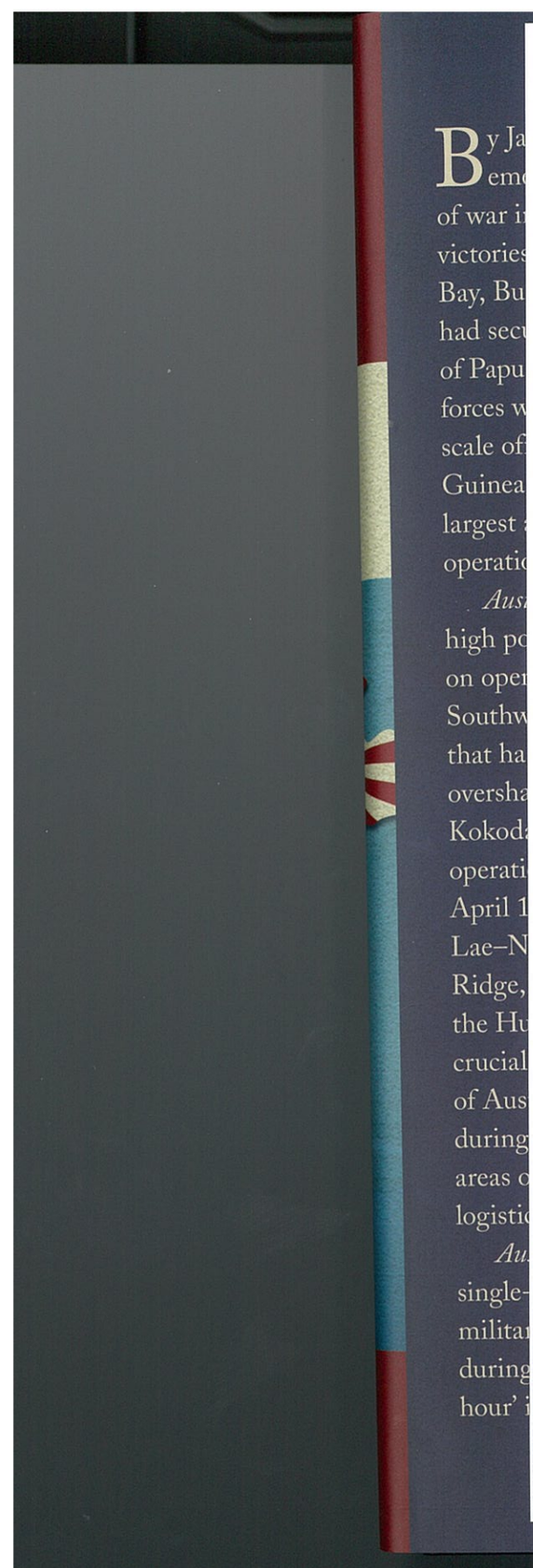


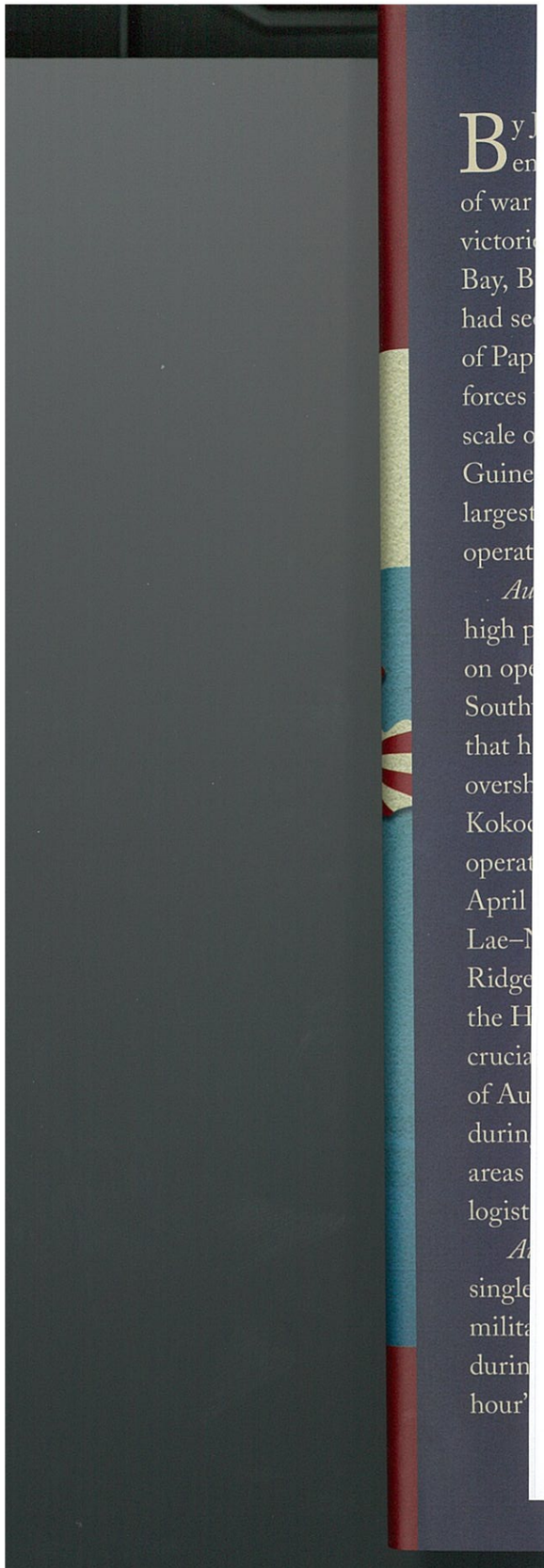
Australia 1943
The Liberation of New Guinea

By January 1943, Australia had emerged from the shadow of war in a strong position. The victories in 1942 at Kokoda, Milne Bay, Buna, Gona and Sanananda had secured the northern coastlines of Papua and Australia. Australian forces were now poised for a full-scale offensive to liberate New Guinea from the Japanese, the largest and most complicated operations in their history.

Australia 1943 explores the high point of Australia's influence on operations and strategy in the Southwest Pacific, a campaign that has been traditionally overshadowed by the drama of Kokoda. It investigates critical operations from January 1943 to April 1944, including Salamaua, Lae–Nadzab, Finschhafen, Shaggy Ridge, the Markham Valley and the Huon Peninsula. This was a crucial period in the development of Australia's military capabilities during the Pacific War in the areas of strategy, tactics, doctrine, logistics, equipment and techniques.

Australia 1943 is the first detailed single-volume study of Australia's military operations in the Pacific during 1943 – Australia's 'finest hour' in the Second World War.

Peter J. Dean is the Director of Studies at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, the Australian National University and a Senior Lecturer at the Australian Command and Staff College. He is the editor of *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War* (2012), the author of *The Architect of Victory: The Military Career of Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Horton Berryman* (2011), a contributing editor to the Second World War journal *Global War Studies* and a managing editor for the journal *Security Challenges*.



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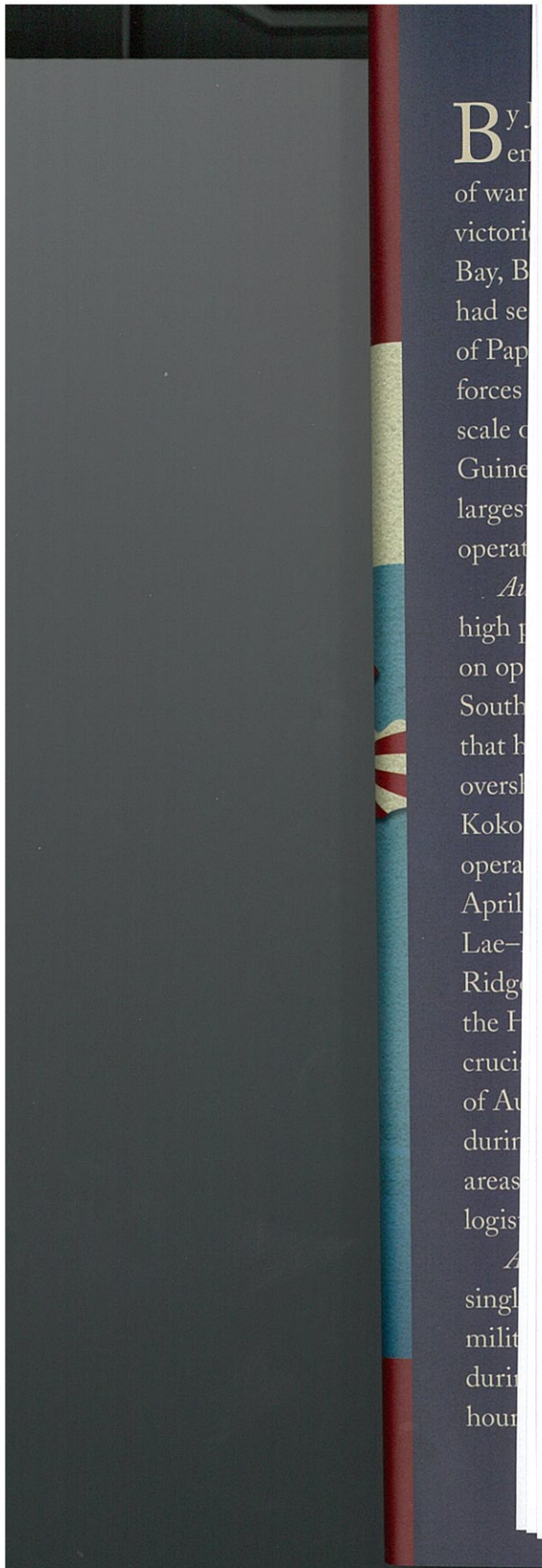

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For Flynn

Foreword

Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson
Director, Australian War Memorial

Although the shadows of war had receded somewhat compared to those of the year before, there were still dark days ahead for Australia in 1943. It was the year in which Australia and its key ally, the United States, moved from the gripping struggle to defend the Southwest Pacific to the offensive.

My family, like many of the period, had its members serving in the various theatres of the war. My grandfather, Arthur Beercroft, had left home in 1941 serving in New Guinea and the Pacific Islands as a pilot officer in the airfield defence guards, and would not return home until 1945. One of his brothers, having been captured at Tobruk, was imprisoned in Italy for four years before escaping. Another brother had returned from the barren-desert carnage at Tobruk to fight in the jungles of Milne Bay and on the coast of New Guinea. The youngest brother had in 1943, at the age of just sixteen, convinced his mother to sign enlistment papers allowing him to join the Royal Australian Navy to serve on HMAS *Hobart* in New Guinea and beyond. Two of his sisters joined the Women's Auxiliary in Launceston, giving their all until the war's end. My family's experience symbolises just one small part of how every facet of Australian life, after the nation's ill preparedness for war, was now deeply immersed in it – overseas, on the borders and at home.

In reading through *Australia 1943*, no one should forget the context in which Australia's war in the Southwest Pacific occurred. The Sino-Japanese conflict on mainland China, the struggle in Burma, the Allied victory in North Africa, the invasion of Sicily, the Italian campaign,

the toll taken on the Eastern Front – especially at Kursk – the heroic battle for the Atlantic and the dreadful toll exacted by the bomber offensive over Europe were but some of the theatres of the war of critical importance to its outcome. A number of these were also ones in which Australians fought and died.

Closer to home, Rabaul had to be isolated before further advances could be made through the Southwest and Central Pacific towards the Philippines and the Japanese home islands. Sadly, too little thought has been given to the 1943 offensive in New Guinea. This collection of essays will do much to redress this.

The 1943 campaigns in New Guinea were slogged out against a tough opponent in some of the most oppressive and harsh conditions experienced anywhere during the Second World War. But it was these hard-fought, and even harder earned, victories that paved the way for the better known Allied successes in the Pacific in 1944 and for the war's end. Without 1943, there would have been no Marianas, Palau, the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Okinawa or Borneo.

Few Australians appreciate that the 1943 campaigns in New Guinea were the largest military operations ever conducted by Australian forces. These were larger than the operations on the Western Front in 1918, which had involved five Australian divisions. These divisions included both volunteers of the Australian Imperial Force and conscripts of the militia. Most of the Royal Australian Navy was deployed here as was a great part of the Royal Australian Air Force. None of us should forget that these campaigns liberated an Australian mandated territory from an invading foe.

In the year from March 1943, some 1200 Australians lost their lives on the battlefields of this theatre. The Japanese lost 35 000. That Australian casualties remained so relatively low says something of the leadership, professionalism and conduct of Australia's forces during the campaign. Australians had to master first the brutal terrain and then jungle warfare itself. Whereas the campaigns of 1941 and the 'turning points' of 1942, such as the battle of the Coral Sea and Kokoda, are well remembered in Australia, the tough struggles against an enemy far from defeated in 1943 receive much less attention.

Although born of the battle of the Coral Sea in 1942, it was the New Guinea campaigns of 1943 that really forged what would become the bedrock of the Australia–US Alliance formalised in 1951. Not a day should go by in Australia without reflection on the extent of American

sacrifice in the Pacific from 1942 until the end of the war. That we do so – publicly or privately – has informed much Australian defence and foreign policy since.

As 2013 marks the 70th anniversary of the 1943 campaigns in New Guinea, it is important we pause to reflect on their significance to Australia and our freedoms. Although the 1942 battles were turning points in the war, it is often forgotten that they were ones in which an enemy advance had been stopped. The first tentative steps to victory had to be taken in 1943.

After 1942, the Allies had to fight a series of tough campaigns – in Europe and the Pacific – against a determined enemy as yet far from defeated. After the victory at El Alamein, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill reminded an increasingly confident public that this was not the end. With great sobriety he said it was, 'not even the beginning of the end'. But it was, he said 'perhaps, the end of the beginning'.

It was also true for the Australian and American victories that had turned the tide in the Southwest Pacific by the beginning of 1943. Following the gains hard won at Midway, Guadalcanal, Kokoda, Milne Bay and the beachhead battles of Buna, Gona and Sanananda, the Japanese fortress at Rabaul had to be isolated. It was to this extraordinarily difficult task that in 1943 the nation's military attention turned.

At home, a different kind of battle re-emerged – conscription. Prime Minister John Curtin who had fought so strongly against conscription during the First World War in the deeply polarising debates at the time, now found himself its reluctant but necessary advocate. But this was a different war and, clearly, Australia's vital interests were at stake.

The north of the continent had been bombed and by 1943 more than 20 000 Australians were prisoners of war. The government amended the Defence Act to extend the definition of areas to which conscripted servicemen could be sent to include all areas south of the Equator in Southeast Asia. All major war zones in the Pacific theatre were included.

In February, the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Gavin Long was appointed on the recommendation of Charles Bean as the General Editor of the projected official history of the Second World War. It would take his oversight, 14 authors and over 25 years for it to be completed.

In the same year the ANZAC Day Dawn Service was held at the Australian War Memorial for the first time. This reflected in part the improved nature of Australia's precarious war position. In 1942, Curtin had considered the state of war to be such that only a very subdued service

could be conducted. But in 1943, Their Excellencies the Governor-General Lord Gowrie and Lady Gowrie attended an afternoon service.

In October 1943, the Memorial's art committee commissioned Nora Heysen as the first female war artist. Heysen was the only female artist allowed to work in operational areas, and travelled to New Guinea in April 1944. Also of an artistic nature, the great Damien Parer's film *Kokoda Front Line!* was awarded an Oscar in 1943.

On 9 November, the Carley lifeboat from HMAS *Sydney* (II) went on display in the Memorial to mark the second anniversary of the cruiser's loss on 19 November 1941, sunk by the German raider *Kormoran*. It was, until the wreck of the *Kormoran* was discovered in 2008, one of the few tangible links to the cruiser and one of the great mysteries of the war.

Politically, 1943 was dominated by the 'equality of sacrifice' debate. Australians were challenged to ask themselves who was really suffering in the fight to win the war. Further to this, the nation had to shake off the view that the state governments were the predominant form of governance. The referendum approving the transfer of taxation powers from the states to the Commonwealth laid the foundation for Australia's modern fiscal system and through it Australia came to true nationhood. This would be Curtin's lasting legacy beyond his wartime leadership. His election victory in August 1943 was crushing, achieving 58 per cent of the two-party-preferred vote and winning all Senate seats contested.

A 29-year-old Australian soldier in north Queensland, already a seasoned veteran, wrote home to his sister in 1943 on the eve of his embarkation for New Guinea. Under no illusion as to his possible fate he noted, 'I do hope I get through our next action okay. Life is so good and sweet when one has such a grand wife as Beryl, don't think I am frightened to die, it is not that, but the thought of leaving behind such glorious things'. This soldier was Tom 'Diver' Derrick. 'Beryl' was his one true love whom he had married before the outbreak of the war.

At Sattelberg, on the heights overlooking Finschhafen, New Guinea, in November 1943, Derrick was awarded a Victoria Cross. He singlehandedly captured a Japanese machine-gun post with extraordinary bravery. He would survive and return home to see Beryl. But for the last time. In 1945, just three months before the war's end, he would die fighting on Tarakan just off the coast of Borneo.

Unlike the Derrick family the Beercrofts were incredibly fortunate that all of our family returned from the war. But they, like Australia, were changed by it in ways that are still difficult to fully understand and that inform who we are today.

Beyond 1788, 1942 was arguably the most important year in our nation's history. But the iconic nature of that year and the bloody, courageous sacrifices that made it so would not have counted for much if not for the hard, selfless work at home and at war in 1943.

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The initiative for this book came from the project *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War*. The campaign for the reduction of Rabaul in 1943, in particular the Australian operations in New Guinea, has, for a long time, been my favourite campaign in Australian military history. The New Guinea operations were the largest ever by Australia's Military Forces yet they remain relatively unknown outside of the small circle of veterans, military historians and Pacific War enthusiasts. They warrant and deserve a broader audience. As such I have always planned on producing a book on Australia's role in this campaign during 1943. As luck would have it, the success of *Australia 1942* in combination with the encouragement of my colleagues at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (the Australian National University) and the staff at Cambridge University Press (CUP), plus the 70th anniversary, has meant that I have been able to fulfil this ambition. It is a success that in every respect is equally due to my co-authors.

A book of this kind always depends on the quality of the historians who author the chapters. Those writing in these pages, with their dedication to the field, their extensive knowledge of 1943 and their professionalism has made this book what it is. They have been a pleasure to work with. While this book is very much focused on Australia I felt it was imperative that the strategy, operations and perspectives of the two major powers involved, Japan and the United States, were well represented. As such, in particular I want to thank the two fine scholars from these countries, Hiroyuki Shindo and Kevin Holzimmer, for having provided chapters for the book.

In Australia there is no finer military historian than Professor David Horner, one of the world's foremost authorities on the Pacific War. He continues to mentor me in my career and I remain forever in his debt for the opportunities and guidance he provides to me.

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All of the authors gathered here represent some of the best and brightest in Australian military history and I whole-heartedly thank them for their contributions. Their generosity of time, effort and energy has been amazing.

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Contributors

Peter J. Dean (editor) is the Director of Studies at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, College of Asia & the Pacific, at the Australian National University. He is the author of *The Architect of Victory: The Military Career of Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Horton Berryman* (2011) and editor of *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War*. He is a contributing editor and board member of the journal *Global War Studies* and managing editor of the journal *Security Challenges*.

Lachlan Grant is a historian in the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Specialising in the Second World War, he has published on Australian experiences of the war in Asia and the Australian prisoner-of-war experience. His PhD, completed at Monash University, examined the attitudes and outlooks of Australian soldiers in Asia and the Pacific during the Second World War. A manuscript based on this research is currently being prepared for publication as a book.

Kevin C. Holzimmer is Research Professor and Adjunct Professor of History at the US Air Force Research Institute. He is the author of a biography of the commander of the Sixth US Army under General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, entitled *General Walter Krueger: Unsung Hero of the Pacific War*. In addition to completing a study of the current international security environment in the Asia–Pacific region, he is writing *MacArthur's Lieutenants: The Campaign in the Southwest Pacific Area, 1939–1945*.

David Horner, AM, is Professor of Australian Defence History in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. He is the author or editor of over 30 books on Australian military history, strategy and defence including *High Command* (1982), *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (1998), *Strategic Command, General Sir John Wilton and Australia's Asian Wars* (2005) and *Australian Military*

History for Dummies (2011). In 2004, David was appointed the Official Historian of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations. He is the General Editor of a six-volume series of the same name and is writing two of the volumes, the first of which, *Australia and the 'New World Order'*, was published in 2011. In 2009, David was appointed official historian for the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

Karl James is a Senior Historian in the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and completed his PhD at the University of Wollongong. He has worked on several Memorial exhibitions and was the curator for the special anniversary exhibition, *Rats of Tobruk, 1941,* on display during 2011. Karl's first book, *The Hard Slog: Australians in the Bougainville Campaign, 1944–45*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012.

Mark Johnston is Head of History at Scotch College, Melbourne. He is the author of nine books about the Second World War, including *Whispering Death: Australian Airmen in the Pacific War* (2011), *Anzacs in the Middle East* (2013) and histories of the 6th, 7th and 9th Australian Divisions.

Ross Mallett completed a PhD in military history with the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy in 2007 on Australian Army Logistics in the campaigns of 1943–45 in the Southwest Pacific Area. He recently attended the 2012 Paralympic Games in London as part of the History of the Paralympics in Australia (HOPAU) Project.

Ian Pfennigwerth served 35 years in the Royal Australian Navy and now researches, writes and promotes Australian naval history. His books include *A Man of Intelligence*, *The Australian Cruiser* Perth, *1939–1942*, *Tiger Territory: The Untold Story of the Royal Australian Navy in Southeast Asia*, *The RAN and General MacArthur*, *In Good Hands: The Life of Dr Sam Stening*, *POW* and *ADFA: The First 25 Years of the Australian Defence Force Academy*.

Garth Pratten is a senior lecturer in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. He has worked for the Australian Army's Training Command, the Australian War Memorial and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Dr Pratten was a

member of the research staff for the *Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts* and is currently contributing to the *Official History of Australian Peacekeeping and Post–Cold War Operations*. In 2010, while working for the British Ministry of Defence, Dr Pratten deployed to Afghanistan as part of the team compiling the war diary for the International Security Assistance Force's Regional Command South. He is the author of *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2009.

Hiroyuki Shindo is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Military History, National Institute for Defence Studies, in Japan. He has an LLB from Kyoto University and an LLM from Kobe University and is a graduate of the Ohio State University PhD coursework program. His special areas of interest are Japanese military strategy and operations during the Second World War and US–Japan diplomatic and military relations in the 1930s.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
Adm	Admiral
Adv LHQ	Advanced Headquarters Allied Land Forces; headed by Blamey
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AMF	Australian Military Forces
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administration Unit
APD	high-speed amphibious transport (ex-destroyer)
AWM	Australian War Memorial
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
Brig	Brigadier
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
Coy	Company
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff (Australian Army)
Div	Division
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
GCB	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath
Gen	General
GHQ	General Headquarters, SWPA (MacArthur's HQ)
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HQ	Headquarters
JAAF	Japanese Army Air Force
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LCI	Landing Craft, Infantry
LCT	Landing Craft, Tank
LSI	Landing Ship, Infantry
LST	Landing Ship, Tank
NARA	US National Archives and Records Administration
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer

NGF	New Guinea Force (Corps, later Army level command based at Port Moresby)
OCHM	Office of the Chief of Military History (US Army)
PIB	Papuan Infantry Battalion
PIR	Parachute Infantry Regiment (US Army)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RAA	Royal Australian Artillery
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
Regt	Regiment
SOPAC	South Pacific Area Command (US Navy Command under Adm Halsey)
SWPA	Southwest Pacific Area
TPS	Test Pilot School
USAAF	Unites States Army Air Forces
USN	Unites States Navy
US	United States

CODENAMES

Binocular	codename for Lae, New Guinea
Dexterity	codename for US operations in New Britain
Diminish	codename for Finschhafen, New Guinea
Doublet	codename for Morobe/Salamaua, New Guinea
Exchequer	codename for Markham Valley, New Guinea
Phosphorus	codename for Australian Task Force for New Guinea operations
Postern	codename for Lae and the operation for its capture

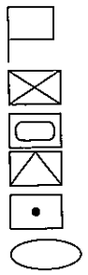
CHRONOLOGY

Major Campaigns, South and Southwest Pacific Areas, 1942–44	
Papuan Campaign	23 July 1942 – 23 January 1943
Guadalcanal Campaign	7 August 1942 – 21 February 1943
New Guinea Campaign	24 January 1943 – 24 April 1944
Northern Solomons Campaign	22 February 1943 – 21 November 1944
Bismarcks Campaign	15 December 1943 – 27 November 1944

Southwest Pacific Area (MacArthur)		South Pacific Area (Halsey)	
Japanese repulsed at Wau	30 January 1943		
Bismarck Sea battle	2–4 March 1943		
Woodlark and Kiriwina Is. occupied	22–30 June 1943		
Nassau Bay Landings	29–30 June 1943		
		New Georgia Group Landings	30 June 1943
		Kula Gulf Naval Battle	5–6 July 1943
		Munda, New Georgia captured	5 August 1943
		Vella Lavella Landing	15 August 1943
Fifth Air Force Raids on Wewak	17–18 August 1943		
Amphibious Landing at Lae	4 September 1943		
Nadzab Parachute Landing	5 September 1943		
Salamaua Captured	11 September 1943		
Lae Captured	16 September 1943		
Kaiapit Captured	19–20 September 1943		
Finschhafen Landing	22 September 1943		
Dumpu Occupied	5 October 1943		
		Naval battle off Vella Lavella	6–7 October 1943
		Treasury Island Landing	27 October 1943
		Bougainville Landing	1 November 1943
		Naval Battle of Empress Augusta Bay	1–2 November 1943
Sattelberg Captured	25 November 1943	Naval Battle off Bougainville	25 November 1943
Arawe Landing	15 December 1943		
Cape Gloucester Landings	25 December 1943		
Saidor Landing	2 January 1944		
Sio Captured	16 January 1944		
		Green Island Landing	15 February 1944
Manus Island Landing	15 March 1944		
Hollandia and Aitape Landings	22 April 1944		
Madang Captured	24 April 1944		
Alexishafen Occupied	26 April 1944		

MILITARY SYMBOLS ON MAPS

FUNCTION SYMBOLS



headquarters
infantry
armour
anti-tank artillery
artillery
defensive position

STRENGTH INDICATORS

•	section
•••	platoon/troop
|	company/squadron
||	battalion
|||	regiment
×	brigade
××	division
×××	corps
(+)	reinforced
(–)	sub-unit(s) detached

MILITARY HISTORY AND 1943: A PERSPECTIVE 70 YEARS ON

Peter J. Dean

This book is a sibling of last year's production *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War*. That book focused on Australia's first traumatic year of the Pacific War from the fall of Singapore until the victory in Papua in January 1943. It demonstrated that while a Japanese invasion of Australia may have been possible it was never probable and that ultimately the country was not under direct threat. Instead, stretched to their limits, the Japanese had decided in February 1942 to isolate Australia. This meant that the battles of 1942 were to be fought in the air and sea approaches to the Australian continent and in the islands of the archipelago to Australia's north. It is here that the security of Australia was achieved.

The events of 1942 had shown that Australia, with its small population and limited industrial base, needed to develop a close strategic partnership with a global power. When Great Britain failed to be able to meet this need in 1942 Australia was fortunate that the United States was both capable and willing to fill the void. In partnership with the United States, Australia's Army, Navy and Air Force had defeated the Japanese attempts to isolate Australia during 1942. At the dawn of a new year – 1943 – Australian and US forces in the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) would plan and launch offensive operations to push the Japanese far away from Australia's shores and to strike at the heart of Japanese military power in the South Pacific.

This book is about Australia's role in the SWPA during 1943. Throughout this important phase of the Pacific War Australia would