eisenhower or Mountbatten. Australia was never represented on the operations staff.[176] Furthermore, it should be emphasised that it was not a joint staff; there was no strong naval representation,[177] and the American airforce had not yet been separated from control by the army.

Obviously the Australian representatives on MacArthur's staff had little hope of influencing his strategy. The only possibility lay with General Blamey, in his capacity as Commander of the Allied Land Forces. Blamey's problems will be elaborated upon shortly, but for the moment it is instructive to observe the American reaction to Blamey's position, and also to the efforts of General Brett, the Allied Airforce Commander, to integrate the Australian and American airforces. Brett had organised a joint allied air staff. His chief of staff was an Australian, the deputy chief and senior air staff officer were

---

174. Interview with Brigadier J.D. Rogers, Liaison Officer at GHQ, 1942, 25 June 1974.

175. This officer was Brigadier T.W. White who was appointed in November 1943. Letter. MacArthur to Blamey, 20 November 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial. MacArthur had three planning teams; Blue, headed by White, Red, headed by Colonel Peyton, US Army, and White, headed by Captain Tarbuck, USN.

176. Rogers interview.

177. There was a naval liaison officer, initially Captain Carson. Later there was a naval captain in each of the operations and planning staffs, but in each case they were out-numbered by about 7 to 1 by army officers.

Americans, and the other senior positions were divided roughly equally between Australians and Americans.

In June 1942 Major-General Robert C. Richardson visited Australia to investigate these matters,[178] and he discerned two disturbing facts. The first was that, as a result of Brett's organisation, in some cases American air units were commanded by Australians. This was particularly galling to the Chief of the US Army Air Forces, Lieutenant-General H.H. Arnold, who complained that 'Our combat units are not being employed in accordance with War Department doctrines and principles ... The Australians have been operating our combat units in accordance with their doctrines and no attempt has been made on our part to gain control.[179]

The other matter was that the American ground troops in Australia were under the command of General Blamey. Richardson wrote to Marshall that 'the present organisation was an affront to national pride and to the dignity of the American Army'.[180] MacArthur was already aware of this problem and requested that Richardson remain in Australia to command an American corps consisting of the 32nd and 41st US Division. Richardson agreed, but nonetheless continued to return to America to report to Marshall.[181]

---

178. General Eisenhower to Richardson, 16 May 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 333, item 17, National Archives.

179. Memorandum for AC of S from Arnold, 22 July 1942, RG 165, OPD 381, Australia 5.23.42, National Archives.

180. Memorandum for C of S from Richardson, 28 July 1942, RG 165, OPD 333, item 17, National Archives.

181. Eichelberger Dictations, Book 4, p.VIII-36. Eichelberger said MacArthur told him that Richardson had agreed to become the corps commander, but when he had asked to go on to the US from Noumea he had known that he would never return. See also Radio, Marshall to Richardson (in Noumea), 7 July 1942, RG 319, File ABC 381 Australia (1.23.42) and Richardson to WD, 8 July 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 10, item 16, National Archives.

When Richardson returned to Washington it was decided that an American corps should be set up in Australia, but he again refused to accept command. He pointed out that his corps would come under the command of an Australian army commander who in turn was under the command of General Blamey: 'Such an organization is inimical to the proper combat development of American Forces ... They breed friction and resentment because human nature and national pride are involved'. He continued that American officers in Australia had no confidence in the Australian command and staff, who were 'colonial officers' and mostly non-professionals, and furthermore that as part of the army of a great nation, they felt that they were entitled to be under American command, and not be incorporated in an Australian army for operations'.[182] In essence, Richardson believed that the formation of an American corps would not remedy the situation since the corps commander would be 'placed under a non-professional Australian drunk'.[183] With this he was referring to Blamey. Nevertheless in his report Richardson said that, 'There was no resentment of the Australians themselves, but merely of the system of control'.[184]

Richardson's point was accepted by the staff of the War Department, but they were not in agreement that it was necessarily valid, for they were confident that MacArthur would be able to handle the situation. Finally, however, it was suggested that MacArthur should be advised that

---

182. Richardson's Report to Chief of Staff, 9 June 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 2, item I, National Archives, and Memorandum for C of S by Richardson, 28 July 1942, RG 165, OPD 333, item 17.

183. Minutes of Conference, 26 July 1942, RG 165, OPD 333, item 17, National Archives.

184. The AAF in Australia to the Summer of 1942, typescript dated July 1944, compiled by Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence Historical Division, AWM.

one way of overcoming the problem would be to form a task force under an American commander when combat was imminent, and for the American corps to be assigned to the task force. Major-General Handy, an Assistant Chief of Staff, felt that MacArthur was aware of American policy and was sure that his request for a corps commander and staff was made with such a purpose in mind, and therefore the establishment of a corps would remedy the situation.[185]

MacArthur has often been accused, and with justification, of undermining Blamey's authority as Commander of the Allied Land Forces by removing American combat troops from his command in operations.[186] It is interesting to note, therefore, that this was the approach recommended by the Operations and Plans Division of the War Department. MacArthur's command was not seen as an Allied one, but as an American one which, by force of circumstance, was compelled to cooperate with other foreign forces, or as General Handy commented, 'The Australians have 350,000 troops and a little break for them seems to be necessary'.[187]

General Marshall was angry that Richardson had refused the command in Australia. Explaining the decision to General Eichelberger, who was to go to Australia instead of Richardson, Marshall told him that he

---

185. Memorandum, Handy to Marshall, 3 August 1942 and Radio message to MacArthur, 3 August 1942, RG 165, OPD 333, item 17, National Archives. The message to MacArthur advised him that the corps headquarters would 'do much to facilitate the employment of United States Forces in Australia as a national force'. This message was apparently not sent to MacArthur. It will be recalled that on 21 March MacArthur had advised Marshall that he intended to organise task forces to meet tactical requirements. See above p.

186. G. Long, *The Final Campaigns* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963), p.599, says MacArthur changed the organization by 'stealth' and 'subterfuges'. See also Willoughby and Chamberlain, *MacArthur 1941-1951* (Heinemann, Melbourne, 1956), p.124; W. Kreuger, *From Down Under to Nippon* (Combat Forces Press, Washington, 1953), p.10; G. Long, *MacArthur as Military Commander* (Batsford, London, 1969), p.122; E.G. Keogh, *South West Pacific, 1941-1945* (Greyflower, Melbourne, 1965), pp.265, 473.

187. Minutes of Conference, 26 July 1942, RG 165, OPD 333, item 17, National Archives, (Wash.).

had been selected because it was believed that he could get along with MacArthur. Eichelberger recalled that Marshall then

> launched into a tirade against General Richardson ... With his arrival back here, he at once began to get himself out of this combat detail claiming that he did not want to fight under the Australians and particularly under General Blamey who had been selected by agreement of Americans as Chief of the Allied Ground Forces. He called Blamey the Chief of Police of Melbourne, Australia.[188]

Apparently Richardson had complained at length to Marshall about the personal life of General Blamey.[189]

Probably only Richardson knew the real reason why he refused the command in Australia.[190] It is clear, however, that he was afraid that his career would be harmed by the unsatisfactory command arrangement which at that time MacArthur seemed happy to perpetuate.

The first step to rectify this situation took place in early July when Major-General George C. Kenney was ordered to Australia to relieve Brett. Kenney was briefed to take 'corrective action' to change the situation that had caused Richardson to complain that 'no American Commander should be placed in the position of being dependent on

---

188. Eichelberger Dictations, Book 4, pp.VIII-35, VIII-36. In addition, Eichelberger recalled (p.VIII-37) that: 'In this connection, I must say that I found Gen. Blamey a very fair commander and I would have taken his judgement at any time far above the three characters who were behind me in the command chain - I refer to MacArthur, Krueger and Sutherland'.

189. *Ibid.*, p.VIII-37.

190. Richardson later told MacArthur that he had wanted the Corps command but that Marshall had concluded that he was prejudiced after commenting on the 'unsoundness' of the March directive to MacArthur. Letter, Richardson to MacArthur, 9 August 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial; Radio, Marshall to MacArthur, 30 July 1942, Marshall Library. Richardson's signal to Marshall, and Eichelberger's Dictations suggest that Richardson did not want the command. In June 1945 MacArthur offered Richardson an army command which he refused. Jay Luvaas (ed), *Dear Miss Em, General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn. 1972), p.281.

foreigners'.[191] This he proceeded to do, forming the 5th US Air Force under his own command, and grouping the RAAF units together as the RAAF operational command.[192]

The replacement of Brett caused some disquiet in the Advisory War Council, and when it met on 13 August the question was raised as to whether an officer, to whom Australian combat forces had been allocated, should be replaced without consultation with the government. There was concern as to whether Blamey might be similarly replaced and Curtin promised to discuss the matter with MacArthur.[193]

Curtin must already have been feeling that he was on unsure ground with MacArthur. At the end of June the Advisory War Council had asked for a weekly statement of operational aircraft casualties in the South-West Pacific Area.[194] MacArthur had refused this request, pointing out that he was responsible to the Chief of Staff of the US Army and was 'not at liberty to make such operational reports to other agencies'.[195] He promised to make reports of losses of RAAF aeroplanes if desired.

It was now abundantly clear that except for such leverage the Australian government could exert as a result of supplying combat forces to MacArthur, or any influence that its resident ministers might have in Washington or London, the strategy to be employed for the defence

---

191. 'The AAF in Australia to the Summer of 1942' typescript dated July 1944, compiled by Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence Historical Division, p.34, AWM. Kenney wrote later that Marshall 'had told me in Washington that he didn't think much of mixing nationalities in the same organization'. Kenney, *op.cit.*, p.63.

192. The problems of command in the RAAF are dealt with in Appendix 3.

193. Advisory War Council Minute No.1032, Melbourne, 13 August 1942, CRS A 2682, item Vol.5.

194. Letter, Shedden to MacArthur, 30 June 1942, CRS A 2684, item 1080, part 1.

195. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 2 July 1942, *loc.cit.*

of Australia was out of the hands of that country. The minutes of the meeting of the Advisory War Council for 9 July are illuminating: 'It was decided that the request for regular reports of operational losses in the Southwest Pacific Area should not be pressed'.[196] Government leaders had been in awe of MacArthur since his arrival in Australia and they believed that in military matters his advice should be followed at all times.

At the Prime Minister's War Conference in Brisbane on 18 August Curtin discussed the matter of Brett's replacement with MacArthur, who told him that both Brett and Admiral Leary of the Allied Naval Forces had been appointed before he had arrived in Australia. He said that the appointments of Blamey, Brett and Leary had been made by him in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, but that the replacement of General Brett had been made by the United States Chiefs of Staff. He would be glad to consult with the Prime Minister on any impending changes which might be contemplated. In the case of General Blamey there could 'be no question of any variation in his status without prior consultation with the government'.[197]

It is difficult to believe that MacArthur was being candid. Whilst it is true that the order to relieve Brett had come from Washington, MacArthur had worked to ensure it.[198] Furthermore, the idea of forming a task force so that the command of American troops in combat would not remain with General Blamey, was definitely a 'variation' in Blamey's status. MacArthur was, however, careful not to antagonise Curtin with obvious breaches of this agreement. On 6 September he sent Curtin a message: 'US Navy Department wishes to replace Admiral Leary by Admiral Carpender. Both are most excellent men. Request your approval'.[199]

---

196. Advisory War Council Minute No.993, Canberra, 9 July 1942, CRS A 2684, item 1080, Part 1.

197. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Brisbane, 18 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

198. See the author's *Crisis of Command*, p.116.

199. MacArthur to Curtin, 6 September 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

Blamey's dual role as Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces and Commander, Allied Land Forces, presented considerable difficulties. The first duty required his presence in Melbourne, the second in Brisbane or New Guinea. Colonel E.G. Keogh has pointed out that this arrangement was at variance with the principles of command which MacArthur had wished to establish, namely to 'free the combat echelons of all administrative, supply and political considerations, permitting uninterrupted concentration on combat'.[200] Keogh used the example of the United Kingdom to suggest that Australia should have retained the Military Board and appointed a Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces.[201] But he overlooked the fact that the UK Army Council remained responsible for a number of overseas theatres as well as for the home theatre, while by March 1942, with the exception of the 9th Division in the Middle East, all of Australia's forces were concentrated for the defence of Australia alone.

Despite the very fine work of Sturdee and Rowell in the first months after Japan entered the war, in the opinion of General Berryman and other senior generals there was no alternative to the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief in the emergency of March 1942.[202] Blamey's signals with the prefix 'Z' ensured immediate action. Indeed, the expansion and training of the Australian Army in mid 1942 was an impressive feat, facilitated by the rapid decisions from Land Headquarters.

Eventually Keogh seemed to concede that their might have been merit in Blamey's appointment as Commander-in-Chief, for he concluded that:

> Even if the prevailing conditions in Australia rendered necessary the replacement of the Military Board with a Commander-in-Chief AMF,

---

200. Keogh, *op.cit.*, pp.472-474.

201. *Ibid.*, pp.142-144.

202. Berryman interview, 22 July 1944.

> it would have been far better if our Government had followed the British example and avoided getting the strings of responsibility crossed by allowing the same officer to undertake the duties of operational commander as well.[203]

Keogh's theory is persuasive, but he does not spell out exactly how it would have worked. However the following organisation might have worked. Blamey might have become Commander-in-Chief of the AMF and been appointed Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He would then have become Curtin's principal adviser on defence policy and would have been present for all discussions between MacArthur and Curtin. Another Australian army officer, perhaps General Lavarack, might have been appointed Commander of the Allied Land Forces and as such, commander of all the Australian Army operational forces in the SWPA. Training and administrative units might have remained under Blamey's control, but this would not have meant that he would have been head of merely the administrative side of the army. for through his constant presence at the Prime Minister's War Conference he would have retained some control over operations. Under such a scheme it would not have mattered if MacArthur had treated his nominal Land Force commander as a Task Force commander; as Curtin's principal adviser and representative,Blamey would still have been able to watch over Australian interests. At a later stage of the war Blamey could have resumed control over the operational forces in Australia leaving MacArthur with an Australian expeditionary force.

The difficulties in instituting such a scheme would have been: first, and most importantly, Shedden would not readily have given up his position as principal adviser to the Prime Minister. The government was suspicious of the military and would probably have accepted Shedden's advice on this matter. Second, there would have been personality problems with the generals; Blamey had little confidence in Lavarack, Sturdee lacked active experience in the war, Bennett was

---

203. Keogh, *op.cit.*, p.144.

not trusted by Blamey and many other generals, Mackay was not equipped for the task, Morshead was still overseas, and the other generals in March 1942, such as Rowell, Vasey and Robertson, were too junior. Third, MacArthur might have objected to Blamey's presence at the Prime Minister's War Conference, arguing that as Allied Commander-in-Chief he should be Curtin's sole military adviser. But since the Australians formed the bulk of his army he would have to agree had Curtin had the courage to insist. Fourth, Blamey might not have been able to work efficiently and cordially with the Prime Minister, although this is unlikely. Fifth, Blamey would not have had absolute power over all aspects of the army, and he was anxious for as much power as possible. On the other hand he would have been able to exert more influence on the government if he had been Curtin's principal adviser.

Some of these difficulties could have been overcome if the government previously had given the Chiefs of Staff a more important role in strategic policy-making, and if the government had looked to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff for day to day strategic and defence advice, rather than to the Secretary of the Department of Defence.

But faced by the difficulties outlined above it is easy to understand why a weak and inexperienced government failed to initiate such a scheme. Another possible scheme would have been to separate the administrative and operational functions of the army: for example, giving Blamey command of the operational side and leaving Sturdee as Chief of the General Staff or nominal Commander-in-Chief. A similar scheme in the Air Force (as described in Appendix 3) proved disastrous. Admittedly personalities played a part in causing the ensuing chaos, but the main problem was that the government's principal adviser on air matters, the Chief of the Air Staff, had absolutely no responsibility for operations, while the chief operational officer had no access to the Prime Minister. The situation with the navy was slightly different, as its limited size

and capability meant that it could never play any more than a supporting role.

Thus given the weakness and inexperience of the government, Blamey realised that if he was to provide some degree of a check to the almost complete power of MacArthur he needed to fill the only two positions available to him, namely Commander-in-Chief of the AMF and Commander, Allied Land Forces. By virtue of his role as Commander-in-Chief, Blamey had direct access to the Prime Minister, even if he was not present at the vital discussions between MacArthur and Curtin. The other chiefs of staff could only present their views either through their respective ministers or when asked at the Advisory War Council. By virtue of his role as Commander, Allied Land Forces, Blamey had more direct access to MacArthur's strategic plans than would have been possible had he been merely the commander of the Australian Army's operational forces or the Chief of the General Staff. The importance of Blamey's dual role was heightened by the Prime Minister's lack of military knowledge.

The arrangement worked smoothly and effectively until MacArthur's GHQ moved to Brisbane, forcing Blamey to follow suit and open Advanced Land Headquarters (Landops) in Brisbane. Blamey then found himself in the position of having to fly between his operational headquarters in Brisbane and his administrative headquarters in Melbourne. At this stage Blamey might have considered an attempt to persuade the government to institute the organisation described above, but decided against it because of the difficulties mentioned above. Lavarack was responsible for the defence of the east coast of Australia, and Rowell was given command of all the forces in New Guinea. Vasey, Blamey's Chief of Staff at Landops, has testified that there was not a great deal of day-to-day work there.[204] Yet he was often placed in the invidious position, in Blamey's absence, of having to argue the Australian case to MacArthur's staff.

---

204. Vasey's letters to his wife, August-September 1942, Vasey Papers.

Blamey's problems in managing his two appointments were intensified by MacArthur's concept of the role of the Commander, Allied Land Forces. From the beginning of operations in New Guinea it was obvious that MacArthur wished to operate as his own land forces commander, and that he intended that operations should be conducted by task forces operating under his personal control. Thus, following the Japanese landings in Papua,he suggested on 1 August that the 32nd US Division should be sent to New Guinea to operate directly under the control of GHQ. This move would have led to an impossible command structure with two separate superior headquarters in Australia controlling separate national forces in one operational area.[205] Apparently Blamey talked him out of that folly. Again, on 14 September, MacArthur ordered Eichelberger to prepare to command a task force alongside that of Rowell in New Guinea, but Sutherland persuaded him to drop the scheme.[206]

However, MacArthur was soon to get his own way, for when things appeared to be going badly in New Guinea he persuaded Curtin to send Blamey there to act, in effect, as a task force commander. This was against Blamey's wishes and resulted in the unfortunate dispute with, and eventual replacement of Lieutenant-General Rowell, the Commander New Guinea Force.[207] Nor would MacArthur allow Blamey to return to

---

205. Rowell,*Full Circle*, p.110. In a letter to Major-General Orlando Ward, the US Army's Chief of Military History, on 6 April 1951, Rowell wrote that Blamey 'was so concerned at the possibility of the control of land operations passing to GHQ that he had come to Brisbane from Melbourne to urge that 7th Division should be sent to New Guinea together with my HQ', Rowell Papers, file 11, AWM.

206. Luvaas, *op.cit.*, pp.27, 31. Also Eichelberger Dictations Book 1, pp.66, 68, 157 and Book 2, p.59. Sutherland opposed the scheme not just because it would have led to a hopeless command muddle, but also because it would have led to Eichelberger assuming a more important role than his as MacArthur's Chief of Staff.

207. This subject has been covered in detail in the author's *Crisis of Command*, Chapter 8.

Brisbane, even when Lieutenant-General Herring arrived to take-over from Rowell.[208]

While there is no doubt that MacArthur's aim was to become his own land forces commander, and to use task forces, Blamey's dual role gave MacArthur a ready-made excuse for doing so. For example, even before his headquarters opened in Brisbane, Blamey had decided that he would not be permanently located there. As Sturdee explained on 20 July: 'He combines the functions of operational commander with head of the housekeeping side and will therefore spend a considerable period of time in Melbourne in addition to travelling about Australia generally'.[209] Between 1 August, when his headquarters opened in Brisbane, and 23 September when he left to take command in New Guinea, Blamey spent barely half of his time in Brisbane.[210] This might have been acceptable later in the war, but during the South-West Pacific Area's first campaign, with Port Moresby threatened, and with MacArthur's staff 'like a bloody barometer in a cyclone - up and down every two minutes', as General Vasey exclaimed,[211] it seems Blamey was inviting trouble by being away.[212]

Nor was MacArthur completely satisfied when Blamey took command in New Guinea. MacArthur realised that when the 32nd US Division, which had begun to arrive in New Guinea in September, was finally committed

---

208. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 8 October 1942, Blamey Papers 23.81, and letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 10 October 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

209. Letter, Sturdee to Smart, 20 July 1942, AWM 425/11/12.

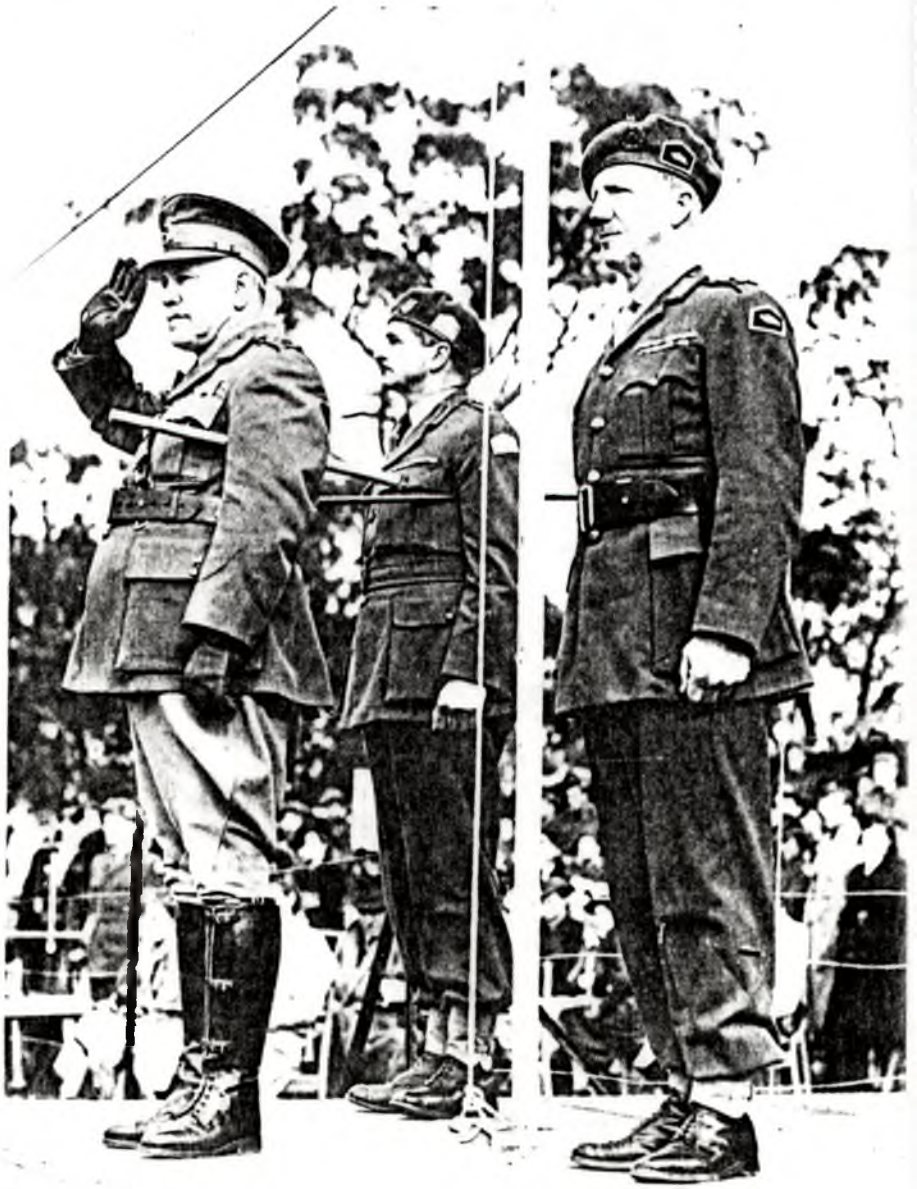
210. Command-in-Chief's Diary, Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 144. He spent 28 of the 53 days (1 August to 22 September) in Brisbane.

211. Letter, Vasey to Rowell, 1 September 1942, Rowell Papers, AWM.

212. Blamey's absence placed his DCGS, Vasey, in an awkward position. On 28 August 1942 he wrote to Rowell that for GHQ this was their first battle and they were 'nervous and dwelling on the receipt of frequent messages'. In another letter that day he wrote: 'It boils down to the question of who is commanding the army - MacArthur or TAB' (Rowell Papers). See also the author's *Crisis of Command*, Ch.7.

Lieutenant-General Richard K. Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff, awarding the Silver Star to an American Red Cross war correspondent, Richard Day, October 1944. Sutherland was 'brusque, short-tempered, capable but autocratic'.

(AWM Negative No.17704)



General Blamey, Brigadier M.A. Fergusson and Major-General H.C.H. Robertson at the saluting base, 1st Armoured Division review, June 1942. As C-in-C Blamey faced an immense and complicated task. Robertson had offered himself as C-in-C.

(AWM Negative No.25454)

to battle, Blamey would, in affect, assume his position as Commander of the Allied Land Forces. On 19 October MacArthur commented to his British liaison officer, Wilkinson, that it 'would *not* do to leave [Blamey] in Supreme Command'. Wilkinson suggested that another American commander would 'have to be put in over' Blamey. MacArthur was not sure how that 'should be handled' but added that he 'could handle Blamey'.[213] Significantly, on 6 November MacArthur moved his own advanced headquarters to Port Moresby. It is not surprising, therefore, that before leaving for New Guinea MacArthur told Shedden that 'it would be necessary for General Blamey sooner or later to make a decision as to whether he was going forward in command of the advanced forces in any offensive operations, or was remaining in Australia to command the forces left there for the defence of the base'.[214] And this was to be one of MacArthur's constant themes for the next two and a half years.

Any discussion of Blamey's command problems must take into account his personality and his reputation in the eyes of the government, the public, the army and MacArthur. General Berryman is probably right when he asserted that when Blamey journeyed to New Guinea he was fighting for his military life.[215]

From the time when he returned to Australia from the Middle East in March 1942 Blamey would have been aware of criticism, in some quarters, of his suitability. There had been the so-called 'Revolt of the Generals',[216] and Generals Robertson, Lavarack and Bennett had all

---

213. Wilkinson Diary, 19 October 1942, Churchill College, Cambridge.

214. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 20-26 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 2.

215. Interview with Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Berryman, 26 June 1974.

216. J. Hetherington, *Blamey, Controversial Soldier* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1974), pp.210-14. See also Stuart Sayers, *Ned Herring, A Life of Sir Edmund Herring* (Hyland House, Melbourne, 1980), pp.195-199.

Major-General G.A. Vasey, DCGS at Landops. In his opinion GHQ was 'like a bloody barometer in a cyclone - up and down every two minutes'.

(AWM Negative No.52620)

Blamey with another of his rivals - Lieutenant-General H. Gordon Bennett, GOC of the 3rd Corps, Perth, 9 June 1943. On the right is Brigadier O.V. Hoad, Commander of the Western Australian Line of Communication Area.

(AWM Negative No.52312)

coveted his position.[217] But for a while Blamey's position seemed secure. After the war MacArthur described Blamey as 'a veteran soldier of highest quality',[218] and before the operations in New Guinea he was lavish in his praise. The topic was raised at the Prime Minister's War Conference in Canberra on 17 July 1942. Shedden's notes recorded:

> The Prime Minister showed General MacArthur an extract from a letter by Mr Wasserman [the chief of the US lend-lease mission] in which he had passed critical comments about General Blamey, both personally and professionally. The Commander-in-Chief said that he viewed the remarks of Mr Wasserman as a cowardly attack. He added that he was quite satisfied with General Blamey as Commander of the Allied Land Forces, and he considered him to be the best of all the Australian Generals. He was above the average military ability of Generals. In his considered professional opinion, General Blamey was a first-class Army Commander.
>
> General MacArthur added that as Commander-in-Chief he was not concerned with any personal idiosyncrasies which General Blamey might possess. He judged him by results, and he considered that he had effected great improvements in the Australian Army since his return to Australia. Furthermore, he had the confidence and respect of the United States Army Staff.
>
> General MacArthur said that he had heard much loose talk from some people about General Blamey and he regretted to say that much of it had originated from officers in the Australian Army. Other Australian officers coveted the post of Commander-in-Chief and had made representations against General Blamey. He had also received anonymous letters on the subject.[219]

After the conference, Curtin confidentially told newspapermen that MacArthur had commended Blamey: 'He praised his organisation of the evacuation of Greece as one of the most outstanding events of the war, greater even than Dunkirk where the evacuating troops had the protection

---

217. Hetherington, *op.cit.*, pp.210-14. Also transcript of interview with F.M. Forde, 4 March 1971, TRC 121/8, NLA; interview with Colonel E. Mander-Jones, 21 August 1974.

218. D. MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Fawcett, Greenwich, Conn., 1964), p.163.

219. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 17 July 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

of almost unlimited aeroplanes'. Curtin continued that Blamey's private life had nothing to do with his military office. 'He said when Blamey was appointed the Government was seeking a military leader not a Sunday School teacher'.[220] To Kenney, who arrived in Brisbane in August, Blamey seemed 'a rather solid citizen and a good rock to cling to in time of trouble!'[221] On 22 September, the day before Blamey flew to Port Moresby to relieve Rowell, MacArthur described him as possessing a 'sensual, slothful and doubtful character but a tough commander likely to shine like a power-light in an emergency. The best of the local bunch ...'[222] Looking back over these early months, Blamey observed later that a good relationship was established with MacArthur 'which ripened into a deep regard and friendship'.[223]

Despite these comments, there is plentiful evidence that as the crisis in New Guinea deepened, Blamey's position became increasingly precarious. On MacArthur's part, Blamey could provide a convenient scapegoat if Port Moresby fell. After all, MacArthur knew that if he suffered another defeat his own position would be unsteady,[224] hence the reports to Washington of the poor fighting quality of the Australians.[225] MacArthur also advised Marshall that Blamey's 'entire

---

220. F.T. Smith Reports, No.13, 23 July 1942.

221. Kenney, *op.cit.*, p.49.

222. Wilkinson Diary quoted in C. Thorne, 'MacArthur, and Australia and the British 1942-1943: The Secret Journal of MacArthur's British Liaison Officer (Part II)', *Australian Outlook*, August 1975, Vol.20, No.2.

223. Blamey's Memoirs.

224. For example, Sutherland later told Kenney that 'if anything went wrong, General MacArthur would be sent home'. Kenney, *op.cit.*, p.124. On 15 September Marshall ordered General Arnold to visit the Pacific and report whether MacArthur's and Admiral Ghormley's claims for more reinforcements were true. F.C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope 1939-1942* (Viking, New York, 1966), p.388. Arnold did not report particularly well of MacArthur. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, pp.210-212. On 21 August MacArthur wrote: 'To make something out of nothing seems to be my military fate in the twilight of my service. I have led one lost cause and am trying not to have it two'. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.193.

225. See the author's *Crisis of Command*, Ch.7.

methods and conception differ so materially from ours that his actions during my absence would be unpredictable'.[226] Perhaps it was this message which promoted William Frye, in *Marshall: Citizen Soldier*, to write that Blamey was a commander 'in whose capacity the Americans found themselves able to place less than complete faith'.[227]

Nor were all the politicians happy. The Advisory War Council on 17 September attempted to determine the responsibility for the deteriorating situation in New Guinea, and it must have been obvious to Blamey, who was present, that some members were blaming him.[228] That evening MacArthur told Curtin that Blamey should proceed to New Guinea 'to save himself' and 'to meet his responsibility to the Australian public'.[229]

Aware of the government's decreasing confidence in his ability, Blamey 'raised no question'.[230] William Dunstan, the General Manager of the Melbourne *Herald*,wrote soon afterwards that, at two background conferences for senior newspapermen, Curtin had discussed Blamey's position 'more or less freely - off the record, of course'.

> They are not satisfied with him ... His every move is watched ... He was sent to New Guinea for no other reason than to give him one final chance ... To this extent we must sympathise with him ... He has had to submit to the MacArthur holiness. Just how much we know of what he has suffered under the set-up. Granted he is GOC Land Forces, just how much does it mean if he took strong directive over US Forces? Would he have to go cap in hand to MacArthur.

---

226. Radio MacArthur to Marshall, 22 September 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec. 10, item 236, National Archives.

227. Quoted in Hetherington, *op.cit.*, p.144.

228. Advisory War Council Minute No.1067, Canberra, 17 September 1942, CRS A 2682, item, Vol.V. For further details and evidence see the author's *Crisis of Command*, pp.163, 164.

229. Notes of Secraphone Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 17 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 532.

230. 'C-in-C's Press Conference', Perth, 9 July 1945, Blamey Papers 138.3.

Dunstan continued that there had been a canvass of names to find a replacement.[231]

But if some observers could accuse Blamey of a lack of moral courage in not challenging the government at this time,[232] others might have seen it as the pragmatic approach of an experienced soldier who was convinced that he was the only man for the job. By strong and effective action in New Guinea, helped by the fruits of Rowell's careful planning, Blamey re-established his reputation to a point in December 1942 where he was able to successfully challenge MacArthur over the employment of an American regiment.[233] And if the Advisory War Council had its doubts about Blamey on 17 September, on later occasions he left them in no doubt. Air Marshal Sir George Jones, who was present at one meeting, recalled that the Prime Minister criticised Blamey at length over a minor administrative matter. When Curtin paused Blamey said, thumping the table:

> Prime Minister, I want you to know that I have no ambitions in this war. If you don't like what I have been doing you damn well get somebody else.

What was an attempt to censure Blamey turned into almost a censure of the government.[234]

Throughout the war Curtin maintained his loyalty to Blamey, prompting Blamey to write later that he had 'no need to bother about rear armour'.[235] But the events of September 1942 show that Blamey's

---

231. Letter, Dunstan to Rowell, 29 September 1942, Rowell Papers.

232. Interview with Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Rowell, 26 June 1974. Also letters, Rowell to Clowes, 22 September 1942 and Rowell to W. Dunstan, 24 September 1942, Rowell Papers.

233. Letters, Blamey to MacArthur, 27 December 1942, MacArthur to Blamey, 28 December 1942, Blamey Papers 43.631.

234. Memoirs of Air Marshal Sir George Jones. Jones recalled that whenever Hughes spoke sharply to Blamey, the latter would snap back at him, and Hughes would recoil into his shell and say, 'I was only asking, General'.

235. Blamey Memoirs.

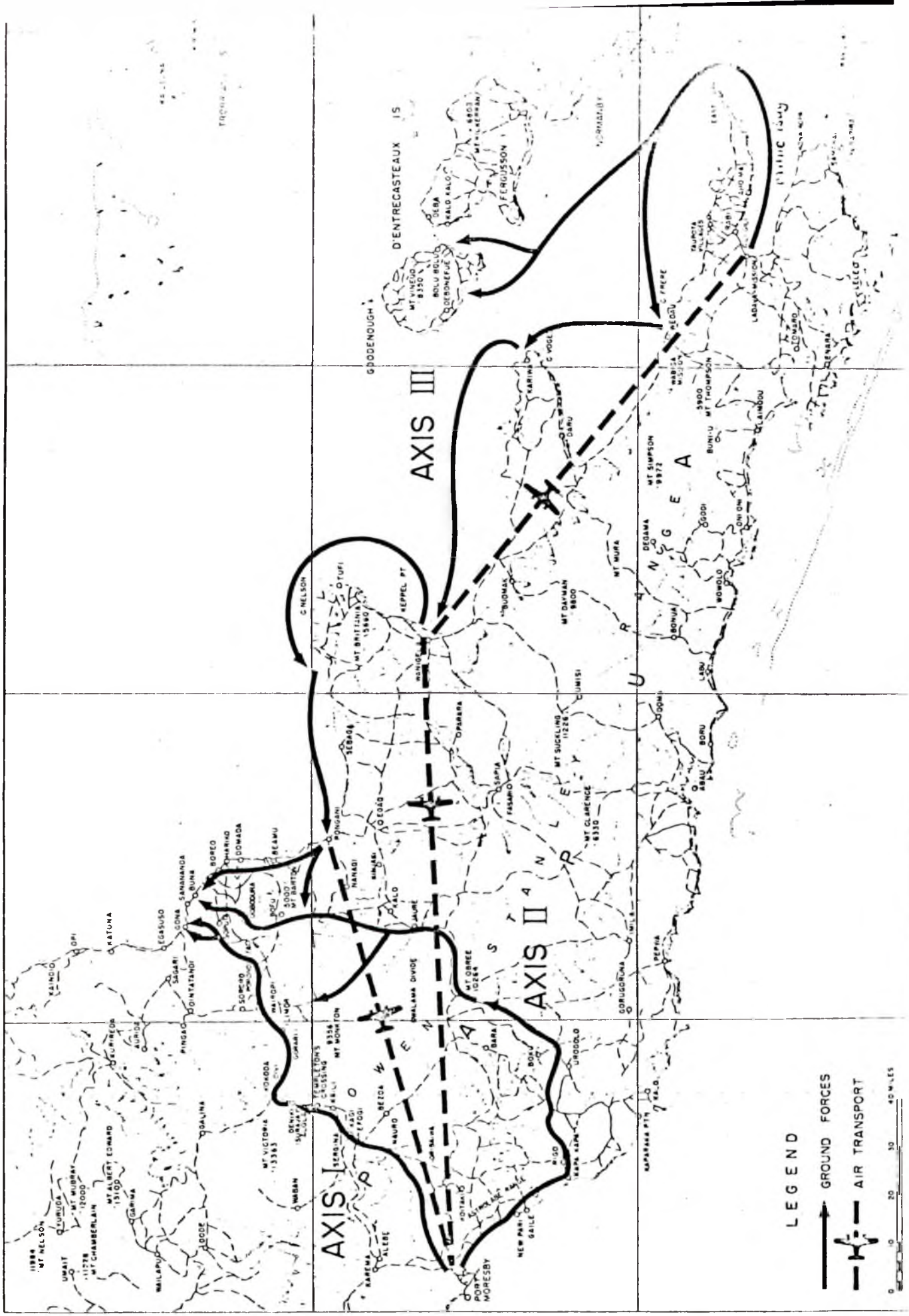
ability to influence allied strategy through his dual positions of power rested on a fragile structure of prestige and performance, and the various perceptions of these by other key actors in the drama.

Strategic Assessment in the Papuan Campaign

During the latter half of 1942 Australian strategic thinking was determined by the grim fighting in the Papuan campaign. Indeed, unlike later campaigns, the government closely scrutinised and at times sought to influence the conduct of the campaign. There were a number of reasons; the battles were close and vital to Australia, and the politicians were inexperienced and tended to panic. But the main reason for the interest was that it soon became obvious that the campaign had been shaped by inaccurate strategic assessments. Faced with the possibility of defeat, politicians were anxious to protect themselves. It is now clear that both MacArthur and Blamey made vital strategic miscalculations, at the expense of the lives of many soldiers and the careers of subordinate commanders, but neither would admit it. And the resulting unfavourable strategic situation caused the government to renew its demands upon Roosevelt and Churchill.

Blamey's miscalculation will be dealt with first. At the end of September 1942 Shedden made a detailed study of Australian policy towards the defence of Port Moresby since the outbreak of war with Japan. He concluded that the government's military advisers had fully realised the importance of Port Moresby, and up to the Coral Sea battle had correctly forecast Japanese intentions that the most probable form of attack would be a seaborne one.

But he found that the army had been remiss in a number of respects. Despite reservations expressed in January by the War Cabinet about the suitability of Major-General Morris to command the force in Port Moresby,



MAP 5

Axes of Advance, Papuan Campaign.

From: *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.76.

the army had persisted with him until July. The troops at Port Moresby were poorly trained, particularly in respect of jungle warfare, and little attempt was made to cater for other than a seaborne attack.

The main criticism, however, revolved around Blamey's decision to send a militia rather than an AIF brigade to Port Moresby in May 1942.[236] This error was compounded the same month by the decision to send an AMF (militia) brigade to Milne Bay. Shedden noted that on 19 May the Advisory War Council had expressed the view that well-trained and experienced troops should be sent to Port Moresby, but that the CGS had said that the 7th AIF Division had to be kept intact for training for overseas operations contemplated later. Shedden observed that 'though this may have fitted in with projected offensive plans, the security of such a vital place should have had priority'.[237]

MacArthur supported this view, and later claimed that he had asked Blamey to send his best troops to New Guinea. He did not think that the militia were well enough trained.[238] General Rowell recalled that the decision not to send the AIF made his 'headquarters weep at the time',[239] and Gavin Long wrote in his diary that 'the decision to keep the best troops to last was "criminal"'.[240]

Shedden came to the conclusion that the reason Blamey did not send the AIF to Port Moresby was that he and the Australian Chiefs of Staff had decided that two AMF brigades would be sufficient to repel a sea-borne attack, and that there was no chance of an overland advance on

---

236. For evidence that it was Blamey's decision, see Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.53.

237. 'The Defence of Port Moresby', by F.G. Shedden, 30 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 587.

238. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 20-26 October 1942.

239. Rowell interview.

240. Gavin Long Diary No.8, Sydney, August 1942, p.76, AWM.

the town. Shedden stated that it was 'probably not an unfair surmise that the Owen Stanley Range and the difficulties of communications on the southern side induced a "Maginot Line" complex that there was an easily defensible barrier to a Japanese advance beyond Kokoda'.[241] After reviewing Shedden's paper, Rowell said that he fully agreed.[242]

MacArthur and his staff were also guilty of discounting the possibility of the overland approach. In May 1942 MacArthur's code-breakers decyphered a Japanese message that their next operation would be over the Owen Stanley Range. This message, which one senior code-breaker called 'one of the three most important to be decoded in the war',[243] was the basis of a forecast in the GHQ Intsum of 23 May 1942,[244] but it was disregarded by MacArthur's intelligence staff. Again on 17 July it was noted that the Japanese had a force ready for the operation,[245] but even after the Japanese landed at Buna on 22 July and advanced towards Kokoda MacArthur's staff insisted that they were not planning to attack Port Moresby. It was not until the end of August, with the loss of the Gap in the Owen Stanleys, that GHQ thought that they might be wrong about the advance on Moresby, and even then they expected only raiding parties.[246] Yet on 30 July the senior intelligence officer of the First Australian Army had forecast a Japanese advance on Port Moresby, and this had been drawn to the attention of GHQ.[247]

---

241. 'The Defence of Port Moresby', *op.cit.*

242. Memorandum by Shedden, 3 October 1942, *loc.cit.*

243. C. Blair, Jr., *Silent Victory: the US Submarine War Against Japan* (Bantam, New York, 1975), p.606.

244. GHQ Intsum 23/24 May 1942, RG 405, G3 Journal, National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland.

245. G2 Information Bulletin, 17 July 1942, RG 407, G3 Journal, 16-20 July 1942, National Records Center.

246. G2 Information Bulletin, 6-7 September 1942, *loc.cit.*

247. Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.104.

MacArthur was guilty of not merely overlooking the possibility of a Japanese advance over the Owen Stanleys, but of generally underestimating the Japanese. He later wrote that in anticipation of the Japanese attack in New Guinea, he 'moved headquarters forward to Brisbane and then to Port Moresby. If I could secure Moresby, I would force the enemy to fight on ground of my selection - across the barrier of the Owen Stanley Range'.[248] Apart from his apparently faulty memory of the date of his move to Port Moresby, this statement is a distortion of what actually happened. As A.J. Sweeting noted, 'the truth surely is that the early conduct of the Papua operations was dictated by the enemy with the Allied forces under General MacArthur responding sometimes belatedly, to known enemy plans'.[249]

MacArthur's claims that he wanted the Japanese to attack across the mountains do not correspond with his orders for the capture of Buna; if the Japanese were to be in sufficient strength to attack Port Moresby it should have been obvious that they would be in sufficient strength to protect Buna from a landward assault. The answer is that MacArthur refused to believe that the Japanese were in sufficient strength either to attack Port Moresby or even to hold Buna. Thus MacArthur's haphazard reinforcement of New Guinea was no more than the strengthening of a defensive bastion, which he thought was unlikely to be attacked heavily by the Japanese.

Despite the rapid Japanese advance inland to secure the important airfield at Kokoda, and despite appeals from Morris in New Guinea for air support, MacArthur remained unconvinced that this Japanese

---

248. MacArthur, *op.cit.*, p.154. He did not move his HQ to Port Moresby until 6 November 1942; the Japanese first landed in Papua in late July 1942. Willoughby and Chamberlain's *MacArthur: 1941-51* makes the same error by implication.

249. A.J. Sweeting, Review of MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, in *Stand To*, Vol.10, No.2, March-December 1965.

attack marked a new offensive. Since the American success at Midway, MacArthur had been determined to advance his air bases into New Guinea, but he was not yet ready to move. There was some justification for this attitude. The original plan had been that after the landing by South Pacific forces at Guadalcanal on 7 August, MacArthur would occupy the Buna area. The Japanese had beaten him to it, but he felt that the landing of the marines on Guadalcanal might cause the Japanese to withdraw troops from New Guinea, thus allowing him to continue his plans for an amphibious advance along the north coast of Papua.[250] It is true that the amphibious forces were not yet available, but MacArthur's reluctance to be forced to conform to the Japanese movement can be understood.

It was not until the Japanese landed at Milne Bay on the night of 25-26 August that MacArthur decided to take the Japanese threat seriously. Thus after a conference at GHQ on the evening of 26 August, General Vasey wrote that MacArthur's intention was to send additional troops to Milne Bay and to 'fight it out in New Guinea'.[251]

These strategic miscalculations must be borne in mind when examining reactions of the Australian government during the campaign. On 5 August W.M. Hughes, the leader of the United Australia Party and a member of the Advisory War Council, released a statement that Australia would

---

250. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 17 July 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

251. Letter, Vasey (DCGS) to Blamey, 26 August 1942, Vasey Papers 2/9. Also letter Vasey to Rowell, 28 August 1942, Rowell Papers. Blamey too seems to have failed to grasp the necessity for a major effort in New Guinea. On 20 August he described the troops in New Guinea to General Lavarack as 'a task force'. Lavarack wrote in his diary that it 'looks more like an all-in campaign to me'. War Diary, GOC First Army, AWM 1/3/1. On the other hand, at a confidential press conference on 29 September Curtin said that 'It was Blamey who had been insistent throughout that the Allies were under-estimating Jap strength'. F.T. Smith Report No.27, 29 September 1942.

suffer the same fate as Malaya unless an offensive strategy were adopted and Buna and Gona were retaken without delay. He continued:

> There has been a lamentable lack of vision, of initiative, of coordination of control by our military leaders. They have failed to anticipate the enemy's movements ... Unless we are to wait like cattle in the pithing pen for the death stroke, we must go out and sweep the enemy from his vantage ground.[252]

The next day Curtin replied publicly, pointing out that the Advisory War Council had had numerous consultations with the service chiefs, and also Blamey and MacArthur, and that Hughes had had many opportunities to indicate his proposals in the Council. Meanwhile, at the Council meeting, Curtin assured the members that 'a satisfactory defensive position had been established' and he 'did not believe in castigating [the] military commanders over the operations in Gona and Buna'.[253]

At the Prime Minister's War Conference on 10 August the service advisers continued to be optimistic. Blamey said that the fighting near Kokoda 'was not of great importance' and Royle said that the naval position was 'not unsatisfactory'.[254]

A week later Curtin met MacArthur in Brisbane and was again given optimistic advice about New Guinea. Despite the fact that MacArthur informed Curtin that he had received news of the naval disaster at Savo Island, near Guadalcanal, including the loss of the *Canberra*, he had no hesitation in assuring the Prime Minister that the Japanese 'could not attack Port Moresby with any strength of land forces over the mountain range'. Indeed the Japanese at Buna and Gona 'were hostages to fortune'.

---

252. Statement attached to Advisory War Council Minute No.1013, CRS A 2682, item Vol.V. See also the *Age*, 6 August 1942. For an explanation of Hughes's statement see L.F. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger, 1914-1952* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979), p.659.

253. Advisory War Council Minute No.1013, CRS A 2682, item Vol.V.

254. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Melbourne, 10 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 1. Present were Curtin, Forde, Evatt, Drakeford, Blamey, Royle, Jones, Shedden and the six state premiers.

MacArthur said that he was planning an offensive operation in New Guinea with two US Divisions and the 7th Australian Division under his command.[255]

MacArthur was particularly upset by the comments of Hughes, and sought and received Curtin's assurance that he still retained the confidence of the government.[256] He thought that if he 'was to become the subject of local political controversy' then the President might insist not only on a change in personnel but in the 'form of command'.[257]

Curtin informed MacArthur that he would take up with Churchill the question of the transfer of naval forces from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific,[258] and he did so in a cable sent on 25 August.[259] But before a reply had been received the battle for Milne Bay had begun and MacArthur's headquarters was beginning to display symptoms of anxiety.[260] On 28 August he warned Marshall that the situation might become critical unless he was provided with naval support.[261]

---

255. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Brisbane, 17 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

256. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Brisbane, 18 August 1942, *loc.cit.*

257. This sentence is an amalgam of view expressed by MacArthur in *ibid.* and by his chief of public relations, Colonel Diller, in a teleprinter message to the Federal Censor on 29 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 537. During a speech to a secret session of Parliament on 3 September Curtin appealed to members to control criticism: 'If it were evident that the High Command were blundering along, it would be the duty and obligation of the Government to intervene in the interests of national security. Some recent criticisms were made on what were only phases of the main events. Finally, unless public criticism is well based on vital factors it can only place a distinguished American soldier, who has come here to help us, in a most invidious position. If this is carried to any great lengths on unsubstantial grounds, I forecast a grave reaction on American co-operation in this theatre'. Notes of Prime Minister's Speech - Secret Session, 3 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 611.

258. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Brisbane, 17 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 1.

259. Cable, Curtin to Churchill, 25 August 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

260. For examples of manifestations of this anxiety in the form of messages sent to New Guinea see the author's *Crisis of Command*, pp.136-144.

261. Radio, MacArthur to Marshall, 28 August 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

Meanwhile General Sutherland, in Brisbane, was in constant touch with Shedden, in Canberra, by secraphone.[262] On the evening of 28 August Sutherland said that MacArthur would like the Prime Minister to make supporting representations to Washington, and after a discussion between Curtin and Shedden it was agreed to send a message the following day.[263] The next day, in secraphone conversations between Shedden and Sutherland, MacArthur and Curtin coordinated their messages to Washington.[264] MacArthur warned Marshall that the failure to review the strategic situation would have a 'disastrous outcome':

> Unless additional Naval forces, either American or British, are concentrated in the Pacific and unless steps are taken to match the heavy air and ground forces the enemy is assembling to launch, I predict the development within a reasonable period of time of a situation similar to those which produced the disasters that have successively overwhelmed our forces in the Pacific since the beginning of the war.[265]

Curtin's long message to Roosevelt, sent on 31 August, requested additional naval and air forces, and included a copy of his earlier request to Churchill.[266] Bruce in London was urged to press the case with the British government,[267] and a copy of the message to Roosevelt was sent to Churchill.[268]

---

262. Memorandum by Shedden, 28 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 532.

263. Memorandum by Shedden, 29 August 1942, *loc.cit.* Also Summary of Secraphone Conversation with Major-General Sutherland, Saturday evening, 29 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 579.

264. Memorandum by Shedden, 30 August 1942, MP 1217, Box 532.

265. Radio C-382, MacArthur to Marshall, 30 August 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 10, item 23a, National Archives. MacArthur was also very critical of the performance of the Australians, thus establishing a possible scapegoat if things went badly.

266. Cable, Curtin to Australian Legation Washington, 31 August 1942, CRS A 1300, item 232. Also RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

267. Cable, Curtin to Bruce, 31 August 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

268. Cable, Curtin to Churchill, 31 August 1942, *loc.cit.*

Although the replies from Washington and London were not encouraging,[269] the Joint Chiefs took MacArthur's requests seriously. Admiral Crutchley's Task Force 44 was ordered to return to MacArthur's command, an additional division was sent to the Pacific, Admiral King ordered Nimitz to release a Marine Regiment to MacArthur, and Arnold began searching for more aeroplanes.[270] For the moment, however, MacArthur would have to get along with what he had.[271] But he did not let Marshall forget his plight, and on 6 September warned that 'if New Guinea goes the result will be disastrous. This is urgent'.[272]

Meanwhile Blamey had been considering the situation with regard to land forces, and, after discussion with MacArthur, on 2 September he advised that there were insufficient forces for the defence of Australia.[273] He reiterated his views at a conference with the Prime Minister on 7 September. Three more US divisions should be sent to Australia. It was not practicable, for the moment, to recall the 9th Division, but it could not be a long-term commitment to the Middle East.[274]

---

269. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.184.

270. Memorandum, Marshall to Roosevelt, 2 September 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 10, item 23a. Also Pogue, *op.cit.*, p.386, Milner,*op.cit*, p.105.

271. In the words of General Arnold, both he and Marshall had to be determined not to 'vacillate with every new demand upon us from every point in the compass'. W.F. Craven and J.L. Cate (eds), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol.4 (University of Chicago Press, 1950), p.92.

272. Radio C436, MacArthur to Marshall, 6 September 1942, RG 165, OPD Exec 10, item 22a.

273. Letter, Blamey to Forde, 2 September 1942, CRS A 816, item 52/302/143, file No.2. This letter was in response to a letter from Forde on 27 August, *loc.cit.*

274. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 7 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 1. That same day Curtin read a minute from the CGS, Northcott, to Forde, claiming that a decision over the 9th Division was a matter of urgency. Minute, Northcott to Forde, 4 September 1942 and letter, Shedden to F.R. Sinclair, Secretary, Department of the Army, 9 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 574.

These views formed the basis of a long cable to Roosevelt on 10 September,[275] but the President replied on 16 September that Australia had sufficient forces.[276] Curtin was 'profoundly disturbed' but 'not surprised' by these negative replies.[277] He therefore recommended to the War Cabinet that the Chiefs of Staff should prepare an appreciation which would then be submitted to MacArthur for his views.[278]

Throughout September 1942 MacArthur and his staff oscillated wildly between moods of optimism and pessimism. At the same time Blamey and the Austalian commanders remained buoyant, but, frightened by public opinion, some members of the Advisory War Council sank steadily into a condition of anxiety, indeed almost panic.[279] These moods have been charted in detail in *Crisis of Command*,[280] and they climaxed with MacArthur's secraphone conversation with Curtin on the night of

---

275. Cable 138, Curtin to Roosevelt, 11 September 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorial, CRS A 3300, item 232, and Cable 8347, Curtin to Bruce, 11 September, CRS M100, item September 1942. The cable was approved by War Cabinet Minute 2356 of 8 September (CRS A 2673, Vol.VII) and Advisory War Council Minute 1053 of 9 September (CRS A 2682, Vol.V).

276. Cable, Australian Legation Washington to Curtin, 16 September 1942, RG4, MacArthur Memorail. This embodied a letter from Roosevelt to Curtin of 15 September 1942, CRS A 3300, item 232.

277. F.T. Smith Reports No.26, 21 September 1942.

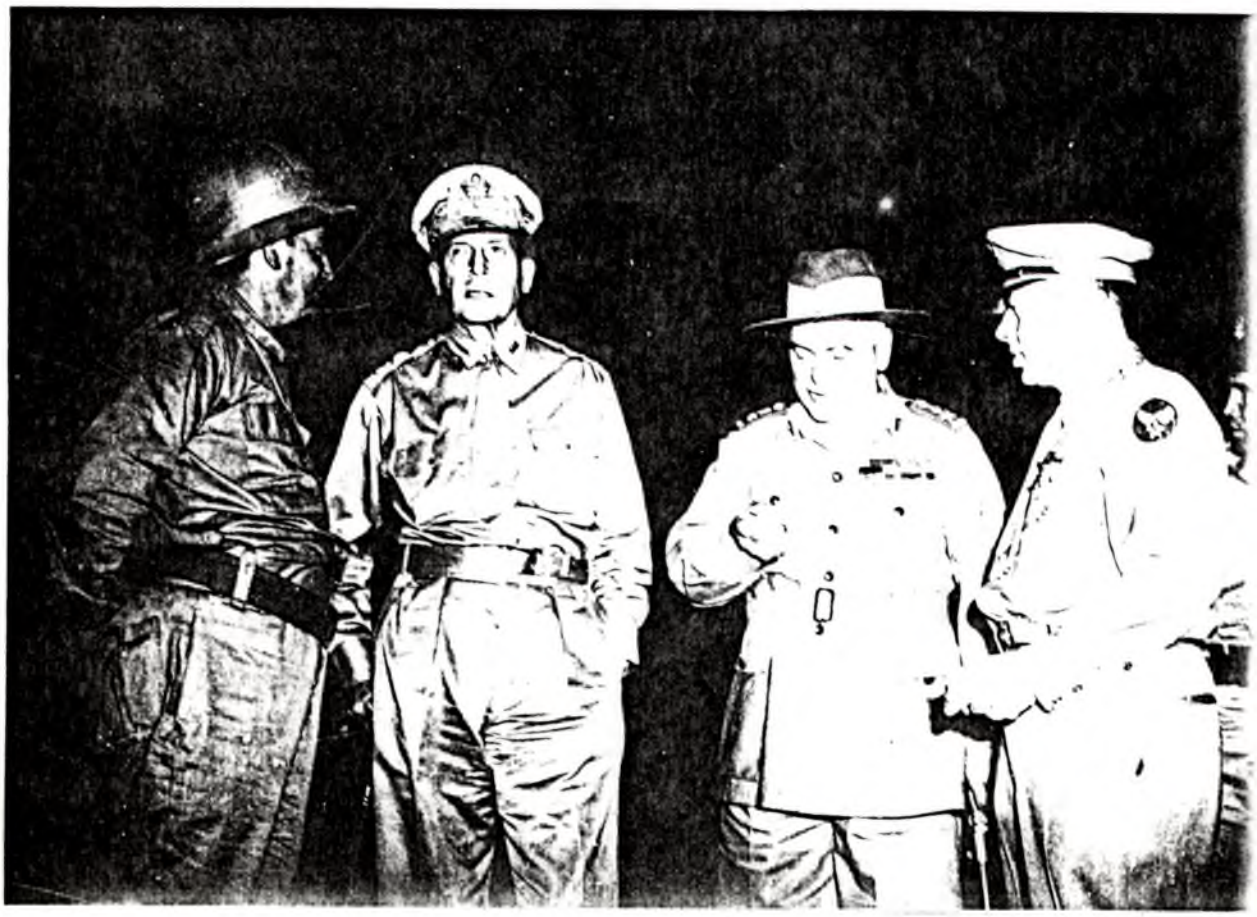
278. War Cabinet Minute 2383, Canberra, 21 September 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.VII. The War Cabinet agreed to Curtin's recommendation.

279. One symptom of this anxiety was a suggestion that MacArthur should appear before a secret session of Parliament to explain the situation, and indeed MacArthur offered to do so. Shedden advised against it and Curtin, Scullin and Shedden decided that neither MacArthur nor Blamey should come to Canberra for a secret session as the public would think that things were going badly. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 12 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 537.

280. See Chapters 7 and 8 of the author's *Crisis of Command*.

Lieutenant-General S.F. Rowell, GOC New Guinea Force, in September 1942, shortly before he was relieved of command.

(AWM Negative No.26982)



Forde, MacArthur, Blamey and Kenney at Port Moresby, 2 October 1942.

(AWM Negative No.13425)

17 September when he requested him to send Blamey to New Guinea,[281] triggering the unfortunate command crisis between Blamey and Rowell. Had different personalities been involved, a *modus vivendi* might have been established in Port Moresby, but this does not detract from the fact that since he was inexperienced in military matters Curtin felt unable to challenge MacArthur, even when his senior Australian adviser offered a contrary view.

On 30 September the Chiefs of Staff presented their appreciation, but they observed that they had been hampered by lack of information. They had not even been fully aware of MacArthur's plans. Nevertheless, they recommended that because of the shortage of reinforcements the 9th Division should return to Australia. They questioned the worth of continuing the Empire Air Training Scheme, and thought that the main objective in the SWPA should be to continue attempts to drive the Japanese from New Guinea; this strategy would be the best way of protecting Australia, and would secure bases for further offensive operations.[282]

When Curtin sought MacArthur's advice on the appreciation, the Commander-in-Chief urged 'most earnestly that the time has come for the 9th Division to be returned to Australia'.[283] The question was then considered by the War Cabinet on 14 October,[284] and by the Advisory

---

281. Notes of Secraphone Conversations between the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 17 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 532. It has not been previously revealed that during the conversation MacArthur mentioned twice that 'we should make our fight in New Guinea', lending support to an earlier contention that it was not until after the magnitude of the Japanese threat was recognised that MacArthur decided to move in force to New Guinea. See also MP 1217, Box 266.

282. Defence of Australia, Appreciation by Chiefs of Staff, 30 September 1942, CRS A 2670, item 404/1942. Also RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

283. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 6 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 611, Box 574, and RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

284. War Cabinet Minute 2428, Canberra, 14 October 1942, CRS A 2670, Agendum No.404/1942.

War Council the next day, and it was agreed that the government should request the early return of the division.[285]

Another question which the War Cabinet had put to the Chiefs of Staff was the nature of the reply to be forwarded to the messages from Churchill and Roosevelt, but the Chiefs had omitted to deal with it. Therefore on 2 October Shedden presented his own views to the Prime Minister:

> Since we cannot alter the basic strategy that was laid down when Mr Churchill and the President agreed that Germany should be defeated first, I think that, having pressed our views to the point of the recent answers, it is better to accept the decisions with good grace and expression of agreement. If we do not, we will only be described as stubborn and the replies from Mr Churchill and the President will be interpreted as rebuffs instead of conclusions with which you find yourself in agreement after your consultations.[286]

Curtin was persuaded by this approach, and at a secret session of Parliament on 8 October said that Churchill and Roosevelt had assured Australia that they would maintain a defensive position in the Pacific, with limited offensive objectives. Since Britain, America and Russia possessed the predominant resources in manpower and production they had 'the greatest voice in the determination of strategy'.[287]

This view was confirmed by the War Cabinet on 14 October,[288] and therefore in cables to Roosevelt and Churchill on 17 October Curtin said that he deeply appreciated the President's assurance that commitments of forces, supplies and equipment to the SWPA would be fulfilled. He then included the main part of the Chiefs of Staff appreciation which

---

285. Advisory War Council Minute 1087, Canberra, 15 October 1942, CRS A 2670, Agendum No.48/1942. The decision was ratified by War Cabinet Minute 2446, Canberra, 15 October 1942, CRS A 2671, Vol.XII.

286. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 2 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 511.

287. 'Review by the Prime Minister following the exchange of views with Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt regarding global strategy and the needs of the Southwest Pacific Area', dated 7 October and presented 8 October 1942, *ibid*.

288. War Cabinet Minute 2428, Canberra, 14 October 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.VII. For the cabinet meeting Shedden had prepared 'Not es on War Cabinet Agendum No.404/1942 of 14 October 1942, which repeated the views expressed in his memorandum of 2 October, MP 1217, Box 574.

stressed that increasing manpower difficulties made it imperative that the 9th Division should be returned.[289]

The arguments in telegram form between London, Washington and Canberra during October, November and December culminating in the decision to return the 9th Division have been adequately related in the Australian official history.[290] But one aspect, not mentioned elsewhere, is of interest. On 1 November Roosevelt replied to Curtin that the common cause could best be served by leaving the 9th Division in the Middle East. However, he said that he was prepared to 'offer a means to ameliorate' Australia's position, by despatching an American division from Hawaii.[291] Shedden immediately used the secraphone to call Sutherland who, after discussion with MacArthur, strongly recommended pressing for the return of the 9th Division. He informed Shedden that they had received advice some five or six days earlier that an American division had already left Hawaii. With Curtin's requests being rejected in Washington and London, in MacArthur's view 'the position could be described as throwing the ball over Mr Curtin's head between Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt'.[292]

The Papuan campaign was not yet over, of course, and during October MacArthur displayed symptoms of anxiety similar to those already noticed in August and September.[293] The main cause of his worry were

---

289. Cable 461, Curtin to Churchill and Cables 151 and 152, Curtin to Australian Legation, 17 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 574.

290. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, pp.191, 192, 196-204. Copies of the cables and associated documents can be found in MP 1217, Box 574, CRS A 816, items 52/302/142 and 52/302/143, CRS M100, October, November, December 1942, AWM 425/2/22 and Blamey Papers 31.4 and DRL 6643, item 77.

291. Cable, Roosevelt to Curtin, 1 November, transmitted through US Navy, MP 1217, Box 574.

292. Notes of Secraphone Conversation [by Shedden] with Major-General Sutherland, Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 2 November 1942, *loc.cit.*

293. *Crisis of Command*, pp.205, 206.

the naval and land battles around and on Guadalcanal, and these were causing equal concern to Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[294] The Australian government was also worried: as Hasluck observed, 'the War Cabinet was expressing deep concern ... having responded rapidly in the way it usually did to bad news'.[295] But apart from the request for the 9th Division, there was little more that could be done. The immediate danger to Port Moresby had eased and the government had reaffirmed its faith in MacArthur.

In these circumstances, on 20 October Shedden travelled north to Brisbane for a series of discussions with MacArthur.[296] With regard to the operations in New Guinea, MacArthur said that he was dissatisfied with the rate of progress against the Japanese, and the absence of vigorous offensive action. With the exception of Blamey, he thought that the Australian army was very weak in leadership. There was a lack of offensive spirit and the permanent officers were too greatly concerned about their future careers and decorations.

Nevertheless MacArthur said that he was already planning to advance on Salamaua and Lae. But this could not take place until the battles in the Solomons had been resolved, and the situation there was 'most grave'.

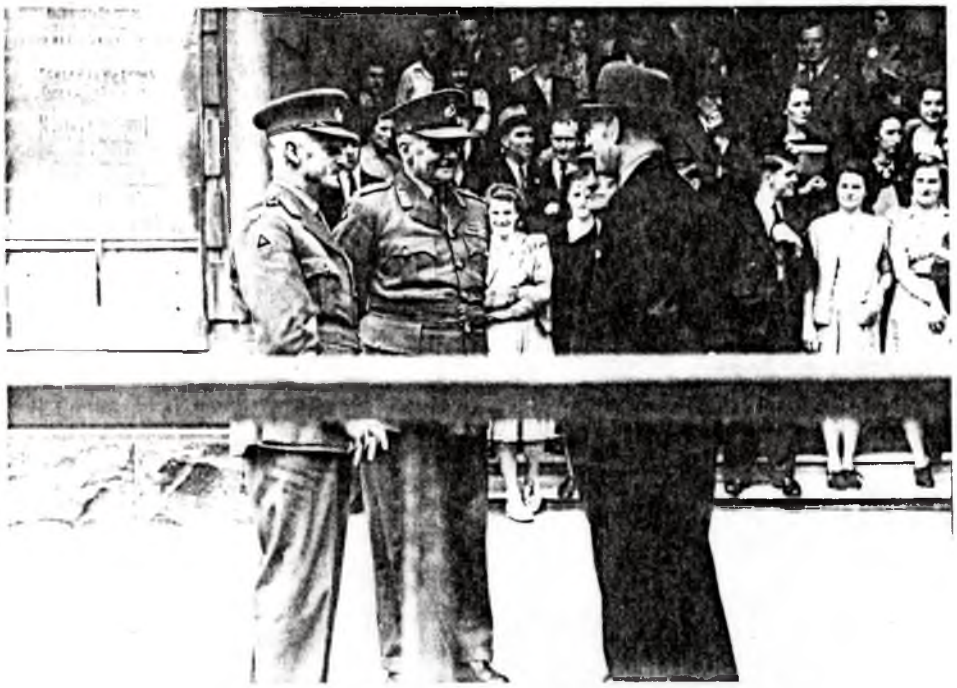
Then, as he had done during his discussions with Curtin in August, MacArthur turned to the political criticism of his operations. He thought that 'Hughes's public utterances were utterly unscrupulous' and that 'from his secret intelligence sources, he knew that the enemy

---

294. *Ibid.*

295. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, p.193.

296. The account of these discussions is based on Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 20-26 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 2.



Curtin talking to Lieutenant-General Bennett, GOC of the 3rd Corps and Major-General H.W. Lloyd, GOC of the 2nd Division, before an AIF parade in Perth, 3 November 1942.

(AWM Negative No.28729)

Curtin inspecting troops who took part in the AIF march, Perth, 3 November 1942. This is one of the few occasions when Curtin had direct contact with troops.

(AWM Negative No.28738)

had profited'. He claimed that the Japanese had turned back before reaching Port Moresby because publicity in Australia had warned them of the allied strength.[297] MacArthur said that Fadden and Spender had assured him of support, but that Menzies had been offended when he had told him that it would be a good thing for the allied cause if Curtin were in the place of Churchill or Roosevelt. MacArthur thought that the non-government members were displeased with military successes as failure would embarass the government and the high command. They considered that the defeat of the government was even of more importance than the defeat of the Japanese.[298]

MacArthur was particularly critical of the newspaper chief, Sir Keith Murdoch, whom he described as 'an Australian Quisling'.[299] He said that 'he had positive information that Sir Keith Murdoch had issued instructions for military achievements to be written down'. Furthermore, reports had been made to London that MacArthur was 'anti-British'.[300] MacArthur urged, therefore, that 'the full rigours of the censorship should be imposed on' Murdoch.

---

297. MacArthur's contention that he intended to lure the Japanese over the mountains and defeat them at Port Moresby has already been mentioned. The facts do not support the wisdom of this contention. Curtin later publicly criticised Hughes using terms similar to those used by MacArthur. Fitzhardinge, *op.cit.*, p.660.

298. On 23 September MacArthur had written to Curtin to complain about Hughes, saying that it had nothing to do with politics, personalities or freedom of information, but was a matter of costing the lives of Australians and Americans, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

299. MacArthur had earlier told Curtin that his censors had suppressed an article by Murdoch. He said that 'No intelligence report by an enemy agent could be so full and complete' as Murdoch's article. *Ibid.* For further comments by MacArthur about Murdoch see Thorne, 'MacArthur, Australia and the British, part 1'.

300. On 14 September, soon after returning to Australia from England, Sir Earle Page sent a cable to Bruce: 'Before I left England the King asked me if I had heard that MacArthur was unfriendly to the British and seemed disturbed about it. I find that MacArthur is very friendly'. Cable, Page to Bruce, 14 September 1942, CRS M100, item September 1942.

The discussion then turned to the machinery for higher direction in the South-West Pacific Area. MacArthur said that Australia 'had surrendered part of its sovereignty in regard to defence, on the understanding that adequate forces would be allotted for the defence of the area, but these had not been forthcoming to the extent which might have been expected'. Furthermore, the original idea had been that there would be unified direction of operations in the South-West Pacific, but with the extension of the South Pacific Area westward to include the Solomons, that had not been achieved. It is interesting to observe that these points were included in a review to Parliament by the Prime Minister in early December.[301]

The chief subject which Curtin had requested Shedden to discuss with MacArthur was the relationship of his operational plans to the use of the militia outside of Australia.[302] A few days earlier the War Cabinet had discussed an appreciation from the Chiefs of Staff, warning that owing to dangerously depleted strengths in Australia it was not possible to send further additional forces to New Guinea.[303] MacArthur said that it was nothing to do with him, but as an observer he said 'that there was one serious flaw in the Government's policy - failure to amalgamate the AIF and the AMF by some formula which, while not giving any credit to the Opposition, would enable the Government to get out of what he felt would become an increasingly difficult

---

301. Review of War Situation by the Prime Minister in the House of Representatives, 10 December 1942, MP 1217, Box 611.

302. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 3, Chapter 33, p.1. Soon after MacArthur arrived in Australia his chief of intelligence, Brigadier-General Willoughby, advised that although Labor opposed amending the Defence Act, Curtin was in favour of it. Indeed he said that if he did not get his way he would cross the floor and set up a National Government. Willoughby said that Curtin would probably accept any suggestion from MacArthur. Memorandum, Willoughby to Sutherland and Chamberlin, 5 April 1942, AWM 423/11/202 Part 1.

303. War Cabinet Minute 2428, Canberra, 14 October 1942, CRS A 2673, Vol.XII.

position'. Such a step would be important in influencing American public opinion. He 'hoped that the Prime Minister would find a way to act and would act quickly'.[304]

> MacArthur explained that, in any offensive operations outside Australia, he probably would not require more than three Australian Divisions. He hoped also to have three American divisions, of which two were in Australia and another had been diverted to the South Pacific Area ... Though the 6th, 7th and 9th AIF Divisions might be available to him for service outside Australia, he did not consider that it would be sound in principle to rely on this as the main argument for not amending the Defence Act to provide for the Citizen Military Forces being available for service outside Australia. The campaign in Papua had indicated its exhausting nature, and the need for the retention of divisions to provide for rest and recuperation.[305]

Shedden's meticulous notes of the conference provide excellent support to the contention put forward in recent years that MacArthur 'precipitated the move' to change the Defence Act.[306] Rather than a shrewd political move to win the election in late 1943, as suggested by Hasluck, Curtin's reaction appears to have been based on 'a web of military and diplomatic considerations'.[307] Thus as the campaign in Papua moved towards a successful, but bloody, climax, Curtin sought to provide additional Australian troops. After all, Australia had a duty to an ally: 'Because of the debt of gratitude owed to the US', Australian troops were required to accompany the Americans in their northward advance and to protect their bases from attack.[308] This reason

---

304. MacArthur showed a keen awareness of Curtin's political position and the possibility of damaging allied relations. Thus he said that he hoped that the government would not approach him for an opinion, as he could not go back on views which he had expressed during World War I and after on the necessity for power to send American troops overseas in defence of USA, and the need for the Army to be homogeneously organised for this purpose.

305. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 20-26 October 1942, MP 1217, Box 2.

306. Peter Love, 'Curtin, MacArthur and Conscription, 1942-43', *Historical Studies*, Volume 17, No.69, October 1977.

307. *Ibid.*

308. *Ibid.*

was, of course, only a small part of the total motivation, for it was in Australia's national interest to take part in the coming campaigns. For diplomatic reasons it was important that Australia should be seen to be pulling its weight. It is, therefore, difficult to determine what Curtin considered to be the most urgent and compelling motive. Nonetheless, the decision reveals how much Curtin had come to rely upon advice from MacArthur.

Meanwhile, in early November MacArthur had established his advanced headquarters in Port Moresby, and therefore the government's principal military advisers were no longer available. Blamey, who had been in New Guinea since 23 September, tried to keep in touch by frequent letters to Curtin emphasising the cost in manpower of the Papua campaign.[309] Although the casualties continued to mount, the government retained its faith in MacArthur and Blamey, and made no further attempt to influence the conduct of the campaign.

The end of a year is an opportunity for taking stock, and at Christmas 1942 Curtin took note of those to whom he had been most indebted. Politically, it was towards the Treasurer, J.B. Chifley; for the direction of operations, it was MacArthur and Blamey; for munitions, it was the Director-General,Essington Lewis; for works, it was the Director-General of Allied Works, E.G. Theodore; and for defence policy it was Shedden. Curtin told Shedden that 'but for the assistance secured from [him] personally he could not have carried on'.[310] Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the most important influence on Curtin's strategic thinking during the year had been that of General MacArthur.

---

309. See MP 1217, Box 532.

310. Shedden's Diary, 22 December 1942, MP 1217, Box 16. On 19 December 1942 Menzies wrote to Shedden: 'As the Christmas season come round, I am naturally thinking of the state of affairs in Australia - and that inevitably leads me to write to you to thank you for your magnificent services ...' MP 1217, Box 67.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALLIED INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION IN THE SWPA

Early Developments in Australia

Before the Second World War Australian cooperation with allied intelligence was an extremely uncomplicated procedure. With few intelligence gathering facilities of their own the Australian services relied almost exclusively on information received from British sources, and in turn the British passed on what they thought the Australians needed to know.[1] Few serving officers were interested in intelligence; the intelligence services were therefore of low quality and did not attract high calibre officers.

Even after the outbreak of war the development of effective intelligence gathering organisations were hesitant and slow. It was recognised that the most important means of gathering information about the enemy would be by intercepting and decyphering his signals.[2] But the Australian services and the government seemed unwilling to develop a crypotographic organisation which might duplicate that of the British Government Code and Cypher School (GCCS), and even a nucleus organisation required British advice and assistance.[3] With problems enough in Europe the British gave low priority to developing an Australian organisation.[4]

---

1. B.N. Primrose, Australian Naval Policy, 1919-1942: a Case Study in Empire Relations, Ph.D Thesis, ANU, September 1974, pp.161, 162.

2. For example the British Commander-in-Chief, China Station, cabled the Admiralty on 14 June 1941: 'Almost our only means at present of gauging extent and success of Japanese espionage is derived from Special Intelligence sources'. WO 193/920.

3. Memorandum, 'Cryptographic Organisation in Australia', CNS to CGS and CAS, 12 December 1939; Memorandum, CGS to CNS, 16 December 1939; Memorandum, CAS to CNS, 21 December 1939; Defence Committee Minute No.10/1940, 15 February 1940, (CRS A816, item 43/302/18); Cable 88, Menzies to Dominions Secretary, 11 April 1940, MP 1185/8, item 1937/2/415.

4. The British did not respond to the Australian cable until 15 October 1940. CRS A816, item 43/302/18.

Nevertheless, despite this discouraging atmosphere, both the army and navy had begun efforts of their own. In September 1939 a signals detachment from the 3rd Division (militia) in Melbourne was detailed to intercept enemy wireless transmissions.[5] Sometime later another organisation was set up at the Sydney University to work on Japanese codes.[6]

The main work, however, was carried out by the navy. In early 1940 an Australian officer in the Royal Navy, Paymaster Commander R.E. Nave, returned to Australia on sick leave from the British Far East Combined Bureau (FECB) in Singapore. Since 1925 Nave had been involved in breaking Japanese codes, and between 1937 and 1939, when based at Hong Kong, he had successfully read the messages of the Japanese Navy operating around the China coast. Between 1921 and 1923, when an officer in the RAN, Nave had been attached to the British Embassy in Tokyo to learn Japanese. The British naval attaché in Tokyo had been Captain Colvin, who was now the Australian CNS. Colvin was therefore aware of Nave's capacity, and he arranged for Nave to set up a small Australian cryptographic organisation.[7]

Thus towards the end of 1940 Nave established a Special Intelligence section to obtain information by radio direction-finding, traffic analysis and cryptanalysis. Radio intercept stations had already been established at Darwin (Coonawara), Melbourne and Canberra (Harman), and the section concentrated on Japanese traffic in the Mandated Islands. Cooperation

---

5. Memorandum, Major-General C.H. Simpson, Signal Officer-in-Chief, to CGS, 1 April 1944, MP 724/8, item 37/43/181. This unit was located at Park Orchard, near Ringwood on the outskirts of Melbourne.

6. This group included Captain A.P. Treweek and Professor T.G. Room, Professor of Mathematics.

7. Interview with Captain R.E. Nave, 25 January 1979, Memorandum, Naval Staff to Mr Douglas Menzies, Secretary of the Defence Committee, 12 November 1941, Prepared by Paymaster Commander Nave, CRS A816, item 43/302/18.

was established with the FECB and Dutch authorities in the Netherlands East Indies. These units were now having some success with the Japanese consular, diplomatic, four figure naval and merchant ship codes and cyphers.[8]

In early 1941 Nave discussed with the group at Sydney University the possibility of their working full-time on Japanese consular and diplomatic traffic, and by mid 1941 the personnel at Sydney University had been transferred to what Nave loosely described as the Special Intelligence Bureau.[9] Nave's staff now included Paymaster Lieutenants K.G. Miller and A.B. Jamieson from the RAN, and Major A.P. Treweek, Professors T.G. Room and A.D. Trendall, Mr R.J. Lyons and Lieutenant I.H. Longfield Lloyd from the Australian Army.[10]

With this limited staff the Australian cryptographic organisation could do little more than supplement the work of the FECB in Singapore and the GCCS at Bletchley Park in England, but the Australian organisation was able to break the code used by the Japanese mission in Australia, and the key was sent to Bletchley and Washington. The Australians had some important successes. In September they intercepted a message instructing the Japanese Consul-General to find another neutral country to look after Italian interests,[11] and they detected on 4 December 1941 that the Japanese staff had been ordered to burn all their codes and cyphers.[12]

---

8. Memorandum for Discussion at Singapore, prepared by Commander J.B. Newman, Director of Naval Communications, early October 1940, Comments by Nave, Notes by Newman, and Memorandum, Newman to Nave, 19 March 1941, MP 1185/8 item 1937/2/415.

9. Memorandum, Naval Staff to Mr Douglas Menzies, 12 November 1941, CRS A816, item 43/302/18. The SIB was established in Monterey House, Domain Road, Melbourne. It was responsible through Newman, the Director of Naval Communications, to the CNS.

10. Defence Committee Minute, 169/1941, 28 November 1941. Nave interview, Room was Professor of Mathematics and Trendall, Professor of Greek at Sydney University.

11. Nave interview.

12. *Ibid.*

This information merely added to the wealth of intelligence then becoming available about Japanese intentions. American successes in breaking the Japanese diplomatic cyphers and the naval codes have been catalogued in numerous books in recent years.[13] But it is not generally realised that in the period before Pearl Harbour the British had as much, if not more, success than the Americans with the Japanese naval codes.[14] It was the British who in 1940 supplied the US Navy's cryptographic organisation at Manila with the key to the important JN25 code,[15] and the Japanese moves into the South China Sea were closely monitored.[16]

Intelligence cooperation between the British and Americans improved during 1941, but the Dominions Office felt constrained to warn the Australians that:

> Information from most secret sources should not be passed direct to United States observers but will be exchanged through the Far East Combined Bureau at Singapore.[17]

One reputable authority has claimed that the British knew when the Japanese fleet for Pearl Harbour changed course the day before the

---

13. See D. Kahn, *The Code-Breakers, The Story of Secret Writing* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967); R. Clark, *The Man Who Broke Purple* (Little Brown, Boston, 1977); Ladislas Farago, *The Broken Seal, The Story of 'Operation Magic' and the Pearl Harbor Disaster* (Barker, London, 1967); Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision* (Stanford, California, 1962); C. Blair, Jr., *Silent Victory, The US Submarine War Against Japan* (Bantam, New York, 1975); E. Van Der Rhoer, *Deadly Magic. A Personal Account of Communications Intelligence in World War II in the Pacific* (Charles Scribner's, New York, 1978); W.J. Holmes, *Double-Edged Secrets, U.S. Naval Intelligence Operations in the Pacific During World War II* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1979).

14. F.H. Hinsley, *et.al., British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol.I (HMSO, London, 1979), pp.52, 53.

15. Nave interview. Also Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (Panther Granada, London, 1978), p.229.

16. See for example the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre Weekly Intelligence Summaries for June-December 1941, AWM 423/11/2.

17. Cable 610, Dominions Office to Australia, 2 September 1941, and cable 611, Australia to Dominions Office, 18 September 1941, AWM 425/11/14.

attack, and the Americans were warned.[18] It is not known how much of this information reached Australia, but there can be no doubt that in early December 1941 Australian authorities expected a Japanese attack any day.[19] It should be noted, however, that most of the information was gained from intercepting Japanese naval signals. There had been little success with the army cyphers.[20]

Thus by the outbreak of war in the Pacific the Australians had developed some limited expertise in what was known as special intelligence. Meanwhile, in the Middle East a Special Wireless Section Type B had been raised by the 1st Australian Corps. Under the command of Captain J.W. Ryan, the section served with 'great distinction', specialising in traffic analysis.[21] One officer who performed well was Lieutenant A.W. Sandford, and he was to play a prominent role later in the war.

Australian intelligence cooperation was not just in the field of communications intelligence. In mid 1940 the War Office suggested that a special branch should be set up in Australia:

> a. To initiate defensive action against enemy Fifth Column and para military activities, and
>
> b. To initiate offensive action by organising our own Fifth Column and para military activities in territories either likely to be occupied by the enemy or which are suspected.

The latter group would carry out raids, demolitions and sabotage.[22] As a result, in November 1940, No.104 Military Mission commanded by

---

18. Fitzgibbon, *op.cit.*, p.255. Fitzgibbon quotes Lord Cavendish-Bentinck, the Chairman of the British Joint Intelligence Committee.

19. Examples of the accumulating evidence are given in the author's chapter 'Australian Estimates of the Japanese Threat, 1905-1941', in P.A. Towle, *Estimating Foreign Military Power* (Croom Helm, London, 1981), forthcoming.

20. Cable 20067, GS01 (Int) Singapore to War Office, 19 June 1941, WO 106/2482.

21. Memorandum, Simpson to CGS, 1 April 1944, MP 729/8, item 37/43/181.

22. War Office telegram quoted in Cable 34, Secretary of State to British High Commissioner, 22 January 1941, CRS A1608, item G/39/2/1.

Lieutenant-Colonel J.C. Mawhood arrived in Australia.[23] The Australian government had not been consulted,[24] but part of the mission, led by Captains Calvert and Spencer-Chapman, successfully trained Australian independent companies, or commandos, for guerilla or irregular warfare.[25]

Meanwhile, Mawhood, a man of great ambition and strong persuasion, even *folie de grandeur*, had hoped to set up an MI5-type organisation in Australia, but Sturdee, the CGS, thought that he was 'totally unfitted for any employment in connection with' security or intelligence.[26] Sturdee, therefore, arranged for the War Office to recall Mawhood to England, but the Prime Minister, Menzies, intervened.[27] He thought that Sturdee had been unfair to Mawhood, and for a while Mawhood was retained to advise on the establishment of an Australian Security Service.[28]

The Navy also had its own irregular organisation, for on the outbreak of war the Director of Naval Intelligence, Commander R.B.M. Long, had given Lieutenant-Commander E.A. Feldt the task of organising the coastwatcher organisation.[29] This organisation was to prove of value not only to Australia, but also to the Americans, and it figured prominently in allied intelligence cooperation later in the war.

---

23. L. Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957), p.83; F. Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral* (Reprint Society, London, 1949), p.19.

24. Letter, Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to Fadden, 27 January 1941, CRS A1608, item G/39/2/1.

25. Wigmore, *op.cit.*, p.84. Spencer Chapman, *op.cit.*, pp.20, 21.

26. Lieutenant-Colonel C.A.K. Cohen, to Gavin Long in Long Notes No.90, AWM. Cohen recalled that Sturdee said: 'After Mawhood had been talking to me for half an hour, I had to pinch myself to wake myself up'. See also cable 22, Bruce to Prime Minister, 30 August 1941, CRS A1608, item G/39/2/1.

27. *Ibid.*, and War Cabinet Minute 1227, Sydney, 18 July 1941, CRS A2673, Vol.7.

28. Cable 4899, Fadden to Bruce, 1 September 1941 and Cable, Curtin to Dominions Secretary, 23 February 1943, *loc.cit* See also War Cabinet Minute 1237, Melbourne, 22 July 1941, CRS A2673, Vol.7A. For an account of the Security Service see C.D. Coulthard-Clark, 'Australia's Wartime Security Service' in *Defence Force Journal*, May/June 1979.

29. G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957), p.73.

Commander R.B.M, Long RAN
Director of Naval
Intelligence, 1939-1945.

(AWM Negative No.107006)

Major-General C.H. Simpson,
Australian Signal Officer-
in-Chief, 1942-1945.
(AWM Negative No.91084)

Special Intelligence after Pearl Harbour

The Japanese victories in early 1942 threw the allied intelligence organisation in the Pacific into turmoil. In January the cryptographic section of the FECB had to leave Singapore for Colombo, later moving to Kilindini in East Africa, and finally to New Delhi.[30] The following month the US Navy's 'Cast' code-breaking unit at Corregidor moved by submarine first to Java and then to Australia. This organisation of some seventy-five men, under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Rudolph Fabian, was particularly important because it possessed the Purple machine which could read the Japanese diplomatic code, as well as the slightly simpler Red machine.[31] Fabian's unit was established on the middle floor of the Monterey Building in Melbourne, and liaison was soon organised with Nave's SIB on the top floor and the Directorate of Naval Communications on the ground floor.[32]

When MacArthur arrived in Australia in March 1942 the intelligence organisation underwent a further change, for accompanying him was Lieutenant-Colonel J.R. Sherr and a few members of the 2nd Signal Service Company, which had provided the army's signal intelligence service in the Philippines.[33] It did not take MacArthur long to realise that one of his most pressing requirements was the development of effective signals intelligence. Thus, on 1 April, ten days after arriving in Melbourne, he radioed Washington:

---

30. Cable 62009, Chiefs of Staff to Wavell, 4 January 1942, No.106/3298. The British wanted the FECB to come to Australia but Newman said that facilities were not available. See also Cable F4, Dominions Secretary to Prime Minister, 7 August 1942, CRS A816, 19/304/330.

31. Kahn, *op.cit.*, p.10.

32. Blair, *op.cit.*, pp.218, 219; Nave interview.

33. G.R. Thompson and D.R. Harris, *The Signal Corps: The Outcome* (OCMH, Washington, 1966), p.340. Signal, Brett to Marshall, 19 March 1942, OPD Exec 10, item 11, RG 165, National Archives, lists the officers evacuated with MacArthur. Most of the 2nd Signal Service Company were killed or captured.

> Investigation discloses that a central allied signal intelligence section is required for the interception and cryptanalyzing of Japanese intelligence. The time delay and transmission uncertainties incident to sending intercepted material to Washington and elsewhere dictate that this work be handled locally. Allied forces here are organizing such a bureau.

He went on to request that trained staff should be sent to Australia to supplement the 'few individuals that I have brought from the Philippines'.[34]

On 15 April 1942, after discussions between MacArthur's Chief Signals Officer, Brigadier-General S.B. Akin, and the Australian Signal Officer-in-Chief, Major-General C.H. Simpson, a combined allied organisation, the Central Bureau, was established in Melbourne. It operated under the direction of General Akin, with Colonel Sherr as the nominal executive officer. The necessary cryptanalysts requested by MacArthur left America the following day on the last scheduled clipper flight to Hawaii.[35]

The Australian Army component of Central Bureau came from the Australian Special Wireless Group, the sections of which had seen considerable service in the Middle East and Singapore, and also included some British personnel who had escaped from Singapore. The RAAF component consisted of personnel assigned from Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. There were three assistant directors, Lieutenant-Colonel Abraham Sinkov of the American Army, Major, later Lieutenant-Colonel, A.W. Sandford, and Wing-Commander Roy Booth of the RAAF.[36]

---

34. Radio 1224, MacArthur to the Adjutant-General, 1 April 1942, OPD Exec 10 item 7D, RG 165, National Archives.

35. C.A. Willoughby (Comp), *Operations of the Military Intelligence Section, GHQ, SWPA/FEC/SCAP* (GHQ, Far East Command, Tokyo, 1948), Copy held in CMH, Washington.

36. *Ibid.* Sinkov had joined the legendary Colonel Friedman of the American Army Signal Intelligence Service during the early 1930s, and therefore had considerable cryptanalysis experience.

The navy had much less involvement in the Central Bureau, but a small section of the RAN's SIB, headed by Nave and Professor Room, joined and provided valuable experience with Japanese naval codes. However the remainder of the SIB, led by Professor Trendall, remained under Australian control, and concentrated on diplomatic intelligence.[37] Furthermore, Fabian did not join MacArthur's organisation, and although he passed some information to the Central Bureau, his main recipient was Admiral King in Washington. This was, of course, a bone of contention with MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence, General Willoughby, who wrote later that:

> The Navy has shrouded the whole enterprise in mystery, excluding other services, and rigidly centralizing the whole enterprise. At this date, [8 May 1945] for example, this same system is still in vogue: as far as SWPA is concerned, the crypto-analysis is made in Melbourne, forwarded via 7th Fleet D.N.I.; the Melbourne station is under direct orders of Washington, is not bound by any local responsibilities, forwards what they select, and when it suits them. The possibility of erroneous or incomplete selection is as evident now as it was in 1941. The only excuse the Navy has is that its field is primarily naval intercepts, but there is a lot of Army traffic or other incidental traffic. This collateral traffic is not always understood or correctly interpreted by the Navy, in my opinion.[38]

The collection of intelligence is does not yield consistent results, and a fruitful source one month might become barren and useless the next. In the Pacific war this was particularly so during 1942, when the Japanese changed their codes several times. On the other hand good intelligence is most vital during the defensive phase of war,[39] and in 1942 the allies

---

37. Nave interview. Nave was emphatic that he was not under command of Central Bureau, but was employed as an adviser.

38. Affidavit by Major-General C.A. Willoughby, dated 8 May 1945, in U.S. Congress, Hearings before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, *Pearl Harbor Attack* (USGPO, Washington, 1946), Part 35, p.87.

39. In a report written at the end of the war, Captain W.J. Holmes, Deputy Commander of the Joint Intelligence Centre in Hawaii wrote: 'In the defensive stages of the war, radio intelligence was not only the most important source of intelligence in the Central Pacific, it was practically the only source'. Report 8 December 1945, SRH-020, RG 457, National Archives.

were on the defensive. During this period the most important source of intelligence came from decoding Japanese naval messages, and from traffic analysis.[40] This intelligence was responsible for the successes at Coral Sea and Midway,[41] and had an important impact on the operations in the Solomons[42] and at Milne Bay.[43]

Although MacArthur's staff had difficulty decoding Japanese Army messages, naval intelligence was the most important, because in the early stages of the war the Japanese forces in the SWPA were under naval command. Yet for a while MacArthur, like many other commanders, was loath to trust radio intelligence completely.[44] His rejection of the intelligence that the Japanese intended to seize Port Moresby by an overland operation was almost disastrous.[45] And at times MacArthur felt that he knew better than the reports. As one of his intelligence officers wrote, 'More than one intelligence officer's career was blighted by writing accurate but unpalatable reports'.[46]

---

40. See Holmes, *Double-Edged Secrets*, for the best account of the intelligence problems in the Pacific War.

41. *Ibid.* See also the author's article, 'Special Intelligence in the South-West Pacific Area in World War II', *Australian Outlook*, December 1978, for the information available to MacArthur. For the use of intelligence during the Coral Sea battles see J.B. Lundstrom, *The First South Pacific Campaign: Pacific Fleet Strategy, December 1941-June 1942* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1976).

42. For the role of intelligence in the Solomons see *The Role of Radio Intelligence: The American Japanese Naval War*, Vol.III, *The Solomon Islands Campaign*, SRH-012, RG 457, National Archives.

43. Some of the decoded messages affecting the operations at Milne Bay are reproduced in the author's article, 'Special Intelligence in the South-West Pacific Area in World War II'.

44. On 29 December 1941 General Marshall, the US Chief of Staff, personally telephoned one of his staff officers to make sure that he stressed to the commanders that Magic, the name of the intercept information, was not 'merely "authentic and from a reliable source", but was actual truth'. R.S. Cline, *Washington Command Post, The Operations Division* (OCMH, Washington, 1951), p.340.

45. See the author's 'Special Intelligence in the South-West Pacific Area in World War II'.

46. E.R. Thorpe, *East Wind, Rain* (Gambit, Boston, 1969), p.55.

In September 1942 the Central Bureau followed MacArthur's headquarters (GHQ SWPA) to Brisbane where it was set up at 21 Henry Street, Ascot, near the racecourse. Here it did valuable work during the early campaigns against the Japanese. Nevertheless, the main breaks were still made by naval intelligence, and the information was probably fed to MacArthur by the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (COIC).[47] This naval intercept material was given the title of Ultra.[48] MacArthur was also receiving Magic information which was the result of the decryption of coded messages between Japanese diplomatic and consulate officers abroad and their home government. This vital source provided MacArthur with the advice that the Japanese did not intend to invade Australia.[49]

It is obvious that Blamey, as Commander of the Allied Land Forces, was receiving Magic information, for in his papers there is a South-West Pacific Naval Force memorandum entitled 'Memorandum for the Admiral' and dated 28 November 1942, which details Tokyo's appraisal of the general war situation.[50] Evidently this 'wide' circulation of Magic

---

47. A good summary of the naval intelligence available during this period can be found in the Admiralty's 'Operational Intelligence Centre Special Intelligence Summaries', ADM 223/22.

48. This material should not be confused with that obtained by the British GCCS and which was also given the title of Ultra.

49. See for example the American intercept of the Japanese message from Madrid to Tokyo of 16 July, decoded 20 July, stating that the strength of the defence in Australia would soon render landings 'absolutely impossible'. SRH-012, Vol.III, Annex No.179, RG 457, National Archives.

At the Prime Minister's War Conference on 17 August 1942 MacArthur told Curtin that: 'Most secret information had also been received that Japan was not responding to German pressure for an attack on Russia through Siberia'. MP 1217, Box 1.For these messages see *Collection of Japanese Diplomatic Messages 1938-1942*, SRH-018, RG 457, National Archives. The intercept of the Japanese report of the discussions between the Japanese Foreign Minister and the German Ambassador to Tokyo on 18 April 1942 indicated that there was no plan to invade Australia, SRS 575, *Magic Summary*, 18 April 1942, RG 457, National Archives.

50. 'Memorandum for the Admiral', Personal and Most Secret, 28 November 1942. Blamey Papers 59.

caused disquiet in a number of circles, and after the issue from Land Headquarters of 'Special Intelligence Precis No.4' of 21 December 1942, Admiral Carpender, the Commander of the Allied Naval Forces, wrote to MacArthur complaining of the circulation of the material. He explained that the contents were:

> undeniably interesting reading but would seem to have little direct relation to the command of the war by the Armed Services ... For the strictly naval point of view Japanese diplomatic code despatches are fruitful sources of information concerning prospective movements of enemy shipping particularly along the Asiatic coast. Data from this source pertinent to the conduct of naval warfare in this area is now supplied to this command from the Navy Department; and I assume that the War Department keeps you similarly informed on matters relating to military operations and other subjects of possibly wider import to the general strategic concept of operations.

Carpender suggested that MacArthur should report the matter to Washington.[51] MacArthur replied on 1 January 1943, pointing out that since 'the source of the subject information [was] under the direct control of the Commander Southwest Pacific Force, [Carpender]', then the latter should himself take action. For his part, MacArthur had decreed that Magic should be shown to no-one other than himself and Sutherland.[52] MacArthur then reminded Carpender:

> that the Naval Intelligence Unit under your command has incorporated an Australian section. It is probably that, in accordance with the practice that has been observed in similar joint organizations, the Australian section makes reports through its own channels in addition to the one furnished you through Lieut. Commander Fabian. It has been my observation that the Australian agencies normally disseminate information to echelons that have no

---

51. Memorandum, Carpender to MacArthur, 28 December 1942, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial.

52. Memorandum, MacArthur to Carpender, 1 January 1943, *loc.cit.* Captain J.R. Fife of Carpender's staff was detailed to take Magic to MacArthur who by this time was in Port Moresby. After Fife had shown the Magic to MacArthur he ostentatiously burnt it in a bucket next to General Willoughby's desk. Willoughby's complaints about the navy can well be understood. Blair, *op.cit.*, p.304.

> immediate use therefor, and which cannot act in the premises. This has been in the past the subject of communications between General Headquarters and the Commander, Allied Land Forces. I am of the opinion that effective results will be obtained only by your retaining complete control of your intelligence unit, preventing any dissemination of information except in suitable form that will protect the source, and then only when data is of immediate importance and capable of being acted upon by the specific agency concerned.[53]

Carpender was naturally somewhat disconcerted by this letter, and replied that the Central Bureau had obtained and disseminated Magic type information and the circulation was therefore beyond his control.[54] On MacArthur's behalf Sutherland wrote on 19 January 1943 that 'The Central Bureau is not charged with cryptanalysis of diplomatic traffic. It has never been engaged in such activity. No agency of General Headquarters has been so engaged'. Sutherland also informed Carpender that since returning from Port Moresby MacArthur had not received any diplomatic traffic. Furthermore, he believed that the Australian intelligence unit operating under Fabian had been transferred to the Australian Army in Melbourne and was no longer part of the SWPA.[55] In this respect Sutherland was wrong, for the RAN's SIB had never been part of Fabian's unit, and indeed the important Diplomatic Section under Trendall was responsible directly to the Department of Defence.[56] Nevertheless, Magic was no longer handled by the COIC, and therefore Blamey had to receive all his Magic information directly from the Assistant Chief of Staff G2 at GHQ (Willoughby).[57] It is difficult to ascertain whether Sutherland

---

53. Memorandum, MacArthur to Carpender, 1 January 1943, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial.

54. Memorandum, Carpender to MacArthur, 6 January 1943, *loc.cit.*

55. Memorandum, Sutherland to Carpender, 19 January, 1943, *loc.cit.*

56. Nave interview. In a memorandum to General Sutherland on 11 January 1943 General Akin said that the Diplomatic Section was 'under the direction of the Chief of Intelligence of the Australian Department of the Army' (Sutherland Papers, Allied Naval Forces), but Nave's account is probably correct.

57. Memorandum, Sutherland to Blamey, 6 February 1943, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial.

was completely candid about the Central Bureau never engaging in cryptanalysis of diplomatic traffic. By mid 1942 the Central Bureau was probably receiving some Ultra information from New Delhi and Bletchley Park and this may have been diplomatic information. Furthermore, it is certain that MacArthur was determined to have his own access to such traffic. On 31 December 1942 he told Marshall that since his intercept organisation was becoming better organised the time had come to intercept and decode 'Japanese traffic of the greater East Asia Administration and other correspondence of the highest plane of diplomatic and military agencies'. He intended to set up a completely separate agency under his own Signals Officer, Sooey, and it was to report directly to him.[58]

It appears that when the navy ceased passing information to MacArthur it was because of an instruction from US Naval Headquarters, which had become worried about the 'Army's mishandling of radio intercept intelligence'.[59] The result was that the Central Bureau was reorganised as the GHQ agency to control operationally all intercept and direction-finding units in the SWPA. The only exception was the naval intercept organisation, which was regarded as distinct from the land and air agencies. This plan had been suggested as early as August 1942 by Blamey.[60] Apparently Marshall was able to send immediately the men and machines requested by MacArthur on 31 December, for on 30 January 1943

---

58. Radio, C1384, MacArthur to Marshall, 31 December 1942, OPD Exec 10, item 23a, RG 165, National Archives (Washington).

59. MIS Memorandum, 2 February 1943, OPD Exec 11, item 1, *loc.cit.*

60. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 26 August 1942, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial.

the new organisation for the Central Bureau was instituted with Sandford confirmed as Executive Officer.[61]

The problem of controlling special intelligence, or 'Y' intelligence as it was called at the time, has already been mentioned, so it is worthwhile recounting an example of one of the problems. On 23 November 1942 the Headquarters First Australian Army Weekly Intelligence Summary No.29 included the following statement:

> Wireless intercepts reveal that Japanese Commanders at Rabaul and Kavieng have been continually calling for aircraft reinforcements.

This document had a circulation of forty copies which, when it was discovered, caused apoplexy at GHQ SWPA. On 3 December 1942 Sutherland wrote to Blamey in New Guinea.

> It has given the C-in-C great concern since intelligence of this nature is of great strategic importance and experience has shown us that any enemy knowledge of its usefulness to us will result in changes terminating such usefulness.[62]

Blamey apologised immediately for the error,[63] and directed his own Chief of Staff, General Berryman, at Advanced Land Headquarters (LHQ) in Brisbane, to ensure that the 'source of information such as this should [not] be revealed to any authority below Adv LHQ'.[64]

When Berryman investigated the lapse in security he discovered that the source of leakage was the Assistant Chief of Staff (Operations)

---

61. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey, 20 January 1943, *loc.cit.* MacArthur wrote: 'The Bureau, of course, has been in existence for a number of months but it is only recently that it has been felt that sufficiently detailed and extended experience has been gained to permit of a decision regarding the necessary organization, mission and control'.

62. Letter, Sutherland to Blamey, 3 December 1942, *loc.cit.*

63. Letter, Blamey to Sutherland, 5 December 1942, *loc.cit.*

64. Letter, Blamey to Berryman, 5 December 1942, Blamey Papers 59.

at MacArthur's Headquarters. GHQ had bypassed LHQ and had sent the information directly to HQ 1st US Corps, which had prepared a 'Summary of Enemy Situation' and had forwarded it to First Army. Berryman reported these facts to Blamey on 9 December 1942 with the information that the First Army had been ordered to delete the paragraph in question from every copy of the summary.[65] This report would have reached Blamey at the time when he was already rubbing salt into MacArthur's wounds following the failure of US troops at Buna.[66]

Other Intelligence Activities

While Special Intelligence was being organised, MacArthur and Blamey were also concerned with other areas of intelligence activity, and in July 1942 the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) was established to coordinate the various units which had been formed in Australia during the early months of the year.[67] The role of the AIB was to 'obtain and report information ... to weaken the enemy by sabotage and destruction of morale and to lend aid and assistance to local efforts to the same end in enemy occupied territories'.[68] Colonel C.G. Roberts, the Australian Director of Military Intelligence, was appointed Controller and the AIB was divided into four sections.[69]

---

65. Letter, Berryman to Blamey, 9 December 1942, *loc.cit.* Berryman wrote in his diary: 'I discussed matter with Chamberlin on basis of "people in glass houses should not throw stones". He will fix it at his end'. Berryman Diary, 7 December 1942.

66. See Chapter Seven.

67. Directive dated 6 July 1942, signed by Major-General R.K. Sutherland, MP 1254/24, item DNI P/D. For the correspondence leading up to the formation of the AIB see the Blamey Papers 56.3.

68. *Ibid.*

69. C.A. Willoughby (Comp), *Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, GHQ SWPA*, (GHQ, Far East Command, Tokyo, 1948), Ch.II. A popular history of the AIB is Allison Ind, *Spy Ring Pacific* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1958); also published as *Allied Intelligence Bureau* (David McKay, New York, 1958). My account relies on the Willoughby monograph.

Section A was responsible for gaining information and conducting sabotage from behind enemy lines and was known as Special Operations Australia (SOA) or the Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD). The director was Lieutenant-Colonel G.E. Mott, who had been sent by the War Office in London to establish a branch of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE).

Section B was responsible for 'secret intelligence', and was known as Secret Intelligence Australia (SIA). In fact it was a branch of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and was under the command of Captain R. Kendall, RNR, who reported directly to London. The unit was concerned with espionage and subversion in Japanese held areas.[70]

Section C was formed from the old coastwatchers organisation and was responsible for gaining information from coastwatchers, natives, and civilians. The officer in charge was Lieutenant-Commander E.A. Feldt, who had previously been responsible for the coastwatchers, but the unit was now expanded and divided into three sub-units covering the North East Area (NEA), the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI).[71]

Section D was a propaganda unit operating under the title of the Far East Liaison Office (FELO) and commanded by Commander J.C.R. Proud, RANVR.

The Directors of each section were under the general supervision of the Controller of the AIB, who in turn was responsible to General Willoughby at MacArthur's Headquarters.[72] However, the organisation did not work as well as was hoped. The FELO involved allied political propaganda

---

70. *Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. For a chart of the organisation of the AIB in July 1942, see Appendix 16.

which was beyond the responsibility of MacArthur's headquarters. Furthermore, the Dutch sought a separate organisation to gain political and economic intelligence from their former territories.

But the main trouble was with the Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD), which found itself in conflict with Section C, especially in the North East Area. Often ISD agents operated without the knowledge of local allied commanders, who could otherwise have made valuable use of ISD intelligence. The fundamental problem was that Colonel Mott thought that his first priority was to carry out sabotage and guerilla type activities, while Willoughby and Roberts believed his first responsibility was to seek intelligence.[73]

As a result, in early 1943 the irregular units were reorganised on a regional rather than a functional basis.[74] The three sub-sections of the old Section C became sections in their own right with Feldt retaining command of the North East Section. Lieutenant-Colonel A.W. Ind of the American Army became the commander of the Philippines Regional Section and Commander G.B. Salm of the Netherlands Navy became the commander of the NEI Section, soon to be known as the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Section, Division III (NEFIS III).[75]

The ISD now changed its name and became the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) with the task of conducting special operations outside the SWPA. The new commander was Lieutenant-Colonel P.J.F. Chapman-Walker from the British SOE. Units of the SRD could still operate in the SWPA, but only with Blamey's approval in the North East Area, and with Dutch approval in the Indies.[76]

---

73. Letter, Mott to Blamey, 16 January 1943, Blamey Papers 56.3.
74. For a chart of the organisation in April 1943, see Appendix 17.
75. *Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau*, Ch.IV.
76. *Ibid.*

The FELO was removed from the AIB's control and its political policy became the responsibility of the Minister of External Affairs advised by a Political Warfare Committee with British, American and Netherlands representatives. The actual operation of the FELO was controlled directly by General Blamey.[77]

It is beyond the scope of this work to recount the operations of the various elements of the AIB, and indeed some exploits have been told elsewhere. The fine work of the coastwatchers in the Solomons campaign has been described by E.A. Feldt in *The Coastwatchers*, Malcolm Wright in *If I Die* and by Walter Lord in *Lonely Vigil*.[78] Ronald McKie, in *The Heroes*, gives an excellent account of operations Jaywick and Rimau, the two raids by SRD parties against Singapore in 1943 and 1944.[79] Colonel Allison Ind, in *Spy Ring Pacific*, provides a popular history of the AIB, including the work in the Philippines, an area which is covered in a number of publications.[80] As noted earlier, the FELO left the control of the AIB, but continued to work in close cooperation with AIB parties. The work of the FELO is described by H.N. Walker in an *Army Journal* article.[81] The problems faced by one SRD party in Borneo are told by Tom Harrison in *World Within*.[82] And

---

77. The main documents are in CRS A816, item 19/304/327. See also Memorandum, Willoughby to Sutherland, 7 February 1944, AWM 423/11/202 Pt 1; Notes of Discussion with Wing Commander C.C. Bell, 24 September 1943, by S.M. Bruce, CRS M 100, item February 1943; Report on Activities of Felo, Wills Papers Folder 4, AWM; Letters, MacArthur to Curtin, 31 August and 18 September 1942 and Curtin to MacArthur, 12 September 1942, MP 1217, Box 289; and FO 371 35878/71.

78. E.A. Feldt, *The Coastwatchers* (Oxford University Press, London, 1946); W. Lord, *Lonely Vigil, Coastwatchers of the Solomons* (Viking, New York, 1977); Malcolm Wright, *If I Die* (Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1965). See also M. Murray, *A Coastwatcher's Story* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1967).

79. R. McKie, *The Heroes* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1960).

80. For an Australian account see R. Blow, 'With the Filipino Guerillas', *Australian Army Journal*, December 1965.

81. H.N. Walker, 'Psychological Warfare in the South-West Pacific', *Army Journal*, March 1974.

82. Tom Harrison, *World Within, A Borneo Story* (Cresset, London, 1959).

the very fine performances of the AIB parties in New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville in the last years of the war, have been covered in the Australian Army official histories.

These accounts taken together go only a small way towards providing a history of the AIB. Furthermore, the AIB and Central Bureau were not the only organisations involving allied intelligence cooperation established during the first year of the SWPA. There was the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) under the command of Colonel Sidney F. Mashbir of the US Army, which worked mainly on captured documents, deriving details of orders of battles and operations plans.[83] The Allied Geographic Section (AGS) under Colonel W.V. Jardine-Blake (AIF) prepared maps, guidebooks and terrain profiles.[84] Another allied group was Section 22 which was responsible for radar and radio counter-measures. At times it operated behind enemy lines, and like AGS and ATIS, it was responsible directly to GHQ.[85]

Finally, the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (COIC) should be mentioned. This was a joint service organisation set up in Australia before the Japanese attack to provide coordinated intelligence to Australian commanders responsible for the defence of Australia. It was retained and used by GHQ, although General Willoughby thought that it merely duplicated the work of his G2 (Intelligence) Section.[86]

Although there appeared to be sound operational reasons for reorganising the AIB on regional rather than functional lines, the outcome was that the Americans gained complete control over the areas

---

83. S.F. Mashbir, *I Was an American Spy* (Vantage, New York, 1953).

84. C.A. Willoughby (Comp), *A Brief History of the G2 Section, GHQ, SWPA and Affiliated Units* (GHQ Far East Command, Tokyo, 1948), p.59. The first commander was an Australian intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Colonel E. Mander-Jones, but after a few months he was succeeded by the then Major Blake. Blamey Papers 56.7.

85. War Diary GHQ SWPA, AMF Det. Sect 22, August 1945, AWM 1/1/7. For a diagram of the allied intelligence organisation in May 1943 see Appendix 18.

86. *A Brief History of the G2 Section*, p.75.

which interested them, and ceased to worry about those areas in which they had little interest. Thus the Philippine Regional Section, from May 1943 under the command of Colonel Courtney Whitney, gradually drifted away from the control of the AIB, and in June 1944 this was confirmed when the PRS became the Philippines Special Section operating directly under the operations, not the intelligence, branch of GHQ. Furthermore the PRS procured its equipment from American sources, and the AIB from Australian sources. Since the Australian Army was already dependent on American sources for much of its transport and equipment, the AIB continued to have difficulties in this respect.

The political and strategic importance of the American control over special operations was not lost on the British government and the directors of the SOE in London, who feared that the Americans would limit the role of the SRD, thereby reducing Britain's political influence in the Pacific theatre. Representing the views of the SOE, the Australian High Commissioner in London, Bruce, cabled Curtin in March 1944, raising the possibility that Mountbatten's South East Asia Command might be 'virtually eliminated from the main campaign against Japan'. Therefore it was obviously 'more than ever important to make the most of such relatively slight British Commonwealth representation as will remain'. He urged operations against the China coast.[87] Seven months later he cabled that special operations against the NEI and British Borneo were 'virtually paralysed' due to a lack of transportation, while the Americans were providing ample for the Philippines. To remedy this situation SOE in London was approaching the Admiralty.[88]

However, by the end of 1944 the Americans had realised the value of effective AIB operations in Borneo and the NEI, and the new Controller of the

---

87. Cable 48A, Bruce to Curtin, 24 March 1944, CRS M 100, item March 1944.

88. Cable 144A, Bruce to Curtin, 23 October 1944, CRS M 100, item October 1944. Curtin replied on 1 November: 'You are authorized to cooperate with SOE and to support the proposals they are submitting to the Admiralty. Cable 166, Blamey Papers 56.4.

Brigadier J.D. Rogers,
Director of Military
Intelligence,
1942-1945.
(AWM Negative No.22096)

Brigadier K.A. Wills,
Deputy Director of
Military Intelligence,
1942-1944, Controller
of the Allied Intelligence
Bureau, 1944-1945.

(AWM Negative No.22922)

AIB, Brigadier K.A. Wills, secured increased control over the various elements of his organisation.[89] By this time, of course, both the Americans and the Australians had an improved capacity to provide logistic support.

In the area of psychological warfare the Americans also sought to separate their operations from those of the Australians. Thus in June 1944 the Psychological Warfare Branch was established under the command of Brigadier-General Bonner Fellers, for operations in the Philippines.[90] The FELO remained responsible for psychological and propaganda operations in the Australian area. In addition a few FELO officers assisted the Pscyhological Warfare Branch in the Philippines, but General Willoughby was never happy with this arrangement.[91]

Cooperation in Special Intelligence

For political purposes it was important to the Americans that they alone should be seen as responsible for operations in the Philippines. But in the less visible and strategically vital area of top-level intelligence-gathering and assessment, the Americans were anxious for Australian participation. The teams were well-trained and to separate the allied components would have been disruptive. With respect to the ATIS and the AGS this was never seriously contemplated, but the Central Bureau was another matter.

MacArthur and his headquarters were always extremely sensitive to criticism of their intelligence estimates and of the information presented in their communiques. For example, MacArthur's communique dealing with the allied successes in the Bismarck Sea in March 1943 was

---

89. *Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau*, Ch.VII.

90. *A Brief History of the G2 Section*, p.57.

91. *Ibid.* On 7 November 1944 General Berryman wrote in his diary: 'G2 is taking strong exception to Felo having reps in the P.I'. Berryman Diary.

different from the information received in Washington and London.[92] Consequently MacArthur sought to restrict the flow of intelligence to Washington and London, and when this was not possible he was anxious that the Australians, who might inform London, should have no independent means of gathering intelligence which might vary from that acceptable to GHQ.[93]

From the outset the American Army and Air Force provided about half of the staff of the Central Bureau, with the Australian Army and Air Force each providing a quarter.[94] This was a perfectly acceptable arrangement because the Americans did not have enough personnel, and the Australians were gaining excellent experience. Indeed most of the field work was conducted by Australian sections. However, by early 1944 the possibility was raised of an independent Australian strategic role in operations north from Darwin,[95] and senior Australian commanders became concerned that if the new command was separated from the SWPA they would lose access to SWPA Central Bureau material.

As the year progressed it also became clear that the Americans intended to transfer the Central Bureau, with all of its IBM machines, to Manila, once the city was secured, and that the Australians would be

---

92. For a discussion of the resulting argument see James, *op.cit.* Vol.II, pp.296-303.

93. The head of the British mission in Australia reported: 'Situation between Advanced Allied Land Headquarters and GHQ over direct exchange of intelligence between former and overseas HQ has always been most delicate'. Cable, British to War Office, 29 March 1943, WO 106/3416. On 6 November 1944 General Berryman prepared a memorandum showing the instances where Australian intelligence had disagreed with Willoughby's estimates. He added: 'It is submitted that we cannot behave like dishonest tradesmen and keep two sets of books, but that it is our duty to inform our Commander of what we believe to be the truth assessed from time to time as fresh evidence comes to hand'. Blamey Papers 54.1.

94. War Cabinet Agendum 205/45, dated 15 May 1945, MP 729/8, item 41/431/8.

95. This topic is dealt with in Chapters Eight and Nine.

left without machine resources. These fears were expressed by the Australian Director of Military Intelligence, Brigadier Rogers, and by Colonel Sandford, at a series of important intelligence conferences in London in September 1944.[96]

By this time the Central Bureau had expanded considerably. In 1943 it had a strength of over 1,000 men and women; by May 1945, when its advanced headquarters moved to San Miguel (Manila) the strength was over 4,000.[97] The Australians continued to try to provide about half the total strength in an effort to ensure that if the Australian component was separated it could form a viable organisation.[98] Furthermore, No.1 Special Wireless Group from the Canadian Army was sent to Australia to assist with interception.[99]

When the plan to move elements of the Central Bureau to Manila was first raised, Blamey was opposed to the Australian intercept staff following the Americans northwards since he felt that the Australian Army would lose its intercept capacity. However, after an appeal from the Americans he changed his mind. Nevertheless, Rogers felt moved to comment that 'it was high time that the Americans provided their own sections, both signals and intelligence personnel, to care for their own requirements'.[100] The Australian staff in Manila did, however, enable

---

96. Minutes of Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, Conference on Coordination of Intelligence in the Far East, 8-14 September 1944, Blamey Papers 54.2. See also J.D. Rogers, *Say Not the Struggle*, unpublished manuscript. Further information on the conference was provided by Air Vice-Marshal J.E. Hewitt who as Director of Allied Air Intelligence, SWPA, also attended. Interview 3 July 1978.

97. *Operations of the Military Intelligence Section*, pp.77 and 78.

98. Letter, Rogers to Berryman, 12 July 1944, Berryman Papers. Also Berryman Diary, 15 July 1944.

99. Signal Officer-in-Chief's Report No.2, 23 January 1945, Blamey Papers DRL 664, item 60. See also C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments, The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1970), p.158. Details of the planning leading to the request for the Canadian Group can be found in Blamey Papers 56.8.

100. Letter, Rogers to Blamey, 14 August 1944, Blamey Papers 56.8.

the Australian High Command to keep up to date with the latest US intelligence developments. In June 1945 Colonel Sandford wrote to Blamey from the Philippines:

> Through fortunate combination of breaking and capture, it should be possible for us to read all High Command communications in and out of Tokyo for the period 1 July '45 to 31 December '45.[101]

The main protection for the Australians against the restricted distribution of intelligence by the Americans, was the control over special intelligence instituted by Washington in accordance with agreements with the British. A National Security Agency report has revealed that until these controls were instituted, 'there was no arrangement for passing the intelligence to commanders in the field promptly and in a manner which would ensure security'.[102]

It took quite some time for the appropriate controls to be introduced in the South-West Pacific. Following the Pearl Harbour fiasco Mr Alfred McCormack had been appointed as Special Assistant to the Secretary of War with the task of investigating how best to use the intelligence material. As a result, and after some hesitation, Special Branch, Military Intelligence Service (MIS) had been set up in early spring 1942. This branch,with Colonel (later Brigadier-General) Carter W. Clarke as Chief and Colonel McCormack as Deputy Chief, 'was charged with intelligence exploitation of intercept material and exercised a limited amount of guidance over the US Army Signal Corps in its activities of interception, traffic analysis, cryptography and communications'. MIS was attached to, but was not part of the War Department General Staff, and came under the control of the Assistant Chief of Staff G2, Major-General George V. Strong.[103]

---

101. Top Secret Ultra letter, Sandford to Blamey, 30 June 1945, Blamey Papers 56.

102. 'Use of (CX MSS Ultra) by the United States War Department (1939-1945)', SRH-005, RG 451, National Archives.

103. *Ibid.* For a detailed account of MIS, see *History of the Special Branch, MIS*, SRH-035, RG 457, National Archives.

One difficulty was that the navy continued to tell the army what it thought the army needed to know. The paucity of naval information of value to the army in the Weekly Memoranda produced by MIS was testimony to the unsatisfactory nature of the arrangement.[104] On the other hand, the strength of MIS was that it had access not only to its own intercepts, but also to the British Ultra.

The procedures for disseminating intelligence from what General Strong called 'our most secret and in many ways our most reliable sources',[105] had not yet been developed to anything like the efficient system used by the British for Ultra. Therefore, in an effort to improve the situation, the Joint Security Control was set up in Washington in early 1943 with the following aims:

> a. To prevent information of military value from falling into the hands of the enemy.
>
> b. Timing the implementation of these portions of cover and deception plans which must be performed by military and non-military agencies in the United States.[106]

Then in August 1943 Colonel Clarke, who was now also head of the Joint Security Control, visited MacArthur in Brisbane to explain a new plan to ensure a more effective use and flow of intelligence. It is significant that over a year elapsed from the time of the establishment of the MIS before the British were willing to co-operate completely with the Americans and plans were sufficiently developed to warrant a trip to the SWPA.[107] In a letter preceding Clarke's visit, General Strong explained to MacArthur that:

---

104. Memoranda for A C of S, 1942, OPD Exec 11, item 3, RG 165, National Archives (Washington).

105. Memorandum, Strong to Marshall, 4 July 1942, OPD Exec 10, item 7C, *loc.cit.*

106. JSC (8-4-42) SI, CCS 334, RG 218, National Archives (Washington). Joint Security Control was analagous to the London Controlling Section, which was responsible for the coordination and control of deception against Germany.

107. 'Use of (CX/MSS ULTRA) by the United States War Department'. This part of the report is partly censored and has been pieced together by other references.

> The plan for achieving this objective [more effective use of British and American Ultra] is based on our own experience in the War Deaprtment and the European theater and upon the very successful system used by the British. The plan calls for a co-ordinating center in Washington with representatives throughout the world, including officers assigned to the staff of each field commander concerned. For reasons which Colonel Clarke will explain it is believed essential that each of these officers be trained in the work here and should function in the theaters as representatives of the intelligence center here.[108]

MacArthur naturally had to agree, but in characteristic fashion he resisted (unsuccessfully) Marshall's demands that the 'Special Security Officers' had to remain under the control of the War Department.[109]

As the time for the invasion of Europe drew nearer British Intelligence became determined to ensure a uniform policy in the handling of Ultra, particularly for the invasion forces who were to rely on it so much, but also in the other theatres of war. Therefore, on 23 May 1944 Marshall sent MacArthur a copy of the regulations for handling Ultra, which by now was the term for both British and American intercept material.[110] MacArthur replied on 2 June 1944:

> I am in complete accord with the security measures indicated. Most of them are now in effect here and the proposed refinements will be inaugurated immediately. I would welcome the assignment of specially selected and trained personnel for security missions.

However, as usual, and again without success, he objected to the War Department control of the security personnel,[111] and the Australian

---

108. Letter, Strong to MacArthur, 21 August 1943, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial and Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department, National Archives.

109. Letters, MacArthur to Marshall, 4 August 1943; Marshall to MacArthur, 5 August 1943; MacArthur to Marshall, 2 September 1943, *loc.cit.* It might be observed that MacArthur's insistence on the perfection of his own intelligence, and his refusal to co-operate with other agencies contributed to his eventual dismissal in 1951.

110. Letter, Marshall to MacArthur, 23 May 1944 with enclosures, SRH-034, RG 4571, National Archives. The regulations covered five typed pages of foolscap. A copy is in Blamey Papers 59.

111. Letter, MacArthur to Marshall, 2 June 1944, RG 4, MacArthur Memorial.

commanders were not issued with a copy of the regulations until September.[112]

Meanwhile the British and the Australians had been attempting to increase the interflow of intelligence between the Central Bureau and organisations in Britain and India. In March 1943 Lieutenant-Colonel Sandford left for USA and Britain for additional training in handling Ultra, and whilst in England visited Bletchley Park. Probably he returned via India and visited General Auchinleck's 'Y' organisation, because that month (July) Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief in India, suggested to MacArthur that there should be closer links between the SWPA and the Indian 'Y' organisation. He proposed to send Lieutenant-Colonel G.E. Aldridge to Brisbane, and in return MacArthur proposed to send Colonel Sherr to India.[113] Unfortunately in October, whilst on the way to India and China, Sherr was killed in a plane crash.[114] As mentioned, Sandford returned to England in September 1944, and it might be conjectured that he persuaded the British to increase their intelligence network to include Australia.

In November 1944 British intelligence established a Special Liaison Unit (SLU) in Brisbane, and the Security Liaison Officer was Squadron Leader S.F. Burley.[115] In view of the streamlined and tightened procedures now developing in the Central Bureau, as a result of the acceptance of the British regulations, it might have seemed superfluous

---

112. Letter, Northcott to Morshead, 5 September 1944, Morshead Papers 101/8.

113. Signals, Auchinleck to MacArthur, 29 July; MacArthur to Auchinleck, 3 August; MacArthur to Auchinleck, 17 August; Auchinleck to MacArthur, 21 August; Auchinleck to MacArthur, 24 August; Auchinleck to MacArthur, ? October; MacArthur to Auchinleck, 2? October 1943. Sutherland Papers, Miscellaneous 2, National Archives.

114. Thompson and Harris, *op.cit.*, p.340 claim that Sherr was killed in September 1942, but footnote 113 indicates that it was probably September 1943.

115. An account of the SLUs in Australia is given in S.F. Burley, *The Silent Guardians of Ultra*, unpublished manuscript.

to set up an SLU in the SWPA, but the integration of the SWPA into the British Ultra system coincided with the rapidly expanding role of the US Army in the area, and also the increased British concern to regain some influence in the Australian area. About this time the headquarters of the Central Bureau moved to Hollandia, and then in October 1944 to Leyte, and there may have been some concern that the Australian forces would have less access to Central Bureau material. After all, although the Central Bureau was an allied agency it came under MacArthur's direct control. The SLUs did not. The provision of the SLU (SLU 9) therefore gave the Australian forces greater independence from the American monopoly of secret information. For example, SLU 9 could pass information directly to RAAF Command which previously would have had to receive intelligence from Kenney's Allied Air Force Headquarters. Furthermore, as MacArthur's command became more wide-spread the RAF SLU's encoding facilities enabled current intelligence to be rapidly disseminated. Nevertheless, the bulk of the intelligence came from the Central Bureau at Ascot, which looked upon SLU 9 on the top floor of the Australian Mutual Providence building in Brisbane as an amateur organisation.[116]

This was somewhat unfair to SLU 9, for Brisbane was the only point in the SWPA where both the approved American and British cryptographic systems for passing Ultra were held. The role of SLU 9, which operated in conjunction with the American Special Security Office, was not to intercept and decrypt enemy signals, but to pass Ultra intelligence to its recipients in the most secure manner.[117]

---

116. Letter, Flight-Lieutenant N.E. Reynolds to Group-Captain Winterbotham, 29 June 1942. Original loaned to author by Winterbotham.

117. Report of Special Security Representative, Headquarters Armed Forces, Pacific. SRH-032, RG 457, National Archives. See also History of the Operations of Special Security Officers attached to Field Command, SRH-033, *loc.cit.*

Before long SLU 9 had set up an expanded network to cover the Australian operations. There were SLU detachments with Air Commodore Scherger's 1st Tactical Air Force and General Blamey's Advanced Land Headquarters (which passed information to Morshead's 1st Australian Corps) at Morotai, with General Sturdee's 1st Australian Army at Lae, and with Air Commodore Charlesworth's Northwest Area RAAF at Darwin. When the 1st TAF moved to Labuan in July 1945 it was accompanied by its SLU, and when the dropping of the atomic bomb signalled the end of the war another SLU was preparing to move to Manila.[118] These SLUs proved to be very valuable to the Australian forces in their operations in Borneo, New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville during 1945.

The direct access by Australian officers to the worldwide Ultra sources meant that Australian authorities could now use this information to help determine national policy and ensure internal security. On 17 January 1945 it was agreed that the Australian Director-General of Security should receive information from Ultra sources.[119] Perhaps this move had developed out of a letter written by Blamey to the Acting Minister for the Army, Senator J.M. Fraser, on 6 January 1945. Blamey had explained that there had been a number of reports of security breaks, including a report:

> from Harbin on 24th November, 1944 [which] gave details concerning General MacArthur's plans for certain operations in the Philippines. The source of this report was given as the Soviet Ambassador in Australia.[120]

---

118. Letter, Reynolds to Winterbotham, 29 June 1972.

119. Letter, Blamey to Director-General of Security, 25 January 1945, Blamey Papers 59.

120. Letter, Blamey to Fraser, 6 January 1945, Blamey Papers 59. The letter provided other examples of information provided by the Soviet Ambassador. Presumably the Soviet Ambassador had passed this information back to the USSR where it had been picked up by Japanese agents based in Harbin (Manchuria). From there the information would have been sent in cypher to Tokyo, and this traffic was read by American cryptanalysts. It is interesting to note that the *Royal Commission into Intelligence and Security*, Fourth Report, Vol.1, p.21 states that 'the Petrov Commission came to the conclusion that from 1943 up to the time of Petrov's defection, USSR intelligence agents had been operating in Australia'.

Good intelligence is one of the most important elements of strategic decision-making. During the Second World War Australia advanced from a position of being almost totally dependent upon British intelligence to a point where she had relatively large and effective intelligence organisations cooperating closely with similar American and British organisations. This was a substantial achievement which was to have important repercussions for the future. It should be remembered that the AIB, AGS, ATIS and CB were all built upon Australian Army foundations, and although GHQ had the responsibility for their overall control, the Australians provided the major part of their personnel, and cared for most of their domestic needs.[121] During the war the increasingly accurate and voluminous intelligence enabled the government and its advisers to make strategic decisions with confidence and precision. If the strategic decisions of 1941 and 1942 were based on inexact knowledge, by mid 1943 the government could be sure that not only was Australia secure, but that the chances of a major military reverse had been substantially decreased.

Australia's experience with intelligence in the Pacific in the Second World War emphasises the important role which a minor country can play in a coalition war. The minor country may be able to provide unique expertise and may be important by virtue of its geographic location. Results in intelligence are not related directly to the magnitude, but rather to the quality of the effort. In this respect a minor country may be able to achieve national objectives through special operations even when it lacks the resources for more conventional methods. Furthermore, skilful intelligence co-operation may result in the minor country receiving more valuable intelligence material than it could hope

---

121. Letter, Rogers to Directors of Military Intelligence in London, India, the Middle East, Ottawa and Wellington, 10 May 1943, War Diary Adv HQ AMF, G Int Sect, AWM 1/2/2.

to obtain if it did not co-operate with other intelligence organisations. It may well be that present day allied intelligence co-operation has proved to be the most lasting and important legacy of Australia's experience of coalition warfare in the Second World War. And the consequent development of the Australian intelligence services strengthened the nation's capacity for making independent judgments on foreign policy after the war.

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGY IN THE SWPA

January-December 1943

Strategic Planning in January 1943

When, on 8 January 1943, MacArthur issued a communique announcing the virtual termination of hostilities in Papua,[1] the Australian and American commanders in New Guinea were astonished, and not a little angry.[2] Some observers have attributed this premature announcement of the 'annihilation of the Japanese Papuan army'[3] to MacArthur's desire to beat Halsey and the Marines in turning 'in the first important land victory of the Pacific War',[4] thus improving his prestige in Washington. But it was not just a matter of prestige, for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff were leaving Washington for the Casablanca conference, and on 8 January they instructed MacArthur to submit detailed plans for carrying out their directive of 2 July, (i.e. to capture Rabaul), and authorised him to discuss these plans with Halsey.[5]

MacArthur was, therefore, aware of the forthcoming Casablanca conference and he knew that the Pacific strategy was to be a point of discussion. He felt that it was necessary to return to Brisbane to supervise the preparation of these plans and to muster the support of the Australian government. He could only leave Port Moresby if the campaign was, as he announced in his communique on 8 January, 'in

---

1. *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.98.

2. Luvaas, *op.cit.*, pp.62, 64. R.L. Eichelberger, *Jungle Road to Tokyo* (Odhams, London, 1951), pp.76, 77.

3. *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.98.

4. Willoughby and Chamberlain, *op.cit.*, p.88.

5. John Miller Jr., *Cartwheel: The Reduction of Rabaul* (OCMH, Washington, 1959), pp.11, 12.

its final phase',[6] and accordingly he returned to Brisbane the next morning.[7] He was immediately followed by Blamey, who had no intention of allowing MacArthur to confer with Curtin without being able to present his own point of view.[8] Thus while Generals Eichelberger and Herring struggled to 'mop up' the remaining 4,500 fiercely determined Japanese defenders at Sanananda,[9] MacArthur, Blamey, Curtin and Shedden turned their attention to the plans for the ensuing year, and on 10 January MacArthur sent a long signal to Marshall pointing out that he had insufficient forces to begin an offensive. His only available troops were Australian militia which was 'not of sufficient quality for employment in the offensive'.[10]

Blamey met Curtin and Shedden in Canberra on 14 January, and the Prime Minister began by stating that until greater forces were available he thought that the only alternative was a 'holding strategy in the Pacific'. He asked Blamey his opinion as to what was the capacity for further action. Blamey said that there was little to fear in northwest Australia but that there were insufficient allied resources to undertake an offensive against Timor. The next operation contemplated was against Lae, in New Guinea, which was the centre of a Japanese defensive line. 'Direct action was not contemplated against Salamaua, as this centre could be starved out once Lae was captured'. Blamey suggested that MacArthur should visit Washington to convey from first-hand experience the results of the operations in New Guinea and the

---

6. Communique for 8 January 1943, in *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.98.

7. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.271. For a further discussion of this incident see Horner, *op.cit.*, p.257.

8. Horner, *op.cit.*, p.257.

9. *Ibid.*, p.252, fn.38.

10. Signal Q 6924, MacArthur to Marshall, 10 January 1943, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department.

needs of the South-West Pacific Area. Curtin pointed out that politically this would be an unwise step, and Blamey agreed. Curtin then turned to matters of command, and he asked Blamey who he would recommend as his successor should he become ill or a casualty. Blamey replied that he did not consider Lavarack 'possessed all the attributes of a first class Commander', and he thought that Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead possessed 'the best qualifications and personal attributes for this post'.[11]

After this conference Shedden flew to Brisbane where he spent from 16 to 20 January discussing the recent campaign and the current plans with General MacArthur.[12] Shedden began by asking why the campaign had apparently taken so long. MacArthur replied by criticising the Australian commanders, 'he regretted to state that his criticisms of slowness in exploiting advantages and following up opportunities applied to all Australian commanders including General Blamey'. MacArthur said that he had asked Blamey three times to remove General Clowes, but that Blamey had 'said that this officer had important influences behind him'. There was no mention by MacArthur that the Commander and senior officers of the 32nd US Division had been replaced, nor did he suggest the possibility that he himself might have erred in not sending troops to New Guinea earlier than he did.[13] But he did acknowledge that 'of the nine campaigns in which he had fought, he had not seen one where the conditions were more punishing on the soldier than this one'.

---

11. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 14 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 1. A reasonably detailed account of the meeting is also given in F.T. Smith Reports, No.45, 15 January 1943, NLA.

12. The following account is from Notes on Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 16-20 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

13. These issues are covered in Horner, *Crisis of Command*.

MacArthur expanded on his general criticism of the Australian commanders, and observed that 'Blamey had had quite an easy time in New Guinea'. Overlooking the fact that Blamey did visit Buna and Sanananda, MacArthur said that he had wished to visit the battle area but had not been able to do so because Blamey had remained at Port Moresby.[14] He described Blamey 'as a good, courageous Commander in the field, but not a very sound tactician', and pointed out that he did 'not command the fullest support of all' in the Australian Army and that he had political ambitions. He had expected Blamey to remain to finish the campaign and he had left New Guinea early to allow Blamey to have 'the final scene to himself'. But 'the urge to get back was too great for General Blamey'. MacArthur concluded by stating that Blamey should become Commander-in-Chief of the Home Defence Forces in Australia, and that Morshead should command the Australian part of an Allied Expeditionary Force. It was important that in his capacity as Commander of the Allied Land Forces Blamey should be entirely under and available to MacArthur. If this clashed with Blamey's responsibilities for the administration of the Australian Army, then he would have to vacate the post of Commander, Allied Land Forces.

The discussion then turned to the future operations in the South-West Pacific Area. MacArthur explained that he had informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that if he were to achieve the second phase of his directive, the capture of the Solomons and northeast coast of New Guinea, he would need more planes, ships and troops. He said that the Pacific War Council in Washington, and the Australian military representatives in Washington and London, had achieved nothing, and he thought that the

---

14. Blamey visited Buna and Sanananda on 5 and 6 January 1943. At no stage did MacArthur visit the battle front, although in later years he tried to create the impression that he had been there. Eichelberger Dictations, Book 2, p.V-79.

only way to secure assistance was to arouse American public opinion. He did not think that it would be worthwhile for him to visit Washington.

Shedden said that if MacArthur could provide the facts and figures, he would draft a cable for Curtin to send to Roosevelt. Eventually it was agreed that Curtin's cable would quote a press statement from MacArthur that the outstanding lesson of the operation was airpower, and that if sufficient planes were provided they could strike the Japanese 'a mortal blow'.[15]

There were a number of other important matters. Honours for American officers were discussed, there was an assessment of various Australian officers, MacArthur was criticial of some non-government members of the Advisory War Council, he welcomed Curtin's efforts to amend the Defence Act,[16] and he expressed the view that he wanted only the three AIF divisions for combat; the militia was fit for home defence and garrison duties only. The case of General Rowell was discussed, MacArthur was critical of Eisenhower, Shedden left a note about communiques, and MacArthur said that he would control the activities of the United Kingdom liaison officers.[17] MacArthur indicated that the

---

15. Cable, Curtin to Australian Mission Washington, 19 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2037.

16. MacArthur said that 'in his own opinion, the Prime Minister had not moved a day too soon, as he was aware from reports from America that a campaign was being insidiously built up in the United States on this matter ... General MacArthur stated in the strictest confidence that he had received an entirely reliable report that Admiral Leahy, Personal Assistant to the President, had said that if Australia did not remove the limits on the use of its forces in the Southwest Pacific Area, he would urge the President to withhold Lease-Lend assistance to the Commonwealth'. Notes on Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 16-20 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

17. MacArthur said that he would control the activities of the United Kingdom Army and Air Liaison officers with the utmost care as he feared that they might be prejudicial to the interests of the Southwest Pacific Area. *Ibid.* For a discussion of the controversy over the UK liaison officers see Appendix 6.

Japanese were becoming interested in Merauke which he was not able to occupy in force, and he emphasised that he did not have the resources to retake Timor.

Shedden had enquired about Timor as a result of questions asked in the Advisory War Council about the build up of Japanese forces in this area.[18] Indeed certain members of the Advisory War Council appeared to have a fixation about Timor, and in December they had instructed the Chiefs of Staff to prepare an appreciation for the capture of the island.[19] The Chiefs had claimed that they had insufficient information,[20] and Blamey thought that the instruction from the Advisory War Council was 'imbecility'.[21] Nevertheless the continuing fear of a threat from the northwest was to be important for the government in the following months.

As agreed during the discussions, on 19 January Curtin telegrammed Roosevelt and Churchill at Casablanca, quoting MacArthur's statement, and appealing for an additional 2,000 aircraft for offensive action.[22] A few days later, against the advice of Shedden,[23] in an Australia Day

---

18. Advisory War Council Meeting, 12 January 1943, CRS A 2682, Vol.VI.

19. Advisory War Council Meeting, 8 December 1942, *loc.cit.*

20. Appreciation by Chiefs of Staff, December 1942, Blamey Papers, DRL 6643, item 20. Letter, Northcott to Blamey, 9 December 1942, Northcott Papers, ML MSS 1431/14. CRS A 2671, item 22/1943.

21. Blamey wrote in red pencil across the front of the terms of reference supplied by the Advisory War Council: 'Many years of training have produced in me a dislike for profanity in writing. This alone prevents me from giving my complete opinion on this imbecility'. Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 20.

22. Cable No.10, Curtin to Australian Mission Washington, 19 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2037 and CRS A 2679, item 9/1943. Also Curtin to Roosevelt, 19 January 1943, Map Room, Box 12, Folder 2B, Roosevelt Library.

23. Memorandum by Shedden, 25 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 611. Shedden said that the speech would antagonise Roosevelt and Churchill without gaining anything. Curtin agreed that this might be the case but still went ahead.

broadcast, Curtin appealed directly to the American people, descibing Australia as the 'bulwark of civilisation south of the Equator'.[24] The broadcast drew some criticism, and one reporter wrote that 'the spectacle' of Curtin appealing to the American people 'was rather pathetic'.[25] But MacArthur told Curtin that the speech 'was magnificent measured by any standard of strategy, courage, patriotism or commonsense'. He promised to radio Washington at once to support the Prime Minister's argument.[26]

There is no evidence that these representations had much influence on the Casablanca conference, where Admiral King was arguing vigorously in favour of the Pacific War.[27] On 29 January the Australian government was informed that while the Pacific War was reduced to fifth on the list of priorities, after the Atlantic, Russia, the Mediterranean and the United Kingdom, the directive of 2 July 1942 to capture Rabaul remained unchanged.[28]

The discussions between Shedden and MacArthur in Brisbane in January 1943 throw valuable light on their role in Australian strategic planning. On 27 January 1943 Curtin wrote to Shedden thanking him for the 'highly informative' and valuable notes of the conferences.[29]

---

24. Broadcast by Prime Minister, 26 January 1943, Blamey Papers 12.

25. Message by Dickson Brown to *News Chronicle*, London, quoted in teleprinter message, Deputy Chief Publicity Censor, Brisbane, to Chief Publicity Censor, Canberra, 27 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 611.

26. Message, MacArthur to Curtin, 27 January 1943, *loc.cit.*

27. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.383.

28. Cable Z 9, Churchill to Curtin, 29 January 1943, Cable Z 10, Attlee to Curtin, 29 January 1943, Cable 154, Dominions Secretary to Curtin, 29 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 575.

29. Letter, Curtin to Shedden, 27 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

The next day Shedden made some attempt to anticipate for the Prime Minister the course of events in the coming months:

> Now that the immediate threat to Australia had passed by the destruction of the Japanese forces in Papua, I detect an anxiety on the part of General MacArthur to free himself of the restraints and limitations placed on him by operating his Headquarters in the country of a sovereign state. I anticipate that, at the first opportunity, he will set up his Headquarters outside the Australian mainland, and organise an expeditionary force which it will be his aim to make predominantly American and that Commanders of the Naval, Land and Air Forces will be all American officers.[30]

In a separate paper Shedden also took the opportunity of giving his impression of MacArthur:

> I always find General MacArthur's personality an interesting study and he really has to be closely studied to be properly understood. Some people, who should know better, dismiss him rather cheaply because of a certain demonstrative manner and his verbosity.
>
> His demonstrative manner is due to his mercurial temperament. He has great enthusiasm for his work, but becomes depressed at the political frustrations which, in his view, shape world strategy, to the detriment of the Southwest Pacific Area. His verbosity is probably largely due to the fact that he keeps so exclusively to himself and his staff. This probably leads to a tendency to introspection and a desire to pour out his thoughts and feelings on anyone interested in his problems and views. Another result of this introspection is a tendency to suspect motives on occasions without sound grounds for them, with the consequence that, by dwelling on them, he may build up a view which is entirely contrary to the known facts.
>
> Anyone who has had close relations with General MacArthur cannot come away without any other impression than that he has been in the presence of a great masterful personality. He has a broad and cultured mind and a find command of English. He might be described as an American conservative who has faithfully maintained the standards of his

---

30. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 28 January 1943, *loc.cit.*

> British ancestors. He views with great disfavour the influence which foreign people have had in America on British standards. He is a great stickler for the status of his position.
>
> I rank General MacArthur's expositions of strategy as equal to those of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, who is the greatest living writer on Naval history and strategy, and to Lord Hankey, who, as Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, demonstrated the possession of a great strategical mind. General MacArthur has a profound knowledge of military art and history, is a shrewd judge of men, and, what is essential for a successful Commander, great personal courage and leadership, as was exemplified during the campaign in the Philippines. Though his Army was mainly Philippino, it offered a stout resistance to the Japanese and this Army was entirely General MacArthur's creation.[31]
>
> At 63, he has shown that his mind has not lost its resiliency and that he has not been blindly wedded to orthodoxy in the art of war, by demonstrating in the New Guinea campaign how effectively land and air forces can be used in cooperation, and how air transport can be used when movement by land and sea is impossible.
>
> General MacArthur is very proud of his post as Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, by reason of the unity of Naval, Military and Air control that is vested in him, and also because of the fact that he is a foreigner commanding on the soil of a sovereign State Allied Forces; of which the main part belong to the Government of the country in which he is located. He is extremely solicitous for the correctness of his relations with the Australian Government, to whom he feels greatly indebted for the set-up under which he works.

Shedden also noted MacArthur's impact on decision-making in Australia:

> Australia is very fortunate to have such an officer responsible for operations in the Southwest Pacific Area. General MacArthur says that, should he commit a grave error in the conduct of operations, he will be the first to detect it and efface himself from the scene. The Government need have no fear of having to take distasteful action with his own Government, as he would not let

---

31. It should be added that the validity of the assertion that MacArthur's force offered stout resistance is open to challenge.

> the need arise. His influence, counsel and advice are having effects over the whole field of Service administration in Australia, and it is of great advantage to the Government that such a person should be available in addition to the Government's own advisers. He will certainly be missed when he moves his Headquarters away from the mainland and our main contact with the higher direction of the war will again be confined to the Government's representatives in London and Washington.[32]

Thus Shedden stressed MacArthur's important role in advising the government in matters beyond those of strategy.

MacArthur similarly had a high opinion of Shedden, and on 5 February wrote to Curtin:

> As the first great phase of our campaign to protect Australia from invasion draws to a close, I cannot abstain from expressing my appreciation of the splendid contribution to our success by the Secretary of the Defence Council, Mr Shedden. While not in any sense serving under my command, his duties have been so identified therewith that I feel I owe him a deep obligation for the superior manner in which he has beneficially influenced many momentous problems and materially contributed to their successful conclusion. Unfortunately I have not the power to decorate civilians or I would unhesitatingly cite him for an appropriate reward. I hope you will not regard me as presumptuous, although I realise I go beyond my normal limitations, if I recommend him to your consideration for such recognition. He belongs to that great class of civil servants who work in comparative obscurity but whose value cannot be over-estimated.[33]

---

32. Visit to Brisbane, 16th to 20th January 1943, Impressions of General MacArthur, Notes by Shedden, MP 1217, Box 2037.

33. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 5 February 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial. There was a sequel to this correspondence, for on 9 February Curtin promised MacArthur that he would do his 'best to give effect to the views you have so considerably and delightfully expressed'. Shedden also wrote on 15 February to thank MacArthur: 'I am very deeply grateful for your thoughtfulness, the more so as I have done a thousandfold more in the cause of Empire and Australian Defence, but it has not evoked any parallel expression of commendation from the Australian Service Leaders'.

On 3 June 1943 in a letter to MacArthur Shedden referred to his knighthood as a result of 'your splendid recommendation', but MacArthur pointed out, on 4 June, that he had been careful, in his letter of 5 February, not to state which award he recommended since that was a matter for the Australian government. These letters are in the Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian government.

As a result of this letter Shedden was knighted some months later.

Changing the Allied Command Structure

During his discussions with Shedden MacArthur had said that Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger would soon be arriving in Australia to command the Sixth US Army and he hoped that additional US divisions would be sent to Australia. In Curtin's view, the arrival of Krueger seemed to indicate that the US Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided to send substantial reinforcements to the SWPA,[34] but the appointment was based on quite different considerations.

During the Papuan campaign it had become increasingly clear that MacArthur was determined that his operations should be controlled by task force commanders, rather than by Blamey as Commander, Allied Land Forces. Indeed MacArthur told Shedden in January that Blamey was unable to perform adequately his duties as Commander ALF as well as those of C-in-C of the AMF. Thus on 11 January 1943 MacArthur asked Marshall to send Krueger 'to give the US Army the next ranking officer below General Blamey in the Allied Land Forces which is not now the case and is most necessary'.[35] Soon after Krueger's arrival MacArthur formed Alamo Force to conduct the operations of the Sixth Army. There were not yet enough troops to form a US Army in Australia, but Krueger, who also commanded Alamo Force, 'realised that this arrangement would

---

34. F.T. Smith Reports, 11 February 1943, No.44. On 8 February 1943 MacArthur wrote to Curtin that the action of sending Krueger indicated 'a growing feeling of the importance of the Southwest Pacific Area' and was an indication that more reinforcements could be expected. Blamey Papers 5.0.

35. Signal, MacArthur to Marshall, 11 January 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

obviate placing Sixth Army under the operational control of the Allied Land Forces'.[36]

There is other evidence to support this view. General Dewing, the British Army representative in Australia, wrote that MacArthur was 'working steadily to exclude the Australians from any effective hand in the control of land or air operations or credit in them, except as a minor element in a US show'.[37] Krueger's deputy Chief of Staff commented later that Alamo Force was created 'to keep the control of Sixth Army units away from General Blamey'.[38] In the opinion of General Eichelberger, Krueger was sent to Australia because the Americans were disadvantaged by the high rank and experience of many of the Australian officers: 'Whether Walter's rank will help solve the problem only time can tell ... It reminds me of the poker games in Shanghai ... where the cuspidor was put on the centre of the table because no one dared look away to spit'.[39]

Throughout 1943 it became increasingly obvious that MacArthur was edging Blamey out of his position as commander of the land forces. Indeed General Dewing reported that an 'entirely independent but reliable source close to MacArthur' had informed him that the intention was that Krueger would replace Blamey as Commander of the Allied Land Forces. Dewing told the War Office that he did 'not know whether Blamey [was] aware of this but judge him astute enough to have made [a]

---

36. Krueger, *op.cit.*, p.10. In a letter to General Orlando Ward, the US Army's Chief of Military History, on 12 September 1951, Krueger attested to the great problems he faced as a commander with the dual responsibilities for Alamo Force and 6th Army. RG 319, Records of the Office of the Chief of Military History, National Archives.

37. Dewing to Wilkinson, 10 February 1943, quoted in Thorne, *op.cit.*, p.263.

38. Interview tapes, Papers of General George H. Decker, US Military History Institute, Carlyle, Pennsylvania.

39. Luvaas, *op.cit.*, p.67.

shrewd guess'. Dewing thought that Australia could not resist such a change.[40] This was not, of course, MacArthur's plan. Rather MacArthur became his own land force commander and exercised command through task forces, and Blamey was well aware of this scheme. On 15 February 1943 he wrote to MacArthur that he would like to examine the composition of the task forces; he was 'in general agreement with the point of view that General Sutherland suggested in regard to their relationship to Headquarters and details of command'.[41]

Colonel Keogh has written that in forming Alamo Force to avoid placing any large body of American troops under Blamey's command, MacArthur needed 'to be congratulated for his skill in extricating himself, his own Government and the Australian Government from an embarassing situation'.[42] This may well have been the case, for towards the end of 1943 Curtin stated that he intended to discuss Blamey's role when MacArthur returned from New Guinea.[43] Perhaps Shedden advised Curtin that the formation of Alamo Force made a change to the organisation less urgent. Such a change, coming at the same time as an upheaval in the command of the RAAF,[44] might have been difficult

---

40. Cable 8, Dewing to VCIGS, 3 March 1943, WO 106/3416.

41. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 15 February 1943, AWM 515/5/5. It is interesting to note Blamey's comments in a letter to Shedden on 11 March 1943 dealing with the suggestion to appoint an Air Officer Commanding for the RAAF: 'Such air forces as may be allotted to the S.W.P.A. are somewhat in the nature of task forces and the operational command of these forces will be exercised by an R.A.A.F. Commander under the Commander, Allied Air Forces. Such a position may also arise in relation to the Allied Land Forces at various times and there may be an interchange of command as between Australian and American Commanders both in Air and Land Forces'. Blamey Papers 23.4.

42. Keogh, *op.cit.*, p.473.

43. Memorandum by Shedden, 19 November 1942 and letter, Curtin to the Minister for Air, 24 December 1942, CRS A 816, item 31/301/196A.

44. See Appendix 3.

to institute, for Blamey was advising the government that the results achieved in Papua 'would have been quite impossible had he not been' C-in-C.[45]

But if Keogh is right in his suggestion that MacArthur needed to be congratulated for his skill, he overlooks another aspect of MacArthur's motivation. Keogh claimed that if the Commander, Allied Land Forces, had not had the additional responsibility of administering the Australian Army, then 'the subsequent command arrangement would have adhered more closely to the original plan'.[46] What Keogh failed to realise was that whether the nominal Commander, Allied Land Forces, had other responsibilities or not, MacArthur had no intention of allowing him to operate as such. Blamey's 'two hats' provided a convenient excuse for MacArthur's rearrangement of his forces; they were not the real cause of the change.

There is no doubt that MacArthur's new system worked, although Krueger doubted whether it would have done so if the land forces had been faced with defeat.[47] Nevertheless, MacArthur's method of achieving it was, in the words of Gavin Long, 'by stealth and by the employment of subterfuges that were undignified, and at times absurd'.[48] These subterfuges revealed a lack of consideration by MacArthur towards a subordinate who, to date, had shown outstanding loyalty. Indeed on 17 May 1943, MacArthur's Chief Public Relations Officer, Colonel L.A. Diller, wrote to MacArthur from Melbourne: 'I found no question from

---

45. War Cabinet Agendum 107/1943, Sup 1, 15 April 1943, CRS A 816, item 31/301/196A.

46. Keogh, *op.cit.*, p.474. Keogh claimed that the Australian Army should have had an operational commander under MacArthur's command while retaining the Military Board. He makes no mention of the fact that a similar system operating in the RAAF was a complete failure and was detrimental to the effectiveness of that service.

47. Letter, Krueger to General Orlando Ward, 12 September 1951, RG 319, National Archives.

48. Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p.599.

any source of General Blamey's loyalty and fidelty'.[49] F.M. Forde commented later that Blamey 'worked very hard in order to give satisfaction to General Douglas MacArthur and to render a maximum of assistance'.[50] Yet it was to be almost two more years before Blamey lodged a formal complaint with Curtin over MacArthur's degradation of the role of Commander, Allied Land Forces.[51]

Securing Additional Forces for the SWPA

Although MacArthur's decision to eliminate Blamey from the chain of command was to have an important impact on Australia's ability to influence allied strategy,in early 1943 Curtin was concerned with what he considered to be more crucial matters. At the Advisory War Council meeting on 2 February it was agreed that there would be no profit in challenging the Casablanca decision. Curtin promised, however, to consult MacArthur as to whether the forces in the SWPA would be sufficient to achieve the objectives laid down, and if not,whether additional forces were required. He would report to Roosevelt and Churchill in the light of MacArthur's reply. During the meeting misgivings were again expressed about a Japanese threat from the Northwest. Both the CNS and the CAS said that they were not worried, but Curtin said he would speak to MacArthur.[52]

---

49. Letter, Diller to MacArthur, 17 May 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial. In an eight page letter Diller described the problems of dealing with the Press in Melbourne. He concluded: 'Melbourne seethes with intrigue ... and certain people in Melbourne seem to have almost immediate information about happenings at headquarters. Vicious, scandalous, gossip is prevalent in Melbourne. Sir Guy Royle [the CNS] appears to be implicated in the antagonism [towards Americans] very strongly'.

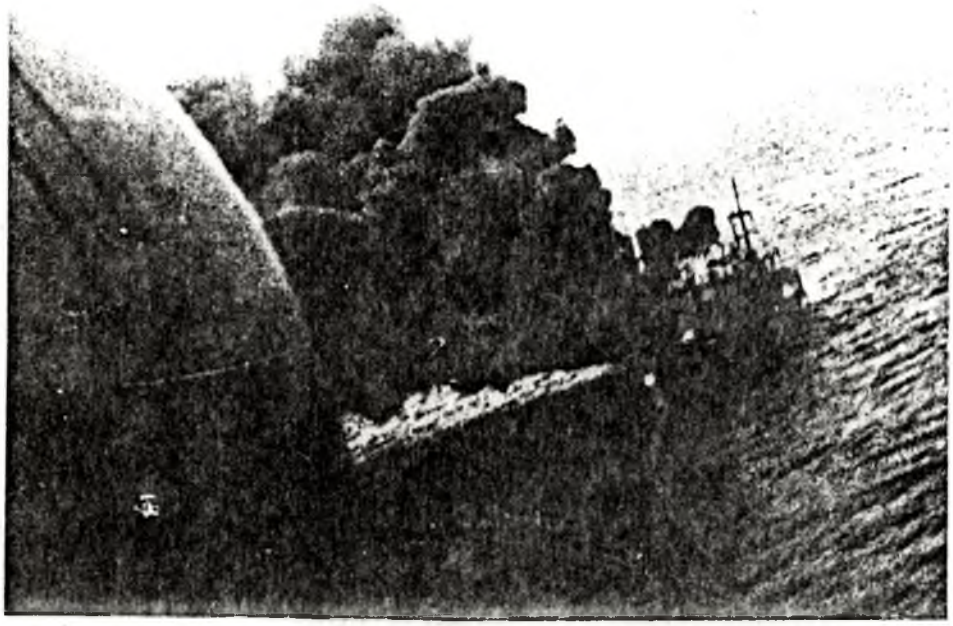
50. Transcript of interview with F.M. Forde, 4 March 1971, NLA TRC 121/8.

51. See Chapter Ten. For a diagram of the command organisation in July 1943 see Appendix 15.

52. Advisory War Council Meeting, Minutes 1129, 1131, 1132, Canberra, 2 February 1943, CRS A 2682, Vol.VI.

Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger, CG Sixth US Army, and Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack, GOC First Army, photographed in April 1943. Krueger also commanded Alamo Force. Krueger knew 'that this arrangement would obviate placing Sixth Army under the operational control of CG Allied Land Forces'.

(AWM Negative No.50475)



A Japanese ship on fire during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. The engine of the Beaufort is in the foreground.

(AWM Negative No.127965)

Meanwhile the strategic situation continued to improve. The Australians thought that the arrival of the Sixth US Army would mean that an additional force of three divisions would be sent from America,[53] and the Australian CNS advised that by June 1943 there would be a powerful American fleet in the Pacific.[54] In addition, the 7th Amphibious Force under Admiral Barbey, and the 2nd Engineer Special Brigade, were assigned to MacArthur's command.[55] By the end of February the Japanese thrust towards Wau had been soundly defeated,[56] and the Japanese on Guadalcanal had been eliminated. Finally in early March a Japanese convoy attempting to reinforce Lae was virtually annihilated by Allied aircraft in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.[57] Furthermore, allied intelligence was now becoming increasingly accurate. It had contributed the Bismarck Sea

---

53. At the Advisory War Council on 9 February 1943, Curtin said that MacArthur had advised him of the arrival of the Sixth Army and it was an 'excellent indication of their intention to increase the forces assigned here'. The CGS then said it would probably result in an allocation of an additional corps of 3 divisions. CRS A 2682, Vol.VI. This was a reasonable assumption since the Australian Army had received a request for accommodation for up to 3 divisions. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 12 February 1943, MP 1217, Box 4.

54. Advisory War Council Minute 1129, 2 February 1943, *loc.cit.*

55. *The Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.105. The title of Barbey's command was later changed to 7th Amphibious Fleet. For an account of the fleet see D.E. Barbey, *MacArthur's Amphibious Fleet*, (Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1969).

56. The GHQ Communique of 12 February 1943 said the enemy had been 'decisively defeated'. MP 1217, Box 530.

57. While there is no doubting the enormous victory in the Bismarck Sea, there was a long and bitter argument over the exact number of Japanese ships sunk. See James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, Ch.7, part 1 and Craven and Cate, *op.cit.*, pp.129-150.

success,[58] and the battle itself provided further valuable information.[59]

Naturally, MacArthur was not pleased with the Casablanca decision to give the Pacific fifth priority, and on 29 January he pointed out to Marshall that he would have insufficient strength to capture Rabaul.[60] Meanwhile, as they prepared their plans, it became clear to MacArthur and his staff that the capture of Rabaul could secure for the Allies 'important, but not decisive advantages'. Plans were, therefore, begun (but not passed to Washington) for the advance to the Philippines.[61]

MacArthur's Elkton plans for the capture of Rabaul were discussed during February, and Elkton II of 28 February stated that he would need an additional five divisions and almost 2,000 more aircraft.[62] Since there were also problems of coordination with the South Pacific Area, the JCS called a Pacific Conference in Washington,[63] and on 12 March MacArthur's chief of staff, Major-General R.K. Sutherland, presented the Elkton II plan to the conference. That evening Sutherland radioed

---

58. In a letter to General Mackay on 27 February 1943 Blamey said that intercept information had warned the Allies of the Japanese attempts to reinforce Lae and Madang between 5 and 12 March: 'Every effort will be made by our own airforce to deal with the enemy as he approaches, and HQ SWPA is very confident of causing a very great amount of damage, and possibly preventing the enemy from achieving his object'. Blamey Papers 170.3.

59. A group of Japanese survivors from the battle were ambushed on Goodenough Island by Australian soldiers and the Japanese Army List and Directory for 1942-1943 was captured. *The Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.111, and D. Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1961), p.10.

60. G. Odgers, *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945* (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957), p.20.

61. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.10.

62. The Elkton Plan of 28 February 1943 is reproduced as Appendix I in Morton, *op.cit.*

63. On 15 February 1943 MacArthur asked Marshall for permission to send his chief of staff and several other officers to Washington to explain his plans for the advance towards Rabaul. (Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department). The JCS approved, but arranged a conference which was to include representatives from Halsey's and Nimitz's areas.

MacArthur that there was almost no chance of the SWPA receiving reinforcements. Only two or three divisions and a few more planes could be sent.[64]

On 8 February Curtin had asked for MacArthur's observations on the forces required to fulfill his directive, but had received no reply.[65] Then after being informed by MacArthur on 1 March that he had sent Sutherland, Kenney and Chamberlin to Washington to present his views, since he was 'operating in an atmosphere of such uncertainty as to jeopardise plans and effort',[66] Curtin had asked if there was any way in which he could 'assist the attainment of the objectives which the mission had in view'.[67]

Now, faced with what appeared to be the intransigence of the JCS, MacArthur sought Curtin's help, and the build-up of Japanese strength in the islands northwest of Australia enabled him to stress the need for adequate forces to ensure the defence of Australia. Thus when Curtin spoke to MacArthur by secraphone on 16 March after a heavy air raid on Darwin the previous day,[68] the latter emphasised the threat to Australia. Forgetting that the JCS had called his representatives to Washington to discuss the Elkton plan, and that he had sent them with the specific purpose of 'explaining the full details of my suggested

---

64. Miller, *op.cit.*, pp.13, 14.

65. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 8 February 1943, MP 1217, Box 575.

66. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 1 March 1943, MP 1217, Box 579.

67. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 4 March 1943, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian Government. See also Prime Minister's War Conference Minute 79, Canberra, 17 March 1943, MP 1217, Box 532.

68. At the War Cabinet Meeting in Canberra on 16 March 1943 there was a discussion regarding the Japanese air raid on Darwin the previous day. Curtin left the meeting to speak to MacArthur by secraphone, and then returned to give the latter's views. War Cabinet Minute 2690, CRS A 2673, Vol.XIII.

plans for phase two and three of the advance to Rabaul',[69] MacArthur told Curtin that he had sent them to obtain 1,000 to 1,500 planes and a corps of troops not for an offensive against Rabaul, but to defend what was already held. MacArthur said that the Japanese would be able to 'launch a major attack' in from two to four months.[70]

It is difficult to believe that MacArthur was completely candid with Curtin. After all, in January both Blamey and MacArthur had informed Curtin that they considered that there was nothing to fear from the Japanese in northwest Australia.[71] Now, on 17 March, Blamey reaffirmed that he was 'not disturbed regarding the possibility of heavy Japanese attacks in the immediate future'. The only worry was a possible Japanese occupation of Merauke.[72] Although MacArthur issued plans on 22 March for the reinforcement of Merauke and the Horn Island-Cape York area, in April the plans were amended so that the reinforcements should not be deployed but should be ready to move at short notice.[73]

---

69. Signal X447, MacArthur to Marshall, 15 February 1943, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department.

70. The notes of the secraphone conversation of 16 March 1943 are held in MP 1217, Box 524, File, Operations at Darwin 1943. An extract of the notes appears in Advisory War Council Minute 1153, Canberra, 18 March 1943, CRS A 2682, Vol.VI.

71. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 14 January 1943, MP 1217, Box 1, and Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 16th to 20th January 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

72. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 17 March 1943, MP 1217, Box 4.

73. Long, *The Six Years War*, p.290. This plan, known as the Moultrie Plan was issued as GHQ Operation Instruction No.32 on 12 April 1943, AWM 519/6/59, Part 1.

The Japanese build-up in the islands was in fact a defensive measure which MacArthur's intelligence should have been able to detect.[74] Furthermore the increased success of US submarines operating out of Fremantle would have made a Japanese move against northwest Australia increasingly difficult.[75] As mentioned, MacArthur was already making secret plans for the advance to the Philippines.

Meanwhile, having received no answer from Roosevelt and Churchill, Curtin reminded MacArthur that he had not replied to his letter of 4 March, when he had offered to assist him in his attempts to gain increased resources.[76] MacArthur replied immediately that the failure of Roosevelt and Churchill to reply to Curtin's appeal of 19 January was 'an astonishing development'. MacArthur therefore suggested that 'benefit might result through independent action on the part of the Prime Minister and at worst no harm would be done'.[77] Bruce in London had already warned Curtin that despite the fine words from Casablanca, the basic idea was still 'Hitler must first be defeated',[78] and on 18

---

74. In all the correspondence between MacArthur and Marshall there is no evidence that MacArthur was really afraid of a Japanese advance from the area northwest of Australia. In his correspondence with Marshall, the possibility is mentioned only once in a signal sent on 25 March. (Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with War Department.) On 12 March 1943, after a meeting with the Australian Minister in Washington, the US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, wrote in his diary: 'He and I also discussed the alleged threat of the Japanese to North Australia. I told him that I had not taken it very seriously because all the other news had convinced me that the Japanese could not sustain any such attack and I gave him some of the instances which went to prove my views correct. He said he was much encouraged'. Papers of Henry L. Stimson, Library of Congress.

75. Blair, *Silent Victory: The US Submarine War Against Japan*, Ch.18.

76. Teleprinter message, Shedden to MacArthur, 17 March 1943, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian Government.

77. Teleprinter message, MacArthur to Curtin, 17 March 1943, MP 1217, Box 289, File, Messages from MacArthur.

78. Cable 31, Bruce to Curtin, 10 February 1943, MP 1217, Box 575.

March Curtin made renewed representations to Roosevelt and Churchill.[79] No doubt Curtin had been anxious for proof that the Pacific theatre had not been forgotten, but he had not been willing to act without MacArthur's agreement.

The events of early 1943 demonstrate how much Curtin had come to rely on MacArthur's strategic advice. Indeed General Dewing thought that MacArthur so dominated Curtin that it was unlikely that the Australian Prime Minister would ever 'stand up against MacArthur in insistence on the rights of, or even a fair deal for the Australian services in the theatre'.[80] At one interview MacArthur told Dewing that Curtin was completely in his hands 'on all military questions'.[81]

For the moment, however, Curtin's natural desire to ensure the safety of Australia was complementary to MacArthur's plans for an advance to the Philippines. Curtin's forceful arguments in cables to Roosevelt, Churchill and Bruce during March and April 1943 have been carefully recounted in the Australian official history, where Hasluck has perceptively noted that the claims for additional planes to enable MacArthur to conduct a limited offensive, marked 'the end of representations based largely on the fear for the security of the Australian mainland'.[82]

While Curtin was making these representations, planning continued in Washington and on 28 March the JCS issued their directive for offensive operations in the South and Southwest Pacific. The Joint Chiefs were

---

79. Cable Johcu 60, Curtin to Churchill, and cable 49, Curtin to Australian Minister, Washington, 18 March 1943, CRS A 2679, item 9/1943.

80. Report by Major-General R.H. Dewing, 20 April 1943, WO 106/4839.

81. Reported by Major-General R.H. Dewing to S.M. Bruce, 30 June 1943, CRS M100, June 1943.

82. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.212. Copies of the cables can be read in the Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian Government, in CRS M100, March 1943, in PREM 3, 142/7, and in Roosevelt Papers, Map Room Box 12, Roosevelt Library.

unable to supply all the forces required by MacArthur if he were to take Rabaul, and the aim was modified to that of containing the Japanese forces by maintaining the initiative, and preparing for the ultimate seizure of the Bismarck Archipelago. This was to be achieved by establishing airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands, seizing both sides of the Vitiaz Straits, and advancing through the Solomons to southern Bougainville.[83] The operations of Halsey's South Pacific Forces were to be under MacArthur's general direction. The Joint Chiefs agreed to supply MacArthur with two more divisions of ground troops, 524 additional combat planes and 336 non-combat planes.[84]

MacArthur had therefore achieved support for a limited offensive, but with the advance to the Philippines in mind he was still not satisfied and sought to apply additional pressure to the US government. Thus on 1 April he advised Curtin that Dr Evatt, who was about to depart for America, should seek to obtain aircraft to allow the RAAF to expand to 72 squadrons. He suggested that these aircraft could come from the British allocation of US aircraft, and would, therefore, be additional to the aircraft already provided to the US Airforce in the SWPA.[85]

On 6 April MacArthur notified Shedden of a statement which he planned to release on 9 April, the anniversary of the fall of Bataan.[86] At the same time, he sent Shedden another statement which he requested Curtin to issue as a comment on the original statement. The second statement urged that the war in the Pacific should be considered as the second front ... 'Let us hope it will not become the front where we lost the

---

83. The Directive is reproduced as Appendix 10.

84. Letter, Curtin to Evatt, 1 April 1943, CRS A 2684, item 1500, Part 2.

85. *Ibid.*

86. Letter, MacArthur to Shedden, 6 April 1943, RG 10, MacArthur Memorial.

war'.[87] Curtin duly released this as requested, and added a further comment:

> Others have decreed that Germany must be beaten first. We must therefore exert every endeavour and receive every assistance to ensure that the Pacific does not also become the Lost Front.[88]

Blamey's support was also enlisted, and on Anzac Day (25 April) he broadcast to America appealing for 'a reasonable allocation of force ... If five percent of the output of America and Britain is made effective in this region, we can attack. If we attack we will win'.[89]

Meanwhile, in Washington, Evatt was putting the Australian case for both the rapid delivery of promised aeroplanes, and for a substantial increase in the strength of the RAAF.[90] But Evatt achieved little real success. Although 132 aircraft were made available to Australia most were of types then being superseded.[91] He won few friends in Washington and had no impact on the Trident Conference in May.[92]

Early in May Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff arrived in Washington for the Trident Conference with Roosevelt and the US Joint Chiefs. With Evatt, by coincidence, in Washington, Curtin saw the opportunity of submitting 'a new appreciation of the Australian position',[93] but MacArthur advised him against it, arguing that it 'might possibly arouse harmful resentment, especially from the London [representatives]

---

87. Teleprinter message, Shedden to MacArthur, 7 April 1943, RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

88. Prime Minister's Press Release, 8 April 1943, MP 1217, Box 2037.

89. Broadcast by Blamey, 25 April 1943, marked 'BC [Broadcast] to America', Blamey Papers 136.61.

90. Cable, Evatt to Curtin, 14 April 1943, CRS A 2684, item 1500 Part 2.

91. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, p.214.

92. The success or otherwise of Dr Evatt's mission is dealt with in Appendix 2.

93. Advisory War Council Minute 1188, Melbourne, 13 May 1943, CRS A 2682/XR, Vol.VI.

Dr H.V. Evatt about to broadcast during the annual rededication ceremony at the Anzac Gardens on the British Empire Building at the Rockefeller Centre, New York, 10 June 1943. With Dr Evatt is Mrs Roosevelt.

(AWM Negative No.42501)

Sir Owen Dixon, the Australian Minister to the USA, 1942-1944. The 'diplomatic side was not so significant as in pre-war times'.

(AWM Negative No.12151)

who, rightly or wrongly, are unquestionably assuming the prerogative of speaking for the British Empire and who have gone to Washington with a completely-thought-out and crystallised plan in which, so far as the Empire is concerned, all decisions have been made'.[94]

The events in Washington in early 1943 culminating in the Trident Conference which began on 12 May, demonstrate the difficulty faced by Australia in seeking to alter allied strategy. The Australian Minister to the USA, Sir Owen Dixon, explained the situation to the Advisory War Council on 13 May when he stated that the 'diplomatic side was not as significant as in pre-war times', and that the 'services were resentful of civilian interference'. The decisions were made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. 'The Pacific War Council was not an effective body'.[95]

The head of the Australian Military Mission in Washington, General Sturdee, achieved little more than Dixon, and following the Trident Conference he wrote to Blamey:

> Evatt has also taken up the general question of Dominion participation in planning with little or no result so far as I am aware. Future operations are divulged only to those who must know in order to function thereon. Now take the Washington Conference just finished, the only participation of Dominion Service Representatives was attendance at a Meeting of British COS (London) at which 'also present' were British COS (Washington) and Dominion Representatives. At this meeting two possible alternative areas of attack were surveyed but no conclusions or recommended plan were even indicated. After some difficulty I managed to arrange a half hour interview each with Brooke and Ismay. This difficulty was not that they did not want to see me, but meetings went on day and night and it was hard to

---

94. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 13 May 1943, quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, p.214.

95. Advisory War Council Minute 1187, Melbourne, 13 May 1943, CRS A 2682/XR, Vol.VI. The Pacific War Council in London had even less influence than that in Washington, and Churchill commented to Ismay on the matter of the next meeting of the Council: 'There is nothing to discuss at present, the situation having greatly changed. This dog has gone to sleep and had better be left lying still for the moment'. Minute, Churchill to Ismay, 13 March 1943, PREM 3 167/3.

> fit it in. During these interviews I explained the Australian position so far as the Australian Army was concerned, but beyond atmosphere and assurances that they were continuously watching Australia's interests and security, I got very little.[96]

MacArthur also saw no value in relying on the Australian military missions overseas.

> He looked on them largely as 'window-dressing' and as a useful source of information when it suited the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but he did not think they were ever consulted on major matters ... he did not think they had done any good, or had exercised an iota of influence. If they had an attempt would have been made to squelch them and the Australian Government would have heard a complaint from them long ago.[97]

It seems that Curtin agreed with this assessment, for at the end of the year he complained that he had 'never seen any reports on the background of higher strategy' although officers had been sent whose 'rank and status would give them [entry] to the highest circles dealing with such matters'.[98]

MacArthur had judged the mood in Washington nicely, for without additional urging from Australia, Churchill informed the press on 25 May that the war would be waged with equal force on the European and Pacific fronts.[99] This comment by Churchill was a slight exaggeration,

---

96. Letter, Sturdee to Blamey, 28 May 1943, Blamey Papers 6.1. On 2 March 1944 Lieutenant-Colonel J.G.N. Wilton on the army staff at Washington wrote to General Berryman: 'Sometimes I feel quite sorry for the Americans with all us foreigners here trying to get something out of them... our representative here has no part in planning the war, there is no reason why he should ever be consulted by the CCS and all Australian forces are in the SWPA, and MacArthur has a directive from the CCS, so that the planning as regards the employment of the AMF is a matter for direct settlement between MacArthur and LHQ'. AWM 225/1/16.

97. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with the Commander-in-Chief, South-west Pacific Area, Brisbane, 25th to 31st May 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

98. Letter, Curtin to Blamey, 20 December 1943, MP 729/6, item 69/401/74. Lieutenant-Colonel Wilton in Washington observed that the appointment of a lieutenant-general was 'apparently purely one of prestige and that he has difficulty in occupying his time'. Letter, Wilton to Berryman, 2 March 1944, AWM 235/1/16.

99. *Washington Post*, 26 May 1943.

for although the Allies had agreed to provide sufficient resources to the Pacific and Far East to enable commanders to maintain and extend 'unremitting pressure' against Japan, the basic policy of defeating Germany first still remained.[100] Nonetheless, the Trident decision did indicate a change in emphasis, and apparently Churchill made his comment to underline this change while at the same time reassuring the American public that Britain would pull its weight in the Pacific.[101]

When he visited MacArthur in Brisbane at the end of May Shedden discussed Churchill's announcement, and the Commander-in-Chief noted that Churchill's assurance had still to be implemented, but it represented 'a big advance to have it said publicly'. MacArthur thought 'that the recent public statements of both [himself and Curtin] influenced American public opinion to a degree which could not be ignored', and he observed that the Washington communique was 'colourless' and did not give Curtin the credit he deserved for his representations.

Shedden and MacArthur then prepared a statement to be released by Curtin:

> Australia has every reason for satisfaction with the decision ... that the war in the Pacific will be prosecuted with the same vigour as the war in Europe ...
>
> The discussions of the last three months have now brought to Australia one of the greatest successes of the war.

Australia had sought to arouse public opinion to the dangers of allowing Japan to acquire an invincible defensive position, and the Washington discussions 'had absolutely and completely supported the contentions of the Australian Government'.[102] This statement formed the basis of

---

100. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.458.

101. Thorne, *op.cit.*, p.289. This was the theme of Churchill's address to the US Congress on 19 May 1943. MP 1217, Box 648.

102. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 25th to 21st May 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

the announcements by Curtin during early June, but the official historian has observed that it was 'extremely doubtful whether the information before Curtin justified him in phrasing the statement in such a way'.[103] It should be remembered, however, that the statement had been carefully prepared by Shedden and MacArthur, and they were anxious to ensure that the Combined Chiefs continued to provide support to the SWPA.

MacArthur's attempt to give credit to Curtin must be seen as flattery and encouragement to the Prime Minister. For his part, Curtin found it politically useful to receive credit for influencing allied strategy to Australia's advantage. Once again, for different ends, Curtin and MacArthur found common cause in mutual support.

MacArthur's Role in Formulating Australian National Policy

Throughout the first six months of 1943 Curtin actively supported MacArthur's claims for greater reinforcement for the South-West Pacific Area and for the defence of Australia. Curtin had backed his support by amending the Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Bill to allow militiamen to serve in most of MacArthur's command, and by June 1943 over 680,000 Australians were in uniform.[104] However Curtin was now faced with a most important independent strategic decision.

It has already been related that Australia had very little influence over allied strategy - either in the balancing of global strategy, or in the direction of allied strategy in MacArthur's command. The only way Australia could positively influence allied strategy was by denial or supply of resources ranging from fighting troops to food. Thus, if the Australian government sought to ease the burden on its

---

103. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.217. It was not until 5 June 1943 that the Australian government received official information on the Trident decisions. Cable Z 65, Dominions Office to Australian Government, 5 June 1943, MP 1217, Box 648.

104. Butlin and Schedvin, *op.cit.*, Ch.14. See also Minute of Defence Committee, 13 September 1943, CRS A 2671, item 389/1943.

people by reducing supplies to MacArthur, the latter would be forced to curtail his advance to the Philippines; there would be no guarantee that the shortfall would be provided from other sources. Balancing the Australian war effort therefore involved decisions of a strategic nature and required firm leadership from the Australian Prime Minister.

Although the 3rd Australian Division was grinding slowly towards Salamaua in a series of exacting and grim battles, in other respects the first six months of 1943 was a period or preparation for further efforts against the Japanese. Meanwhile the heavy casualties from enemy action and disease during the Papuan campaign had caused the government in early 1943 to begin an examination of the manpower necessary to maintain the army. At the same time the government had begun to view with concern the surplus production of weapons and ammunition.[105]

On 13 April Blamey, who quite early in the campaign had been concerned at possible manpower shortages,[106] presented a report stating that to provide an offensive force of three divisions and to maintain home security, Australia would require nine infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, one armoured brigade and one army tank brigade. If further manpower could not be released from industry, 'then the force being prepared for offensive operations should be reduced by an infantry division'. In view of the altered strategic situation, Blamey considered that it was now 'a justifiable and indeed an unavoidable risk' to reduce the forces in the areas remote from the enemy.[107] In essence Blamey had raised the question of whether or not Australia was to reduce its share in offensive operations against Japan.

---

105. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.294.

106. Letter, Blamey to CGS, 3 January 1943, AWM 721/12/24.

107. War Cabinet Agendum 106/1943, Supplement 1, 13 April 1943, CRS A 2671, item 106/1943, Supplement 1. The Agendum was presented at the War Cabinet Meeting of 14 April, but deferred to a later date.

On 30 April the War Cabinet referred the report to the Defence Committee to review the exact strengths of the three services which could be maintained if 10,000 persons per month were available, and recommended that Curtin should take up with MacArthur the question of whether the offensive force should be reduced by one division.[108] The Defence Committee reported that the existing programme had to 'be reviewed in the light of policy decisions based upon an authoritative and comprehensive review of the existing strategical situation'. This could only be provided by General MacArthur.[109]

Already it was apparent that, as the official economic historian wrote, 'the structure of command of the direct war effort was in disarray'.[110] The War Cabinet was unable to balance the demands of the military for an increased role in offensive operations against the rationalists who saw Australia's most important duty as the supply of food and war equipment. Moreover, if Australia's contribution to the war was not reduced there would be a further decline in civilian living standards. The problem was further complicated by conflicting, and at times incompetent and dishonest advice from the departments involved.[111]

Both the economic and political official historians have used harsh words. Hasluck wrote that 'the central feature of the whole manpower situation [was] a constant uncertainty in the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet regarding the exact nature of the Australian war effort'. There was an 'absence of clear, firm, exact and prompt determinations on policy by those responsible for the higher direction of the war in Australia'.[112] Butlin and Schedvin were even more critical. To them the

---

108. War Cabinet Minute 2810, 30 April 1943, CRS A 2673, Vol.XIII.

109. Recommendations of Defence Committee, 6 May 1943, CRS A 2671, item 106/1943, Supplement 1.

110. Butlin and Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.382.

111. See *ibid* for a description of the Department of Munitions' 'clumsy attempt to cook the books'.

112. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.297.

story was 'one of unrelieved confusion, of misinformation and incomplete information, of petty squabbles between Munitions and the Army and between Munitions and the Manpower Directorate, and of lack of leadership from the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet'.[113] The Defence Committee was criticised for procrastination in 'a straightforward case of self-interest',[114] but Butlin and Schedvin reserved their main criticism for the relationship between MacArthur and Curtin:

> Increasingly during 1943 General Blamey, and through him the Chiefs of Staff, were bypassed in the formation of high level military policy. The rapport that had developed between Curtin and MacArthur had its advantages, but Blamey and the Defence Committee were usually uncertain about what had been decided and were not fully aware of the implications for Australian defence policy. To be sure, Blamey and his staff showed a lack of imagination and initiative in over-coming the communications blockage, but an important part of the problem which could not readily be resolved was MacArthur's domination of Curtin.[115]

At one stage the Prime Minister tried to saddle Blamey with the responsibility for restricting the more extravagant American demands for supplies, equipment and works. On 12 February 1943 Curtin told Blamey that Australia had 'reached the maximum of her manpower, material and financial resources'. He said that American 'standards of expenditure were higher than those of the Australian Services and this dulled the incentive to economy on the part of the latter'. Curtin thought that MacArthur was keen to help the Australian government but the extravagance was caused by subordinate officers. He suggested that 'Blamey could drop a few hints' to MacArthur.[116]

---

113. Butlin and Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.393.

114. *Ibid.*, p.345.

115. *Ibid.*, p.382.

116. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 12 February 1943, MP 1217, Box 4.

During this period General Dewing observed that the Australians were now coming to realise how completely the control of equipment and the employment of Australia's defence forces were in MacArthur's hands. With respect to 'relative weight in council of the foreign commanders and the domestic government', he drew a parallel between the role of the allies in French North Africa at that time.[117]

On 10 May Blamey reported that he had been less successful in remedying the problem than he had hoped. He complained that GHQ had 'issued directives applicable not only to themselves but also to the Australian Forces concerning administrative policy'. Thus the US Forces were in a position 'dominant in respect to the Australian Forces'. He continued:

> I do not think it is either practicable or desirable to attempt to dictate to the US Forces in regard to the questions in discussion. It seems to me that the Government should accept the consequences of events which were probably in any case inevitable and which very large arose from conditions which were initiated or accepted by the Government. I do not think that anything could result from any other attitude, but disturbance of amicable relations with an Allied power which has come to our assistance. I would suggest, too, that the Australian Government itself is not in a position to exercise any fully effective direction or control over the US Forces, except perhaps by a denial of their requests which would virtually be a denial to the C-in-C, SWPA, of the means to implement his strategical policy. A fortiori the Commander, Allied Land Forces, a subordinate of the Government, does not possess any real authority to do this in respect to a superior command ... the idea that the existence of an Australian Commander of Allied Land Forces can achieve the Government's wishes is somewhat illusory ...
>
> I feel that the approach to C-in-C, SWPA on this subject should be by the Prime Minister and not by me.[118]

---

117. Report by Major-General R.H. Dewing, 20 April 1943, WO 106/4839.

118. Letter, Blamey to Forde, 10 May 1943, MP 1217, Box 291.

However, while Blamey realised that it was a matter for the Prime Minister, he did not give up his attempts to restrict the use by the Americans of Australian manpower, and on 2 June 1943 he told Curtin that if the situation continued it would 'virtually remove Australian forces from active operations and result in Australian personnel being employed to render service to the US Forces'.[119]

This was, of course, only part of the problem, for as Hasluck observed, there was 'no sign of a single mind rising above the detail to consider the whole problem'.[120] Nevertheless, at the end of May Shedden tried to summarise the situation. He concluded:

> (i) It is evident from the manpower situation that the Australian war effort has reached saturation point.
>
> (ii) There is urgent need for the review of its nature, extent and balance, in the light of the present strategical situation and plans for future operations in the Southwest Pacific Area ...
>
> (iii) Additional commitments can only be undertaken at the expense of some other obligation ...
>
> (iv) The requirements of the United States Forces require close coordination with those of the Australian Forces so that the total position may be seen and plans prepared to ensure that the requirements of the Commander-in-Chief will be met in accordance with his operational needs. It is essential that demands for munitions should be submitted through the Australian Service Department concerned.
>
> (v) ... In order to ensure the preservation of balance in the Commonwealth's war effort, it is desired to discuss with the Commander-in-Chief whether it is possible to devise measures in respect of American proposals which will give the Australian Government a ... degree of reassurance in regard to the control of this aspect of the Australian war effort ... [in view of] the very large expenditure involved.[121]

---

119. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 2 June 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

120. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.296.

121. Memorandum prepared by Shedden, 30 May 1943, attached to Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane 25th to 31st May 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

Shedden discussed this memorandum with MacArthur, when he visited him in Brisbane in late May, and MacArthur urged that the AIF Corps should be kept to a strength of three divisions: 'Anything less would be incompatible with Australia's status and destiny as a Pacific Power and would not guarantee her the same voice in the Peace Councils, to which she should otherwise be entitled'. Here MacArthur struck a sympathetic chord, for Australian leaders were to express such a view on a number of occasions during the following year. MacArthur promised to present Curtin with a strategic appreciation which might make it possible for the demands for local defence to be reduced.[122]

Obviously Shedden was becoming concerned at the inactivity of the government, for a few days later (4 June) he wrote to MacArthur urging him to indicate in his strategic appreciation that the improvement in the security of Australia might allow a 'relatively small reduction to be made to the great number of men in the land forces'. To do so would furnish 'Mr Curtin a remedy for some of his problems which at present otherwise appear insoluble'.[123]

The discussions between Shedden and MacArthur during May culminating in the letter of 4 June, emphasise again the importance of Shedden's role, and support his proud claim that 'all higher policy questions dealt with' between Curtin and MacArthur passed through his hands.[124] Indeed in February Curtin had told Shedden that he was 'his right and left hand and head too',[125] and on 9 May he said that 'if the Government were successful [in the next elections] a large share of the credit would go to [Shedden who] had done most of the work on

---

122. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, South-west Pacific Area, Brisbane, 25th to 31st May 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

123. Letter, Shedden to MacArthur, 4 June 1943, RG 316, Box 71, National Archives.

124. Letter, Shedden to Brigadier-General C.A. Willoughby, 6 January 1945, MP 1217, Box 2068.

125. Shedden's Diary, 25 February 1943, MP 1217, Box 16.

the higher war policy'.[126] But if Shedden wants to claim that he had an important impact on higher policy, he must also be prepared to share some of the blame for any shortcomings in that policy.

When MacArthur met Curtin in Sydney on 7 June 1943, he began by assuring the Prime Minister that 'the threat of invasion to Australia had been removed'. There was, however, a risk of marauding raids which might cause considerable damage and loss. MacArthur then outlined his anticipated operations for the advance to Rabaul. Following the capture of Rabaul he planned to expel the Japanese from the whole of New Guinea before moving into the Philippines and then attacking Formosa. He added that these were his own ideas and that he was not aware of the intentions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

During the discussion MacArthur dealt with the problem of balancing Australia's war effort. He opposed Blamey's idea that the American forces should provide many of their own services, but he realised that Australia could not continue to provide troops, munitions, aircraft and food. The minutes of the conference recorded that:

> General MacArthur urged the Prime Minister that the AIF Corps of three divisions should be kept up to strength indefinitely, even at the expense of other formations. After the capture of Rabaul, an entirely new strategical situation would arise, as the Japanese would be forced back to Truk. Australia would no longer become the zone of operations, though the United Nations might still wish to continue to use it as a main base. At that stage Australia should resume a more reasonable and rational basis of national activity, more closely harmonised with its normal structure and post-war aims. It was important that the National effort must not be so devoted to war as to result in the Commonwealth being left behind in the post-war situation.
>
> The final phase for the defeat of Japan would be longer and it would require greater stamina and resources to last the distance. Australia should contribute land and air expeditionary forces to go forward with the other troops in

---

126. Shedden's Diary, 9 May 1943, *loc.cit.*

Curtin meets MacArthur at Sydney airport, 7 June 1943. MacArthur assured the Prime Minister that 'the threat of invasion to Australia had been removed'.

(AWM Negative No.52514)

Advisory War Council Meeting, Melbourne, 10 November 1943. Left to right, J.A. Beasley, H.V. Evatt, F.M. Forde, John Curtin, Sir Frederick Shedden and J.B. Chifley.

(AWM Negative No.139924)

> the United Nations, but at the same time the Commonwealth should be put in a position of security for the post war world situation.[127]

Thus MacArthur suggested that Australia should provide a maximum of military effort until Rabaul was captured. Then the Australian military commitment could be reduced to a land and air expeditionary force, enabling resources to be devoted to food production. In view of the improved strategic situation Curtin was anxious to reduce the strength of the land forces in Austalia. MacArthur was not happy for the force in northern Australia to be reduced but he felt that there was a large number of non-combat troops in Australia.[128] It can be seen therefore, that MacArthur went beyond advising Curtin on strategic policy for the SWPA Command, and offered direct comment on balancing the Australian war effort.

In his memoirs Shedden put a slightly different emphasis on this meeting to that described in his minutes. In his opinion MacArthur's advice 'was most helpful, even though as Commander-in-Chief, he could have been unduly demanding'. He thought MacArthur was sympathetic to Australia's position. When Curtin delicately enquired whether supplies to the US Forces could be reduced, MacArthur referred to the added burden this would apply to the inadequate trans-Pacific shipping. However, MacArthur acknowledged that the utlimate decision would remain with the Australian government.[129]

Three days after the conference Curtin released the following statement:

> The conclusions of President Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister for the prosecution of the war in the Pacific with the same vigor as the

---

127. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Sydney, 7 June 1943, Present, Curtin, MacArthur, Shedden, MP 1217, Box 2.

128. *Ibid.*

129. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 4, Chapter 56, p.4.

> war in Europe have ominous portents for the discomfiture of the Japanese.
>
> The holding war imposed on us under circumstances of great difficulty has been an obligation under global strategy which has been discharged. As in the case of Britain, we had a close call at one stage. The Battle of the Coral Sea was a deliverance and the return of the AIF enabled us to stop the Japanese advance in New Guinea just in time.
>
> I do not think the enemy can now invade this country. We have proved that,with the resources we have had, together with the command of the sea established by the gallant United States Navy by decisive victories at Midway Island and the Solomon Islands. We are not yet immune from marauding raids which may cause much damage and loss. I believe, however, that we can hold Australia as a base from which to launch both limited and major offensives against Japan. This conception must be the pattern to govern the nature and extent of Australia's war effort, as part of the plan of the United Nations in the Pacific.
>
> My discussions with General MacArthur were marked by the greatest degree of cordiality, as has always been the case. This country can feel very grateful to General MacArthur, who came here at a crucial time, and who has applied himself in such a distinguished way to ensuring the security of Australia as a base in order that the cause of the United Nations in the Pacific would not fail.[130]

Curtin's statement must be seen as a further and powerful debating point in the continuing discussions over the balance of the Australian war effort. MacArthur had been keen for Australia to provide the maximum number of troops and supplies, and had therefore been unwilling to admit to Curtin that Australia was now safe from the threat of invasion. Shedden had persuaded MacArthur that the country was unable to sustain its current war effort, and that for Curtin to alter the direction of the economy, MacArthur's authoritative support was needed. But MacArthur went beyond a mere statement that Australia was secure and sought to determine the balance of the war effort during the coming months.

---

130. Strategical Situation in Southwest Pacific Area - Prime Minister's Statement of 10th June, Advisory War Council Minute 1204, 16 June 1943, CRS A 2682, Vol.VII.

MacArthur might have suspected that such a reorganisation would take time to be determined and executed, and meanwhile he would have the full use of Australian resources. For the present these resources were vital. Now, after five months of relative inaction, relieved only by the gruelling and bloody battles of the 3rd Australian Division on the approaches to Salamaua, and the success of the airforce, MacArthur was about to embark on a new series of offensive operations in which Australians were to play a major part.

Blamey's Influence on Strategy

From as early as October 1942 General Blamey had sought to influence the strategic direction of the operations in New Guinea in 1943.[131] At that time his plans for landing troops in the Markham Valley had been premature, but throughout 1943 he made a number of significant attempts to guide allied strategy along what he considered to be logical lines.

As mentioned, in February 1943 MacArthur had prepared the Elkton plans for the capture of Rabaul. It is difficult to determine whether Blamey had much impact on the formulation of these plans, but certain facts are known. The first plan, Elkton I, envisaged a two pronged advance on Rabaul, with SWPA forces moving along the north coast of New Guinea to the western end of New Britian, and Halsey's South Pacific forces advancing northwards through the Solomons. The unoccupied islands of Kiriwina and Woodlark were to be captured to provide air bases.[132] Blamey was highly critical of this scheme which he thought 'entirely suited to the enemy's plans'; the Japanese would be able

---

131. On 18 October 1942 Blamey wrote to MacArthur and mentioned plans for landing Australian troops in the Markham Valley to capture Lae. Blamey Papers 43.611.

132. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.389.

to operate on interior lines. He advocated the elimination of the Woodlark-Kiriwina phase and a major attack on the Lae-Huon Peninsula area. From there, Gasmata on the south coast of New Britain or Cape Gloucester at the western end, could be seized, using forces otherwise earmarked for Woodlark and Kiriwina. Blamey also advocated the by-passing of Salamaua although preliminary operations against it might induce the Japanese to send in reinforcements, thus denuding other areas.[133]

Apparently, MacArthur did not completely agree with Blamey, for the Elkton II plan of 28 February detailed most of the features of Elkton I. However the Woodlark-Kiriwina phase was dropped and the new plan emphasised that the Huon Peninsula was to be secured before the attack through the Solomons.[134] But Blamey's minor success (if indeed the changes were due to him) was shortlived. At the Pacific Conference in March the Joint Chiefs limited MacArthur's objective to advancing to the Huon Peninsula, western New Britain and southern Bougainville. The capture of Woodlark and Kiriwina was again included in the plan.[135]

After discussions with Admiral Halsey, on 26 April MacArthur issued Elkton III. It was now planned that Halsey would begin landing on New Georgia at the same time as MacArthur moved into Woodlark and Kiriwina. For planning purposes it was stated that the operations, codenamed Cartwheel, would begin about 1 June. The attack on Lae was to take place two months later.[136]

Blamey's advice had therefore gone largely unheeded, and the orders issued by GHQ on 6 May 1943 made it clear that he was responsible

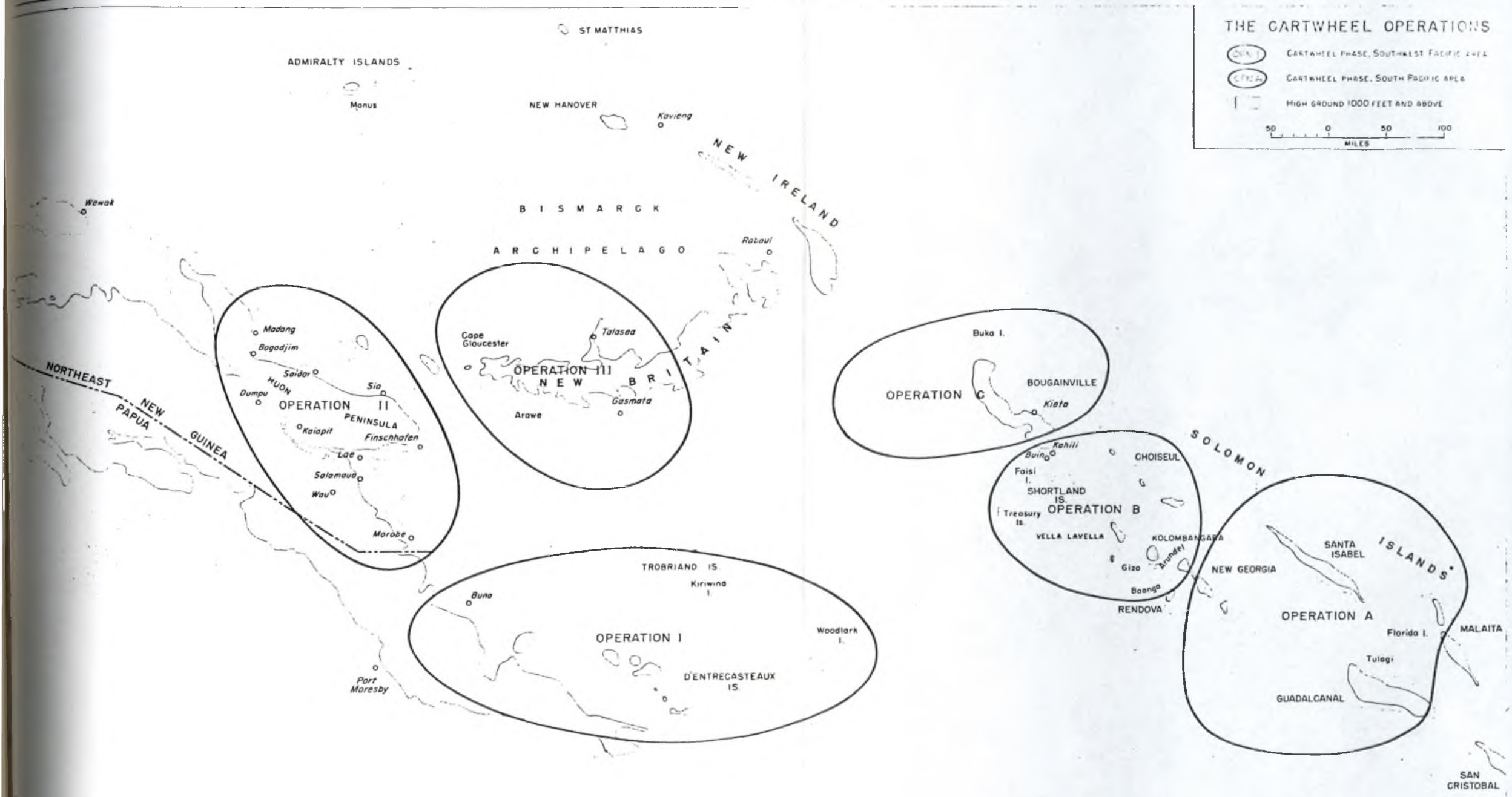
---

133. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 15 February 1943, and 'Alternative Proposal for Offensive Operations', 22 February 1943, AWM 515/5/5.

134. Elkton II, Appendix I to Morton, *op.cit.*

135. Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive, 28 March 1943, Appendix K, *ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*, pp.25-27.



MAP 6

From: Morton, *op.cit.*, inside back cover.

for the New Guinea Force operations only. Supported by allied air and naval forces, New Guinea Force was ordered to:

> (1) By airborne and overland operations through the Markham Valley and shore-to-shore operations westward along the north coast of New Guinea, seize Lae and Salamaua and secure in the Huon Peninsula-Markham Valley area, airdromes required for subsequent operations.
>
> (2) By similar operations, seize the north coast of New Guinea to include Madang; defend Madang in order to protect the northwest flank of subsequent operations to the eastward.[137]

It soon became apparent to Blamey and his planners that a further operation would be needed. Since the maximum range of the landing craft carrying troops for the assault on Lae was sixty miles, it was necessary to establish a shore base within that distance, and Blamey suggested Nassau Bay. Furthermore, its capture would ease the supply difficulties for the 3rd Australian Division advancing overland from Wau to Salamaua. MacArthur readily agreed to this plan, which would involve the use of an American regiment,[138] and it was to take place on 30 June, the same date as not only the landings on Kiriwina and Woodlark, but also Halsey's landing on New Georgia in the Solomons.

MacArthur had a further reason to welcome the Nassau Bay operation. During June Admiral King had become increasingly dissatisfied with the apparent lack of offensive activity; if MacArthur would not advance the navy would do so in the Central Pacific.[139] Thus MacArthur made the most of the landings in his area - Woodlark, Kiriwina and Nassau Bay. At least the American troops at Nassau Bay soon saw action, but the

---

137. GHQ Warning Instruction No.2, 6 May 1943, AWM 589/3/11.

138. Commander Allied Land Forces Report on New Guinea operations, 23 January 1943-13 September 1943, 16 March 1944, AWM 519/6/58.

139. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1945*, pp.186, 187.

Australians were particularly caustic about the Woodlark-Kiriwina operation.[140] After all, the Americans of Alamo Force who stormed ashore at the end of late June were not only met by their own advance party, which had been there since 23 June, but also by small detachments of Australians who had been there much longer. Indeed, it took the Japanese some time to discover that the islands had been captured.[141] Certainly the occupation of the islands enabled amphibious warfare doctrine and equipment to be tested, but as Samuel Morrison observed: 'Kiriwina and Woodlark never paid dividends on the investment of effort and material'.[142]

Blamey and the Australians could permit themselves a wry observation about the Kiriwina-Woodlark landings, but for the moment Blamey's attention was on the Salamaua operation. In February he had recommended that Salamaua should not be captured before the fall of Lae,[143] and MacArthur's plan, Elkton III had envisaged the capture of Salamaua six weeks after that of Lae. Blamey later summarised his plan:

> If, therefore, the enemy's attention could be concentrated on the operations for the capture of Salamaua there was every chance that he would drain his strength from Lae by reinforcing his

---

140. Letter, Northcott to General Smart, 28 July 1943, WO 106/3481. Blamey wrote in his memoirs that the capture of Woodlark 'was hailed as a fine operation of war by the news hungry. It was, in fact, one of the jokes of the war. There were no Japanese on the island and it was and had been occupied by a very small body of Australian troops for some time. It had the effect, however, of holding up material and vessels urgently required for the following operations against Lae'.

141. Matloff, *op.cit.*, p.193; Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.223.

142. Samuel E. Morison, *Breaking the Bismarck's Barrier, 22 July 1942-1 May 1944* (Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1968), p.134.

143. 'Alternative Proposal for Offensive Operations', 22 February 1943, AWM 515/5/5.

> forces south of Salamaua and that any discovery of further preparations on our part might lead him to believe that we we were preparing for heavier action against the latter area.[144]

This was the plan which Blamey carefully described to Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring who, as Commander New Guinea Force, was to act as his deputy during the planning of the coming operations. This was despite the fact that Blamey had been specifically charged with the responsibility for the operations. Clearly Herring was warned not to capture Salamaua; as he later wrote, Blamey 'wanted the operation against Salamaua to serve as a cloak for our operations against Lae, and to act as a magnet drawing reinforcements from Lae to that area'.[145]

But it did not work that simply. After the receipt of a letter from Herring's acting chief of staff, General Berryman, Blamey wrote to Herring stressing that Salamaua was not to be taken before Lae.[146] Herring replied that he had no intention of diverting from his original plan and that the poor wording of Berryman's letter had given the wrong impression.[147] Nevertheless Berryman had detected that something was amiss, and indeed General Savige, commanding the 3rd Division advancing on Salamaua, wrote later that he 'knew nothing about the use of Salamaua as a magnet to draw Japan forces from Lae'.[148] On the contrary, Savige thought that his mission was to attack Salamaua, or as Herring put

---

144. Commander Allied Land Forces Report on New Guinea operations, 23 January 1943 to 13 September 1943, 16 March 1944, AWM 519/6/58.

145. Report on Operations, New Guinea, 22 January-8 October 1943, by Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring, 17 January 1944, AWM 589/7/1. Herring received these instructions on 17 May 1943.

146. Letter, Blamey to Herring, 15 June 1943, AWM 591/7/21.

147.Letter, Herring to Blamey, 18 June 1943, Blamey Papers 170.2.

148. Comments on Official History, by Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Savige, Savige Papers, AWM.

it, 'there are indications that he rather went his own sweet way'.[149]

Then on 5 July MacArthur instructed Herring that he wanted Salamaua taken 'as early as possible', and offered Herring the use of the 162nd US Regiment to assist with its capture. Herring realised that in any event he could not capture Salamaua for some time and he wrote to Blamey requesting him to speak to MacArthur.[150] On 15 July Blamey tried to persuade MacArthur that Salamaua should not be captured,[151] but obviously he was not happy with MacArthur's reaction, for on 28 July he again raised the matter.[152] This time he was more successful and it was agreed that the attack would not 'be pressed to finality unless a favourable opportunity occurs to capture Salamaua but to be so conducted as not to prejudice, delay or divert troops' from the Lae operation.[153]

Obviously after the Nassau Bay landing MacArthur, and many others, had become carried away with the possibility of capturing Salamaua quickly. Indeed General Kenney claimed that Blamey would not use extra troops to attack Salamaua as it would involve the 7th and 9th Divisions, and then American troops would take over at Lae.[154] This was definitely not the case. Finally, afraid that things might get out of hand, Blamey's chief of staff, Berryman, who was acting as Herring's chief of staff,

---

149. Dexter, *op.cit.*, pp.73, 137. Letter, Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1952, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

150. *Ibid*, and letter, Herring to Blamey, 6 July 1943, Blamey Papers 170.2.

151. Notes of Conference, GHQ, 1700 hrs, 15 July 1943, Blamey Papers 43.632.

152. Berryman Diary, 28 July 1943, Berryman Papers.

153. Letter, Blamey to Herring, 30 July 1943, Blamey Papers 170.2.

154. Kenney, *op.cit.*, p.256.

Lieutenant-General Walter Krueger greeting General MacArthur at Milne Bay while directing the landings at Kiriwina and Woodlark, but the operation 'never paid dividends on the investment of effort and material'.

(AWM Negative No.15248)

Lieutenant-General Herring and General MacArthur in Port Moresby, July 1943. MacArthur told Herring to take Salamaua 'as early as possible'.

(AWM Negative No.15194)

visited Savige on 19 August to ensure that Salamaua was not captured before the Lae operation.[155]

After the success of the Lae operation in early September MacArthur was quick to accept credit for the effective role of the troops before Salamaua. Indeed his *Reports* imply that it was his idea to delay the capture.[156] But Berryman saw things differently and on 4 September 1943 he wrote in his diary:

> The landing was a surprise and effected without opposition - a vindication of C-in-C [Blamey] and my judgment in adhering to plan to bypass Salamaua. Herring and [Fifth U.S. Air Force] wanted to alter plan and take out Salamaua - that would have ruined surprise and spoilt the manoeuvre. I was surprised at Herring after having agreed to our plan, being so easily swayed from it by 5 AF.[157]

Blamey summed up the incident another way: 'The greatest pressure was put on me to force the Salamaua position but I was lucky enough to stick to my plan to bypass Salamaua before' the capture of Lae.[158] In this case he can properly claim to have had an important influence on allied strategy.

---

155. Comments on *Official History*, Savige Papers. On 29 July 1943 Herring wrote to Savige: 'your role is still first of all to drive the enemy north of the Francisco River. The capture of Salamaua is of course devoutly to be wished but no attempt upon it is to be allowed to interfere with the major operation being planned'. Savige claimed that he showed this letter to his two senior staff officers, but no one at HQ 3 Division realised that Salamaua was not to be captured before the fall of Lae. On 15 July 1943 Herring had signalled Savige: 'You can and I know you will drive the enemy over the Francisco River'. NGF War Diary, April 1943, AWM 1/5/51. On 20 September 1943 Berryman wrote in his diary: 'I am wondering if Herring is tired or too easily influenced. Examples causing me to doubt are: (i) 24 July he pressed me to support the view that we should capture Sal. before the Lae op ...'

156. *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.I, p.121.

157. Berryman Diary, 4 September 1943.

158. Letter, Blamey to General Sturdee, 16 September 1943, Blamey Papers 6.1.

The planning for the Lae operation throughout June, July and August 1943 brought to light a number of fundamental differences between the American and Australian modes of operation. These differences are discussed in the chapter dealing with problems of battlefield cooperation, but American disquiet over Australian planning was the starting point for another disagreement over strategy.

Part of Blamey's instructions had been to 'seize the north coast of New Guinea to include Madang'.[159] In accordance with Australian practice Blamey had merely given orders for the Lae phase of the operation, believing that there was little point in planning for an assault on Madang until the Japanese reaction to the Lae offensive could be determined. GHQ believed that a plan should be prepared to allow the 'timely concentration of troops and supplies' and on 15 August ordered Blamey to prepare a plan for the seizure of Madang.[160]

Blamey immediately put his Chief of Staff, Berryman, to work to prepare an appreciation,[161] but in the meantime MacArthur wrote to Blamey pointing out that the New Guinea Force orders 'remain silent as to the consolidation of the Huon Peninsula including the seizure of Finschhafen'. He therefore ordered Blamey to produce an outline plan 'at the earliest practicable date'.[162]

The Australians still failed to prepare a plan for the capture of Madang, but Berryman argued in his appreciation that the Australians should strike northwest from Lae up the Markham Valley and into the Ramu Valley. The coastwise operation to secure Finschhafen would be

---

159. GHQ Warning Instruction No.2, 6 May 1943, AWM 589/3/11.

160. Memorandum, Sutherland to Blamey, 15 August 1943, AWM 589/3/9.

161. Berryman Diary, 31 August 1943, Berryman Papers.

162. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey, 30 August 1943, AWM 423/11/209, also Blamey Papers 43.632.

determined by events at Lae. To attack Madang without securing the western end of New Britain or intermediate points at Sio or Saidor would be hazardous. He concluded:

> It is not practicable to prepare a detailed plan for operations beyond the capture of Lae and the Markham Valley at this stage ... The region Madang-Finschhafen-Cape Gloucester is the centre of the enemy's present line. It would be over optimistic to anticipate that he will not react vigorously to the attack in Lae and the Markham Valley which threatens the very centre of his position. If he does so react any detailed plan would have to be recast.[163]

On 31 August Blamey forwarded this appreciation to MacArthur with a covering letter urging 'a most careful consideration of the relative merits of the seizure of the areas covering both sides of the Vitiaz Straits before pushing forward the operations up the coast of New Guinea'. Once that was achieved allied forces could move either northwest or northeast.[164] Blamey's proposals were carefully examined by MacArthur's operations staff, who had to agree that 'The conclusions expressed merit careful consideration'. Furthermore, Blamey's plan appeared to be the only one so far proposed which could be executed in 1943.[165] On 1 September Blamey tried to persuade MacArthur, and the Commander of the Allied Naval Forces, Admiral Carpender,to accept his plan, and it was agreed to decide the matter at a conference on 3 September.[166] Blamey was confident that his views would be accepted and wrote to General Herring: 'I think I have somewhat shaken the belief in the idea that we had to continue along the New Guinea coast'.[167]

---

163. Operations for the Capture of Madang, 31 August 1943, Berryman Papers, Staff Appreciation: Lae.

164. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 31 August 1943, Berryman Papers. Extracts of this letter, and of the Appreciation can be found in AWM 599/3/3.

165. Memorandum, Brigadier-General S.J. Chamberlin to Major-General R.K. Sutherland, 3 September 1943, AWM 594/3/3.

166. Berryman Diary, 1 September 1943.

167. Letter, Blamey to Herring, 1 September 1943, Blamey Papers, 170.2.

At eight o'clock on the evening of 3 September 1943 the 7th Amphibious Fleet carrying troops of the 9th Division was steaming along the Papuan coast bound for the dawn landing at Lae.[168] At the Markham River the 24th Battalion was preparing to attack Markham Point as a curtain-raiser to the airborne assault on Nadzab.[169] In Port Moresby Generals MacArthur, Sutherland, Chamberlin, Kenney, Whitehead, Blamey and Berryman, Admiral Carpender and Captain Steinhagen (USN), were meeting to discuss the operations to follow the capture of Lae.

Blamey began by emphasising the views expressed in his appreciation. Kenney followed by supporting Blamey. Indeed he went further and suggested an airborne advance 200 miles up the Ramu Valley. Admiral Carpender was still keen to advance along the New Guinea coast before an attack on Cape Gloucester, although it would not be necessary to go as far as Madang. General MacArthur appeared to support Carpender, but after further discussion he was eventually persuaded to accept Blamey's view. Thus it was agreed that an airfield would be secured at Dumpu in the Ramu Valley by 1 November, providing Kenney with a base to give air cover for simultaneous operations against Saidor and Cape Gloucester probably on 1 December.[170]

Blamey then attempted to push his luck, and suggested that the 6th Australian Division (of two brigades) should take over the American role and attack Cape Gloucester.[171] Chamberlin pointed out that with the 7th and 9th Divisions Blamey might not have sufficient troops to conduct the operations at Lae, Dumpu and Finschhafen, but Blamey proposed to use the 4th, 6th and 7th militia brigades if necessary. The Americans opposed

---

168. Dexter, *op.cit.*, pp.328, 329.

169. *Ibid.*, pp.341-343.

170. Memorandum for file, by General Chamberlin, no date, AWM 594/3/3, and Notes of Conference on 'Dayton' at Adv GHQ, 2000 hrs, 3 September 1943.

171. Memorandum for file, AWM 594/3/3.

this plan since to use the brigades would strip Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Oro Bay of garrison troops.[172] Blamey suggested that American troops could relieve the Australians in base areas,[173] but MacArthur, of course, had no intention of allowing the Australians to execute all his offensive operations and he said that there would be no change to the decision that Alamo Force would conduct the operations against western New Britain.[174] General Berryman concluded his notes of the conference with the comment that 'General MacArthur then gave us a lecture on a naval strategy for the Pacific'.[175]

It can be observed that throughout 1943 Blamey was not only responsible for the tactical and strategic direction of the Australian forces, but on a number of occasions was able to alter the strategy laid down by GHQ. The conference on 3 September described above was, however, the last occasion on which he attempted to act as the Allied Land Forces Commander. There can be no doubt that Blamey's influence can be attributed directly to the important part played by the Australian forces, but it was already becoming obvious that MacArthur had every intention of reducing substantially the Australian involvement in offensive operations. Thus on 7 October MacArthur spoke of creating two commands in the southwest Pacific. One command would consist of Australian land, naval and air forces and would be responsible for an area south of Madang. The other all-American command would be involved in the advance along the north coast of New Guinea to the Philippines,

---

172. Memorandum, Chamberlin to Sutherland, 3 September 1943, AWM 594/3/3.
173. Letter, Herring to Blamey, 3 September 1943, Blamey Papers, 170.2.
174. Memorandum for file, AWM 594/3/3.
175. Notes of Conference on 'Dayton', Berryman Papers.

MacArthur would command the American force and exercise strategic supervision over the Australian force.[176]

Nothing came of this plan, but on 20 October GHQ issued RENO III, the plan for the operations culminating in the capture of the southern Philippines.[177] In five phases of operations beginning on 1 February 1944 and ending with the attack on Mindanao on 1 February 1945 the Australians were allocated an offensive role in part of only one phase, namely the occupation of islands in the Arafura Sea in June 1944.[178] No evidence has been discovered to indicate what Curtin thought of this plan, but during this period his mind was concerned more with balancing the war effort, that with critically analysing MacArthur's strategic plans.

Divergence of Views

During the latter half of 1943 the Australian government continued its efforts to reconcile the various claims on Australian manpower. On the one hand there was the argument that Australia had done enough fighting and that her role should be, as Curtin said in November 1943, that of the 'hewer of wood and carrier of water'.[179] In short, Australia's main task should be to supply her allies with food and munitions. On the other hand there was the belief that Australia's post-war influence in the Pacific would depend on the amount of fighting undertaken by her

---

176. G3 Journal 7 October 1943, Notes of Discussion between MacArthur and Halsey, AWM 519/1/4.

177. At the Quadrant Conference at Quebec in August 1943 the Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided to permit Nimitz to begin an offensive in the Central Pacific and MacArthur to continue his offensive operations in the SWPA. The CCS instructions did not say 'anything about the Philippines, but disapproved of the plans to take Rabaul'. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.520. Ehrman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, p.14.

178. Summary of RENO III, Appendix 8 of Morton, *op.cit.*.

179. F.T. Smith Reports, 17 November 1943.

troops during the last years of the war. The problem was not whether to undertake either of these two course; by mid 1943 both courses were being purused vigorously despite the fact that it was obvious that the economy could not sustain the effort. The problem was rather to determine which of these activities should be drastically reduced.

Curtin's statement in June that Australia was safe from invasion paved the way for the consideration of these important decisions and on 13 July 1943 he presented the War Cabinet with his views on the governing principles. He began by stating that the danger of invasion had decreased, and that 'the nature, extent and balance of Australia's war effort' was due for review. He said that the adjustments had to 'be governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy of' General MacArthur, and 'by the physical capacity of the Commonwealth to complete the programmes within the requisite time'.

In essence Curtin gave notice that all aspects of the war effort were to be closely scrutinised, but for a start, he recommended that the navy should be maintained at its existing strength; the army should provide three infantry divisions for offensive operations and 'adequate forces for defence of Australia and New Guinea and for relief of units in New Guinea'. The air force should be maintained 'at the strength authorised under the 72 squadron programme to the extent to which aircraft can be provided'.[180] Manpower considerations were to govern the final size of the forces, and also the provision of munitions, other supplies, works and essential services.[181] The War Cabinet agreed to adopt these rules as principles.[182]

---

180. At times the programme mentioned 71, 72 and 73 squadrons. The different figures depended on whether certain squadrons in the Middle East were included.

181. War Cabinet Agendum, 311/1943. The Australian War Effort, 10 July 1943, CRS A 2671, item 311/1943. Presented to War Cabinet 13 July 1943, Minute 2968. *loc.cit.*

182. War Cabinet Minute 2968, 13 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

Later during the War Cabinet meeting the Defence Committee recommended that MacArthur might be asked to provide Americans to relieve Australians of some of the maintenance services and work projects they were carrying out on behalf of United States forces. This had been the theme of Blamey's letter to Curtin of 2 June 1943,[183] and the War Cabinet decided that representations should be made to MacArthur.[184]

Curtin had already sent MacArthur a copy of War Cabinet Agendum 311/1943 outlining the principles governing the extent and nature of Australia's war effort,[185] and despite the Cabinet decision to approach MacArthur again, Curtin hesitated to do so.[186] Meanwhile Forde, the Minister for the Army, had been studying Agendum 311/1943, and he observed that although it embodied the principles arising from Curtin's discussions with MacArthur, it did 'not deal specifically with the problem referred to in General Blamey's letter' of 2 June, namely the problem of services being provided by Australians to the American forces.[187] Forde had arranged for enquiries to be made in England, and these had revealed that British authorities were encountering similar problems with the Americans.[188] Thus on 31 July Forde wrote to Curtin that this further information added weight to Blamey's recommendations.[189]

---

183. See p.277.

184. War Cabinet Minute 2969, 13 July 1943, CRS A 2671, item 100/1943, Supplement 1.

185. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 13 July 1943, CRS A 2671, item 311/1943.

186. On 21 July Shedden forwarded an amended version of Agendum 311/1943 to MacArthur, but there was no mention of the matter of services provided to the American forces.

187. Letter, Forde to Curtin, 31 July 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

188. Cable LM 2047, Smart to Wynter, 24 June 1943, *loc.cit.*

189. Letter, Forde to Curtin, 31 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

Spurred by Forde's letter, on 5 August Curtin wrote to MacArthur and stressed Australia's manpower difficulties. He raised the possibility of American personnel undertaking maintenance and works projects currently provided from Australian resources, where an Army might normally provide these services from its own resources, and asked for MacArthur's views.[190]

MacArthur replied on 24 August and stated that he should like to make his forces independent of civilian services, 'but such a result could be achieved only at considerable cost to the military effectiveness of my command'. If additional service and maintenance personnel were brought from America without an increase in shipping then less combat troops could be sent. The alternative would be for Australia to provide additional combat troops, but he understood that there was not sufficient surplus manpower in Australia to permit such an increase.[191]

Curtin did not immediately dispute the facts as outlined by MacArthur, and on 3 September told him that the provision of Australian resources was 'one of broad policy' to be considered 'on the basis of the principles governing the nature and extent of the Australian War Effort'. He promised to keep MacArthur informed.[192] Curtin's reply was therefore non-committal, but MacArthur's chief of staff, General Sutherland, was in no doubt about the meaning of Curtin's letter. At the bottom he pencilled a comment for the commander of the US Army Services of Supply in Australia: 'Gen. Marshall, Aussie demobilization!'[193]

---

190. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 5 August 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

191. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 24 August 1943, *loc.cit.*

192. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 3 September 1943, *loc.cit.*

193. Comments on letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 3 September 1943, RG 316, Box 72, National Archives. Major-General R.J. Marshall was Commanding General, US Army Services of Supply in Australia.

The government now realised that, if the question raised with MacArthur were to be carried further, it would have to gather the necessary manpower statistics.[194] But it was not until 21 September, four weeks after the receipt of MacArthur's reply, that Curtin forwarded a copy to Blamey. Furthermore, he did not ask for Blamey's comment.[195] Nevertheless, on 27 September Blamey informed Curtin of the difficulties being experienced in restricting American demands.[196]

On 30 September Shedden produced a detailed review of the manpower situation based on information received from the War Commitments Committee and the Defence Committee.[197] This document was presented to the War Cabinet by Curtin the following day, and it was accepted as a statement of government policy.[198] The policy did not, however, indicate a fundamental change in direction, but rather a slight shift in emphasis, and it represented Shedden's own attempt to compromise between the various demands on manpower. Indeed on 2 October Shedden

---

194. Memorandum, A.J. Wilson, Assistant Secretary, Department of Defence, to Shedden, 31 August 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

195. Letter, Curtin to Blamey, 21 September 1943, *loc.cit.* MacArthur's letter of 24 August had been received that same day since it had been sent from Brisbane to Canberra by teletype.

196. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 27 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 4.

197. A Review of the Nature, Extent and Balance of the War Effort in the Light of the Manpower Position, signed by Curtin, 30 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 305.

198. War Cabinet Minute 2065, 1 October 1943, CRS A 2671, item 389/1943.

felt compelled to tell the Prime Minister that his department had produced most of the recommendations.[199]

The War Cabinet agreed with the proposition that by June 1966 20,000 men should be relased from the Services, 10,000 men should be released from munitions and aircraft industries, and that the monthly intake into the Services should be fixed by 5,000 men and women. But apart from the fact that it was decided to 'stabilise' the RAAF at its 'present strength' in Australia at 48 squadrons, rather than attempt to expand to 73 squadrons, there was no commitment to reducing substantially the forces fighting in the South-West Pacific Area. The minute reads, in part, as follows:

---

199. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 2 October 1943, MP 1217, Box 305. Shedden wrote that 'three major recommendations were made by the War Commitments Committee which were adopted by War Cabinet, none by the Defence Committee and eighteen by the Defence Department. Though publicity cannot be given to these facts, it is nevertheless important that the precise position should be fully understood in fairness to the Staff who have rendered such able assistance'. On 27 October 1943 Shedden wrote to Captain L.S. Bracegirdle, the Military and Official Secretary to the Governor General: 'I must confess that I am the author of the documents, but I do so only to allay any misgiving on your part that you might have unwittingly attributed to me the authorship of the words of some other person. As a matter of private information, you might be interested to know that we had voluminous reports from the War Commitments Committee and the Defence Committee and certain interested Departments which presented varied and conflicting views, and a first class problem as to the solution. I am glad to say, however, that the Defence Department, in the usual anonymous and unpublicised manner, was able to indicate a way out of the maze'. MP 1217, Box 48.

> War Cabinet reviewed the commitments overseas which had been entered into by Australia in respect of land, sea and air forces before the occurrence of the war in the Pacific. The following principles were affirmed:
> (a) It is of vital importance to the future of Australia and her status at the peace table in regard to the settlement in the Pacific that her *military effort* should be on a scale to guarantee her an effective voice in the peace settlement.
> (b) If necessary, the extent of this effort should be maintained at the expense of commitments in other theatres. In the interests of Australia and the British Empire in the Pacific, it is imperative that this view should be accepted by the United Kingdom and the other Dominions especially New Zealand and Canada.[200]

The official historian, Paul Hasluck, described this as 'a new and opportunistic principle', pointing out that till now, the security of Australia and limits on manpower had governed the Australian war effort. He continued: 'This new idea that the war effort was an admission ticket to a peace conference was perhaps not novel in itself, but on this occasion it would almost seem as though the admission ticket was being confused with the currency with which it had to be purchased'.[201] Hasluck seems to be implying that the government had developed the principle to justify one of the ways they hoped to reduce manpower expenditure, while at the same time justifying the use of that manpower elsewhere.[202]

---

200. War Cabinet Minute 3065, 1 October 1943, Canberra.

201. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, pp.301, 302.

202. Clearly Hasluck felt restrained by his role of official historian from criticising the government too strongly. More recently he has written that with 'four or five outstanding exceptions, its ministers were not highly competent or efficient and the ministry itself was often irresolute in crisis and, as some of its best ministers found, it was hesitant in coming to grips with a major problem (for example, manpower in 1943 and 1944 and the struggle for resources between civilian and military authorities)'. *Diplomatic Witness*,, p.159.

The economic historians, Butlin and Schedvin, were more precise in their criticism, pointing out that the government was faced with a clear choice as expressed by the Director-General of Manpower, Wallace Wurth:

> (a) relieve the Services of responsibility for some of the commitments on which their estimates are based, and/or
> (b) endorse a further regulation of the civilian economy, together with failure to a substantial extent to meet the British and Allied requirements [of food and materials].[203]

To Butlin and Schedvin, the 'War Cabinet had chosen a suit of the same colour and style but one size smaller: it had ducked choosing between Wurth's clear-cut alternatives'.[204] The maximum possible offensive deployment was to be maintained.

While there is much truth in the views of the official historians, they do not link directly the government's prevarication to the advice tendered by MacArthur to Shedden in May and Curtin in June. Yet MacArthur had used terms almost identical to those now enunciated as government policy, and in July Curtin had stated that the Australian war effort would be 'governed by operational considerations determined by the strategical policy' of General MacArthur.[205]

A cynic might observe that while MacArthur claimed that it was in Australia's interest to provide a substantial striking force, already by October he was making plans to reduce the Australian offensive role.[206]

---

203. War Cabinet Agendum 374/1943, CRS A 2671, item 379/1943.
204. Butlin and Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.365.
205. War Cabinet Agendum 311/1943, 13 July 1943, CRS A 2671, item 311/1943.
206. See pp.292, 293.

Nevertheless, the Australian defence chiefs were in no doubt that Australia should continue to provide a substantial military commitment. Thus on 12 July Blamey warned Curtin that 'any reduction in the strength of the striking forces below three divisions [would] greatly weaken Australia's place in determining the future 'and that such a reduction was 'most undesirable in the national interest'.[207] On 27 September Blamey told Curtin that the operations in New Britain would be by American forces 'to strengthen a claim to retain New Britain in the post war settlement'.[208]

Blamey's views were expressed by the Defence Committee in its report to the War Cabinet,[209] and as a result the government's policy statement of 1 October included the paragraph that MacArthur was to be informed of:

> limits to which commitments can be accepted by the Commonwealth Government for United States Service requirements and of the alternative choices which such limits impose.[210]

Furthermore, Blamey believed that MacArthur's argument in his letter to Curtin of 24 August should not go unchallenged, and on 5 October he wrote in strong terms to the Prime Minister. He agreed with MacArthur's assertion that Australia could not provide additional combat forces, but pointed out that if the Americans continued to send combat forces without maintenance personnel then Australia would have to disband further combat formations. He continued:

---

207. Memorandum, Blamey to Forde and Curtin, 12 July 1943, CRS A 816, item 31/301/274.

208. Minutes of Prime Minister's War Conference, Canberra, 27 September 1943, MP 1217, Box 4.

209. Review by Defence Committee of the Strength and Composition of the Services and the Munition and Works Programme, 15 September 1943, CRS A 2671, 389/1943.

210. War Cabinet Minute 3065, 1 October 1943, *loc.cit.*

> The issue which has arisen is that General MacArthur has been asked to relieve us of a burden which is causing a reduction in our forces, and in reply takes the view that not only should the burden continue to be borne but that it should be increased.

Blamey advised that since MacArthur was disinclined to respond to Curtin's request, then the Prime Minister should take up the matter with the US government.[211] In reply Curtin said that he would be writing again to MacArthur, and in the meantime requested Blamey to provide information on the number of Australian army personnel performing maintenance and other services for the Americans.[212]

On 8 October Curtin sent an important cable to Churchill setting out the government's decision, and seeking the British reaction.[213] But he did not immediately write to MacArthur. Blamey's argument, however, seemed unchallengeable, and Curtin was receiving other evidence to support the suspicion of ulterior American motives.[214] On 22 October Curtin complained to a visiting UK Press Delegation that the Americans were using their preponderance in fighting troops with a view to post-war commercial interests. 'We keep on getting people out here', said Curtin, 'with letters saying they are President Roosevelt's personal representatives, who seem to be spying out the land'.[215]

---

211. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 5 October 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

212. Letter, Curtin to Blamey, 25 October 1943, *loc.cit.*

213. Cable 267, Curtin to Churchill, 8 October 1943, CRS 680, item 35/1943, file No.1.

214. F.T. Smith Reports, 6 September 1943. Curtin said he was aware of US commercial and economic claims in the Southwest Pacific. On 4 March 1943 the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted the US Secretary of the Navy, Colonel Knox as saying: 'We are fighting for a common cause and expended our own money on these bases. I imagine that Americans at the Peace table will make out a very strong case for retention of those bases'. Cutting in CRS A 989, item 43/235/202, Part 2.

215. Notes on talk between Sir Walter Layton and Curtin, 22 October 1943, PREM 3 159/2. On 13 July 1943 the *Argus* reported: 'In the opinion of *Chicago Tribune*, owned by Colonel McCormick, the British territory in the Pacific,will, when it is reconquered from the Japanese by US troops, become US property'. Cutting in the Shedden Papers, MP 1217, Box 2068. See also Thorne, *op.cit.*, p.367.

On the other hand Curtin found it difficult to distrust MacArthur, and commented: 'If he had been born in Australia and gone to Duntroon he could not have shown a higher concern for Australia's interests'.[216] Nonetheless by the end of October Curtin was displaying agitation over the lack of positive action by the Americans.[217]

On 1 November 1943 Curtin wrote a long letter to MacArthur informing him that the navy would remain unchanged; the army would consist of three infantry divisions and an armoured brigade for offensive operations plus garrison forces; the airforce would be set at 49 squadrons. The manpower problems were described, but in particular he repeated Blamey's arguments that the arrival of US combat forces without their own maintenance units would aggravate Australia's already criticial manpower position. He said that specific proposals would be submitted as soon as they had been worked out.[218]

MacArthur replied promptly on 6 November and clearly he was dissatisfied with Curtin's plans. He had read Curtin's report 'with some anxiety' and in direct language he criticised three particular aspects. First, he was critical of Australia sending food to Britain if that resulted in a reduction of the supply to his own forces. Second, if Australian civilians could not undertake works for the US forces, and if American civilians were imported, they too would be a drain on the economy of the country. Third, although he was endeavouring to have US service troops brought from America, he opposed the policy that each force must be able to operate separately. MacArthur told Curtin that

---

216. *Ibid.*

217. For example on 29 October 1943 Shedden wrote to MacArthur: 'The Prime Minister is becoming somewhat agitated over the absence of a reply from you', concerning the need for a Cairns transhipment point. Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian Government.

218. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 1 November 1943, CP 290/16, item bundle 1; also CRS A 2680, item 35/43 Part 2.

his 'proposed solutions [were] fraught with grave potentialities of danger to the military effort ... They could not fail to endanger the basic cooperation between our countries.[219]

For once Curtin was not to be brow-beaten by MacArthur and in a strong letter on 13 November refuted MacArthur's claims. He pointed out that the 'extent of the demands from the United Kingdom for food supplies from Australia [was], in fact, due to reductions in deliveries from the United States'. He offered, however, to take up the question with Churchill and Roosevelt. As for the other questions, Curtin reminded MacArthur that the 'principles covered by the decisions communicated to you are, of course, matters for the Australian Government', but offered to discuss them with MacArthur.[220] MacArthur seemed to realise that Curtin was on firm ground, and accepted the suggestion for a meeting at a suitable time:

> I shall, as always, present my view to you as frankly and earnestly as I am able, but my loyalty to the execution of a final decision will not be dependent upon whether it agrees with my own opinion or not.[221]

Curtin was still not satisfied. On the one hand the bureaucracy seemed unable to conform to the directive of 1 October, prompting Shedden to write a number of urgent minutes to Curtin.[222] On the other hand the Defence Committee could not provide exact figures until they knew the strategic and operational plan,[223] and this was a matter for MacArthur.

---

219. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 6 November 1943. *loc.cit.*

220. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 13 November 1943, *loc.cit.*

221. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 16 November 1943, MP 1217, Box 306.

222. Letter, Shedden to Curtin, 20 November 1943, MP 1217, Box 305. On 21 December Shedden sent a memorandum to Curtin warning him that 'after three months' delay, you are going to carry the responsibility for deciding what can be released from the munitions and aircraft' industries. *loc.cit.*

223. Report by Major-General R.H. Dewing, 18 November 1943, WO 106/4839.

On 22 November, after a discussion with Blamey, Curtin wrote to MacArthur:[224]

> The splendid progress of your operations has been the subject of some thought on my part and discussion by the Government in relation to your future plans and the area of employment of the Australian Forces which have been assigned to you ...
>
> Australia ... has a special interest in the employment of its own forces in the operations for the ejection of the enemy from territory under its administration. furthermore, it is essential that the Government should be at least broadly aware of your ideas for the employment of the Australian Forces in any areas outside Australia and mandated territory, and of what you may contemplate in regard to operations affecting the latter areas ...
>
> Although, by the most complete cooperation on your part, there has never been any need to refer to the documentary basis which governs your relationship to the Australian Government, you will be aware that the position under the setup in the Southwest Pacific Area [is so governed] ...
>
> I would greatly appreciate advice of prospective plans in regard to the use of the Australian land forces, in order that the Australian Government may consider their contemplated use.
>
> It is, of course, unnecessary for me to add that this request is not prompted by any desire to interfere in any way with your conduct of operations, or to participate in the formulation of plans. The Australian Government has at all times had the utmost confidence in your handling of these matters, and is deeply appreciative of the remarkable results you have achieved with the limited resources at your disposal. My present request arises solely from the responsibility to the Australian people which must be exercised by myself and the Australian Government.[225]

MacArthur replied that the desirability and necessity of Curtin being informed of operational plans was 'self evident' and agreed to give him details at a meeting six days later.

---

224. Letter, Curtin to Blamey, 22 November 1943, Blamey Papers 5.1. MacArthur's account in *Reminiscences*, p.181 of the reasons why Curtin wrote the letter do not seem to be correct. For one thing, Curtin had not yet undertaken his overseas trip, as claimed by MacArthur.

225. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 22 November 1943, Blamey Papers 5.1.

226. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 24 November 1943, MP 1217, Box 570.

MacArthur met Curtin in Brisbane on 30 November, and began by reviewing the current and prospective operations.[227] He said that General Sutherland had gone to Washington to place his plans before the Americans and Combined Chiefs of Staff, and then gone on to the Cairo conference between Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-Shek. He had not yet heard the result of these meetings.

The question which concerned Curtin, however, was the employment of the Australian forces. MacArthur mentioned the possibility of 'an Australian advance to clear the islands to the west of New Guinea as far as Amboina'. The question was not pursued since Curtin thought that 'he was not in a position to raise any query' and he would await advice from General Blamey.

The discussion then turned to Australia's manpower problems and balancing the economy. Although MacArthur had opposed Curtin's suggestions in vigorous letters to the Prime Minister on 24 August and 6 November, by 16 November he had indicated that he would loyally abide by the government's decision. He now told Curtin 'that he accepted absolutely that it was for the Australian Government to decide the nature and extent of its war effort'. The only point which MacArthur still wished to challenge was that of Australia sending food to the United Kingdom rather than to the American forces. Curtin reminded MacArthur that the USA had not fulfilled her contract to supply Britain, and there were other

---

227. The account of the conversation is taken from Notes of Discussions with the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Brisbane, 29th November to 1st December 1943 [prepared by Shedden], MP 1217, Box 2. Obviously the official historian was not fully informed when he wrote that there did 'not appear to be any formal record of the conversation'. He also is in error when he states that Curtin's letter of 22 November suggested a conversation; in fact the letter of 13 November first suggested the need for a meeting. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.415. These errors may well have been caused by Shedden, for in response to a series of questions from Gavin Long concerning the discussions between Curtin, MacArthur and Blamey at the end of 1943, he wrote that 'much was left to the verbal exchange of views'. Letter, Shedden to Long, 19 November 1954, MP 1217, Box 570.

considerations such as the maintenance of a market and the effect on Australia's sterling resources. MacArthur suggested that Curtin should 'cover himself against American criticism' by putting the matter to Churchill. Curtin assured MacArthur that whatever shape the Australian war effort might take, it would be the maximum of which Australian was capable.

Thus MacArthur provided Curtin with little information about the employment of Australian forces, but accepted, as inevitably he had to, the Australian government's right to decide the shape of the country's war effort. Soon after the conference Curtin released a press statement stating that MacArthur had 'expressed his full agreement with the general principles laid down by the Government',[228] but in a broadcast Curtin showed that he was still under MacArthur's spell: he concluded by saying:

> I am indebted to General MacArthur for the high statesmanship and breadth of world vision he has contributed to the discussion. The complete integration of our concepts, which has been a source of such strength in the past, will continue to the end.

These last two sentences had been written by MacArthur, who had requested Curtin to add them to his statement.[229]

Meanwhile Shedden remained in Brisbane for further private discussions, and MacArthur took the opportunity to criticise what he considered to be the top-heavy organisation of the Australian army.[230] Shedden then questioned him about Blamey's performance as Commander of the Allied Land

---

228. Notes of Discussions with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 24th November to 1st December 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

229. The statement is reproduced in MacArthur *Reminiscences*, p.183. Evidence in the Shedden Papers, MP 1217, Box 2037 shows that the statement was written by MacArthur and sent by teleprinter to Curtin.

230. The account of this meeting is from Notes of Discussion between Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, and Secretary, Department of Defence, Brisbane, 2 December 1943 [prepared by Shedden], MP 1217, Box 3.

Forces. MacArthur said that he now saw little of Blamey, 'because the latter was trying to do too many things', and he only went to New Guinea as 'a Task Commander when special operations were afoot'. As a result, MacArthur said that he himself had had to take personal command of all major operations. He added that Blamey had originated the suggestion for the appointment of task force commanders for operations by the Land Forces.

It is difficult to believe that MacArthur was completely sincere over this question; since arriving in Australia he had worked assiduously to separate the Australian and American forces. Possibly Blamey had mentioned the advantage of using task forces, but they would have been under his command as the Land Forces commander. It has already been shown that General Krueger was brought to Australia with the express purpose of removing Blamey from command of American forces. Blamey's dual role gave MacArthur the opportunity to claim, with some justification, that the Australian general was too busy to perform his duties as Commander, Allied Land Forces.[231] It should be noted, however, that when Blamey had sought to ease his burden as Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army by appointing Northcott as his deputy, the government, after advice from MacArthur, had denied his request.[232]

---

231. MacArthur's attitude at this time is revealed by comments in Gavin Long's Diary, Sydney, 31 December 1943 (No.4, p.4): 'At the press conference at GHQ at which the New Britain landing was announced, Col Diller [MacArthur's Public Relations Officer] read out to correspondents the names of a list of generals and admirals whose names could be mentioned in the account of the operations. The list included no Australians except Admiral Crutchley [who was in fact British]. Dixon Brown, the English correspondent, said: But can't General Blamey's name be mentioned? Isn't he C-in-C of the Allied Land Force? Diller said: No, his name will not be mentioned'. AWM.

232. In late 1942 Blamey had put this request to the government but the government had wanted to await the return of Morshead to Australia. It is significant that at his conference with Shedden in October 1942 MacArthur had advised against the appointment of a Deputy Commander-in-Chief. See Blamey Papers 23.81, Armstrong Papers (Papers from Mr Garry Armstrong, formerly of the Department of Defence), Northcott Papers (Mitchell Library) and MP 1217, Box 2.

Shedden's minutes of the conference recorded MacArthur's views on these questions:

> MacArthur described General Blamey as an able operational Commander with a good strategical mind which quickly appreciated the facts of a situation and reached a sound conclusion. He considered, however, that since he had established his position, he had become somewhat lazy, but nevertheless desired to control everything. He was really attempting to cover too wide a field.
>
> If MacArthur's ideas and plans for future operations by the Australian Forces were carried out, his intention was to appoint a Task Force Commander who would have control of all the land and air forces engaged, but he had not decided who would be the most suitable officer for this.

The question of an Australian task force commander will be pursued in later chapters, but it should be observed that MacArthur gave the Australians ample warning of his intentions for the last three years of the war.

The discussion then turned to the Commonwealth Prime Minister's conference in London, planned for early 1944, and Shedden mentioned Curtin's interest in establishing machinery for cooperation between members of the British Commonwealth. Shedden assured MacArthur that the government had no intention of altering its relationship with the SWPA Command. He said that since America had the resources with which to defeat Japan, 'they were entitled to the predominant say in determining the strategy'. The Australian government would 'be content to play its part by furnishing an appropriate component of the total forces'.

No doubt MacArthur was pleased to receive this assurance, but he felt it necessary to draw attention to the 'divergent views which had arisen in the correspondence between himself and the Prime Minister in the last few months'. Shedden mentioned the reports from several deaprtments of the 'excessive demands and extravagant proposals by the United States Forces'. He said that:

> Every care was taken in the drafting of letters from the Prime Minister, but, when a question of principle was involved to which the Australian Government was unable to agree, it was inevitable that a divergence of opinion would arise. It was hoped to minimise any misunderstanding by the fullest possible personal contacts.

Thus 1943 ended with an acknowledgement that there had been substantial disagreement between MacArthur and the Australians. But Curtin and Shedden seemed to believe that most of the problems had been resolved. Even Blamey had to acknowledge in January 1944 that in recent months the US Services of Supply organisation had been built up and that the Americans were now planning to send service personnel to Australia.[233] But if Curtin and Shedden were willing to give MacArthur the benefit of the doubt over matters of administration, particularly over the control of American demands, Blamey was not.[234] To him, MacArthur's attitude over the review of American expenditure was symptomatic of his view of Australian's strategic role. Blamey's hardening attitude towards MacArthur is revealed as a result of MacArthur's letter of 6 November in which, in passing, he stated that it had never been his intention to defend Australia on the mainland of Australia.[235] Curtin referred the matter to Blamey who replied that there was 'no justification for' MacArthur's statement.[236] As Blamey's biographer noted, 'Even in a

---

233. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 13 January 1944, MP 1217, Box 306.

234. Letters, Blamey to Shedden, 8 December, Curtin to Blamey, 20 December, Blamey to Shedden, 20 December, 1943, Blamey Papers 6.2. Blamey's attitude is also revealed in his memoirs where he wrote that the lack of 'independence of the Australian government in certain matters' greatly handicapped the Australian army. 'Perhaps the most serious of these was in the allocation of Australian produced equipment ... The Australian government ... gave the American Command overall authority in the distribution of much of the Australian produced equipment'. For correspondence on the same topic in 1945 see MP 729/8, item 20/431/19 and MP 1217, Box 14.

235. Letter, MacArthur to Curtin, 6 November 1943, CP 290/16, item Bundle 1.

236. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 28 January 1944. Blamey Papers 12. The original is in MP 1217, Box 368.

letter to his Prime Minister a serving soldier can hardly call his superior officer a liar. Blamey could not have gone closer to it than he did'.[237]

---

237. Hetherington, *op.cit.*, p.304.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BATTLEFIELD COOPERATION WITH THE AMERICANS 1942-1943

Despite the numerous examples of the disagreements between the British and the Australians recounted in Chapter Two, the most outstanding feature of their joint operations was the fine cooperation displayed at all levels. With similar military systems, common training methods and equipment, and a shared heritage, it is not surprising that Australian units were able to fit smoothly into British formations when necessary.

However, battlefield cooperation with the Americans was another matter, and the events of late 1942 and 1943 show that at times both sides needed to display tact, understanding and goodwill to achieve effective cooperation. Furthermore, it is suggested that as American power increased some senior American officers felt less disposed towards making concessions for the sake of allied cooperation.

Throughout the period of Australian-American cooperation there was a two way relationship between the problems of strategic planning, and those of battlefield cooperation. Difficulties in the one sphere could quite easily create difficulties in the other. For example, the composition of the force to invade the Philippines was determined partly by problems of battlefield cooperation. And cutting across both the spheres of strategy and battlefield cooperation was the problem of command relationships.

The *pas de deux* between Australia and America over the command framework was introduced in Chapter Three, and continues throughout the thesis. It is not dealt with specifically in this chapter but it is an underlying theme behind the problems of battlefield cooperation.

Before the Americans joined the land battle in November 1942, it was already apparent that there would be problems of cooperation. The American attitude is summed up by MacArthur's comments to General Eichelberger when he arrived in Australia in August 1942; he ordered him to pay his respects to the Australians and then have nothing further to do with them.[1] But many Americans realised that it was important to ensure good cooperation, and General Chamberlin exemplified this when he wrote to the American commander of a joint training unit whom he heard had not showed the required adaptability:

> I have had considerable experience in dealing with conditions that exist here in Australia and although I have to gnash my teeth on many occasions, I cannot help but realize that I myself cannot change things. We constantly have to deal with our Allies. Their system, their methods and their line of thought are different from ours. In many cases measured by our own standards, these methods appear most inefficient. We detect when measured from our own standards what appears to us to be neglect and lack of effort. We find in some cases theory and practises which according to our own tactical doctrines, if not by actual demonstration, are faulty and will necessarily lead to failure. In spite of anyone's ideas that these things are all wrong, they cannot be corrected abruptly. Great patience is necessary. It behooves all of us to know when to give in and when to be firm.[2]

The officer in question did not appear to accept the advice and was soon replaced,[3] and Blamey commented that it was 'regrettable that otherwise capable officers are not able to adjust themselves realistically to the conditions of mutual service'.[4]

---

1. Luvaas, *op.cit.*, p.30.

2. Letter, Chamberlin to Colonel B.Q. Jones, Commandant, Joint Overseas Operational Training School, 17 September 1942, Stephen J. Chamberlin Papers, US Military History Institute, Carlyle, Pennsylvania.

3. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey 26 September 1942, Blamey Papers 48. Also memorandum, Berryman to Blamey, 22 September 1942, Berryman Papers.

4. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 13 October 1942, Blamey Papers 48.

By November 1942 the situation had developed to a point where Shedden felt it necessary to bring the matter to the attention of the Prime Minister, and he listed some incidents which were likely to cause bad feeling. He began with the instances of American origin:

(i) The criticism of senior Australian permanent Army officers by General MacArthur.

(ii) General MacArthur's dissatisfaction with the standard of training of the Militia Forces sent to New Guinea.

(iii) General MacArthur's criticisms of the conduct of operations in New Guinea.

(iv) A statement by General MacArthur that General Blamey had asked that the forces being organised to operate against Lae and Salamaua should be entirely Australian. General MacArthur did not agree with this, as he said that he had available a parachute battalion which would be eminently suited for this operation, but General Blamey was apparently reluctant to use it.

(v) The division of the Combined Air Force into the 5th American Air Force and the R.A.A.F. Command. (I have heard reports that the Americans reached the conclusion that the only satisfactory arrangement was the entire separation of the two forces, both operationally and in respect of ground maintenance units).

(vi) Also related to the preceding item is a criticism of Air Vice-Marshal Jones in regard to the use of operational information obtained by him from Allied Headquarters. I understand his criticism at the Advisory War Council of the ability and courage of American fighter squadrons in New Guinea reached American ears.

(vii) During my visit to Brisbane I asked the Officer in Charge of the Defence Secretariat to obtain from the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre a copy of the full daily situation report, in order that I might compare it with the situation report furnished by the Commander-in-Chief for the information of the Advisory War Council. It will be recalled that you had written to the Commander-in-Chief regarding the meagre nature of these reports. I understand my request was reported to the Chief of Staff, who repeated it to the Commander-in-Chief, and that there was quite a discussion as to whether the information should be made available to me. I mention this merely to indicate that a simple request was apparently viewed with some suspicion.

(viii) The Commander-in-Chief's letter of 25th September in which an independent attitude was adopted on works procedure, by stating that the Americans had funds at their disposal for the execution of the works they required and presumably were not dependent on Lease-Lend facilities.

(ix) The extravagant expenditure incurred under reciprocal Lease-Lend on items which would not be admitted as a public charge in the case of the Australian Forces.[5]

Shedden thought that MacArthur was quite entitled to the views or actions noted in paragraphs (i) to (v), but he failed to take into account that in many cases MacArthur's criticisms were ill-informed.

Shedden then gave two instances of Australian origin:

(i) The statement by General Sturdee when Chief of the General Staff that the American Staff were very academic in their outlook and lacked practical experience in warfare, with the result that they adopted a rather rigid textbook or staff college attitude towards problems.

(ii) The statement of Lieut.-General Rowell that he had had a keen argument with Major-General Sutherland, Chief of Staff, when the latter visited Port Moresby to ascertain why certain things were not being done. Lieut.-General Rowell said that by working entirely off the map in Brisbane the American Staff were unaware of the practicability of the execution of the orders they were issuing. Major-General Berryman, Chief of Staff, Land Forces Headquarters, also referred to the issue of impracticable orders to local commanders in New Guinea.[6]

No comment was offered, but it might be observed that in both cases the Australian attitudes appear to have been justified.

The differences between the Australians and the Americans came to a head in late November 1942 with the so-called 'Battle of Brisbane', when Australians fought Americans in the streets of Brisbane.[7] But although the problems on the home front within Australia were important for allied relations, problems on the battlefield were likely to have a more

---

5. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 11 November 1942, MP1217, Box 293.

6. *Ibid.* The problems covered in item (ii) are dealt with in Horner, *Crisis of Command*, Chapter 7 and 8. With regard to item (i), Eichelberger wrote that the Australians regarded the Americans as 'inexperienced theorists'. Eichelberger, *op.cit.*, p.21.

7. See D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area: First Year*, Appendix 3, and *National Times*, 10-15 February 1975. Also Blamey Papers 5.2(6).

crucial impact on allied strategy, and by the time of the Battle of Brisbane American troops were already in action in New Guinea.

The Impact of the American Failure at Buna

The first major operation in which American land forces cooperated closely with Australians was during the last stage of the Papuan campaign, when the allies closed in on the Japanese beachhead at Buna, Gona and Sanananda.[8] However, before the Americans even saw action, some bad feeling had been engendered by unfair criticism of the Australians by senior American officers in Brisbane during the fighting on the Kokoda Trail in September 1942. It mattered little to the Australians that MacArthur might have been under great strain, or that his comments might have been made to establish an alibi if he was unsuccessful, or that he might have been trying to secure increased American support.[9] The Australians were angry and would be watching closely the performance of the Americans in their first campaign.

MacArthur's criticism of the Australians was not, however, just rhetoric, for many self-confident Americans believed that their forces would have no trouble dealing with the Japanese, whom the less capable Australians had been unable to defeat. For example, one American observer noted that:

> GHQ was afraid to turn the Americans loose and let them capture Buna because it would be a blow to the prestige of the Australians who had fought the long hard battle all through the Owen Stanley Mountains and who therefore should be the ones to capture Buna.[10]

---

8. An American engineer unit had taken part in the battle at Milne Bay in late August 1942, but their contribution had not been significant.

9. MacArthur's criticism and his possible motives are discussed in Horner, *Crisis of Command*, Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

10. Quoted in Milner, *op.cit.*, p.138.

Indeed, Major-General E.F. Harding, the commander of the 32nd US Division, doubted that the Japanese would defend Buna strongly, and that he 'might find it easy pickings'.[11]

It came as a severe shock to the Americans when their assault on Buna on 19 November was repulsed, and MacArthur by-passed the chain of command to order Harding to 'Take Buna today at all costs'.[12] But a week later the Americans had not advanced. The Australians now began to complain that the Americans would not fight, with General Vasey, of the 7th Australian Division, complaining that the Americans had 'maintained a masterly inactivity'.[13]

This was the sort of information which Blamey used to give MacArthur back some of the medicine which he had been forced to swallow in August and September when the Australians were being driven back along the Kokoda Trail, and were in action at Milne Bay. General Eichelberger, who later took over from Harding, commented that General Berryman told him in effect:

> The jokes of the American officers in Australia, making fun of the Australian Army were told all over Australia ... Therefore ... when we've got the least thing on the American troops fighting in the Buna sector, our high command has gone to General MacArthur and rubbed salt in his wounds.[14]

---

11. Letter, Harding to Sutherland, 14 October 1942, AWM 581/3/5.

12. Lida Mayo, *Bloody Buna* (Doubleday, New York, 1974), p.102. HQ NGF received this order at 0240 hours 21 November 1942, War Diary HQ NGF, G(Air) Branch, November 1942, AWM 1/5/51.

13. Letter, Vasey to Blamey, 25 November 1942, Blamey Papers 171.2. Vasey told Blamey: 'The situation on the front of 126 US Regt remains inactive and unsatisfactory. I saw Tomlinson [the US commander] this afternoon and he said he was "embarassed" by the present situation. I said I was too'.

14. Eichelberger Dictations, Book 2, pp.VII-122, VII-123.

He added that MacArthur, Kenney and Sutherland were 'not guiltless' among those who made disparaging remarks about the Australians. Blamey's attitude was neither dignified nor diplomatic, but in view of MacArthur's strictures on the AIF, it can be understood. Thus when on 25 November MacArthur suggested bringing the 41st US Division up from Australia to reinforce the 7th Division, Blamey objected. General Kenney, who was present, recorded that:

> Blamey frankly said he would rather put in more Australians, as he knew they would fight ... I think it was a bitter pill for General MacArthur to swallow but he agreed that we would fly in the Australian 21st Brigade.[15]

Whatever the calibre of the American troops, one problem was the lack of coopeation between Harding and his immediate Australian superior, Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring. Harding felt that he had received less than his share of administrative support, and that Herring 'seemed to take an almost detached view of the trials and tribulations of my all-American contingent'.[16] Herring thought that Harding cut a 'pathetic figure' and had lost his nerve.[17] Certainly Harding had lost the confidence of Herring, Blamey, and eventually MacArthur and Sutherland, and early in December he was relieved by General Eichelberger.[18]

---

15. Kenney, *op.cit.*, p.151. Blamey's request to use the 21st Brigade added further insult to his criticisms of the Americans, for the 21st Brigade was already understrength and exhausted from its battles on the Kokoda Trail.

16. Milner, *op.cit.*, pp.109, 201.

17. Interview with Lieutenant-General Sir Edmund Herring, 25 June 1974. See also Stuart Sayers, *Ned Herring, A Life of Sir Edmund Herring* (Hyland House, Melbourne, and Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1980), p.239. On the first day of the campaign Harding had been on a lugger which had been sunk by Zeroes. He had had to swim to shore. This air attack is described in J.W. O'Brien, *Guns and Gunners* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1950), p.171.

18. This incident is described in detail in Eichelberger, *op.cit.*, p.42ff and Milner, *op.cit.*, p.203ff. See also Horner, *Crisis of Command*, Ch. Ten.

The impact of Eichelberger shows the degree to which effective battlefield cooperation depends on personalities. Herring described Eichelberger's arrival as 'a very pure breath of fresh air', that 'blew away a great deal of the impurities that were stopping us getting on with the job'.[19] A spirit of cooperation soon developed and Herring and Eichelberger became firm friends.[20] By 11 December Herring was beginning to believe that the Americans might make some progress.[21] Furthermore, as the fighting continued it became obvious that the Australians too were having trouble clearing the Japanese from their swampy bastions at Gona and Sanananda.

But Blamey in Port Moresby continued to make full capital out of the American failure. On 4 December he informed Curtin: 'My faith in the Militia is growing, but my faith in the Americans has sunk to zero'.[22] When Herring told Blamey that the Americans were improving Blamey replied:

> I would be very sorry to do anything that would impair the good relations you have established with the Americans, but I doubt very much whether Buna will be captured if we rely on them to do it.[23]

And indeed Blamey sent the fresh and experienced 18th Australian Brigade to Buna, where with the support of Australian tanks, they were successful.

One lesson of the Buna experience appears to be, that in a coalition the influence of the junior partner is related directly to the relative

---

19. Luvaas, *op.cit.*, p.16.

20. Herring interview; Eichelberger Papers, *passim*; Sayer, *op.cit.*, pp.239, 240.

21. Letters, Herring to Blamey, 10, 11 December 1942, Blamey Papers 170.2.

22. Letter, Blamey to Curtin, 4 December 1942, Blamey Papers 12.

23. Letter, Blamey to Herring, 11 December 1942, Blamey Papers 170.2.

performances of the fighting troops; or more strictly, to the perceptions of the relative performances. Eichelberger seemed to realise this, for on 25 December he warned MacArthur:

> My relations with General Herring have been most happy and I am inclined to think that his criticisms of the American troops might not have been as strong as General Blamey might indicate ... You have been very patient but I hope you will not let any Australian generals talk down their nose at you. When these [American] troops have been chased by the Japanese as often as the Australians they will be just as good and I think perhaps better.[24]

The next day he continued in the same vein cautioning MacArthur not to let the Australians 'spring the numerical strength of my forces on you', as he had a long supply line and many men in hospital.[25]

Perhaps MacArthur took notice of Eichelberger's caution not to let Blamey spring the 'numbers game' on him, for on 27 December he ordered the first regiment of the 41st US Division (163rd) to be sent to Eichelberger's command. This action by-passed the chain of command, since Blamey was Commander of the Allied Land Forces and of New Guinea Force, and had intended the regiment to be sent to Vasey's command in the Sanananda area. Blamey felt that this was a matter of principle, and that he was now strong enough to stand up to MacArthur. Hence, in a strong letter to MacArthur he stated that there were sound military reasons for sending the regiment to Vasey. He continued:

> I regret still more that you should have personally taken control of a single phase of the action... With the greatest respect I would urge for your consideration that this alteration of plan will profoundly disturb [Herring's] confidence and upset his arrangements. General Herring is responsible for the whole front and I regret

---

24. Letter, Eichelberger to MacArthur, 25 December 1942, Eichelberger Papers.

25. Letter, Eichelberger to MacArthur, 26 December 1942, *loc.cit.*

> exceedingly that he should be placed in the position of doubt and uncertainty as to the troops that will be available to him, and as to which authority he may exercise over them.
>
> I do not for one moment question the right of the Commander-in-Chief to give such orders as he may think fit, but I believe that nothing is more contrary to sound principles of command than that the Commander-in-Chief or the Commander, Allied Land Forces, should take over the personal direction of portion of the battle. This can only result in disturbing the confidence of the inferior commanders.[26]

In September Blamey had bowed to the wishes of MacArthur and had moved to Port Moresby, triggering the eventual dismissal of Rowell. Then in October Blamey had not objected to MacArthur's strong signals from Brisbane criticising General Allen on the Kokoda Trail, but now Blamey sought to protect Herring. This illustrates how closely a commander's performance is tied to what he perceives to be the strength of his position, and indeed the strength of his rival's position.

MacArthur did not agree with Blamey, and replied that the Buna area was the most important and that the Japanese force at Sanananda was less than that imagined by the local commanders.[27] He concluded:

> I do not for a moment agree with your view that I am unduly interfering with the local details of the operation. I am in no way attempting to control tactical execution on the front but am merely strategically advising as to where I believe it would be wise to exert the main effort of the ground forces. I think you will realise from your own long experience that no Commander-in-Chief, present on the field of operations as I am, could have given greater latitude to you or

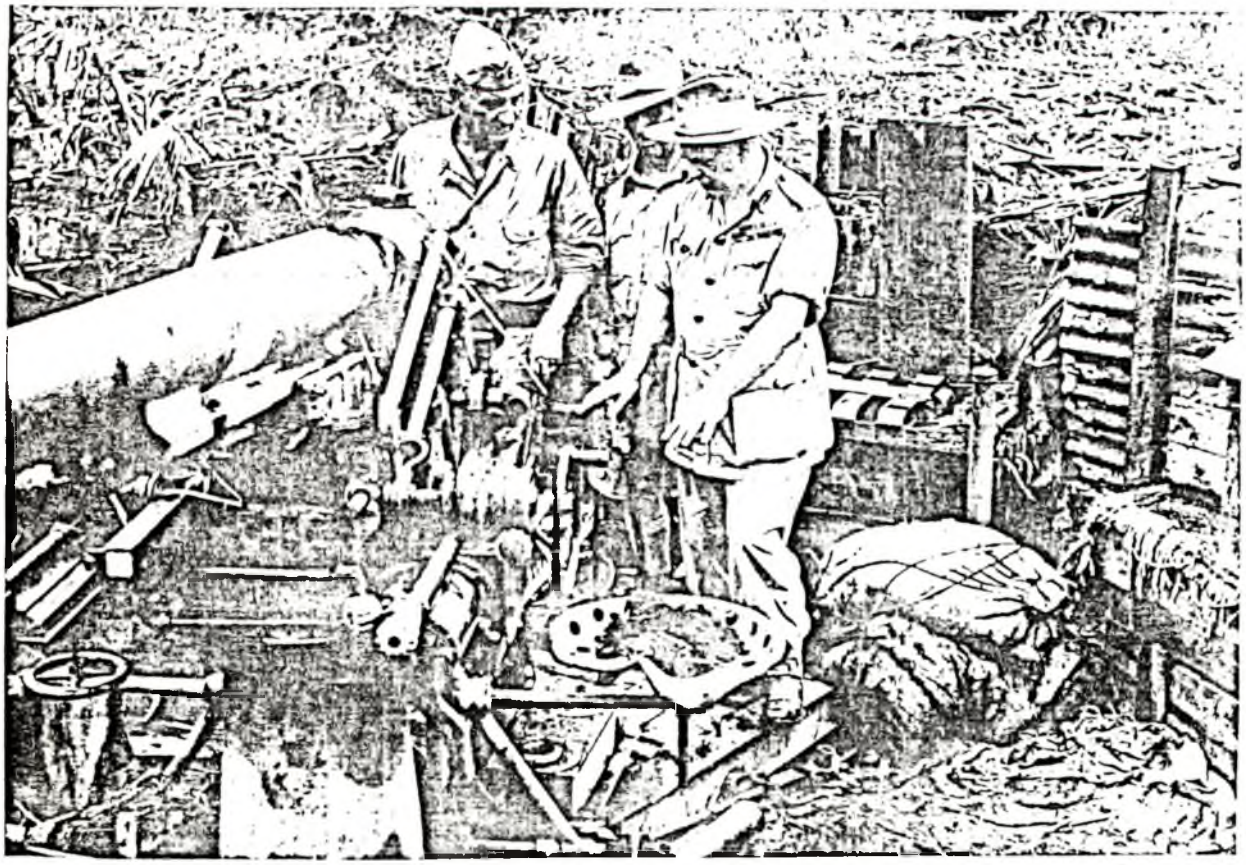
---

26. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 27 December 1942, Blamey Papers, 43.631.

27. In this he was wrong. The Japanese forces in the beachhead probably numbered over 8.000. Of these there were about 2,500 in the Cape Endaiadere-Buna area (McCarthy, *op.cit.*, p.485). If we assume that there were 1,000 troops in the Gona area (Milner, p.145 says 800) that leaves some 4,500 for the whole Sanananda area. There would have been at least 2,000 Japanese in the defences facing Vasey's troops.

Blamey and Eichelberger at Buna. Blamey said that "a miracle had been performed."

(AWM Negative No.14094)



Eichelberger, Herring and Blamey examine a three inch AA gun captured from the Japanese at the Government Gardens, Buna.

(AWM Negative No.14099)

> expressed both by word and deed greater confidence in the commanders involved. Complete cordiality, understanding and goodwill have prevailed between us up to the present and I cannot but hope that this condition, so essential to success, will be maintained. You have mistaken my advice as an arbitrary order. Since my assumption of this command, and throughout its duration, any order that I issue has been and will be in written form. My verbal discussions are advisory only.[28]

Yet when Blamey had gone to Milne Bay on 25 September he had 'ordered' General Clowes to send troops to Wanigela.[29] When Clowes and Rowell had objected, Blamey had been adamant that it had been advice only and not an order. He now found himself in the same position as Rowell. Nevertheless he chose to ignore the implied threat of MacArthur's letter, accepted it at face value, and informed Herring that although there had been 'a keen difference of opinion between' himself and MacArthur, the regiment would go to Vasey's area.[30] No more was heard from MacArthur on the subject. At that time MacArthur viewed his own position as precarious,[31] and in the event he did not overrule Blamey.

After the initial difficulties with Harding, there seems to be no doubt that the allied commanders on the battlefield made every effort to ensure cooperation. Indeed on 18 January Eichelberger wrote that he had 'no complaint concerning the Australians. They have seemed willing to extend the hand of friendship'.[32] Problems were quickly resolved. For example on 16 January Vasey wrote that he was 'not convinced that [the Americans under his command] are quite as aggressive when it

---

28. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey, 28 December 1942, Blamey Papers, 43.631; also RG4, MacArthur Memorial.

29. This incident is described in Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p.178.

30. Letter, Blamey to Herring, 28 December 1942, Blamey Papers 170.2.

31. On 26 December MacArthur had told Herring: 'This situation is becoming very serious. If we can't clear this up quickly I'll be finished and so will your General Blamey'. Herring interview, 25 June 1974.

32. Letter, Eichelberger to MacArthur, 18 January 1943, Eichelberger Papers.

Major-General G.A. Vasey, Commander of 7th Australian Division, and Colonel Jens A. Doe of the 163rd US Regiment. Vasey thought that Doe's men lacked offensive spirit.

(AWM Negative No.30258/17)

Lieutenant-General R.L. Eichelberger. He said that he had 'no complaint concerning the Australians'.

(AWM Negative No.17264)

comes to close work as is necessary to finish the Japs'.[33] On 18 January Vasey discussed the 'lack of offensive spirit' of the 163rd Regiment with Eichelberger,[34] but when, at the latter's suggestion, they both inspected the forward American pits, they discovered that the 163rd was acting aggressively.

The experience during the campaign had an important impact on MacArthur, for early in January 1943 he set in motion a chain of events to remove American units from Australian command.[35] It would be an exaggeration to claim that the problems of allied cooperation in Papua in late 1942 contributed directly to this action. Rather it is likely that MacArthur had decided to separate the Australians and Americans some six months earlier.[36] But the events at Buna, and Blamey's humiliating taunts, convinced him that he could delay no longer.

Incidents at Nassau and Tambu Bays

After Buna, American combat units came under direct Australian command on only one other occasion, and the exercise proved again the difficulty of battlefield cooperation between allies with different systems. The incidents took place following the landing of American troops at Nassau Bay at the end of June 1943 to support the advance of the 3rd Australian Division, under Major-General S.G. Savige, towards Salamaua.

The American force, known as MacKechnie Force, consisted of the 1st Battalion of the 162nd Regiment of the 41st US Division and was

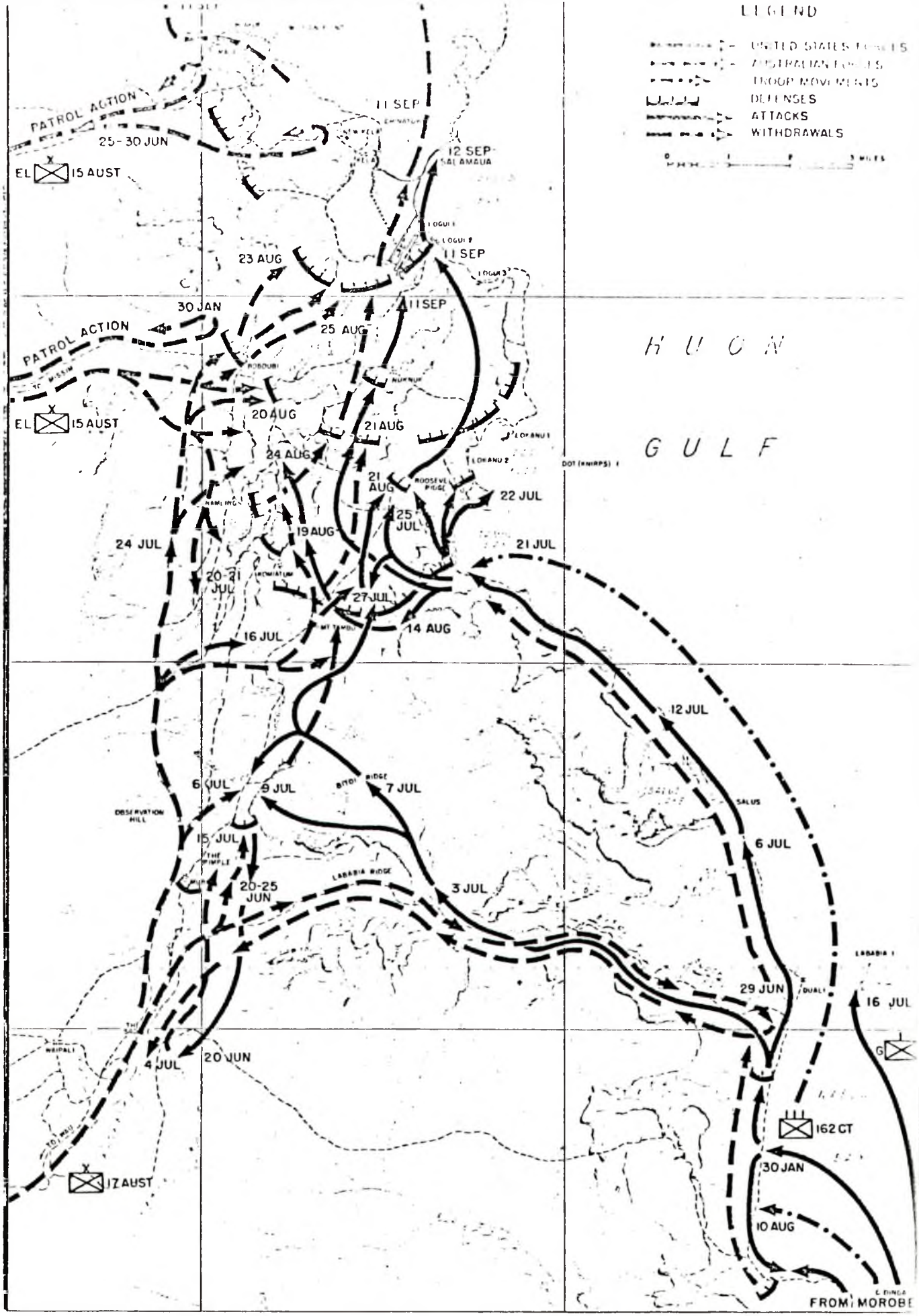
---

33. Letter, Vasey to Brigadier Hopkins, 16 January 1943, Vasey Papers 2/9.

34. War Diary HQ 7 Division, G Branch, January 1943, AWM 1/5/14.

35. These events are described in Chapter Six.

36. See Chapter Four.



MAP 7

Operations, Nassau Bay to Salamaua.

From: *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1, p.119.

Nassau Bay, 1 July 1943, the day after the landing of MacKechnie Force.

(AWM Negative No.55710)

Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring, GOC NGF.

(AWM Negative No.64081)

Major-General S.G. Savige, GOC 3rd Australian Division, observing the Japanese positions at Komiatum from a Forward Observation Post. In front of him is Brigadier M.J. Moten, Commander of the 17th Brigade.

(AWM Negative No.55638)

commanded by Colonel Archibald R. MacKechnie, the commander of the 162nd Regiment. Unfortunately MacKechnie was not sure whether he was to come directly under the command of Savige or of his own divisional commander, General Fuller. Hence when Savige ordered MacKechnie to advance, the American claimed that Fuller had instructed him not to do so unless he was adequately supported by artillery and heavy weapons.[37]

The problem was caused when Lieutenant-General Herring, the Commander of New Guinea Force in Port Moresby, left the command arrangements vague lest the Americans at Nassau Bay should feel uncomfortable in being commanded by Savige from his headquarters across the mountains.[38] Herring's actions had the reverse effect to what he had intended. Indeed Savige wrote later that, 'while openly supporting the principle of unified command by written and oral statements, [Herring] undermined action to achieve it because he was "diffident" about it'.[39] And it was only after a conference at Port Moresby on 5 July attended by Herring, Fuller and Savige, that Herring issued instructions that MacKechnie was to come under Australian command.[40] The problem was therefore resolved, but the comments of the official historian are pertinent:

> Whenever the allocation of command is deliberately or unconsciously left vague, there is trouble. This incident might well have served as a warning to prevent further such incidents. But for the sane

---

37. Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.104. Signal, 17 Brigade to HQ 3 Division, 5 July 1943, War Diary, HQ 3 Divison, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

38. Notes of Interview between D. Dexter and Herring, 6 April 1951, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring. Herring said: 'Had I put them under a commander 2 or 3 mortars away from the coast they might have protested to MacArthur'. But Herring claimed that he made the situation clear in a conference with Savige and Fuller on 31 May, and again on 15 June with Savige, Berryman, McKechnie and Col. Sweeney, a senior US staff officer. Herring Comments on Official History, *loc.cit.*

39. Comments by Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Savige on the Official History, Savige Papers AWM.

40. Savige's notes on the Conference, War Diary, HQ 3 Division, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

> attitude of the commanders and the genuine friendship between the Australian and American troops in the front line, relations between the two commands might have been strained at this time. Give and take was necessary on both sides.[41]

However, within a week the problem flared again, for MacArthur had authorised Herring to send the 3rd Battalion of the 162nd Regiment along the coast from Nassau Bay to Tambu Bay, where guns were to be installed to bombard Salamaua.[42] This new force, Coane Force, was to be commanded by Brigadier-General Ralph W. Coane, who was instructed that he came under the command of Fuller at Popondetta.[43] Savige was informed that MacKechnie Force remained under his command, but since Coane Force (which Savige claims he was not aware existed!) included an uncommitted battalion of MacKechnie's 162nd Regiment, he wrongly assumed that the new troops also came under his command.

The difficulties thus engendered can be gauged by the reply received when the Australians attempted to issue orders to the commander of the 3rd Battalion 162nd Regiment:

> Regret cannot comply your request through MacKechnie force dated July 14. I have no such orders from my Commanding Officer [Coane]. As a piece of friendly advice your plans show improper reconnaissance and lack of logistical understanding. Suggest you send competent liaison officer to my headquarters soon as possible to study situation. For your information I obey no orders except those from my immediate superior.[44]

This reply was sent by Major Archibald B. Roosevelt, who, although he was commanding the 3rd Battalion, might well have been more reticent about offering military advice. His previous military service had been in the First World War and he was now fifty years of age. It was only

---

41. Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.201.

42. Herring to Gavin Long, 6 August 1946, Gavin Long Notes, W4, AWM.

43. Letter of instruction from Fuller to Coane, 11 July 1947, War Diary, HQ 3 Division, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

44. Signal, Roosevelt to 17 Brigade, repeated to 3 Division, 14 July 1943, *loc.cit.* See also Blamey Papers 43.632.

because he was the son of Theodore Roosevelt, and because of the special interest of President Franklin Roosevelt, that he was given the command, and even then he knew he was 'too old physically speaking, and mentally'. Indeed he described his tactics as 'both rusty and old fashioned'.[45]

Savige had misunderstood Herring's intention that Coane Force should remain under American command, and after further futile attempts to give orders to Roosevelt,[46] he wrote to Herring warning that 'a confused and impossible situation has now arisen which makes it impossible to coordinate control of operations now progressing in 3 Aust Div area'.[47] As a result, on 15 July Herring ordered Coane Force to come under the command of the 3rd Division.[48]

This was not, however, the end to the confusion, for some days earlier Coane, who was the artillery commander of the 41st Division, had been appointed artillery commander of the 3rd Divison. Now with Coane Force underway, it was agreed that Coane's artillery deputy, Colonel William D. Jackson, should act as artillery commander for the 3rd Division until Coane himself decided to assume duties as CRA (Commander, Royal Artillery). This of course was an unsatisfactory solution, but for the moment Savige was reluctant to change command of Coane Force.[49]

Meanwhile, as he put it later, MacKechnie was 'placed in the unenviable position of trying to obey two masters'.[50] His operations

---

45. Letter, Roosevelt to MacArthur, 1 May 1943, Sutherland Papers, Miscellaneous, National Archives.

46. To an order sent by Savige through MacKechnie Force, Roosevelt replied: 'I do not recognise this signature. I take orders only from my commanding general 41 US Div and will hereafter be careful to certify his signature'. Signal, Roosevelt to 3 Divison, 15 July 1943, War Diary, HQ 3 Division, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

47. Letter, Savige to Herring, 15 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

48. Signal, Herring to Savige, 15 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

49. Savige's Notes on Official History. See also Summary of Decisions of Conference and HQ NGF, 19 July 1943, AWM 591/7/21, and Record Covering Conference HQ NGF, 19 July 1943, War Diary, HQ 3rd Division, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

50. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.201.

were under the control of the 3rd Division, while his beachhead was controlled by the 41st Division. As a result he asked to be relieved of command of the 162nd Regiment,and this request was granted on 22 July.

Although a number of difficult situations had been created, it is clear that harmony ultimately rested on the personalities of the commanders involved. The attitude of Major Roosevelt is revealed in a letter which he wrote to MacArthur, using the special access obtained by his name and the interest of the President:

> The combination of two foreign groups and the ill organized control produced, and is now producing, contradictory orders and no rigid chain of command has or can be established ...
>
> The situation has been brought about by the intermingling of the two armies - Australian and American - and will steadily become worse to the detriment of the American Army.[51]

On the other hand the infantry commander of Coane Force, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles A. Fertig, tried to keep Roosevelt's mind on the main task. He advised Roosevelt to clean out the Japanese first, and then 'if higher command decides to clean up on the Aussies, we will concentrate on them. Frankly, Major, I am more concerned about the attitude of the men of your battalion at the moment than I am about any attempt of the Aussies to throw a block on us'.[52]

But while his troops remained inactive, rather than attacking the Japanese as had been ordered, Roosevelt continued to harp on the unsatisfactory arrangements, and in a ten page letter to MacArthur he complained of the problem created by two different military systems: 'God knows we have as bad failings as theirs, but we are accustomed to our failings and are better able to deal with and correct them'. He warned MacArthur that friction between the Australians and the Americans could 'flare into an international incident' and that his soldiers felt that they were

---

51. Letter, Roosevelt to MacArthur, 26 July 1943, Sutherland Papers, Miscellaneous.

52. Letter, Fertig to Roosevelt, 27 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

'being made into Hessians for Australia'. The result would be dangerous to MacArthur, and Roosevelt concluded by urging him to 'get all American ground forces out of New Guinea as quickly as possible'.[53]

Savige had already lost faith in Roosevelt,[54] and soon began to loose faith in Coane, who, while commanding Coane Force, appeared to be sending instructions to Jackson about the control of artillery.[55] Savige believed that Coane Force had displayed a lack of aggression and enterprise, and finally, on 7 August, he recommended the removal of Coane and Roosevelt from their commands and that MacKechnie should take over from Coane.[56] In an interview with Gavin Long, Savige put it another way:

> the regimental commander (162 Regt) spent all his time in his tent and most of it lying on his bed. I decided to sack him and Roosevelt. They said 'You can't do that. It's very political'. I did it and waited to see what would happen.[57]

Herring discussed the changes with MacArthur's chief of staff, Sutherland,[58] and on 11 August MacArthur confirmed that MacKechnie was to resume command.[59]

Thus ended the command problems at Nassau and Tambu Bays, with MacArthur supporting the Australian recommendations for the relief of

---

53. Letter, Roosevelt to MacArthur, 7 August 1943, *loc.cit.*

54. Precis of telephone conversation, Savige to Brigadier Moten, 23 July 1943, War Diary, HQ 3rd Division, General Staff, AWM 1/5/4.

55. Letter, Savige to Herring, 1 August 1943, *loc.cit.*

56. Signal, Savige to Herring, 7 August 1943, *loc.cit.*

57. Interview with Savige, 3 February 1945, Gavin Long Notes, No.69, AWM.

58. Signal B106, Herring to MacArthur, 10 August 1943, RG 316, Box 72, National Archives. Herring agreed with Savige that Roosevelt and Coane had 'proved unsatisfactory commanders in the circumstances'. Letter, Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1952, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

59. Signal XC-5975, MacArthur to Herring, 11 August 1943, *loc.cit.*; also RG4 MacArthur Memorial. The message reached Savige on 12 August, War Diary HQ NGF, August 1943, AWM 1/5/51.

American officers, but it was to be the last occasion when he would allow such a situation to develop. It is not known how much he was influenced by Roosevelt's letters, but the events of 1944 were to show that he had decided that Americans were no longer to serve under Australian command, and furthermore, when Australians formed part of American formations they were to use American supplies and equipment. And this decision was to have repercussions over the employment of Australians in the planning of the invasions of the Philippines and Japan.

Planning for Lae

The advance by the 3rd Australian Division and the 162nd US Regiment towards Salamaua coincided with the planning for the attack on Lae, and during this period certain differences in doctrine and temperament between the Australian and American planning staffs became evident. In particular, the main critic of Australian planning was MacArthur's Chief of Operations, Brigadier-General Steven J. Chamberlin, and ironically, he was one of the most popular senior Americans with the Australians. MacArthur described him as 'a sound, careful staff officer, a master of tactical detail and possessed of bold strategic concepts, he was a pillar of new strength'.[60] Eichelberger, who had no love for MacArthur's staff, wrote to his wife: 'Don't sell Steve Chamberlin short. Anything he says can be relied on because he is a very honest person'.[61]

In later years Australian officers were complimentary about Chamberlin. Berryman wrote to him that

---

60. MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, p.168. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.182, says Chamberlin was 'probably the most competent' of the GHQ staff section heads.

61. Letter, Eichelberger to his wife, 6 August 1945, Eichelberger Papers.

> Without you I cannot visualise how Headquarters would have worked as you were the linch-pin that held them together and also the motive power in the implementation of General MacArthur's plans.[62]

And the war-time CGS, General Northcott wrote that

> we have always appreciated your helpful, honest and wholehearted cooperation ... you have always been most willing to help the Australian Forces. When you could not meet all that we asked you have never hesitated to tell us, and patiently explain why it could not fit in to the general plan.[63]

Nevertheless, Chamberlin had not seen action before arriving in Australia, and he had had no opportunity to temper his training with experience. Indeed, he informed Berryman that he would have achieved no more than twenty percent at the US Command and Staff School.[64]

As planning developed for the Lae operation Chamberlin became increasingly concerned at the apparent lack of detail supplied by the Australian planners. General Blamey had delegated the detailed planning to General Herring in Port Moresby, and in turn he had left General Vasey of the 7th Division to organise the air landing arrangements with General Whitehead of the Fifth Air Force, and General Wootten of the 9th Division to organise the amphibious landing with Admiral Barbey of the 7th Amphibious Fleet.[65] Chamberlin's concern is shown by a letter to Admiral Barbey on 13 July:

---

62. Letter, Berryman to Chamberlin, 6 September 1948, Berryman Papers.

63. Letter, Northcott to Chamberlin, 3 May 1946, Northcott Papers, ML MSS 1431/16.

64. Berryman interview, 1 May 1974.

65. Report on Operations, New Guinea 22 January-8 October 1943, by Lieutenant-General E.F. Herring, AWM 589/7/1. Both Wootten and Vasey were about to begin their fifth campaign of the war. Vasey had fought in Libya, Greece, Crete and Papua. Wootten at Giarabub, Tobruk, Milne Bay and Buna-Sanananda.

> I hope your planners will continue to push the matter of detailed planning. I arranged, before I left New Guinea, to have two officers from the Sixth Army join the Australian staff to assist in planning. These officers, who have just been through the mill, and your own planners should be able to render great assistance to the Australian staff, which is undoubtedly new to the game.[66]

In letters and notes to MacArthur, Sutherland, Kenney and Barbey, Chamberlin criticised the Australians, describing their plans as 'extremely general and elementary'. However, when on 21 July he recommended sending a strong letter of complaint to Blamey, Sutherland instructed him to handle the matter informally.[67]

But an informal talk with Blamey's Chief of Staff, Berryman, proved unsatisfactory, and Chamberlin reported to Sutherland that he gained the impression that Berryman 'knew nothing of the progress of the detailed planning of this operation'. He recommended that Sutherland and a staff team should visit Port Moresby to provide 'on-the-spot' coordination.[68] Berryman, however, realised that the problem was the difference in staff methods, and he wrote in his diary:

> He [Chamberlin] wanted to know our detailed plans for Postern and arrangements for coordination ... I explained our system was to allow [the] Commander concerned to work out plans together with Air and Navy on the spot in accordance with the general outline plan ... The difference is we work on a decentralised basis whilst GHQ have a highly centralised one.[69]

Chamberlin did not give up, and on 28 August he informed Sutherland of the 'numerous defects' in the orders issued by Herring's New Guinea Force: 'The missions omitted are more numerous than those covered'. He continued:

---

66. Letter, Chamberlin to Barbey, 13 July 1948, AWM 589/3/9/

67. Memorandum, Chamberlin to Sutherland, 21 July 1943, *loc.cit.*

68. Memorandum, Chamberlin to Sutherland, 5 August 1943, *loc.cit.*

69. Berryman Diary, 4 August 1943. Herring agreed with Berryman's summary. Comments on Draft of Official History, 19 March 1954, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

> Judged from our standards of the preparation of combat orders, it is elementary and incomplete and would draw a 'C.U.' at any of our staff schools. It is extremely lacking in vision of the function this force is to perform. It decentralizes control along with execution. Generally speaking, only the initiation of the operation is covered. The most serious defect is the total lack of appreciation of the logistic problem.[70]

As a result, on 30 August MacArthur wrote to Blamey requesting him to supply his plans for the consolidation of the Huon Peninsula and the capture of Finschhafen 'at the earliest practicable date'.[71] The ensuing disagreement between Blamey and MacArthur over the strategic direction of the campaign has been dealt with in the previous chapter,[72] but MacArthur's letter raised another important question, namely the coordination of land and air forces.

The New Guinea Force order of 25 August had delegated the Commander of the 1st Australian Corps as[73] 'the authority to arrange details of air support and naval support for the operation'.[74] MacArthur, however, was adamant that this coordination could be carried out by no-one but himself: 'Any attempt to delegate this responsibility would, I am sure, result in ultimate confusion'.[75] Blamey replied that the order had not meant to affect the coordinating role of the high command,[76] but events

---

70. Memorandum, Chamberlin to Sutherland, 28 August 1943, AWM 589/3/9.

71. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey, 30 August 1945, AWM 423/11/209 and Blamey Papers 43.632.

72. See pp.289-292.

73. The planning of the Lae operation was conducted by Headquarters New Guinea Force, commanded by Lieutenant-General Herring. On 20 August, shortly before the operation, Blamey assumed command of New Guinea Force, releasing Herring to command the 1st Corps which was responsible for the actual operation.

74. New Guinea Force Operation Instruction No.95, 25 August 1943, AWM 589/3/11.

75. Letter, MacArthur to Blamey, 30 August 1943, AWM 423/11/209 and Blamey Papers 43.612.

76. Letter, Blamey to MacArthur, 31 August 1943, AWM 599/3/3.

during the following month when MacArthur and Blamey had both returned to Brisbane, were to show that the centralisation of coordination could lead to possible disaster. With respect to the misunderstanding over the planning for Lae, the official historian's comments are relevant:

> This misunderstanding underlined the weakness whereby since April 1942 an American general headquarters on which there was quite inadequate Australian representation reigned from afar over a field army that was, for present purposes, almost entirely Australian, and whose doctrines and methods differed from those of GHQ. It was evidence of the detachment of GHQ that, after 16 months, its senior general staff officers had little knowledge of the doctrines and methods of its principal army in the field.[77]

The fault was not, of course, all one sided, and General Mackay, who in late September assumed command of New Guinea Force, noted that there was 'a certain impatience to hurry on, or vary, arrangements entered into with the Americans, or agreed to at pre-operational conferences'. The result was a 'tendency to try and "wangle" things' which reacted to the discredit of the Australians. Mackay cited two examples of this tendency; first when General Vasey attempted to fly an additional brigade into the Markham Valley, and second, when General Herring gave orders to load two or three hundred men onto American destroyers, when the American admiral said he could carry only 150 men.[78]

It is noticeable that both examples concern transportation, and throughout the war the Australians had to go 'cap in hand' to the Americans for transport. General Lumsden, Churchill's representative at MacArthur's headquarters, commented on this problem. He reported that cooperation between the American and Australian forces was excellent at the top, and this feeling permeated the two forces so that 'in spite of unavoidable differences of opinion due to temperament, outlook, organisation and interests', the relationships were good. But he observed that

---

77. Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.283.

78. Letter, Mackay to Blamey, 6 and 7 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.3.

the main difference was shipping: 'This is controlled entirely by GHQ and the Australian Army never succeeds in getting the allotment it requires'.[79] General Dewing made the same observation:

> The Australian Army knows it is man for man vastly better than the American Army. It hates to feel that the American Command can and sometimes does side-track it. It hates to be for ever conscious of the restrictions upon equipment, aircraft and amenities for itself, while alongside them the American Army seems to have everything and rather more.[80]

Significantly, the last major clash with the Americans over battlefield cooperation was to concern transportation.

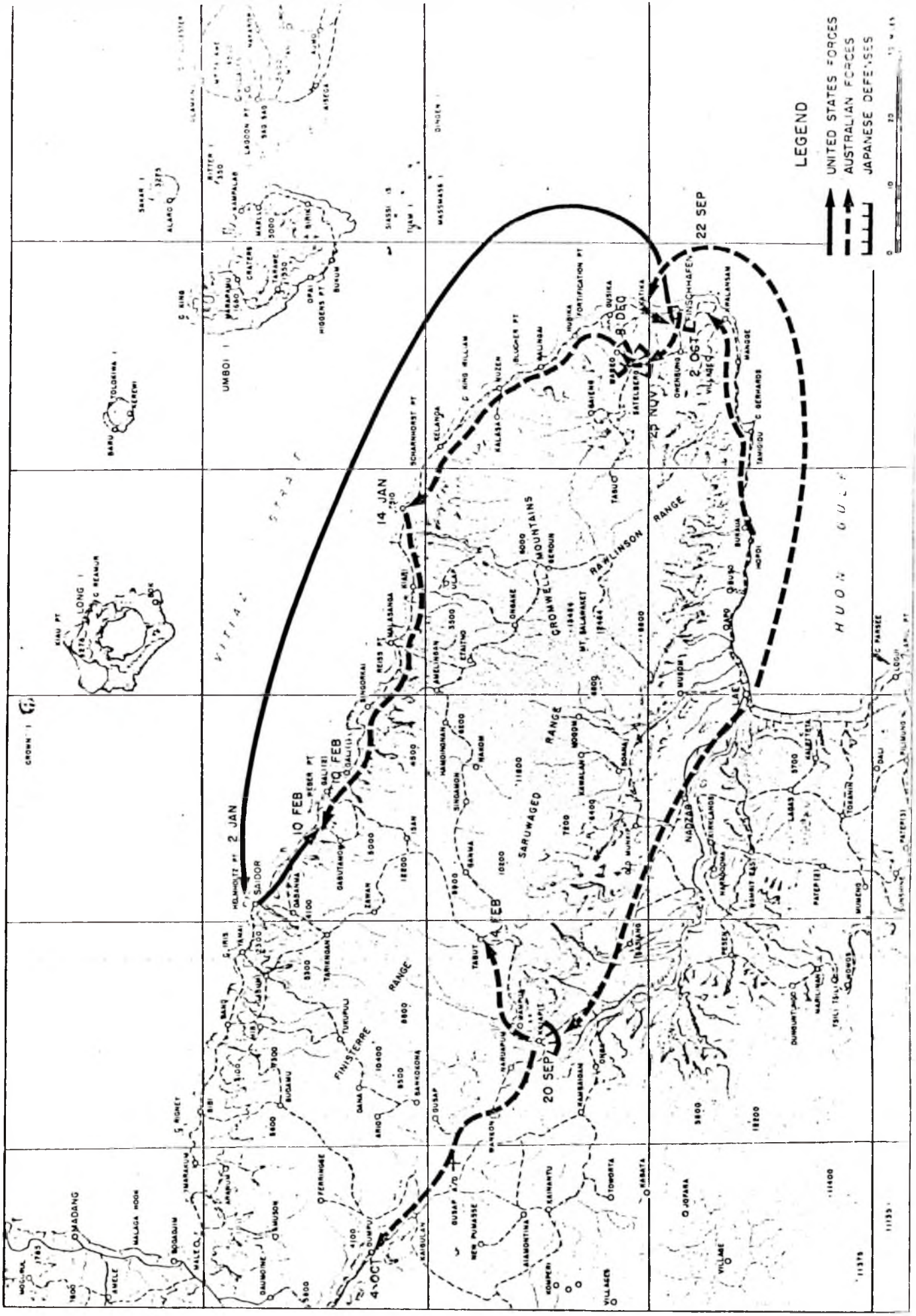
The Dispute over the Reinforcement of Finschhafen

At Buna and at Nassau and Tambu Bays the disputes were between allied ground force commanders, but the disagreement over the reinforcement of Finschhafen was at a higher level involving allied naval and land commanders, and ultimately MacArthur himself. And just as the earlier disputes probably convinced MacArthur of the need to separate the Australian and American ground units, so did this later dispute reveal the inadequacies of the allied command system.

The initial cause was a disagreement about the strength of the Japanese forces in the Finschhafen area. MacArthur's staff put the strength at between three and four thousand; Blamey's Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) believed the strength was over 6,000, and in the event this proved to be an underestimate.[81] The trouble was that MacArthur and his staff continued to claim that they had annihilated the Japanese convoy in the Bismarck Sea in March 1943, while the Australians believed that many Japanese had reached the shore.[82] Furthermore,

---

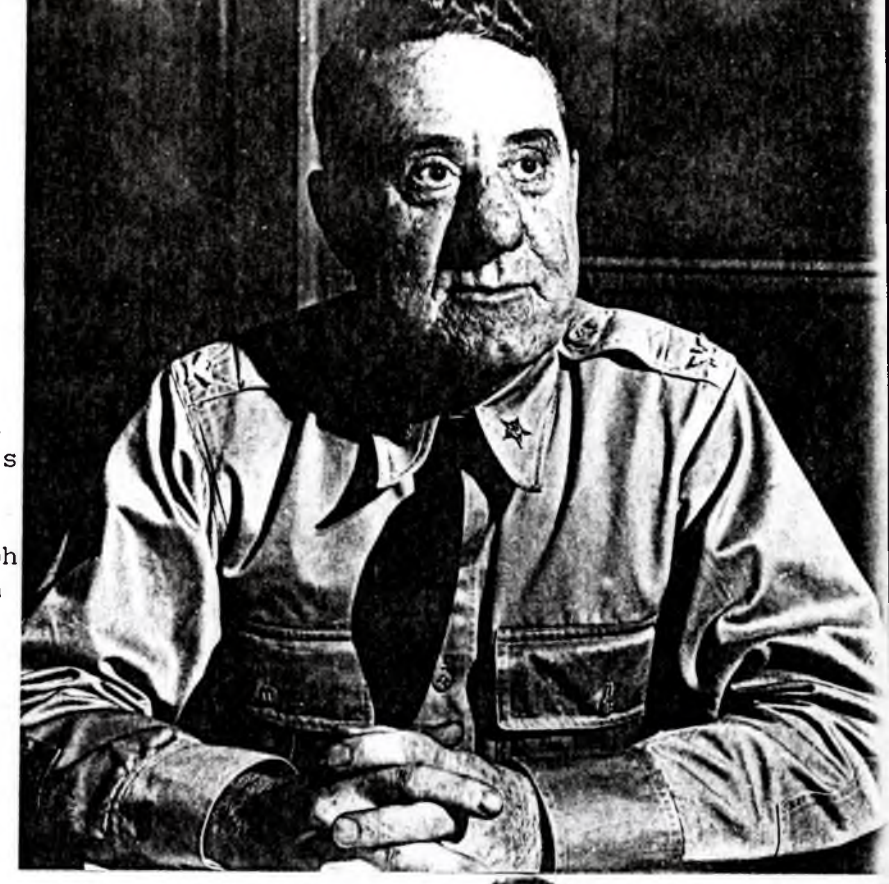
79. Letter, Lumsden to CIGS, 5 January 1944, WO 106/3383.
80. Report by General Dewing, 23 April 1944, WO 106/4839.
81. Memorandum by General Berryman, 6 November 1944, Blamey Papers 54.1.
82. Interview with Brigadier Sir Kenneth Wills, 9 August 1974.



MAP 8

The Envelopment of the Huon Peninsula.

From: *Reports of General MacArthur*, Vol.1. p.126.



Brigadier-General Stephen J. Chamberlin, MacArthur's Chief of Operations. 'A sound, careful staff officer'. This photograph was taken in Melbourne in February 1942 when Chamberlin was a Colonel.

(AWM Negative No.11557C)

Rear-Admiral Daniel Barbey, Commander of the 7th Amphibious Fleet, decorating his land forces adviser, Brigadier R.N.L. Hopkins of the Australian Army, with the Legion of Merit.

(AWM Negative No.17695)

The crashed Mitchell bomber in which Brigadier R.B. Sutherland was killed on 28 September 1943.

(AWM Negative No.57384)

the Deputy DMI, Colonel K.A. Wills, spoke of a force of possibly ten to twelve thousand, and he had been proved right previously on two crucial occasions.[83]

Thus when MacArthur called a conference on 17 September 1942 to plan the Finschhafen landing, Blamey urged a landing by two brigades. MacArthur wanted to use only one brigade but eventually he agreed that one other brigade should stand by to be used if necessary.[84] Blamey therefore warned the corps commander, Herring, to prepare the second brigade,[85] but apparently MacArthur did not warn his naval commander that he might have to move it, and indeed it seems likely that he never thought that the eventuality would arise.

The first troops of the 20th Brigade landed at Finschhafen on 22 September, and that same day Blamey ordered Herring to send in the HQ of the 9th Division and an additional Brigade.[86] Blamey then followed MacArthur south to Brisbane, leaving Lieutenant-General Mackay in command.

The next day Herring informed Admiral Barbey, the American Commander of the Seventh Amphibious Fleet, of his orders, and requested him to arrange transportation of the additional brigade. But unknown to the Australians, Barbey had received instruction from GHQ to 'go easy on Finschhafen' and not to move in more troops.[87] Barbey therefore informed Herring that his orders precluded him from complying.[88] Furthermore,

---

83. *Ibid.* The two previous occasions were in Java in February 1942 (see Chapter Two) and over the Japanese advance to Port Moresby in July-August 1942 (see Chapter Four).

84. *Ibid.* Blamey invited Wills to the conference and asked him to present his views to MacArthur. See also Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.445.

85. Letter, Blamey to Mackay, 18 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.3.

86. Memorandum, Herring to Mackay, 26 September 1943, AWM 591/7/21.

87. Letter from Major-General R.N.L. Hopkins, 13 July 1974. Hopkins was Barbey's Land Forces adviser.

88. Memorandum, Herring to Mackay, 26 September 1943, AWM 591/7/21.

as General Berryman observed, relations 'became somewhat cool and Admiral Barbey sailed from Buna to Milne Bay'.[89] On the other hand Herring has denied that there was any clash of personalities with Barbey.[90]

Meanwhile Berryman, who was acting as Mackay's chief of staff, took up the matter with General Chamberlin, who was visiting Port Moresby. Chamberlin could offer little help, but he requested Berryman to try to solve the problem in New Guinea, and not let it go back to MacArthur in Brisbane.[91] In some respects Berryman saw the problem as revolving around the personalities of Barbey and Herring, and he described them as performing like two prize fighters, while he and Chamberlin acted as seconds.[92] But on the other hand, Berryman was becoming annoyed and he wrote in the diary: 'Our American friends seem to have the impression we have thoroughly defeated the Japs and that the Army requires but little further assistance'.[93]

---

89. Letter, Berryman to Blamey, 8 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.7. Also Berryman Papers. General Hopkins later wrote: 'Milne Bay was the 7th Amphibious Force "home base". It was a safe and guarded (both by sea and air) anchorage. There was none other. The Official History gives the impression that Barbey left Herring at Buna thro' pique or bloody mindedness. Far from it. We called for a conference and we heartily disliked spending any more than essential time there. We had been caught there by Jap bombers one night on the way back from the 9 Div landing east of Lae and damaged a propeller trying to leave in a hurry. The place was full of coral and shoal waters and was unprotected in every way'. (Letter, 13 July 1974).

90. Comments on Draft Official History, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

91. Interview with Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Berryman, 1 May 1974.

92. *Ibid.* There had been disagreement between Herring and Barbey even before the landing on 20 September. For example, on 19 September Berryman wrote in his diary: 'The discussion Herring-Barbey on Barbey's flagship lasted 4 hrs with [Herring] talking hard. He was tired and twice said he would chuck his hand in if he could not get his way. Barbey was accommodating and conciliatory but he should have had an accredited ref'. But Herring wrote later: 'The famous conference at (Milne Bay) between us and the American Navy and Air Force started off on a not very promising note when a deputy chief of air staff - an aggressive vitriolic capable fellow stated, 'We'd get on better if the goddam Navy was not as goddam frightened of losing some of its goddam ships'. Interview Dexter-Herring, 6 April 1951, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

93. Berryman Diary, 24 September 1943. Earlier during the planning Berryman had written in his diary (11 August 1943): 'Chamberlin is quite optimistic about Postern and seems to think it is an easy operation and there will not be much opposition. They never seem to think there will be much when the AIF is concerned, but when it is US then there are many [enemy anticipated]'.

Herring saw the problem from another angle. He could not understand the apparent lack of concern at New Guinea Force Headquarters. 'I just could not get Mackay to realize that it was up to him as GOC NGF to see that TAB's orders ... were carried out', he wrote later. He felt that Mackay and Berryman were not giving him full support.[94]

On 25 September a conference was held at Port Moresby attended by Herring, Berryman, Mackay, Kenney and Admiral Carpender, who, as Commander of the Allied Naval Forces was Barbey's superior. Both Berryman and Herring gained the impression that Carpender was in agreement that another infantry brigade should be moved to Finschhafen, and Carpender promised that in an emergency he would concentrate his forces at Finschhafen.[95]

However, later that evening Carpender said that he would have to seek approval from GHQ, and that Herring had agreed to this during his conference with Barbey on 23 September. Herring was angry and telephoned Berryman from his headquarters at Dobodura at midnight, insisting on the brigade being sent.[96] The next day he wrote to Mackay:

> I made no such agreement but made it clear that as Admiral Barbey would not do as I asked so as to enable me to carry out my orders I would have to refer the matter to higher authority and if necessary, to GHQ as my orders were definite.[97]

Again Berryman took the matter up with the Navy, and on receiving an unsatisfactory answer, Mackay sent a most immediate signal to Blamey and MacArthur, relating the history of the negotiations to reinforce Finschhafen, and concluding that: 'This was foreseen and ordered by you,

---

94. Sayers, *op.cit.*, p.272.

95. Letter, Berryman to Blamey, 8 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.7, Berryman Diary, 25 September 1943, and Sayers, *op.cit.*, pp.272, 273.

96. Berryman Diary, 25 September 1943.

97. Memorandum, Herring to Mackay, 26 September 1943, AWM 591/7/21.

and both commanders New Guinea Force and Aust Corps consider it essential this be done earliest possible'.[98] But in Herring's opinion Mackay's signal did not convey the right sense of urgency.[99]

Meanwhile, the situation at Finschhafen was becoming more difficult, for on 25 September the commadner of the 20th Brigade, Brigadier Windeyer, had asked for an additional battalion, and on 27 September his forces captured a Japanese order for an attack on his position.[100] This news was passed to Blamey,[101] who signalled MacArthur, reminding him of their conference of 17 September, and urging him to authorise the sending of reinforcements.[102]

By this time Herring was becoming agitated, and when Mackay told him that Carpender had agreed to move the troops in three to five days' time,[103] Berryman recorded in his dairy that Herring became 'quite irrational and wanted to go and see GHQ and Sir Thomas'.[104] And Herring's equanimity was not helped when, on the morning of 28 September, his plane crashed on taking off to fly to Milne Bay. His chief operations staff officer, and close friend, Brigadier Sutherland, 'was killed in front of his eyes by being run through by a long piece of timber while still strapped to his seat'.[105]

---

98. Signal 0/8823, New Guinea Force to Land forces, repeated to GHQ SWPA, 26 September 1943, Blamey Papers 43.632.

99. Sayers, *op.cit.*, p.274.

100. Signal, 9th Division to 1st Australian Corps, 27 September 1943, War Diary, HQ 9th Division, G. Branch, October 1943, AWM 1/5/20.

101. Signal B 48, Mackey to Blamey, 27 September 1943, Blamey Papers 43.632.

102. Signal Z 792, Blamey to MacArthur, 28 September 1942, *loc.cit.*

103. Letter, Mackay to Herring, 27 September 1943, AWM 591/7/al.

104. Berryman Diary, 27 September 1943.

105. Hopkins letter, 13 July 1974. Herring's senior intelligence officer, Colonel E. Mander-Jones, recalled that a metal strip on the runway was kicked up by a preceding plane, and it was this which killed Sutherland, (interview, 12 August 1974). Whatever the exact detail, the incident was most unpleasant. See also Sayers, *op.cit.*, p.274.

MacArthur's intiial replies were not encouraging,[106] but on 29 September Mackay eventually received notification that the Commander of the Allied Naval Forces was being directed to comply with the request to send an additional battalion.[107] The danger at Finschhafen was not over, but transport was now being arranged, and eventually the force was built up to over a division before the Japanese were defeated.

The incident focusses attention on the problems of allied cooperation. In the first place there was the disagreement over intelligence assessments. As Hopkins has observed, 'GHQ were woefully wrong in their intelligence estimates but it was nothing to do with Dan Barbey'.[108] When Barbey and Herring received contradictory instructions it was only natural that they could not agree on a common course of action. The problem was exacerbated by the departure of MacArthur and Blamey from New Guinea, for there was no one on the spot who could solve the problem quickly.[109] Ironically, Blamey was the commander of the Task Force in New Guinea, but he had delegated authority to Mackay, which the Americans claimed he should not have done. The Americans were therefore less disposed to accept Mackay's authority.

Although he has subsequently denied that he was shaken by the air crash,[110] Herring does not seem to have approached the problem as tactfully

---

106. Signal 08831, Blamey to Mackay, 28 September 1943, quoting MacArthur to Blamey, 27 September 1943 and Signal G 291, Landops to Landforces, 28 September 1943, quoting MacArthur to Blamey, 28 September. Blamey Papers 43.632.

107. Signal Q 9468, MacArthur to Mackay, 20 September 1943, *loc.cit.*

108. Hopkins' letter, 13 July 1974.

109. Letter, Mackay to Blamey, October 1943, Blamey Papers 43.672.

110. Quoted in I. Chapman, *Iven G. Mackay, Citizen and Soldier*, (Melway, Melbourne, 1975), p.279. Mackay wrote to Blamey on 6 and 7 October 1943 that Herring 'was probably more deeply shaken by the accident than appeared at first sight ... [he] has not quite exhibited his normal poise. This unfortunately is not understood by everybody with the result that rather disturbing situations have occurred. For example, there has been open criticism of other services and formations, sometimes, possibly, with justification, sometimes not, but in all cases tending to destroy mutual confidence and cooperation'. Blamey Papers 170.3.

as he might.[111] He was probably right when he claimed that 'We damn nearly lost Finschhafen',[112] but the incident did not help allied cooperation. Herring remained convinced that he had acted correctly and later wrote to the official historian:

> All I can say about myself is that I think I did do my very best to get those orders carried out, and though I may have been somewhat outspoken about the failure of NGF and the Navy to play their part, or perhaps when you contemplate how much depended on these orders being carried out, you may think a little plain speech was justified. What you have to do, I believe, is to discover what activiated NGF to act as it did. Berryman, I considered responsible for the trouble really and I told TAB so when I reached Australia ...
>
> Both Mackay and Berryman must face the fact that it was NGF's job to see that TAB's orders were carried out,and that they failed to get this done, and what is perhaps still more difficult to understand, passively resisted all my attempts to restore the position.[113]

Berryman did not believe that he was responsible in any way, and wrote later of the impact on the US Navy:

> Unfortunately the controversy has left a scar in that Admiral Carpender in speaking to me very confidentially said that the Navy resented the implication that 'Uncle Sam's Navy was letting us down at Finschhafen'. He also said he was glad he was here and very pleased that he had Sir Iven [Mackay] to deal with as he pressed our case firmly and tactfully and at the same time was scrupulously fair and tolerant in listening to the Navy's views. With the relief of [Herring] by [Morshead] I hope there will be an improvement in our relations with the Navy but the position from our point of view is *not* satisfactory.[114]

---

111. Hopkins letter, 13 July 1974; Berryman Diary, 1 October 1943, letter, Berryman to Blamey, 8 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.7.

112. Chapman, *op.cit.*, p.279. On 25 October 1943 Mackay wrote to Blamey: 'Had 24 Aust Inf Bde followed 20 Bde quickly to Finschhafen, I agree with you that the result might have been very different and Satelberg could have been seized early'. Blamey Papers 170.3. Brigadier Windeyer had no recollection of being desperate, but did admit that it would have been awkward without the arrival of the 24th Brigade. Interview with Major-General Sir Victor Windeyer, 2 May 1974.

113. Letter, Herring to Dexter, 21 January 1955, Gavin Long Correspondence - Herring.

114. Letter, Berryman to Blamey, 8 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.7. This relief had been planned some weeks earlier and was not related to the Finschhafen incident.

Later Berryman discussed the incident with Barbey and noted in his diary that Barbey:

> told me the only regret he had in all his [operations] was that he did not give us earlier support at Finsch. Although tipped by GHQ to go easy had he realised the position we were in he would have done it without asking GHQ. He said he thought Herring very unbending and with a tendency to cry wolf and he did [not] get on with him. Barbey was very honest and said he had a lot of worries himself at the time, as it turned out Herring was right but he handled Barbey badly and only succeeded in getting his back up. Barbey was very honest in admitting his error.[115]

But Mackay had the last word:[116]

> With all due respect to our friends, I think this incident shows the weakness of trying to fight battles from a distance with fixed assumptions that the enemy is bent on withdrawing and that he is incapable of increasing the number of his forces. In point of fact, far from withdrawing, his intention seems to be just the opposite ...[117]

For MacArthur, the incident provided further evidence of the difficulties of allied cooperation. Significantly a report written by General Rowell from Cairo on 25 July covering the allied landings in North Africa, also noted the problems of 'mixed task forces'. He concluded that he was 'sure that we will see an ever-increasing tendency for us and the Americans to work in our own boxes'.[118] This was, in fact, just what MacArthur was planning, and considering that he envisaged that future operations would be over widely separated areas with attendant communication difficulties, he was probably right.

---

115. Berryman Diary, 27 September 1944.

116. In Berryman's opinion, Mackay 'was a tower of strength in handling what might have become a delicate situation'. Personal account written by Berryman, 21 November 1944, Berryman Papers.

117. Letter, Mackay to Blamey, 24-25 October 1943, Blamey Papers 170.3.

118. Letter, Rowell to Morshead, 25 July 1943, Morshead Papers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AUSTRALIA AND ALLIED STRATEGY, January-May 1944

No News from Sextant

At the beginning of 1944 strategic decision-makers in Australia found themselves waiting upon decisions being made across the globe in Cairo, London and Washington. Throughout the latter half of 1943 Curtin had struggled to determine the shape and size of the Australian War effort. The Australian government had decided that if it were to maintain the food and materiel production, which was important to Britain and the American forces in the South-West Pacific Area, then MacArthur could be supplied with no more than a striking force of three infantry divisions and an armoured brigade, garrison forces, 48 RAAF squadrons and a Navy which would not increase in size.[1] MacArthur had agreed to this allocation,[2] and it remained only for Britain and America to agree. The prime strategic question for early 1944 was not, therefore, the size and shape of the Australian commitment, but rather how the forces were to be used, and this was a matter which involved cooperation with allies who had already proven unwilling to listen to their junior partners.

From the Australian point of view this was a convenient time to raise these matters, for it was obvious that within a few months there would be fewer Australian troops engaged in combat in New Guinea than at any time since July 1942. Indeed on 23 December 1943, in a most secret policy directive, Blamey had laid down the role of the army for the following year, stating that:

---

1. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 1 November 1943, CP 290/16 item bundle 1.

2. Prime Minister's speech to Premier's Conference, 25 January 1944, MP 1217, Box 611.

> The operational role of the Australian Military Forces engaged in forward operations in New Guinea will be taken over by USA Forces in accordance with plans now being prepared. Aggressive operations will be continued and reliefs necessary to maintain the initiative will be made by GOC New Guinea Force until Commander USA Forces takes over responsibility.

At the end of the period of relief all but two of the six Australian divisions comprising the 1st and 2nd Corps would have returned to Australia for 'training and rehabilitation' on the Atherton Tableland.[3] This policy was reiterated at the Advisory War Council on 15 February 1944 when Blamey reported that 'it had been decided that the Australian Military Forces should be totally withdrawn from an active operational role in New Guinea'.[4] Now, with the Japanese on the defensive, decisions could at last be taken with a long term view. One possibility that had already been mentioned was that for future operations the Australians would be based on Darwin.[5]

The changes in the fortunes of war had also coincided with new perceptions in Australia's relationship with America. Throughout 1943 there had been increasing evidence of American intentions to seize bases in the South-West Pacific. As a reaction to this threat Evatt had spoken at various times of securing Australian sovereignty over Fiji, the Solomons, the New Hebrides, Portuguese Timor, Java and Dutch New

---

3. AMF Policy Directive 1943-1944, 23 December 1943, Blamey Papers 23.11. The two divisions remaining in New Guinea, the 3rd and 11th, were 'in turn to be withdrawn from active operational and administrative functions for rehabilitation and training'.

4. Advisory War Council Minute 1295, 15 February 1944 CRS A2884, item 1392. At this meeting 'The Prime Minister expressed his complete confidence in General Blamey as Commander-in-Chief, and Mr Menzies said that he still held the same high opinion of General Blamey as when he had appointed him General Officer Commanding AIF'.

5. War Cabinet Minute 3264, Canberra, 21 January 1944, MP 1217, Box 570.

Guinea.[6] Both Australian and American declarations were motivated by fears for the future defence of the region.

The Australians reacted in a number of directions. On the one hand Curtin saw the value of increasing the British presence in the Pacific. Indeed on 11 December 1943 General Dewing cabled the War Office that 'Australians from Prime Minister down want to see British troops in this area'.[7] British Commonwealth cooperation was, in fact, a topic which Curtin intended to raise at the Prime Ministers' Conference scheduled for May 1944.[7]

On the other hand,Australia's increased military power made her able to occupy her own territories and reestablish her own sovereignty. Thus on 22 November 1943 Curtin had reminded MacArthur that Papua was part of Australia and that she had a mandate from the League of Nations over Australian New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville. New Zealand had a mandate for Samoa, and the British had a mandate for Nauru which was administered by Australia. 'Australia', said Curtin, 'therefore has a special interest in the employment of its own forces in the

---

6. Bell, *op.cit.*, pp.147, 148, 157. Paradoxically, at one stage Roosevelt had suggested that Australia might purchase Portuguese Timor. Telegram T 867/3, Roosevelt to Churchill, 22 June 1943, WO 106/3441.

7. Dewing to War Office, 11 December 1945, AWM 9/2/3. Curtin had dealt with this topic at length during an interview with members of the Lethbridge Mission on 3 November 1945. Curtin said that his two major anxieties were firstly the upholding of British prestige in the area, and secondly, the shortage of Australian manpower. 'He stated emphatically that British prestige could only be upheld by deeds and not by words, and that in his judgment the presence of British Imperial Forces in the Pacific theatre was essential'. Curtin said that Australians 'resented American braggadocio' (his words) and the only American division which had been in action in New Guinea had not distinguished itself. Report JSL/1, by Major General J.S. Lethbridge, 3 November 1943, ADM 116/4906.

8. Throughout 1943 Churchill had made repeated efforts to arrange a Prime Ministers' Conference but on at least four occasions Curtin had asked for the Conference to be postponed. Finally, on 9 November 1943, Curtin had agreed to a Conference in late April or early May 1944 (PREM 4, 42/2).

operations for the ejectment of the enemy from territory under its administration'.[9]

In Parliament on 9 February 1944 Curtin summed up the government's view:

> The scale of Australia's military effort will have an important bearing on our status at the peace table. It is of vital importance to our future that the part which we play should be such as to guarantee us an effective voice in the peace settlement. There is, therefore, a minimum below which our military effort cannot be permitted to fall.[10]

But Curtin had few definite ideas on the role of the Australian striking force in the forthcoming year. He had entrusted the Australian forces to MacArthur's command and he continued to look to the American Commander-in-Chief for strategic advice. One of Curtin's great traits was loyalty. It remained to be seen whether MacArthur deserved that loyalty.

Like the Australians, MacArthur too was waiting on overseas decisions. When, in November 1943, Curtin had asked him for an outline of his plans,[11] he had quite rightly told the Prime Minister that they depended upon the Cairo Conference (Sextant).[12] MacArthur received some idea of the situation when after Cairo Marshall visited him in New Guinea on 15 December,[13] but the details of the Pacific strategy remained to be decided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington in December and January. As General Handy disingenously observed, the Sextant decision gave the Joint Chiefs 'almost complete liberty of action in the Pacific

---

9. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 22 November 1943, Blamey Papers 5.1.

10. Review of War Situation by Prime Minister in House of Representatives, 9 February 1944, MP 1217, Box 305.

11. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 22 November 1943, Blamey Papers 5.1.

12. Notes of Discussions [by Curtin] with the Commander-in-Chief, South-west Pacific Area, 29 November to 1 December 1943, MP 1217, Box 2.

13. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, pp.369-371.

without reference to the British Chiefs of Staff'.[14] This had, of course, been the case for almost two years.

Clearly the Australian government was annoyed at being excluded from the discussions of Pacific strategy at Cairo,[15] and this was the last straw which motivated Evatt to arrange the Australia-New Zealand Agreement in January 1944. But although Australia's exclusion from the discussions in Cairo was the motivating factor, Evatt's concern that Australia should play a leading part in the Pacific can be traced back to a speech to Parliament made on 14 October 1943, when he had recounted the so-called success of his overseas mission earlier in the year. He had then gone on to stress the need for permanent collaboration between New Zealand and Australia. When the Australian and New Zealand ministers met in Canberra in January 1944, they proposed to establish a regional organisation to be called the South Seas Regional Commission. Furthermore, they spoke of the need to take a strong part in the administration of the colonies to the north, and of the need to establish in collaboration with other allies bases and major defence works in the islands to ensure regional security.[16] It followed from these views that if Australia were to obtain any influence in the Pacific then Australian forces would have to be involved actively in the operations to the north of Australia, and this attitude was shown by Australia's

---

14. Morton, *op.cit.*, p.601.

15. On 6 December 1943 Curtin told reporters that, with respect to the Cairo Conference, 'They don't tell us anything'. F.T. Smith Reports, No.87. That day Sir Ronald Cross wrote to Curtin promising information on the conference as soon as it became available. CRS A1608, item VV/41/1/1.

16. For an outline of the agreement see Tenant, *op.cit.*, pp.156-159; Ross, *op.cit.*, Ch.26; P. Hasluck, 'Australia and the Formation of the United Nations', *Royal Australian Historical Society, Journal and Proceedings*,, Vol.XI, 1954, Part III and Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, Chapters 10 and 11. For the defence aspects of the agreement see CRS A816, item 11/301/511 and MP 1049/5, item 1846/4/256. For the British reaction to the agreement see PREM 4 50/12. For a discussion of the decolonisation aspects of the agreement see W.R. Louis, *Imperialism at Bay, 1941-1945, United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977), Chapter 18.

efforts to persuade New Zealand to withdraw her division from Italy to the Pacific.[17] The Australian ministers were bitterly disappointed at the lack of response from New Zealand.[18]

The agreement upset the British and antagonised the Americans, and Bell has claimed that following the agreement America became more 'reluctant to endorse Australia's efforts to play an expanded military or political role in the Pacific'.[19] Curtin, however, agreed with Evatt's sentiment when the latter complained that the 'first news [the] Australian Government received of the Cairo decisions was through the medium of the press'.[20] Nevertheless, the Prime Minister showed remarkable restraint in waiting while the details of the allied plans reached Australia in a most unsatisfactory and piecemeal fashion.

On 15 December 1943 the British High Commissioner gave Curtin a summary of the main conclusions of the military decisions at Cairo.[21] Then in January 1944 Australia learnt that Britain was making available a naval

---

17. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.152.

18. For example, on 22 October 1943 Curtin told a British press delegation, led by Sir Walter Layton, that he was 'mad as a hatter' over New Zealand's decision to keep its troops in the Middle East. He thought that New Zealand was 'passing the economic buck to us'. When it was suggested that the choice was between the 'blood buck' and the 'economic buck', he pointed out that the New Zealanders had no forces in New Guinea, and it was a question of their avoiding the 'malaria buck'. PREM 3 159/2.

19. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.157.

20. Evatt to American Minister, Canberra, 24 February 1944, CRS M100, February 1944.

21. Referred to in Cable No.20A, Bruce to Curtin, 7 February 1944, *loc.cit.*

task force of a battle cruiser, two aircraft carriers, four cruisers and twelve destroyers for operations in the Pacific. The task force would probably operate under Nimitz's command and would be based on Sydney.[22] Bruce in London was not satisfied that the United Kingdom government had passed on all relevant information. On 24 December he told Curtin of the preparation of a telegram describing the 'overall' plan for the defeat of Japan,[23] but on 20 January he informed Curtin that there had been a delay in the despatch of the telegram.[24] The delay had been caused by a dispute which the British official historian described as 'a long and complicated debate which was to end only in September 1944, after involving the Prime Minister and the British Chiefs of Staff in perhaps their most serious disagreement of the war'.[25]

On 1 February 1944 Bruce advised Curtin that there had been a 'further hold up' in the despatch of the telegram; he informed Curtin that Churchill wished to modify the strategic concept that had been agreed at Cairo and that he wanted to reopen the discussion with Roosevelt. He pointed out to Curtin that 'the facts I have given you ... are not known even to the members of the War Cabinet'. He suggested that if Curtin received no news in the next few days then he should consider asking Churchill for more information.[26] Six days later Bruce reported that the position had 'not been straightened out' and there was 'little

---

22. Advisory War Council Minute 1284, 20 January 1944, CRS A2684, Volume VII.

23. Cable 246A, Bruce to Curtin, 24 December 1943, CRS M100, December 1943.

24. Cable 11A, Bruce to Curtin, 20 January 1944, CRS M100, January 1944.

25. The course of this dispute is related in detail in J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy, Volume V, August 1943-September 1944* (HMSO, London, 1956), chapters XI, XII. A. Bryant, *Triumph in the West 1943-1946* (Collins, London, 1959), provides an interesting insight into the dispute.

26. Cable 18A, Bruce to Curtin, 1 February 1944, CRS M100, February 1944.

prospect of the contemplated telegram being despatched to you in the near future'. He therefore suggested 'for your consideration the desirability of your cabling to the Prime Minister'.[27]

Hasluck suggests that the movement of the Japanese Combined Fleet to Singapore in late February and the consequent threat to the west coast of Australia, or a question directed to Curtin in Parliament and answered on 2 March, made him 'more acutely conscious that only sketchy information had been provided about the decisions reached at Cairo'.[28] Whatever the reason, on 4 March, three months after the Cairo conference, Curtin cabled London asking for further information to enable him to consult with his military advisers before leaving Australia to attend the Prime Minister's conference.[29] This cable was sent at a particularly pertinent time, for the next day he received from London the agenda for the conference. Item 2 of the agenda was 'Questions arising from the conduct of the war against Japan, including the provison of forces from the British Commonwealth for that purpose'.[30]

Churchill's reply was received on 14 March. He told Curtin that the main decisions at Sextant had concerned the cross-channel operation, but there was a 'preliminary study' of the overall plan for the defeat of Japan. The British Chiefs of Staff were studying two broad conceptions, an advance across the Indian Ocean against the Malay barrier, and a plan

---

27. Cable 20A, Bruce to Curtin, 7 February 1944, CRS M100, February 1944.

28. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, pp.423, 424. Information about the movement of the Japanese Fleet was provided by intercepts of radio messages between Tokyo, Singapore and Rabaul. (Letter, Blamey to Shedden, 2 March 1944, Blamey 54.3) Blamey requested Shedden to destroy the messages after they had been read by himself and the Prime Minister.

29. Cable 56, Curtin to Churchill, 4 March 1944, Blamey Papers 5.6 Also CRS A816, item 31/301/336.

30. Cable D.335, Dominions Office to Curtin, 5 March 1944, PREM 4 42/3, and also quoted in Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 17 March 1944, MP1217, Box 3. See also letter Curtin to Blamey, 13 March 1944, Blamey Papers 154.1.

to place the bulk of the naval forces plus some land and air forces on the left of the US forces in the Pacific. In the latter case Australia would be the base and Churchill suggested, subject to Curtin's agreement, sending a small party of experts to Australia to examine its base potentialities.[31]

To Bruce in London this reply was 'somewhat disingenuous'. On 14 March he explained to Curtin that despite the impression created by Churchill's cable, 'a firm decision was reached at Sextant in favour of the broad strategic plan' for the Pacific. The details of the plan were:

> A. The main effort against Japan to be made in the Pacific by a combined advance through the Central Pacific and along the north coast of New Guinea towards the Formosa, Philippines area, priority being given initially to the Central Pacific.
>
> B. Operations in the S.E. Asia area to be subsidiary to the Pacific and designed to improve the air route to China and open a land route when possible ...
>
> C. Preparations to be made for operations in the North Pacific after the defeat of Germany on the assumption that Russia will probably enter into the war shortly after the defeat of Germany.

Bruce went on to explain that the initial plan would involve the despatch of a British fleet to the South-West Pacific with two infantry divisions moving from India to Australia before the end of the year. Between seven and twelve months after the defeat of Germany a further four divisions and 65 RAF squadrons would follow. The main difficulty was whether Australia could support these forces, and to determine this a party under Rear-Admiral C.S. Daniel[32] had already left the

---

31. Cable 66, Churchill to Curtin, 11 March 1944, received 14 March 1944, Blamey Papers 5.6. Also CRS A816, item 31/301/336.

32. Daniel, a former Director of Plans at the Admiralty, had discussed this mission with Bruce on 2 February, almost six weeks before Bruce's cable. Memorandum by Bruce, 2 February 1944, CRS M100, February 1944.

United Kingdom for Australia via America. Bruce personally doubted whether Australia could support the force, but he believed that in the long run the broad strategy agreed at Cairo would be adopted.[33]

At last Curtin was in receipt of more explicit information,[34] and it revealed Churchill's continuing disdain for Australia,[35] for without receiving Curtin's views he had already despatched Daniel's mission to Australia.[36] The United Kingdom had no right to expect that Australia would willingly agree, for Australia had previously objected to various aspects of the British mission commanded by General Dewing.[37] Not surprisingly, when on 16 March the Australian Chiefs of Staff considered Churchill's cable they stated that they considered themselves quite capable of preparing plans for the reception and maintenance of British Forces. They noted that substantial information had already been forwarded to Whitehall and that information had been supplied to the

---

33. Cable 42A, Bruce to Curtin, 14 March 1944, CRS M100, March 1944.

34. On 15 March the Australian CGS received a cable from the CIGS explaining the purposes of the proposed mission to Australia. CIGS to CGS, 15 March 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

35. Churchill's disdain for the Australian contribution to the war is revealed in his papers. On 25 January 1944 he referred to reports that Australia proposed to maintain only 3 divisions on the offensive: 'There is really no excuse for this'. (Churchill to Cranborne) On 16 April 1944 he said that the maintenance of three divisions 'was a very poor show'. (Churchill to Ismay) The Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum on 1 May 1944 stressed to Churchill that the Australians had 'carried out practically the whole of the fighting in New Guinea', and that the effort of the Australian Army was 'a very remarkable achievement'. PREM 3 63/8.

36. On 3 March 1944 a Dominions Office official said that it was 'important that nothing should be said to the Dominions Governments about the proposed Admiralty Mission until (a) Mr Curtin and Mr Fraser had been informed of the final decision about our Pacific strategy and (b) an answer had been given to Mr Curtin about manpower'. Minute of Meeting at Dominions Office, 3 March 1944. ADM 1/16251.

37. See Appendix 6.

Lethbridge Mission. General Blamey concurred with these observations.[38] There is no evidence that the Chiefs of Staff had seen Bruce's cable with the news that Daniel was proceeding to Australia.

Strategy in the Balance in the South-West Pacific Area

It is convenient to leave for a moment the communications between Australia and Britain and to examine the way the strategy of the SWPA was actually developing. February 1944 marks one of those periodic crises in MacArthur's career when it looked as though he was to be denied the opportunity to 'return' to the Philippines.

At Cairo the two pronged advance against Japan had been endorsed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but with the proviso that if there should be conflicts then 'due weight' should be given to the fact that the Central Pacific offered the prospect of a more rapid advance towards Japan[39] The result was that during December and January Nimitz and King began to prepare plans for a campaign in the Marianas. Then at the end of January Nimitz and members of his staff, met Sutherland, Kenney and Admiral Kinkaid at Pearl Harbour to coordinate the new campaign. Nimitz encountered immediate opposition from the representatives of the South-West Pacific Area. Therefore, early in February Nimitz and his staff and General Sutherland adjourned to Washington to reconsider the plans with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[40]

---

38. Minute by Defence Committee, 16 March 1944, CRS A816, item 31/301/336. The Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir Guy Royle, minuted on the draft reply to the UK government, 'I suggest that we should not turn down this offer of help too abruptly'. The Chief of the Air Staff added, 'I agree'.

39. 'Overall Plan for the Defeat of Japan', 2 December 1943, Morton, *op.cit.*, Appendix T.

40. This period of planning is dealt with in M. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, pp.455-459; R.R. Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines* (OCMH, Washington, 1953), pp.3-11; P.A. Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas* (OCMH, Washington, 1960), pp.12-20.

Meanwhile Nimitz's forces captured important positions in the Marshalls, seized Eniwetok on 17 February, two months ahead of schedule, and struck strongly with carrier-borne planes against Truk.

It was now clear to MacArthur that the Navy was once again trying to secure control of the Pacific War, and he bombarded Marshall with radiograms defending the South-West Pacific approach. Towards the end of February there was an ominous development when Nimitz suggested that all the islands north of New Guinea should be transferred from the South-West Pacific Area to Halsey's command, thus enabling the latter to develop a base at Manus Island.[41] To MacArthur this was the first step towards Nimitz's assumption of Supreme Command in the Pacific.

MacArthur reacted with vigour and on his behalf Sutherland delivered a forceful letter to Marshall. MacArthur wrote that he was 'in complete disagreement with the recommendation of Admiral Nimitz ... He thus has proposed to project his own command into the South-West Pacific by the artificiality of advancing South Pacific Forces into the area'. He explained that under this new arrangement Nimitz would have to deal with the Australian government which was 'in complete opposition to change of this sort. The Prime Minister has expressed to me his intention to resist further modification in strategic boundaries of this area'. Indeed MacArthur concluded that to change the boundaries would reflect on his 'professional integrity' and his 'personal honour'.[42]

MacArthur also sought the assistance of General Blamey, stressing that the boundaries could not be changed without the concurrence of the Australian government.[43] Always sensitive to slights to the Australian

---

41. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.388.

42. MacArthur to Marshall, 27 February 1944, Marshall Library, Lexington Va.

43. Notes of Blamey interview with MacArthur 1300 hrs, 25 February 1944, Blamey Papers 43.1.

government, Blamey generally supported MacArthur, discussed the matter with Curtin, and followed this with a letter to Shedden. But Blamey realised that the British Chiefs of Staff were re-assessing the Pacific strategy, and he added a rider to his letter:

> It is unlikely that the boundary will be altered without consultation with [Curtin], but before he supports MacArthur's claim he may require much more information from either Washington or London as to the means and intentions of further progress.[44]

Shedden replied that the Prime Minister beleived that if there was any dispute between the US Army and Navy then the President would save it to discuss with Curtin when he visited Washington.[45]

While the argument continued over the eventual possession of the Admiralty Islands MacArthur began a daring 'reconnaissance in force' of the islands, and within a few days Los Negros was secure.[46] The important point was that with the capture of the Admiralties one month ahead of schedule, MacArthur was now able to accelerate his plan to advance along the New Guinea coast. On 5 March he sent a revised plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and three days later Sutherland presented the new plan called RENO IV. This plan had four phases:

a. To capture Hollandia and Geelvink Bay in Dutch New Guinea beginning on 15 April;

b. To secure air bases in the Arafura Sea islands beginning on 15 July;

c. To capture Vogelkop and Halmahera starting about mid September; and

d. To land on Mindanao on 5 November and to establish bases to attack the Formosa - Luzon - China coast area.[47]

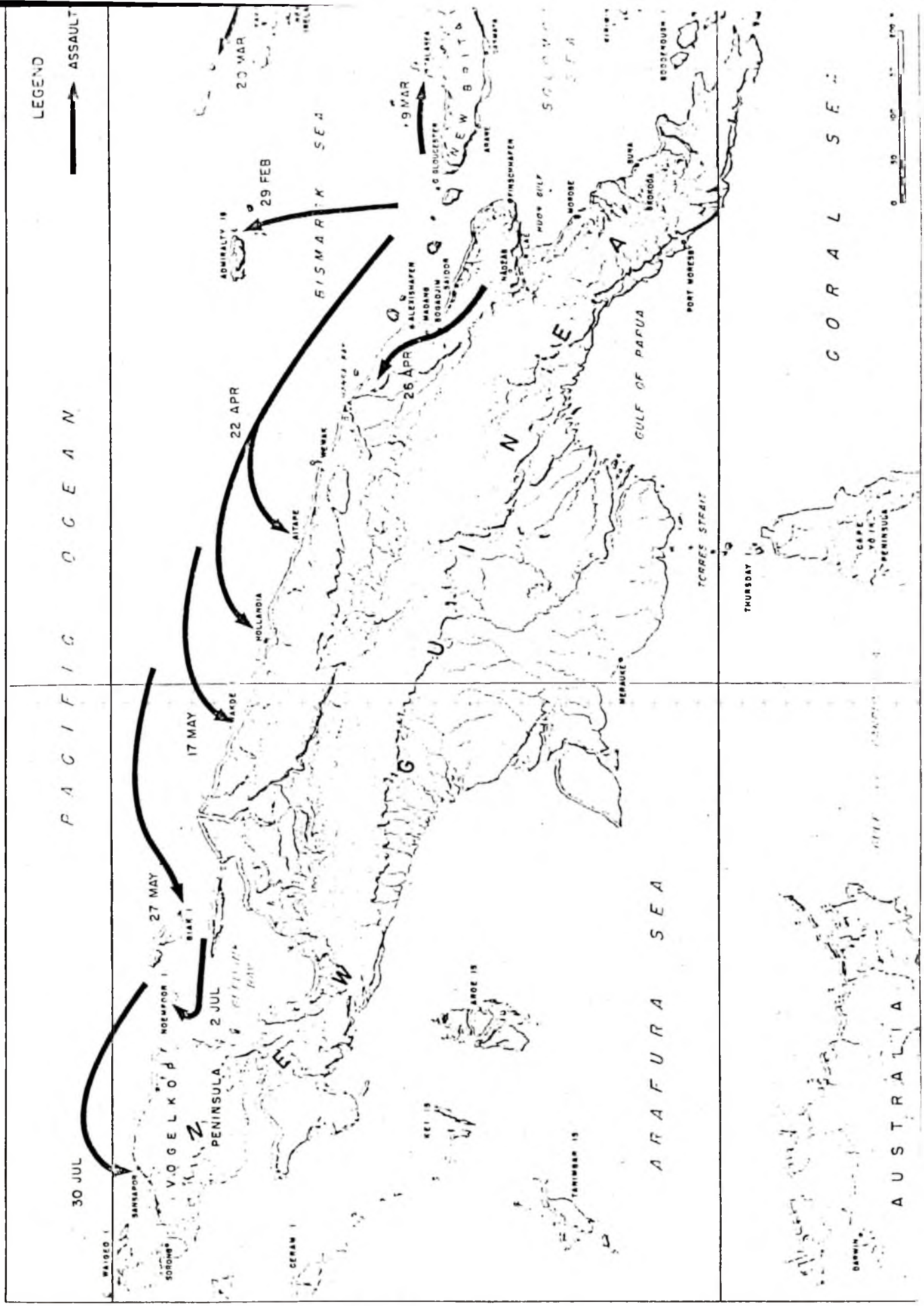
---

44. Letter, Blamey to Shedden, 3 March 1944, Blamey Papers 5.1.

45. Letter, Shedden to Blamey, 13 March 1944, *loc.cit.*

46. See Miller, *op.cit.*, Chapter 16.

47. R.R. Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines*, p.10; P.A. Crowl, *op.cit.*, p.18; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, p.458.



MAP 9

The Westward Drive along New Guinea.

From: *Reports of General MacArthur,* Vol.1, p.135.

On 12 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a revised directive which although it did not give MacArthur the full support which he desired, in effect gave approval to RENO IV. Thus, although the decision as to whether Luzon or Formosa was to be captured was left open, MacArthur, who was ordered to plan for Luzon, could be sure that he was slated to lead the Philippines operation.[48] Furthermore, by this stage, after a stormy visit from Halsey, MacArthur had resolved the disagreement over Manus Island.[49]

Sagacious advice from MacArthur

Whilst the directive for 1944 was being thrashed out in Washington, Shedden was concerned with the forthcoming overseas trip,[50] and on 4 March 1944 he summarised for Curtin the papers then being prepared. In view of his past experience of the 'importance of ensuring Australia an adequate voice in the machinery for Higher Direction and the control and command of its forces', he had prepared papers on the history of the return of the AIF and its importance in the South-West Pacific Area, the relief of the Australian garrison of Tobruk, and Blamey's despatches on Greece. Papers were also prepared on aspects of global strategy and the specific needs of the South-West Pacific Area.[51] One paper prepared by the Department of External Affairs stated that, 'The post-war settlement in the Pacific is a vital matter for Australia because the stability of the region in which we live is at stake'.[52] But with Churchill's

---

48. R.R. Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines*, p.12; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944*, p.459.

49. James, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, pp.401, 402; Miller, *op.cit.*, pp.349, 350.

50. On 13 March 1944 Shedden wrote to Blamey, 'Things have been fairly strenuous, as usual, here, the subject occupying the most time being Higher Command and its strategy'. Blamey Papers 154.1.

51. Memorandum, Shedden to Curtin, 4 March 1944, Blamey Papers 154.1.

52. PM's Conference Paper No.7, CRS A989, item 44/735/192, Part 1. This file contains copies of the papers prepared for the Prime Minister. However it should be noted that the Department of External Affairs prepared few briefs for the conference, the main work being done by the Department of Defence. For further discussion see Appendix 7.

The New Zealand Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, arriving in Sydney, 13 January 1944. He was met by Dr Evatt and the Premier of NSW, W. McKell.

(AWM Negative No.135684)

Curtin and MacArthur entering Parliament House on 17 March 1944 for a dinner to mark the second anniversary of MacArthur's arrival in Australia.

(AWM Negative No.125981)

Curtin and MacArthur at the Parliamentary Dinner, 17 March 1944. MacArthur told Curtin that 'only harm would come by intrusion' into strategic matters.

(AWM Negative No.72968)

suggestion of sending a team of experts to Australia, and with the deliberations still continuing in Washington, Curtin and Shedden looked to MacArthur for advice. On 10 March Shedden wrote to MacArthur:

> I hope it will be possible to see you before we leave, as I shall certainly feel better equipped to help the PM if I am reinformced by your sagacious advice.[53]

By 14 March Shedden had set up the meeting,[54] and on 17 March MacArthur flew to Canberra for a Parliamentary dinner to mark the second anniversary of his arrival in Australia.[55]

After the dinner MacArthur, Curtin and Shedden met privately and the Commander-in-Chief outlined his future operations.[56] MacArthur said that he intended to land at Hollandia, thus by-passing Japanese strongpoints along the New Guinea coast. Rabaul was also to be by-passed. Meanwhile Nimitz was to carry out operations in the Mariana and Palau Islands. After clearing New Guinea MacArthur was to capture the Halmahera Islands as part of the approach to the Philippines. There was also the possibility of an operation in the Arafura and Banda Seas. Although this operation was certainly in American plans, a month earlier MacArthur had told his staff that he did not favour the splitting of his forces, and that the operation which would have been carried out by Australian forces, would probably not come off.[57] There is the impression that MacArthur was stringing the Australians along; as early as December 1943 the US War Department had indicated

---

53. Letter, Shedden to MacArthur, 10 March 1944, RG4. MacArthur Memorial.

54. Teleprinter message Shedden to MacArthur, 14 March 1944, MP 1217, Box 389.

55. During this visit to Canberra, which lasted less than 24 hours, the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, invested MacArthur with the Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath.

56. The following report of the meeting is based on Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, Canberra, 17 March 1944, MP 1217, Box 3.

57. Record of Conversation Major-General Chamberlin, Brigadier White, 1500 hrs, 25 February 1944, Blamey Papers 43.5 Part 1.

that reserves would not be sufficient to support the operation in the Arafura Sea.[58]

Referring to the suggestion to alter the boundaries of the South-West Pacific Area, MacArthur told Curtin that he had threatened to resign if such a change were made. On 13 March Blamey had pointed out to Shedden that even a minor alteration to the boundaries required the consent of the Australian government.[59] Nevertheless when this matter was raised at the meeting MacArthur advised that the dividing line 'was merely one of current operational convenience within the South-West Pacific Area and that it was constantly being changed with the progress of the tactical situation'. MacArthur agreed with Curtin that the organisation to the South-West Pacific Area could not be varied without the consent of the government and he added that 'it would be destructive at this stage of the campaign for the Governments concerned to attempt or even seriously consider so drastic and inadvisable a step'.[60]

MacArthur continued his outline of operations explaining that the target date for the Mindanao landing was November and that the Philippines were to be cleared by February when Formosa would be attacked. He would then dealwith the Netherlands East Indies. When that stage was reached a change in organisation in the Pacific would no doubt be necessary, but at that point the end would be in sight.

As he had mentioned on earlier occasions, MacArthur expressed the view that, as the operations moved away from Australia, Blamey would have to decide whether to go with him, or remain in Australia as C-in-C of the Australian Military Forces. MacArthur contemplated that the spearhead of his advance to the Philippines would be the three AIF

---

58. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, p.455.
59. Letter, Blamey to Shedden, 13 March 1944, Blamey Papers 5.1.
60. Letter, Shedden to Blamey, 31 March 1944, *loc.cit.*

divisions and an American paratroop division. It is difficult to know whether MacArthur was being completely candid. His outline plan for the recapture of the southern Philippines, known as RENO III, and issued on 20 October 1943, listed the combat units for the advance to Mindanao. There was no mention of Australian units.[61] RENO IV presented by Sutherland in Washington nine days before the meeting, was really only an accelerated and streamlined version of RENO III. Nevertheless, Blamey's senior planning officer has pointed out that these were only MacArthur's proposals, and that there was an essential difference between proposals, planned operations, ordered operations and executed operations.[62]

As part of his advance to the Philippines MacArthur envisaged a change in the present system of commanders of the Allied Naval, Land and Air Forces, to one of Task Force Commanders. The Australian Corps would, of course, be commanded by an Australian, but this appeared to MacArthur to be somewhat less of a command than that which had been exercised to date by Blamey as Commander of the Allied Land Forces. MacArthur said that the commander of the corps might possibly be Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead or Lieutenant-General Berryman. The latter, who had been a capable staff officer, had demonstrated in the Finschhafen fighting the qualities of a good commander and 'when things were not going well, he had displayed those tigerish qualities which were so necessary to fight back and overcome the enemy'. MacArthur thought that Morshead possessed good soldierly qualities as a corps commander, but was not as experienced as the other senior officers in jungle warfare. MacArthur had also gained from him 'the impression that

---

61. Summary of RENO III, Morton, *op.cit.*, Appendix S. For the details of RENO III see Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 86, AWM.

62. Interview with Major-General L. de L. Barham, 11 December 1978.

he was content with his record and not anxious for further advancement and the responsibility which it would entail'.

Thus, as he had in December 1943, MacArthur outlined his projected command organisation; one which was to exclude Blamey and work through a more junior task force commander. Now was the time for Curtin to complain if he thought that Blamey should remain an effective Commander of the Allied Land Forces. If Curtin and Shedden agreed with MacArthur then they should have set about formalising the arrangement. Either way it is hard to believe that Blamey remained in ignorance of the plan. Only an independent role for the Australians could assure him of his position. Nonetheless, if MacArthur were to be believed, the Australian corps was committed to the Philippines.

MacArthur now turned to Curtin's forthcoming trip to Washington, and gave the Prime Minister advice about how to deal with Roosevelt. whom he said 'was quite unscrupulous ... in getting away from his own expression of agreement and repudiating his word if it suited him'. Marshall 'was a very well informed and pleasant person, but he really did not have a strategic mind'. King 'had a hard and unattractive personality'. Arnold's main interest was the bombing of Germany. MacArthur advised Curtin to see and have discussions with the President only, and not with the Combined or Joint Chiefs of Staff. Curtin enquired if there was anything he could do to help MacArthur, who replied that as the Pacific was a sphere of American responsibility 'only harm could come by intrusion by the Prime Minister which might be described by those who resented it as an attempt at political interference'.

Curtin then raised the matter of the cables from Churchill and Bruce about the British strategy for the Pacific. MacArthur thought that they were 'entirely academic'. As a soldier 'it was his principle never to refuse any aid' and he recommended that Curtin should accept anything offered, but he pointed out that the time factor was the vital

consideration. Furthermore, any British forces should operate under the existing command system. He endorsed the view of the Australian Chiefs of Staff that they were capable of providing London with the necessary information.[63]

Therefore, in a very one-sided discussion MacArthur had outlined his future operations and given Curtin his views on the line the Prime Minister should take in Washington and London. The events overseas were to show how much Curtin followed MacArthur's advice.

Having secured MacArthur's views Curtin replied, on 22 March, to Churchill's cable of the eleventh. He repeated the statement of the Australian Chiefs of Staff that they were capable of assessing Australia's potential, and added that MacArthur would be able to furnish any opinions that may be desired on the operational aspect of the base potentialities of, and the operation of forces from Australia. Curtin then referred Churchill to his cable of 8 October 1943 when he had mentioned the desirability of a British Empire effort in the Pacific, and concluded:

> British forces could ... operate in the South-West Pacific Area only by being assigned to the Commander-in-Chief in accordance with the terms of his directive. A separate system of command could not be established. Furthermore, the base facilities on the mainland are under the control of the Commander Allied Land Forces, who is also Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces, the Australian Chief of the Naval Staff and the Australian Chief of the Air Staff ... information should be furnished by those sources and the administrative experts sent to Australia should be attached to the staffs of the respective Australian services.[64]

---

63. In a letter to Curtin on 22 March 1944 MacArthur reinforced this view stating that 'the proposed visit of parties of administrative experts seems a waste of time and energy'. CRS A816, item 7/301/32.

64. Cable 68, Curtin to Churchill, 22 March 1944, CRS A816, item 31/301/336; also Blamey Papers 1.2

Blamey had forseen the possibility that the British leaders might wish to establish a separate command in the area, and he was the author of this final paragraph.[65]

When, on 17 March, Churchill had pressed the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff for the capture of Simalu to the north-west of Sumatra, the CIGS, General Brooke, had written in his diary, 'I began to wonder whether I was in Alice in Wonderland or qualifying for a lunatic asylum!'[66] The receipt of Curtin's cable did little to help the argument. The Australian Army Representative, Lieutenant-General Smart, reported that the British Chiefs thought that the Australian reply was 'completely correct' but that the general effect was 'thought somewhat discouraging'. The British Chiefs were now considering whether to send just the Navy to the Pacific.[67] That same day Brooke wrote to Dill in Washington:

> I am quite clear in my own mind that strategically it is right for us to use all our forces in close cooperation from Australia across the Pacific in the general direction of Formosa.[68]

Australian Attitudes on the Eve of Curtin's Overseas Visit

Curtin's advisers during his overseas visit were to be Shedden and Blamey, and on the eve of their departure Blamey's main strategic problem was the employment of the Australian Army. He was aware that the respective RENO Plans made little provision for the Australian striking force, and on 3 March he told Morshead that the operational role of the Australian forces in New Guinea had 'practically terminated'.[69] For a while he had hoped that MacArthur would use the Australians to

---

65. Letter, Shedden to Blamey, 23 March 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

66. Diary, 17 March 1944, Alanbrooke Papers.

67. Cable, Smart to Northcott, 30 March 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

68. Quoted in Bryant, *Triumph in the West*, p.169.

69. Letter, Blamey to Morshead, 3 March 1944, Blamey Papers 170.5; Morshead Papers, 101/9, AWM.

advance northwards from Darwin, but as mentioned, MacArthur had dampened that idea on 25 February.[70]

During the preceding month Blamey's staff had prepared plans to seize islands in the Arafura Sea with a target date of 1 June 1944.[71] As part of the preparations General Allen at Darwin had detailed the works necessary to improve the port and the Engineer-in-Chief and the Quartermaster-General had begun a number of studies.[72] Despite the probability that the operation would continue to be postponed General Chamberlin had suggested that Darwin should be developed in case it should be required.[73] By 28 February Blamey's staff were planning on beginning the operation on 1 August 1944,[74] but on 3 March Blamey told Shedden that it 'now seems probably that any operation by the Australian Force across the Arafura Sea may be delayed'.[75] While Blamey did not completely give up hope, on 23 March he wrote to Morshead:

> On the question of future operations, you will have heard many rumours, chief of which have centered around the fact that Darwin is being developed. While the development of Darwin will continue definitely to meet early Air Force requirements, and possibly later Naval requirements, and while the Army has been charged with the main part of the development work, it is unlikely that it will be used as an Army base for forward movement for very many months, if at all.[76]

---

70. See page 356.

71. 'Appreciation of the Situation on 30 December 1943' by Brigadier W.M. Anderson, Blamey Papers 43.5 Part I.

72. Blamey to Allen, 2 February 1944; Allen to Blamey, 3 February 1944; Steele to Allen, 4 February 1944; Blamey to Allen, 9 February 1944; *loc.cit.*

73. Record of Conversation Major-General Chamberlin-Brigadier White 1500 hours, 25 February 1944, *loc.cit.*

74. Memorandum Brigadier L. de L. Barham to Blamey, 7 March 1944, Minutes of Conference LHQ, 28 February 1944 - AUBURN, *loc.cit.*

75. Letter, Blamey to Shedden, 3 March 1944, Blamey Papers 154.1.

76. Letter, Blamey to Morshead, 23 March 1944, Blamey Papers 170.5, also Morshead Papers, 101/9, AWM.

During this period Captain Alan Hillgarth,[77] the Chief of the Intelligence Staff of the British Eastern Fleet, visited Australia and talked to MacArthur about the attack on the Philippines. He reported that:

> I asked what forces he proposed to use to attack the Philippines, and he said that he would have always 60,000 men ready for battle. Asked if these include Australians, he repeated, '60,000 total always ready for battle', thus evading my question.

As a result of these discussions Hillgarth was certain that MacArthur would not use Australian troops if he could do without them, but he thought MacArthur was 'reluctant to relinquish control over the AIF - probably the finest jungle fighters in the world - in case he *has* to use them'.[78]

Hillgarth later told Admiral Mountbatten that although the senior Australian officers to whom he spoke had no knowledge of Culverin, (Churchill's projected operation against Sumatra) they were keen for the AIF to fight with SEAC, and that three Australian divisions could be made available for such an operation.[79] These unsolicited and unofficial views reached Churchill on 21 April with a note from Ismay that it was undesirable that they should be seen by US officers.[80]

It is important to note that while Hillgarth did not speak to Blamey he did speak to many of the senior staff at Advanced Land Headquarters and GHQ in Brisbane. It was there that he learnt of the suggestion that there should be an entirely Australian expedition from

---

77. After meeting Hillgarth in Canberra on 19 March 1944, Gavin Long noted that he was a 'shrewd, much-travelled bloke'. Gavin Long Diary, No.4, p.43, AWM.

78. Extracts from a report on a visit to Australia 6-28 March 1944 by Captain A. Hillgarth RN, PREM 3 159/9. Hereafter Hillgarth Report.

79. Cable 35, Mountabtten to Ismay, 20 April 1944, PREM 3 63/13. Although Australian army officers had no knowledge of British plans, they did know that General Lethbridge had recommended that two United Kingdom divisions should be sent to Australia. Advisory War Council Minute, 1304, Canberra, 15 February 1944, CRS A2682, Vol.VII.

80. Memorandum, Ismay to Churchill, 21 April 1944, PREM 3 63/13.

Darwin using the three AIF divisions. He felt that the AIF was looking to Blamey for a lead as to where it was to be next employed. He gained the impression that Blamey was 'probably rightly, regarded as a great general and the best man available for land fighting against the Japanese'.[81]

From the above evidence it seems likely that when Blamey left Australia on 5 April 1944 he believed that the Australian forces were to be left behind by MacArthur, and that the best course of action was to look for an alternative employment. He already knew of the plans for basing a force on Australia, and although the so-called 'middle strategy' had not yet been put forward in London, Blamey's ideas were shaping in that direction.

When Hillgarth visited Canberra he gained similar impressions to those he had formed in Brisbane. The Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, told him that the question of the future employment of the AIF was agitating everyone. Hillgarth, who thought that the standard of the Australian politicians was generally low, detected a feeling that they would like to see British forces in Australia.

> Only some Irish and a few thugs like Mr Eddie Ward are still anti-British ... Dr Evatt, the strong man of the Cabinet, is now in full favour of a pro-British policy, though he is by nature suspicious and still dislikes us at heart ...

Hillgarth thought Evatt had brains, energy and ambition, Curtin was 'too honest for his extremists', and Forde was 'of small consequence'.[82]

If Blamey looked forward to the opportunity of in some way influencing Allied Strategy, with perhaps the chance of increasing the British commitment to Australia,[83] there is no evidence that Curtin

---

81. Hillgarth Report.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Hetherington, *op.cit.*, p.330.

felt the same way. The Prime Minister did not feel that Churchill would approach Australia's problems with sympathy. Indeed Churchill had not replied to his important cable of 8 October 1943 outlining the extent and nature of Australia's war effort,[84] and Curtin had pointedly referred Churchill again to this cable on 22 March 1944.[85]

The lack of a British response deeply offended Curtin, and when the Admiralty, through the Australian CNS, suggested that the RAN should man some RN ships, Shedden noted that: 'the Prime Minister went so far as to say that if Mr Churchill did not choose to reply to his representation about the concentration of the Australian war effort in the South-West Pacific by the return of naval crews and RAAF squadrons, he certainly was not going to adopt such a humble attitude as to offer gifts by manning additional ships'.[86]

When the United Kingdom High Commissioner, Sir Ronald Cross, saw Curtin off in the USS *Lurline*, on 5 April, he found him '... almost speechless and terribly depressed', he was tired and lacked self confidence.[87] Cross thought this was because Curtin, whom he thought had 'a great facility of speech' and was 'an able man of good purpose, found himself in the midst of events that dwarfed the little realm of his life's thought, knowledge, experience and undertakings'.[88] He felt that Curtin was terrified of cutting a poor figure before Churchill and the formidable collection of United Kingdom ministers.[89] In this

---

84. Cable No.267, Curtin to Churchill, 8 October 1943, CRS A2680, item Appendum No.35/1943. This cable was considered by the British Chiefs of Staff on 12 October 1943 and the Service Ministers were directed to report separately on the effect of Curtin's requests. However it was not until 28 January 1944 that Churchill began to consider Curtin's telegram. See ADM 1/14987.

85. Cable No.68, Curtin to Churchill, 22 March 1944, CRS A816, 31/301/336.

86. Letter, Shedden to A.J. Wilson, 1 April 1944, MP 1217, Box 305.

87. Letter, Cross to Cranborne, 13 April 1944, PREM 4 50/15.

88. Letter, Cross to Churchill, 2 April 1944, PREM 50/15.

89. Letter, Cross to Dominions Office, 3 March 1944, PREM 4 50/15.

assessment Cross may have misjudged Curtin as he did many other matters in Australia. In Hillgarth's opinion Cross and his staff did not 'cut much ice' in Australia.[90]

Nevertheless, Cross was correct that Curtin did not want to go to England.[91] Between June 1942 and November 1943 he received six invitations from Churchill and Roosevelt, but in each case he felt unable to leave Australia. In Shedden's opinion Curtin had shrewdly taken notice of Menzies' fate after his overseas trip in 1941.[92] When Evatt suggested that the Prime Ministers' meeting should be expanded to become an Imperial Conference which he should attend,[93] Curtin replied firmly that there would be too many ministers absent from Australia.[94] To Curtin the trip was, therefore, a necessary evil, and he told Shedden that 'if he had to go he was going only to avoid being a defaulter'.[95]

The overseas trip proved to be a severe physical strain for Curtin. His great fear of flying meant that he crossed the Pacific in each

---

90. Hillgarth Report. Coincidentally, E.H. Cox of the Parliamentary Press Gallery used exactly the same terms in describing Cross's influence in Australia and he had no knowledge of the Hillgarth report. E.H. Cox interview, 20 November 1978. During an interview with Mr Bruce on 31 March 1943 Sir Campbell Stuart, who had just returned from Australia, 'drew the most appalling picture of Cross' ineptitude and quite frankly suggested that he had to be removed from Australia. He said he was a complete snob, disliked Australia and the Australians'. CRS M100, item, March 1943. Sir Paul Hasluck thought that Cross was 'one of the less successful occupants of that post'. *Diplomatic Witness*, p.117.

91. E.H. Cox recalled that Curtin told him that he did not want to leave Australia as Forde would then be Acting Prime Minister, and he was ill-equipped to deal with MacArthur and Nelson Johnson, the US Minister. Cox interview, 20 November 1978. On 1 May 1944 Johnson reported that, 'Mr Curtin is the one man who can keep the Labor flock in the fold - he has more to fear in his absence from his followers than from the Opposition'. Political Report for February and March 1944, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, file 847.00/421, National Archives. While Curtin was overseas Gavin Long visited Forde, the Acting Prime Minister. On 28 April 1944 he wrote in his diary: 'I saw Forde on 27 April. He was tired and dull ... Today he was weary and worried'. Gavin Long Diary No.4, p.70.

92. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 3, Chapter 45, p.1.

93. Letter, Evatt to Curtin, 17 December 1943, *loc.cit.*, p.2.

94. Letter, Curtin to Evatt, 23 December 1943, *ibid.*

95. Shedden Diary, 20 December 1943, MP 1217, Box 16.

direction by sea,[96] but he still could not relax. Throughout each voyage he remained tense, pacing the deck, and very agitated about the possibility of having to abandon ship. He crossed America in each direction by train, and he found the Atlantic air trip frightening. Curtin's fear for his physical safety added to his nervous condition, and thus helped contribute to his early death.[97]

Developments during Curtin's Journey to England

When Curtin, Shedden and Blamey arrived in Washington on 23 April 1944, they had no intention of discussing matters of strategy concerning Australia. Curtin felt it proper that he should first attend the Prime Ministers' conference and secure British approval of the projected Australian war effort for 1944 and 1945. Nevertheless the visit did provide Curtin with an opportunity to smooth American feathers ruffled by the Australia-New Zealand Agreement and Evatt's subsequent strong statements.[98]

Blamey too was able to make some unofficial contacts. At a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 24 April 1944 he gave a first hand

---

96. In a memorandum on 5 October 1943, the US Minister in Australia, Nelson Johnson, noted that Curtin so disliked air travel that he had made only two aeroplane trips since he had become Prime Minister. Records of the Department of State, RG 59, file 033.4711/147, National Archives.

97. This paragraph has been based on: (1) an interview with S. Landau, who was detailed by Shedden to accompany Curtin on his nightly walks on deck; (2) Shedden's Diary of the overseas trip, MP 1217, Box 16. Shedden noted that one night Curtin was so afraid that something would happen to the ship that he sat up all night with his light on. Curtin insisted on carrying a heavy kapok life-belt rather than a rubber inflatable one. (3) Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 4, Ch.57.

98. Thorne, *op.cit.*, pp.483, 486. The US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, recorded that he told Curtin that 'we frankly do not appreciate the attitude of Dr Evatt' on the Anzac Agreement. 'The Prime Minister then referred to persons with ambitions in a vague sort of way'. Memorandum of Conversation, 24 April 1944, Records of Department of State, RG 59, file 033.4711/160, National Archives.

account of the war in the Pacific.[99] It was at this meeting that, after saying his piece and while discussion continued, Blamey had gone to sleep.[100] Blamey enjoyed his stay in Washington[101] where 'an ADC well acquainted with the night life of the city and with an expense account, was placed at his disposal and kept suitably employed'.[102]

It may be postulated that since the overseas trip led to Blamey's further estrangement from Curtin, his conduct directly affected Australian strategy later in the year.[103] Before the trip Curtin had maintained a strictly business relationship with his army Commander-in-Chief. Now he was forced to deal with Blamey on a personal basis. Curtin, a teetotaller who in earlier years had had a drinking problem, was not impressed by Blamey's rowdy parties on board the *Lurline* which was supposed to be a 'dry ship'.[104] Nor was he pleased when Blamey entertained

---

99. Letter, Brigadier H. Redman and Colonel A.J. Farland, Combined Secretariat of Combined Chiefs of Staff to Blamey, 21 April 1944, Blamey Papers 5.0.

100. Williams, *op.cit.*, p.315; D.H. Dwyer, Interlude with Blamey, unpublished MS. Blamey arrived in Washington by train at 0915 hours on 23 April and the 45 minute meeting with the Combined Chiefs of Staff began at 1215 hours on 24 April. Blamey's Diary, Blamey Papers, DRL 6643, item 144.

101. Letter, Blamey to Marshall, 27 April 1944, Blamey Papers 160.14.

102. Letter, Lumsden to Ismay, 15 July 1944, PREM 3 159/4. The ADC was Captain Albert McCleery, formerly a 'theatre man', and in subsequent years head of the National Broadcasting Corporation. Dwyer, *op.cit.* and *Current Biography* 1972. A 'Memorandum for the President' prepared in the US Department of State for the visit of Curtin, Shedden and Blamey, described the latter as 'short, stubby, jolly, friendly, energetic and frank' and noted that he 'was sometimes referred to as "Boozy Blamey"'. Shedden was described as 'somewhat silent and not aggressive, yet able to hold his own in discussions ... Some say that Sir Frederick excels in laying out administrative plans on paper but is not able in their execution'. Memorandum by John D. Hickerson, Office of European Affairs, Division of British Commonwealth Affairs, 22 April 1944, Records of Department of State, RG59, file 847.00/4-2244, National Archives.

103. This topic will be dealt with in the next chapter.

104. Landau interview, 13 December 1978; Dwyer, Interlude with Blamey; Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16. Shedden wrote: 'Gen B had obviously had too much before dinner last night (11 Apr). He was very jolly and talkative and the PM commented on it to me'.

a mixed party till early hours in his suite at Blair House.[105] These, and other incidents, roused Shedden to comment later about Blamey: 'Though good as a Commander-in-Chief, he is not suitable as a member of a Prime Minister's party for the reasons evident'.[106]

Curtin's party left Baltimore for London by flying boat on 28 April.[107] Meanwhile, news from Australia made it increasingly clear that MacArthur was planning to exclude the Australians from his offensive plans. When Blamey had left Australia troops of the 11th Division were still some ten miles south of Bogadjim,[108] while elements of the 32nd US Division were pushing tentatively along the coast from Saidor.

However, as the operations controlled by HQ New Guinea Force declined in importance, the role of Advanced Land Headquarters in Brisbane resumed its main planning function. Originally Blamey's deputy at Advanced LHQ had been General Vasey, and then General Berryman. But from the beginning of 1944 his chief operations staff officer was the relatively junior Brigadier L. de L. Barham, and with Blamey now overseas Barham was in a difficult position. General Lumsden later observed that Barham was 'afraid of his own shadow lest it fall between him and his job and darken his future prospects of employment. He appears to possess a very timid nature and to have no particular abilities'.[109]

---

105. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16. Blamey's Diary, 26 April 1944; Blamey's Papers, DRL 6643, item 144.

106. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16.

107. Curtin sat up all night in the plane from Bermuda to London 'with his business hat pulled securely down over his ears ... fully clothed and tight lipped'. Blamey slept in a luxurious bed which had been prepared for Curtin who could not relax enough to use it. Dwyer, *op.cit.* When Curtin's party arrived at Baltimore airport and began walking from the car to the airport building, Rodgers, Curtin's press secretary, said to Shedden, 'the PM will now get the wind up with the sight of the flying boats'. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16.

108. Dexter, *op.cit.*, p.777. The HQ 11th Division took over from the 7th on 8 April.

109. Comments by Lumsden in Notes of an Interview with General MacArthur, 1 August 1944, CAB 127/33.

On 10 April 1944 General Chamberlin advised Barham that the 32nd US Division at Saidor was to be replaced by the 5th Australian Division which was to have an offensive role. Barham pointed out that in accordance with Blamey's policy 'an offensive role for 5 Aust Div [was] not acceptable even for the capture of Bogadjim, other than patrolling'.[110] This did not mean that Blamey was opposed to using Australians in offensive operations, but he did not want Australian resources to be wasted on an unproductive advance along the northern New Guinea coast. The next day Barham flew to Melbourne and explained the American plan to General Northcott, the CGS, who was the Acting Australian Commander-in-Chief. Northcott felt that an offensive could not be supported with the resources available, but that he was sure that offensive patrolling would be successful 'in view of the indications of withdrawal from Bogadjim'. Mindful that Blamey had previously declined to allow an 'offensive role' for the division, Northcott believed that 'GHQ [were] trying to put this over as soon as his [Blamey's] back [was] turned',[111] and therefore he decided to fly to Brisbane and discuss the situation with MacArthur.[112] Small though this incident was, it created in MacArthur's mind the idea that Blamey was attempting to restrict the operations of the Australians in New Guinea.[113]

---

110. Memorandum by Brigadier Barham, 11 April 1944, AWM 519/6/49. See also GHQ G.3 Journal, 11 April 1944, copy in papers of G. Hermon Gill, 5/28/50 AWM. After visiting Major D. McCarthy, the Australian liaison officer with the 6th US Army, Gavin Long wrote that General Savige, the GOC New Guinea Force, had his hands 'tied by orders not to commit his forces to any major action'. Gavin Long Notes, No.40, AWM. Major-General C.H. Finlay, who was on the staff of LHQ at the time, thought that Blamey stopped the Australians after the 32nd US Division at Saidor allowed the Japanese to escape. Interview, 5 June 1979.

111. Letter, Northcott to Morshead, 12 April 1944, Morshead Papers 101/11.

112. Letter, Northcott to Blamey, 13 April 1944, Northcott Papers MSS 1431/14, Mitchell Library.

113. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 27 June 1944, MP 1217, Box 3. Also Lumsden to Ismay, 18 July 1944, PREM 3 154/4.

When Northcott met MacArthur the latter made it clear that while he realised the Australian difficulties due to manpower restriction, he had been promised by Blamey and Curtin that the AIF Corps and twelve brigades with administrative troops would be maintained and available to him. MacArthur said that he had been informed that the AIF divisions would not be ready by the time originally promised and he urged that the preparations be speeded up. With regard to future operations he listed the areas in New Guinea where Australian troops were to take-over from American forces, but there was no mention of the future role of the AIF.[114] One is left to wonder whether MacArthur was, by now, aware of the anger in the State Department over the signing of the Anzac treaty, which had revealed Australian sensitivity to the threat of American annexation of the reconquered islands. On 1 May 1944 Northcott cabled Blamey and related his discussions with MacArthur.[115] MacArthur had stressed the need for garrison forces in New Britain, New Ireland, the Admiralties and the Solomons. Northcott reported that MacArthur

> also referred to other British Islands in the Pacific which are at present garrisoned by U.S. troops and the desirability of these being relieved as soon as possible by British or Dominion garrisons. He explained quite frankly that continuation U.S. garrisons when no longer in zone of operations may influence U.S. claims in post war settlement.[116]

This thinly veiled threat, which greeted Blamey on his arrival in London, would have strengthened his hand in attempting to persuade the British of the necessity for their presence in the Pacific.[117] It is

---

114. 'Notes on discussion MacArthur' AWM 519/6/49. This note is in Northcott's handwriting with no date, but may be placed as 14 April 1944 by evidence in Northcott's letter to Blamey, 13 April 1944 (Northcott Papers).

115. It is not certain whether Northcott was referring to his discussion of 14 April, or to a subsequent discussion. In the interim, Northcott had visited New Guinea.

116. Cable, Northcott to Blamey, 1 May 1944, Blamey Papers 43.66.

117. The British were informed of these developments in almost exactly the same terms in Cable 104, Dewing to ACIGS (O), 8 May 1944, WO 106/3405, and also in a letter from Lumsden to Ismay, 24 April 1944, PREM 3 159/14.

not known what advice General Smart, the amiable but somewhat ineffective Australian Army Representative,[118] gave to his Commander-in-Chief when he met him at Croydon airport,[119] but it may be surmised that it followed the lines of a letter he had sent to Northcott a fortnight before. Smart had written:

> the position is now that all the Services favour the use of Australia as a main base and the strategy that would go with it. For a number of reasons, including the diplomatic and prestige value of mounting our effort from India, the value of mounting it from the very well publicised SEAC under Mountbatten etc. etc., Winston Churchill was hard to convince and reluctant to make the approach to Australia. As our reply to his cable was rather reserved I gather his reaction was to drop the project and revert to the original conception of mounting the British effort from India. However, it is said that he is coming round to the Services view.[120]

Blamey also received the news that the Lethbridge Mission had found that India was unsuitable as a base for a large force and that they had emphasised the superior possibilities of Australia.[121]

The most important news for Blamey would have been the suggestion from the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff of a 'Middle Strategy'. This was a compromise strategy which, in early April, the British joint planners had been ordered to investigate. This plan assumed that the American advance would not be as rapid as anticipated and that British forces would advance from northern and western Australia to Ambon (March 1945) and then on to the Celebes, Borneo and Saigon.[122] Subsequently this plan was replaced by the so-called 'Modified Middle Strategy' which

---

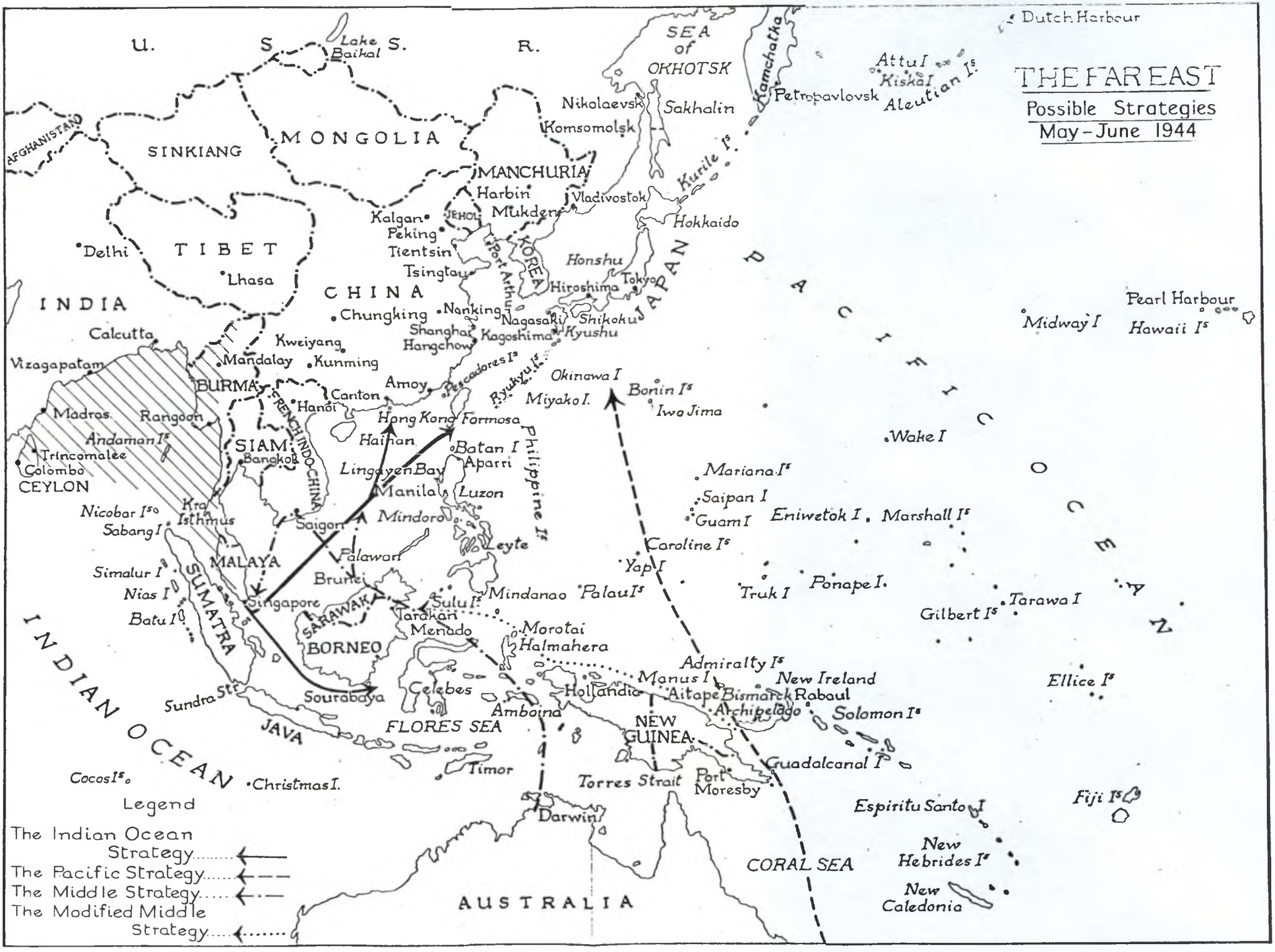
118. Interview with Major-General A.G. Wilson, 13 December 1978. Wilson was Assistant Military Liaison Officer in London. Interview with J.P. Buckley, 22 January 1979. See also the *Bulletin*, 15 April 1942 and Stirling, *op.cit.*, p.373, for a description of Smart.

119. D.H. Dwyer, *op.cit.*; Blamey's Diary, 29 April 1944, Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 4.

120. Letter, Smart to Northcott, 15 April 1944, AWM 9/2/3.

121. Cable, Wynter to Blamey, 20 April 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

122. Ehrman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, p.459.



MAP 10

From: Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol.5.

would be an advance from the American occupied north coast of New Guinea to Borneo, by-passing Ambon.[123] Thus at the beginning of May there were four possibilities to consider: 'Culverin', the Pacific strategy, the Middle Strategy and the Modified Middle Strategy.[124]

Strategic Discussions in London

With the British Pacific strategy revolving around four possibilities, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers met in London on 3 May to discuss the war against Japan. Churchill mentioned the alternative strategies, but Curtin said that he thought that the speed of MacArthur's advance would be greater than that expected by the Chiefs of Staff. Churchill thought that the 'American programmes might be unduly sanguine'. When Curtin inquired if the British force would be under MacArthur, Churchill said that it probably would be, but that the matter had still to be considered.[125]

After this opening discussion, Curtin outlined the situation in the Pacific and Blamey reviewed the course of operations in New Guinea. Curtin then gave details of the Australian war effort. He described the manpower problem pointing out that one in every two men between the ages of 18 and 40 was serving in the forces, and explained the decision of 1943 which he had presented in the 8 October cable to Churchill.[126] He reminded the British Prime Minister that he had never

---

123. *Ibid.*, pp.460, 461.

124. There were, in fact, five possibilities if the American plan for an offensive in northern Burma is included.

125. 'Meeting of Prime Ministers, 3 May 1944', PREM 3 160/1 also PREM 4 42/4. The Prime Ministers had met previously on 1 and 2 May but had not discussed the war with Japan.

126. *Ibid.* This paper had been prepared by Shedden who had then forwarded it to MacArthur for comments. MacArthur had made a few suggestions and had stressed 'the comparative paucity of our means'. Nevertheless he told Shedden that his paper was 'a very able and brilliant analysis of the Australian situation'. Letter, MacArthur to Shedden, 31 March 1944, Sutherland Papers, Correspondence with Australian Government.

received a reply to this cable.[127] Despite the need to reduce the Australian military effort Curtin was aware that Australian influence in the Pacific would be related directly to the amount of fighting it did, not to the amount of food supplied.[128]

Curtin then turned to the question of basing United Kingdom forces on Australia, warmly welcoming the proposal and promising the fullest collaboration and co-operation while adhering to the principles set out in his telegram of 22 March.[129] Curtin suggested that Blamey and the Australian Naval and Air representatives in London discuss with the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff the technical aspects of the procedure to be followed in examining the matter. He reminded the conference that Australia was a sphere of American strategic responsibilities and of the need for the Combined Chiefs of Staff to approve any change to the nature of the Australian war effort.[130] It was agreed at the meeting that the future balance of the Australian war effort should be referred to a private conference lead by the British Minister of Production.[131] But already one British Minister had made up his mind, for the next day L.S. Amery, the Secretary of State for India, told Churchill that it was obvious that Australia did not have a strong enough economy on which to base British forces.[132]

---

127. Cable 11, Curtin to Forde, 3 May 1944, CRS A2680, item Agendum No.16/1944. In reply to this complaint the Dominions Secretary, Lord Cranborne, said that a draft reply had been prepared, but not despatched pending the resolution the decision over the use of British forces in the Pacific. 'Meeting of Prime Ministers, 3 May 1944', PREM 3 160/1. For the draft reply, which was prepared on 23 January 1944, but not sent, see PREM 3 63/8. This reply mentioned that Britain planned to send at least 4 divisions to Australia which in turn would need to provide 3 offensive divisions.

128. 'Meeting of Prime Ministers, 3 May 1944', PREM 3 160/1.

129. See p.360.

130. Cable 11, Curtin to Forde, 8 May 1944, CRS A2680, item Agendum 16/1944.

131. 'Meeting of Prime Ministers, 3 May 1944', PREM 3 160/1.

132. Amery to Churchill, 4 May 1944, PREM 3 160/1.

The next fortnight was a round of meetings between the British Chiefs of Staffs, Blamey and the Australian Naval and Air Representatives in England, Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin and Air Vice-Marshal H.N. Wrigley. Blamey brought with him more recent news of MacArthur's intentions and the British Chiefs now learnt that MacArthur intended to capture Halmahera. Blamey said that it was planned that three AIF divisions would be used for this operation later in 1944 and that the other Australian divisions would be occupied in New Guinea.[133] This created problems for the British since it was likely that MacArthur would be in the Philippines before their forces could reach the Pacific.

The timetable and composition of the British force was a matter which greatly interested the Australians but it took a good number of days before the British were able to give the Australians a detailed statement.[134] Assuming that Germany was defeated by the end of 1944 Britain anticipated sending 4 fleet carriers, 10 cruisers and corresponding other vessels by October 1944. This force was to be expanded to a fleet of 6 battleships, 5 fleet carriers and 25 cruisers by late 1945. Two infantry divisions might arrive from India in January and March 1945 and three from Europe in February, March and April 1945 respectively. 78 RAF squadrons would be sent. Nevertheless Brooke felt constrained to warn the Australians that

> *It should be clearly understood that the statement does not imply any commitment or the adoption of any specific policy or plan of operation in the Pacific.*[135]

---

133. Secretary's Standard File - Australian War Effort, 5 May 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

134. The British had not prepared a pre-conference paper dealing with the role of British Forces in the war against Japan. It was assumed that the topic would be dealt with orally by Churchill assisted by the Chiefs of Staff. Memorandum by Dominions Secretary, 22 April 1944, CAB 66/49, WP(44)219.

135. COS (44) 408 (0) Revised Final, 10 May 1944, War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. Blamey Papers 1.2. The emphasis is in the original.

The problem for the British Chiefs of Staff was that they wanted Australia to give a definite commitment to begin the development of bases, while at the same time, being unable to get Churchill to agree to the strategy they proposed, they were unable to give any guarantee to the Australians.[136] On 18 May 1944 Brooke wrote in his diary:

> ... we had a meeting with the Planners in order to try and settle a final Pacific strategy to put up to the PM. The problem is full of difficulties, although the strategy is quite clear. Unfortunately the right course to follow is troubled by personalities, questions of command, vested interests, inter-allied jealousies, etc. Curtin and MacArthur are determined to stand together, support each other and allow no outside interference. Winston is determined Mountbatten must be given some operation to carry out.[137]

The previous day Curtin had reminded Churchill that although it was important for British prestige for the Empire to be represented in the Pacific, the command organisation could only be altered by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[138]

Blamey met the British Chiefs again on 22 May. By this time they had received a telegram from Admiral Daniel, who had finally received permission from the Australian government to enter the country,[139] saying that he 'saw no reason why the whole Naval force which it was contemplated to build up in Australia by mid 1945 could not be supplied by Australia'.[140] Therefore, on 22 May the British Chiefs agreed with

---

136. *Ibid.*, also COS (44) 408 (0) Final, 12 May 1944, *British Commonwealth Forces for the Far East*, Blamey Papers 1.2.

137. Diary, 18 May 1944, 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers.

138. Memorandum, Curtin to Churchill, 17 May 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

139. Daniel had to wait at Guadalcanal before the Australian government allowed his party to proceed. On 23 April 1944 Churchill had cabled to Australia: 'To avoid further delay, they are being instructed to proceed to Australia ... Considering our idea is to come and help you, we hope no obstacles will be placed in the way'. CRS A816, item 7/301/32.

140. COS (44) 442 (0), 20 May 1944. Memorandum by the First Sea Lord. Blamey Papers 1.2.

Blamey that the British reconnaissance parties to go to Australia should be integrated with the Australian staff and that their report would be from the Australian Chiefs of Staff. Again, to emphasise that no strategy had been settled, Brooke stressed that the officers 'could in no way be regarded as forming a planning staff'.[141] However Brooke's optimism is shown by his comments in his diary: 'Blamey in complete agreement, so much so that we shall now be accused by Winston of settling things without his agreement behind his back'.[142] The British representatives were to include 17 naval officers, 12 army officers and 4 RAF officers. These included Admiral Daniel and Brigadier E.W. Milford who were already in Australia and would therefore need revised instructions.[143]

As a result of these discussions, on 22 May the British Chiefs put the 'Modified Middle Strategy' to Churchill, with Ambon as the target. The forces would be based on the north and west coast of Australia and provided

> for a substantial Imperial and Dominion contribution by forces under the command of their own British commanders, though subordinate to an American Supreme Commander receiving his directions from the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

The Chiefs of Staff went on to elaborate this point:

> At present General MacArthur as Supreme Allied Commander in the South-West Pacific Area, takes his instructions from the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the British Chiefs of Staff have no say in the choice of his operations. Since it is one of our objects to ensure that the British Empire plays the greatest possible effective part

---

141. COS (44) 442 (0), 22 May 1944, Blamey Papers 1.2.

142. Diary, 22 May 1944, 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers.

143. Cable War Office to Dewing, no date, Blamey Papers 1.2. See also letter Northcott to Forde, 16 June 1944, CRS A816, item 2/301/306; cable 44, Curtin to Forde, 24 May 1944, CRS A816, item 7/301/32, and cable ZL 119, Blamey to Northcott, 26 May 1944, *loc.cit.*

> in the operations for the defeat of Japan, we feel it is only right that the Command arrangements should be altered and that the South-West Pacific Area should become a theatre of joint responsibility, subordinate to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, so that we may share in the control of operations in that theatre. Recognising that the American contribution during the first phase will predominate, we suggest that we should be willing to accept General MacArthur as Supreme Commander over the Allied Forces, but that the British and Dominion forces should operate as a distinct Command with British Commanders under General MacArthur's supreme direction. We feel, however, that even this arrangement should be left open to reconsideration at a later date.[144]

This paper seemed to interest Churchill, for the next day he met with the Chiefs of Staff, and Brooke recorded that 'I think we have at last got him swung to an Australia-based strategy as opposed to his old love, the Sumatra trip'.[145] The stumbling block was Curtin, who although he had suggested a revised arrangement some months before as an inducement to the British to enter the South-West Pacific,[146] was no longer willing to alter the command arrangement.[147]

Although Blamey supported Curtin in all formal meetings, there is evidence to suggest that in private conversations with Brooke he was becoming, if he had not already been, attracted to the idea of a semi-separate command in the area to the north of Australia.[148] Brooke met

---

144. Memorandum, Chiefs of Staff to Churchill, 22 May 1944, PREM 3 160/4.

145. Diary, 24 May 1944, 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers. Other supporters of the plan to base the UK forces in Australia were the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg (Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16) and the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden (Minute, Eden to Churchill, 12 June 1944, PREM 3 160/4).

146. Ehrman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, pp.439, 440.

147. On 18 May 1944 Brooke wrote in his diary: 'Curtin and MacArthur are determined to stand together, support each other, and allow no outside interference'. Diary 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers.

148. The British official historian says: 'The idea of a British or Commonwealth Command attracted the Australian military authorities particularly as the future of their troops was by no means clear if the campaign developed an increasingly American character. Ehrman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, p.482. In a memorandum to Churchill on 1 May 1944, the Chiefs of Staff pointed out that MacArthur's policy would result in Australia's 'fine seasoned troops' being used in garrison duties: 'the Australian Government is unlikely to acquiesce in their being given a partly passive role'. PREM 3 63/8.

Blamey on a number of occasions and 'found him easy to get on with, but not inspiring'.[149] At a meeting on 10 May Brooke, Blamey and General Puttick, the New Zealand CGS, discussed MarArthur's plans to use British Commonwealth troops for garrison duties.[150] Since it was pertinent to these discussions, it may be surmised that the CIGS was later shown and explained the implications of a cable from Northcott to Blamey. This cable stated that in a staff discussion with General Bridgeford and Brigadier Barham, General Chamberlin had outlined future operations:

> May, July, September, November objectives on your map are all American land forces objectives. GHQ then move Philippines. Possible role Australian land forces - garrison New Ireland and relieve American garrison division New Britain Nov. Arafura area Nov. New Britain, New Ireland considered New Guinea Force role but would appear *our future offensive operations are likely to be determined* unless American forces held up en route to Philippines. In any case no amphibious or other shipping or air transportation likely to be available to use for Arafura even if required. This may affect British co-operation in Pacific for provision of resources.[151]

In other words, the only hope for an Australian offensive role rested with the plans for a British Commonwealth offensive on the American flank, that is, the Modified Middle Strategy.

The United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff paper of 22 May[152] raised indirectly the possibility that Blamey might command this force. One

---

149. When Brooke met Blamey on 5 May 1944, he wrote in his diary: 'Blamey is not an impressive specimen. He looks entirely drink-sodden and somewhat repulsive'. After a meeting on 12 May Brooke noted that 'Blamey looked as if he had the most frightful "hang-over" from a debauched night! His eyes were swimming in alcohol. However, we made considerable progress ...' Diary 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers.

150. Cable 95293, ACIGS to Dewing, 17 May 1944, and Memorandum, General Kennedy (ACIGS (O)) to CIGS, 10 May 1944, WO 106/3405.

151. Cable, Northcott to Blamey, 22 May 1944, Blamey Papers 43.66. My emphasis.

152. See pp.377, 378.

part of the paper referred to the intention that 'British and Dominion forces will operate together under one command', and that although these forces should operate under MacArthur, 'even this arrangement should be left open to reconsideration at a later date'.[153] This meant that the commander of the force could eventually become an Allied Supreme Commander on a par with Eisenhower, Mountbatten, Alexander, MacArthur and Nimitz. Shedden wrote later that since the forces in the first phase of the proposed operations were to be dominion land and air forces with a predominantly British navy, he suspected that Blamey had an ambition to become the commander.[154] Such a command, when linked with his role as Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army, may have been sufficient to warrant Blamey's promotion to Field Marshal. Hence, Shedden wrote that 'General Blamey's personal assistant [Major Dwyer] had flown a kite with my assistant [Landau] regarding the deserving case of General Blamey for promotion to Field Marshal'.[155]

Blamey's hopes can be gauged by a closer examination of the British Chiefs of Staff paper of 22 May.[156] This paper referred 'to the anxiety that Australia is ready and anxious to use her forces in offensive actions as soon as possible'. Shedden noted later that the British Chiefs could not have formed this view from any of the Prime Minister's statements, and 'was presumably related to an opinion expressed by General

---

153. Notes of Discussions [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 27 June 1944. MP 1217, Box No.3.

154. *Ibid.* In November 1943 a certain Lieutenant-Commander Shepherd RN had visited Australia and had reported that Blamey wanted to form an all-British force of AIF, AMF, RAAF, RAN and RN and wanted to be Commander-in-Chief of all of it. Shepherd's report was passed to Ismay by Admiral Somerville in a letter dated 19 January 1944. Ismay Papers IV/Som.

155. *Ibid.* Landau does not deny this conversation, but he did not place much importance upon it. There was no way of knowing whether it was Dwyer's or Blamey's idea. Interview, 13 December 1978.

156. This was known as COS (44) (449) (0).

Blamey'.[157] This attitude should be contrasted with Blamey's instructions to Northcott to hold the Australian troops back from an offensive,[158] and also with Shedden's recollection that whilst in London Blamey remarked 'when referring to General MacArthur's plans and the use of the AIF, that one should not be too eager to use our own forces.[159]

Furthermore, the paper proposed that the dominion forces should be used for the capture of Ambon and Halmahera. This was an intrusion into General MacArthur's line of advance, as Halmahera was his next objective. It would disrupt his plans and postpone his programme. The proposal was surprising in view of the fact that Blamey had told the British Chiefs on 5 May that Halmahera was MacArthur's next objective.[160] But since then Blamey had received Northcott's advice that, at variance with previous plans, no Australian troops were to be used.[161]

Although Shedden believed that the British Chiefs of Staff paper of 22 May was a good indication of Blamey's attitude, the Australian general played his cards very close to his broad chest.[162] On 25 May 1944 he discussed the Pacific Strategy with S.M. Bruce and said that the forces sent to Australia would have to come under MacArthur's command. Bruce recorded:

---

157. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 27 June 1944, MP 1217, Box No.3.

158. See p.370.

159. Notes of Discussion [by Shedden] with Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area, 27 June 1944, *op.cit.*

160. See p.375.

161. Cable, Northcott to Blamey, 22 May 1944, Blamey Papers 43.66. See p.

162. Blamey's PA, Major Dwyer has written: 'While ... I was on the trip with Blamey and Curtin to London in 1944, the matter of the General's efforts to establish a separate Commonwealth Command in the area from Darwin to the Netherlands East Indies was a matter of top security and one which the General never actually discussed with me except in the most general terms'. Letter, 18 December 1978.

> I asked Blamey whether the three AIF Divisions were definitely earmarked for any particular operation under MacArthur, but Blamey's reply was quite definitely that they were not so earmarked but that they would be at MacArthur's disposition. We then had some discussion on the plan of a parallel advance based on Darwin to the northward move to New Guinea. This, however, did not get us very far.[163]

Blamey's actions on return to Australia were to reveal his true feelings about the proposed scheme.

Whilst Blamey was discussing the British commitment to the Pacific Curtin was concerned with winning British approval for the allocation of the Australian war effort. This was dealt with in typical Churchillian fashion. Churchill invited Curtin to tea at Chequers on Sunday 21 May, telling Curtin that he would like him to meet his daughters and it would be a good excuse for them to be released from their respective services for the purposes of entertaining a distinguishing guest. When Curtin arrived on Sunday afternoon there was no sign of any daughters and he was ushered into a room where Churchill had Lord Leathers, Lord Cherwell and General Hollis armed with a large notebook.[164] At this meeting Curtin detailed the Australian war effort planned for 1945 and Churchill agreed to return to Australia as soon as possible the Australian ships, men and aircraft that had been sent to Europe.[165] This meeting turned out to be a 'final showdown' with Churchill on Curtin's appeal to the United States in December 1941 and Curtin appeared to gain the better

---

163. Notes of Discussions [by Bruce] with General Sir Thomas Blamey, 25 May 1944, CRS M100, May 1944.

164. Notes of Discussion [by Bruce] with Prime Minister of Australia, 25 May 1944, CRS M100, May 1944. Lord Leathers was Minister of War Transport, Lord Cherwell was Paymaster-General and Churchill's scientific adviser and Hollis was Secretary of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

165. Minutes of Conference held at Chequers, 21 May 1944, PREM 3 63/8.

of the exchange.[166] Curtin said later that the following night he had 'received a record of the conversation which represented anything but what had taken place. This record however was altered by Shedden and the United Kingdom people had to accept it'.[167]

The conferences continued. On 26 May Curtin and Blamey again met the British Chiefs of Staff, Churchill, Eden, Attlee, Lyttelton and Leathers.[168] At the meeting Churchill outlined the Modified Middle Strategy, but Curtin said that it was impossible for him to commit himself to a change in the command arrangements in the South-West Pacific Area without consulting his colleagues. He then went on to outline the history of the command arrangements, referring to the establishment of the Pacific War Councils in London and Washington.

> The London body had, to all intent and purposes, ceased to exist, and the Washington body was completely deficient. He, therefore, had had to deal with General MacArthur ... He feared that there was a danger of the gravest misunderstandings with the United States if Australian Forces were taken away from General MacArthur's direct command and placed under a new commander.[169]

---

166. Shedden recalled that: 'Curtin was the guest of Churchill at Chequers during the week-end, 20th-21st May. Late on 20th May, after dinner, Churchill duly fortified looked forward to a long discussion with Curtin whom he queried on his direct appeal of December 1941 to the United States, the inference being that this procedure was contrary to all concepts of Imperial principles. Curtin asked Churchill, "If the British Commonwealth had been at war with Japan, and war with Germany arose later, what would you have done? Would you have appealed to the United States?" Churchill replied "Yes, most certainly". Curtin said, "Well, that was just what I did when we were at war with Germany and Japan came in." The discussion of this subject ended at that'. Shedden Manuscript, Book 4, Box 4, Chapter 46, p.18.

167. Notes of Discussion [by Bruce] with Prime Minister of Australia, 25 May 1944, CRS M100, May 1944. For the amended minutes and Curtin's letter to Churchill of 23 May 1944 see PREM 3 63/8 and MP 1217, Box 5.

168. It was probably at this meeting that Shedden noted that 'Blamey, who was sitting opposite Churchill and the UK Ministers, was drowsy and kept nodding and closing his eyes'. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16. See also Blamey Diary, 26 May 1944, Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 1214.

169. War Cabinet Agendum 342/1944, 4 July 1944, CRS A2680, item Agendum No.17/1944 [Part 1]. Also COS (44) 467 (0), 26 May 1944, PREM 3 160/4. In a note to Curtin before the meeting Shedden urged him to reserve any decision on the Modified Middle Strategy until he could consult the government and MacArthur. MP 1217, Box 5. Clearly Curtin followed Shedden's advice.

It seems from this that the command arrangements in Australia had, at least, been discussed. After the meeting Brooke wrote:

> The meeting started badly as Curtin, who is entirely in MacArthur's pocket, was afraid we were trying to oust MacArthur! He consequently showed very little desire for British forces to operate from Australia. On the other hand I know [presumably from Blamey that] this outlook is not shared by the rest of Australia.
>
> However, as the meeting went on it took a far better turn, and in the end we obtained all we wanted for the present; namely Darwin and Fremantle to be developed for future operations by us...[170]

That afternoon Brooke had further private discussions with Blamey with whom he 'made good progress'.[171]

The next day Churchill wrote to Curtin to stress that a paper known as 'The War Against Japan', which outlined the Modified Middle Strategy, had been given to him merely to indicate the way the British minds were working, and he urged Curtin to make no mention of it in Washington. Indeed in a postscript to the letter Churchill asked Curtin to burn the paper in case someone, who did not know that it was not an agreed document, should read it.[172] However the most important part of the letter, as far as Curtin was concerned, was the confirmation that the British government had generally agreed to the allocation of the Australian war effort. All that remained was for it to be approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington.[173]

Curtin, Shedden and Blamey left London on 29 May, a week before the D Day landings. Blamey was disappointed at missing the opportunity of seeing something of this great event,[174] but Curtin had no similar

---

170. Diary, 26 May 1944, 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers. See also Blamey's Diary, 26 May 1944. Blamey Papers DRL 6643, item 144.

171. Diary, 26 May 1944, 5/8, Alanbrooke Papers.

172. Letter, Churchill to Curtin, 27 May 1944, PREM 3 160/4 and MP 1217, Box 5. The paper, 'The War Against Japan', was not destroyed and can be found in the latter source.

173. Cable 44, Curtin to Forde, 29 May 1944, CRS A2684, item 1496.

174. Dwyer, *op.cit.*

ambitions. Indeed when, soon after, rockets started landing on London, Curtin said that he was glad he had got away when he did. His private secretary observed that if Curtin had been in London when the rockets began, the exit would have been rapid 'or the PM would have had a bad attack of neuritis'.[175]

It seems that Curtin had not enjoyed his stay in London. He was annoyed that Churchill did not take more interest in his plans for Empire cooperation,[176] and he avoided one of Churchill's invitations to Chequers because 'I do not care to sit in an arm chair and listen to one man!'[177] Shedden also noticed Curtin's attitude:

> The PM showed no interest in the countryside, the historical places, nor the noticeable shopping centres. A visit to the country made no appeal to him ... He went to Lords on two occasions to see cricket matches. He did not see any advantage in meeting people to talk to, and as a result many eminent authorities whose views were invaluable were not seen either in London or Washington.[178]

Nevertheless, to many, Curtin made a good impression in London, and Ismay recorded that 'He was both frank and friendly - a difficult combination'.[179]

On 30 May Curtin arrived at Ottawa, where he told a press conference that the European nations were too far distant from Australia to be competent judges of her position in the Pacific. He declared that Australia must have a powerful voice in the conduct of Pacific affairs

---

175. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16.

176. Although the British did not appear to take much notice of Curtin's proposals, they did in fact form the main basis of the discussions on Commonwealth defence cooperation at the Prime Ministers' conference in 1946. See papers in AIR 9/266.

177. Roskill, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p.591.

178. Shedden Diary, MP 1217, Box 16.

179. Letter, Ismay to Casey, 13 June 1944, Ismay Papers IV/cas. On 19 December 1944 Hankey wrote to Shedden that Curtin 'made a favourable impression here'. MP 1217, Box 7.

During his visit to London in May 1944 Curtin visited RAAF units. Here he is talking to Group Captain H.I. Edwards VC, DSO, DFC, at the headquarters of No.460 Squadron RAAF. This was the closest Curtin came to meeting troops in a combat zone.

(AWM Negative No.RAAF SUK 12246)

after the war.[180] When questioned as to whether he was completely satisfied with the decisions taken at the London conference, Curtin replied:

> My dear man, the only person who is completely satisfied is the man who is put in Valhalla or is seated near the throne of the Almighty. I am very pleased with the advances that have been made at the Prime Ministers' conference.[181]

He then travelled to Washington to present proposals regarding Australian manpower and war effort to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

The proposal put forward by Curtin to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 2 June 1944 followed the details determined by the Australian government in late 1943. Curtin explained that he had discussed with Churchill the possibility of basing United Kingdom force on Australia but that the preparations now beginning did not imply any commitment. Australia's war effort was to be on the following basis:

a. The maintenance of six divisions for active operations;

b. The maintenance of the RAN at its present strength;

c. The maintenance of the RAAF at a strength of 54 squadrons;

d. Food for Great Britain (including India) to be exported on the 1944 scale; and

e. Australia to review other aspects of the war effort with a possibility of increasing production.

Curtin ended by stating that as Austalia was 'in a sphere of American strategic responsibility' Churchill had agreed that he should discuss the matter in Washington.[182]

---

180. *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 2 June 1944.

181. Notes of Press Conference, Ottawa, 31 May 1944 CRS A989, item 44/80/1/67.

182. Memorandum by the Prime Minister, 2 June 1944, MacArthur Memorial RG4 and MP 1217, Box 5. This memorandum is reproduced in Appendix 11. In his verbal presentation Curtin mentioned that Australia wanted to take part in the recapture of the Philippines. CCS 161st Meeting, 2 June 1944, MP 1217, Box 5.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff immediately referred these proposals to MacArthur [183] who replied that he considered that Australia's war effort should be determined by Australia.[184] MacArthur had, of course, previously discussed the proposals with Curtin. Thus the Australian war effort received the approval of the Combined Chiefs of Staff[185] and Curtin could set out for Australia.

---

183. Signal W 45292, Marshall to MacArthur, 2 June 1944, RG4 MacArthur Memorial.

184. Signal, MacArthur to Marshall, 3 June 1944. RG4 MacArthur Memorial.

185. War Cabinet Agendum 342/1944, 4 July 1944, CRS A2680, Agendum No.17/1944 [Part 1]. Also letter, CCS Secretariat to Shedden, 3 June 1944, MP 1217, Box 5.