The relationship between aborigines, islanders and the armed forces in the Second World War

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

(Signed) .....

ABSTRACT

During the Second World War, the Services faced a dilemma concerning the enlistment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders: would they conform to the Commonwealth government's assimilationist policy and permit the enlistment of Aborigines who met enlistment criteria, or would they maintain their conservative ethos, arguing that Aborigines should not be admitted to military service? Aborigines and Islanders had much to gain from admission. Military service offered employment, overseas travel, trade training and other benefits. But most importantly, it offered a persuasive argument for the extension to Aborigines of 'citizens' rights'. While Aborigines and Islanders sought enlistment, the Services struggled with their dilemma. The absence of an Aboriginal representation within the digger myth suggests that Aborigines were generally unsuccessful in making a contribution to the war effort and that the Services resolved their dilemma by excluding Aborigines from service.

To investigate this issue, the development of Service policies in regard to the enlistment of non-Europeans was examined and the extent of Aboriginal and Islander enlistment was assessed. The formation of other relationships between the Services and Aborigines was also examined.

Aborigines and Islanders made a significant contribution to the war effort, but the moral value of this contribution

as a means of securing improvements in conditions for Aborigines was not able to be translated into political pressure because of lack of publicity given to the Aboriginal contribution. Throughout the war, the Services remained undecided about the question of the admission of Aborigines. They resolved their dilemma by maintaining the fiction of opposition to Aboriginal enlistment in their official policies while at the same time enlisting Aborigines, forming segregated Islander units, employing Aborigines in de facto military roles and employing Aborigines as civilian labourers.

Although formal Service policies denied Aborigines the right to enlist, many did so. Once enlisted, relations between black and white servicemen were marked by an egalitarianism seldom seen in pre-war race relations. Throughout the war, Service policy makers in senior Headquarters saw Aborigines as generally unsuitable for enlistment on the grounds that white Australians would not tolerate service with them. This perception was not shared by the common soldier who came into contact with Aboriginal servicemen or women. Despite their policies, the Services made significant use of Aboriginal and Islander manpower in a variety of ways. Aborigines and Islanders deserve to be recognised as having made a considerable contribution to the national war effort.

To my wife, Madeline.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABORIGINES, ISLANDERS AND THE ARMED FORCES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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I would particularly like to thank the many correspondents who wrote to me concerning their wartime service or who patiently allowed me to interview them. In particular, those Aborigines and Islanders who shared their memories of the war years deserve special thanks. Their often vivid contributions provided many excellent glimpses of the Aboriginal and Islander view of wartime events.

Thanks must also go to many others who assisted my research, including Ms Rita Bostock and Mr Robert Topping who assisted with unearthing information and to Corporal Noel Brinsmead, who drew the maps.

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CONTENTS

MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CONTINUED

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
AA&QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General
AIC	Australian Instructional Corps
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AMF	Australian Military Forces
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
AOB	Advanced Operational Base
ARA	Australian Regular Army
Aust	Australian
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BCOF	British Commonwealth Occupation Force
Bn	Battalion
CMF	Citizen Military Forces
CO	Commanding Officer
Coy	Company
DDMS	Deputy Director of Medical Services
DGMS	Director General of Medical Services
Div	Division
Fd	Field
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Grn	Garrison
GSO	General Staff Officer
HQ	Headquarters
LHQ	Land Headquarters
L of C	Lines of Communication
Lt	Lieutenant
MD	Military District
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (USA)
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NOIC	Naval Officer in Charge
OBU	Operational Base Unit
OC	Officer Commanding
PMF	Permanent Military Forces
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
USASOS	United States Army Services of Supply

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In popular myth, the Australian digger is seen as

> ... very much a soldier rather than an officer; he is an amateur rather than a professional; and he represents, if not a classless society - though this is the ideal - then at least not an hereditary ruling class. He comes from the masses and will return to them; though he may symbolise the nation, yet he is at least partly antagonistic to many of the values of the establishment, and has enjoyed a somewhat ambivalent relationship with more patrician authority figures.[1]

He is also a white Australian. Although Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders participated in both the First and Second World Wars - the wars which gave shape to the digger myth - they have been excluded from the myth and are Australia's invisible servicemen and women.

It is not known precisely how many Aborigines and Islanders served in the First AIF, but there were at least 300 from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Almost one third of this group became casualties - a casualty rate similar to that of the First AIF as a whole - indicating that Aboriginal and Islander soldiers shared the rigours of the First World War in equal measure with their white comrades. At least three Aboriginal soldiers received

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1. Jane Ross, The Myth of the Digger: The Australian Soldier in Two World Wars, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1985, p. 12.

awards for gallantry.[2] But involvement in the First World War had been limited to those Aborigines who had enlisted and had served overseas. The First World War had little impact on the Aboriginal civilian community. The Second World War was to present a different picture of Aboriginal and Islander involvement.

In the Second World War, Aborigines and Islanders were to make a much larger contribution. The age of 'total war' had arrived. The mobilisation of the total economic power and population base ensured that few citizens escaped the impact of the national war effort. In Australia, this notion of 'total war' found expression in propaganda posters which clamoured 'all in, Australians!', and in the pleas of political leaders who urged a do-or-die effort and called upon all Australians to do their part. Like other Australians, Aborigines and Islanders responded to these calls and contributed in accordance with their abilities and the size of their population. But in some ways, the contribution of Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War was greater than that of white Australians. For the first time in Australia's history, the nation faced a real threat of invasion. In particular, north Australia where the Aboriginal and Islander population outnumbered the white population, became a focus for the national

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2. Chris Coulthard-Clark, Aborigine Medal-Winners of the First AIF, unpublished manuscript, n.d.

struggle. In the Northern Territory for example, the Aboriginal population was estimated to be 14,488 while the non-Aboriginal population was a mere 5,570.[3] Most of the non-Aboriginal population congregated in urban centres like Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin whereas the Aboriginal population was more evenly spread. The populations of north Queensland and the north of Western Australia followed a similar pattern.

Aborigines and Islanders therefore formed a significant portion of the population of north Australia, representing to the Services an important source of local labour. They also possessed detailed knowledge of their tribal areas, some of which acquired strategic significance as the war continued. Their knowledge of local terrain, feasible routes, water resources, and among coastal Aborigines and Islanders, detailed knowledge of sea conditions, reefs and coastal navigation offered the Services the prospect of mobility in the unmapped and hostile environment of north Australia. To the Services, Aborigines and Islanders were

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3. Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, no. 35, 1942-43, pp. 315 and 224. It was estimated that the Aboriginal population was made up of 13,451 'full-blood' Aborigines and 1,037 'part-Aborigines'. L.R. Smith in The Aboriginal Population in Australia, ANU Press, Canberra, 1980, analyses Aboriginal population data from a variety of sources in an attempt to more closely define changes in the Aboriginal population. He shows that although population figures for the Northern Territory varied widely before the late 1930s, estimates were reasonably accurate throughout the 1940s and would have varied by no more than 500 from the Commonwealth Year Book figure.

therefore seen as a source of labour, mobility and valuable information about local conditions. The Services' demand for manpower and information about the north changed the status of Aborigines and Islanders in the Services' eyes. Aborigines and Islanders had acquired a military value.

The contribution of Aborigines and Islanders was not confined to those in the north. Many de-tribalised urban Aborigines from south-east Australia also contributed to the war effort as the demand for manpower increased. Many enlisted in the Services while others contributed to war industries.

Yet few non-Aboriginal Australians are aware of the part played by Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War. Most, if called upon to think of the service of 'natives' in the Australian forces would immediately recall the 'fuzzy wuzzy angels' of the Kokoda track:

> those impromptu angels
> With their fuzzy wuzzy hair.

A few might recall the service of the most famous of Aboriginal soldiers, Reg Saunders,[4] but the contribution of

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4. Enlisting in the Second AIF in April 1940, Reg Saunders served in North Africa, Greece and Crete, later returning to Australia where he served through the campaigns in Papua and New Guinea. In 1944 he achieved notoriety when he became the first Aboriginal to serve as a commissioned officer in the Australian Army. He also served in the Korean war.

the several thousand Aborigines and Islanders who served has never been fully recognised. Sapper 'Bert' Beros' famous poem about the 'fuzzy wuzzy angels',[5] coupled with Damien Parer's graphic film of the carrier lines and their evacuation of Australian wounded from the Kokoda track, projected a positive image of the Papuan into the Australian psyche which later helped to change Australians' attitudes towards Papuans and New Guineans.[6] But another of Beros' poems, 'The Coloured Digger', published in the same collection as 'The Fuzzy wuzzy Angels', made no impact:

> He came and joined the colours
> When the War God's anvil rang,
> He took up modern weapons
> To replace his boomerang,
> ...
> He proved he's still a warrior,
> In action not afraid,
> He faced the blasting red-hot fire
> From mortar and grenade;
> ...
> One day he'll leave the Army,
> Then join the League he shall,
> And he hopes we'll give a better deal
> To the aboriginal.[7]

Beros had dedicated his poem to 'private West', an Aborigine who had died of illness after the fighting across

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5. Sapper H. 'Bert' Beros, The Fuzzy wuzzy Angels and other Verses, Johnston Publishers, Sydney, n.d.

6. Hank Nelson, 'From Kanaka to Fuzzy wuzzy Angel', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds.), Who Are Our Enemies? - Racism and the Working Class in Australia, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1978, p. 172.

7. Beros, Fuzzy wuzzy Angels, p. 24.

the Kokoda track.

National attention had been focussed upon the battles in the Owen Stanleys, providing a dramatic backdrop for Beros' and Parer's portrayal of the Papuan carriers. Aboriginal and Islander servicemen and civilian labourers in north Australia however, lacked a dramatic focus - a land battle, to propel their contribution into the national consciousness. The war in north Australia was essentially an air war, in which a series of relatively impersonal raids and counter-raids were launched. The bombing of Darwin captured the national imagination but arguably it was the possibility of a Japanese invasion following the first air raid which aroused most concern. It was the fear of an invasion rather than further air raids that drove many of Darwin's citizens to seek escape.

Those Aborigines and Islanders who served in the Second AIF or in the Militia saw action in the land battles against Australia's enemies, but these men served in integrated units of the Australian forces and their Aboriginal or Islander identity was lost in a sea of white faces. The Aboriginal and Islander contribution was therefore overshadowed by the drama of the war and remains largely unrecognised to this day.[8]

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8. Aboriginal veterans have recently attempted to commemorate Anzac day as a separate group, signifying their continuing desire to establish an Aboriginal identity for their military service.

Historians have paid little attention to the role of Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War. The Official History of the war hardly makes any mention of Aborigines or Islanders. Although the history includes discussion of the formation of the Thursday Island garrison, the fact that the garrison included over 700 Torres Strait Islander soldiers is not mentioned. Neither is the role of Aborigines in surveillance and early warning on the flanks of Darwin.[9] Similarly, the Official History of the Air Force in the war ignores the part played by Aborigines in airfield construction across north Australia.[10] Other military histories are equally silent on the subject. Military historians have tended to concentrate on the issues of higher command, biographies of senior commanders or studies of particular campaigns, leaving the question of the contribution of particular social groups, such as women, Aborigines or Australian

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9. Dudley McCarthy, South-West Pacific Area - First Year: Kokoda to Wau, (Australia in the war of 1939-45), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, pp. 11 and 75. Individual Aborigines are mentioned only twice by name throughout the entire series of 22 volumes. Corporal Tim Hughes, an Aborigine from South Australia, is mentioned in McCarthy, Kokoda to Wau, p. 471 for his part in the battle of Buna where he won the Military Medal, and Captain Reg Saunders is mentioned in David Dexter, The New Guinea Offensives, (Australia in the war of 1939-45), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1961, p. 24.

10. Douglas Gillison, Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942, (Australia in the War of 1939-1945), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962, and George Odgers, Air War Against Japan 1943-1945, (Australia in the War of 1939-1945), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957.

Chinese, untouched.[11] Histories of the impact of the war on the Australian community have also tended to ignore the place of Aborigines and Islanders.[12]

There is not yet a large body of work on twentieth century Aboriginal history[13] and it is therefore not surprising that the contribution of Aborigines and Islanders to the national war effort has also remained largely untouched by historians working in the field of Aboriginal history. C.D. Rowley[14] mentions the impact of the war upon Aborigines but is mainly concerned with drawing comparisons between the conditions under which

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11. One of the few military historians to study a particular group at war has been Peter Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1981. Charlton examines the original volunteers for the Second AIF and refers briefly to Reg Saunders (pp. 176-177.) but makes no mention of the significance to Aborigines and Islanders of voluntary enlistment in the early months of the war. This significance is discussed in Chapter 2. Ironically, Reg Saunders was not strictly a 'thirty-niner' because he enlisted in April 1940.

12. Michael McKernan's 'All In!': Australia During the Second World War, Nelson, Melbourne, 1983, for example, is really a study of the impact of the war on white Australians, and predominantly, those of south east Australia.

13. Gammage and Markus point out that even after the awakening of interest in Aboriginal history in the 1960s there was still little attention paid to the twentieth century. That research which has been done in this period has mainly been in the form of unpublished theses. See Bill Gammage and Andrew Markus (eds.), All That Dirt: Aborigines 1938: An Australia 1938 Monograph, History Project Inc, Canberra, 1982, p. ix.

14. C.D. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Penguin, Melbourne 1972.

Aboriginal labourers worked for the Army in the Northern Territory and the conditions offered by pastoralists. This theme is also taken up by Stevens[15] in his studies of the history of industrial and political aspects of race relations in Australia. Mission histories such as Cole's Fred Gray of Umbakumba,[16] Perez' Kalumburu War Diary,[17] or MacKenzie's Aurukun Diary,[18] mention the impact of the war years upon northern mission stations but leave many questions unanswered. These mission histories are in effect histories of the white missionaries. Aborigines appear as a mere background against which the lives of the missionaries are painted. Few, if any, attempt to see the mission Aborigines as the subject - despite their being central to the purpose of the missions. Though they offer intriguing glimpses of life on the mission stations during the war, these histories manage to say little about the relationship which developed between the missionaries, mission Aborigines, and the servicemen who often found themselves stationed at these isolated outposts.

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15. Frank Stevens, The Politics of Prejudice, Alternative Publishing Co-operative, Sydney, 1980.

16. Keith Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, Keith Cole Publications, Bendigo, 1984.

17. Fr. Eugene Perez O.S.B., Kalumburu War Diary, R. Pratt and J. Millington (eds.), Artlook Books, Perth, 1981. See also Fr. Eugene Perez O.S.B., Kalumburu: The Benedictine Mission and the Aborigines 1908-1975, Kalumburu Benedictine Mission, Kalumburu, 1977.

18. Geraldine MacKenzie, Aurukun Diary, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1981.

Gordon's The Embarrassing Australian, a biography of Reg Saunders, the only Aborigine to serve as a commissioned officer in the Australian forces in the Second World War, is a valuable but unique biography of a significant Aboriginal serviceman.[19] Through its uniqueness however, it tends to leave the reader with the impression that Saunders was one of very few Aborigines involved in the war. Of late, this view has tended to be modified by Thomson's Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land[20] and the Walkers' Curtin's Cowboys.[21] These have helped to add further dimensions to the portrayal of the Aborigines' contribution to the national defence effort, describing the role performed by Aborigines as de facto servicemen in east Arnhem Land and as civilian guides and labour for the forces in north Australia. But even these refer to the role of Aborigines in defence as an afterthought - an interesting footnote to the matter at hand - Thomson's field work among Aborigines in east Arnhem Land and the history of the North Australia Observer Unit respectively. Gordon's popular biography remains the only major work

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19. Harry Gordon, The Embarrassing Australian: The Story of an Aboriginal Warrior, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1962.

20. Donald Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, (compiled and introduced by Nicolas Peterson), Currey O'Neil, Melbourne, 1983.

21. Richard Walker and Helen Walker, Curtin's Cowboys: Australia's Secret Bush Commandos, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1986.

unequivocally devoted to the issue of Aboriginal military service - and then to the service of only one man - albeit a man who made a significant contribution. The author's articles provide the only general overview of the role of Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War.[22]

This scarcity of published sources is offset by a large volume of previously unpublished records available in Commonwealth and State archives. This thesis has drawn heavily upon these records supporting them with interviews of various participants.

The place of Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War has therefore been largely ignored in military and Aboriginal histories. Their role in the First World War has been equally ignored. Although the creation of a national myth at Gallipoli in the First World War had helped white Australians to define themselves, Aboriginal veterans of that war were unable to share in this new national identity, being generally relegated to inferior and separate status on their return to civilian life and with their cultural heritage under constant assault from

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22. See Major R.A. Hall, 'Aborigines and the Army: The Second World War Experience', Defence Force Journal, September/October 1980, no. 24, pp. 28-41, Robert Hall, 'Aborigines, the Army and the Second World War in Northern Australia', Aboriginal History, vol. 4, nos. 1-2, 1980, pp. 73-95 and Robert A. Hall, 'Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War', The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, working paper no. 121.

white Australian society. They had been too few in number to establish an Aboriginal identity within the First AIF and had been unable effectively to claim a place for Aborigines in the new national identity. Aborigines were excluded from the digger myth of the First AIF and lacked a myth maker of their own. Though they contributed to the Second World War in much larger numbers and in a greater variety of ways, and although race relations in the post-war period have undergone considerable improvement, Aboriginal and Islander servicemen of the Second World War have continued to lack a myth maker. Their service has become 'invisible'. Not only is there little evidence of their service in literature, but the Australian War Memorial - the national shrine to the digger myth - is devoid of any public acknowledgement of their service.[23]

Despite this lack of acknowledgement of their involvement in the national war effort, some historians readily acknowledge that the Second World War formed a watershed in relations between Aboriginal and white Australians. Rowley, for example, notes that 'the war may be taken as indicating the end of the process of destruction of Aboriginal society'.[24] It had raised questions of economic opportunity and justice for Aborigines, particularly in

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23. The galleries of the Australian War Memorial also reflect little of the impact of the war on north Australia.

24. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 337.

north Australia. Markus too, notes that:

> The impact of the war in the north had altered the perspectives of many Aborigines. They had the novel experience of coming into contact with a different kind of European - one who treated them as human beings. Aborigines employed by the army received regular, and by previous standards generous, wages; decent food and accommodation; and they acquired new skills. In the post-war period the militancy of some Aborigines and the awareness of communists and others of the threat posed by skilled Aborigines who remained outside the union movement in part reflected these developments.[25]

This led to greater support for Aboriginal aspirations within the labour movement and eventually to the winning of considerable improvements in their labour conditions. Therefore, while there has been little detailed historical research on Aborigines in the twentieth century, the study of the involvement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War promises to be significant because rich sources of data are available and because the war marks, or is seen by some to mark, a turning point in Aboriginal history.

Some of the changes brought to race relations in post-war Australia can be attributed to causes beyond the Aborigines themselves - even beyond Australia. International revulsion at the product of uncontrolled racism - graphically portrayed in the concentration camps of Europe and Japanese prisoner of war camps - contributed to greater racial

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25. Andrew Markus, 'Talka Longa Mouth', in Curthoys and Markus (eds.), Who Are Our Enemies, p. 153.

tolerance among Australians and the post-war collapse of colonial empires presented Australians with models of indigenous communities well able to order their own affairs and with aspirations much like their own. Post-war immigration also exposed Australians to a variety of ways of coping with the problems of living, so broadening their horizons. A continuing feeling of national unity engendered by the struggle of the war years and the return of economic prosperity heralding better times, may also have had an effect. But another cause may be the relationship which developed between Aborigines and the Services. It seems clear there is a need for an examination of the relationship which evolved between Aborigines and Islanders and the Services because of its own intrinsic significance and because of its place in the wider context of changing Australian attitudes to race over the last fifty years. Such an examination is the subject of this thesis.

The Second World War had interrupted the normal flow of community life in Australia and caused national effort in terms of manpower and the economy to be directed away from many civilian projects, towards the defence forces. Millions of Australians were forced to postpone their personal goals and adopt new ones determined by the requirements of the time. The defence forces became perhaps the most influential instruments of government policy and touched the lives of the bulk of Australians in

one way or another. Furthermore, Australia's defence forces, as a sub-culture within the Australian community, possessed their own ideals and aspirations - a legacy of the traditions established by the First AIF and the cultural practices of Armies, Navies and Air Forces everywhere. These ideals and attitudes, though present within the civilian community, were not reflected as forcefully. They not only permeated to those who came in contact with the defence forces, for example through enlistment, but tended to influence the national ethos as the importance of the Services' role within in the community increased. Particularly as the civil administration of large portions of Australia was handed to the military - areas like the Kimberleys, the Northern Territory and Cape York, where the largest concentrations of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders lived - it is possible that this military administration led to distinctive changes in relations between Aborigines and Islanders and the Services.

During the inter-war period and leading up to the eve of the Second World War, Australia's defence forces had been depleted through a combination of factors which included anti-war and anti-military feeling resulting from the First World War, poor economic circumstances caused by the depression, the sense that adequate defence would be provided by other means such as the Royal Navy, and by the belief that war was unlikely. In 1938, almost on the eve

of the war, the strength of the forces was:[26]

	Permanent forces	Citizen/Reserve forces
Army	2,795	42,895
Navy	4,986	4,315
Air Force	3,104	552
Total	10,885	47,762

By the war's end however, this tiny force had been expanded to a total of 575,111. Gross enlistments in the armed forces had been almost 1 million men, and with a population of only about 7.5 million, about one in every eight people had served at one time or another in the armed forces. This was one of the highest proportions of service to population of any of the combatant countries.[27] This national recruiting effort had required that all available manpower be drawn upon. Aborigines and Islanders however, occupied an unusual place in Australian industry. They had generally been excluded from participation in the workforce on an equal basis. The demand for manpower brought about by the war therefore raised the question of whether the pressure to meet recruitment quotas would affect these discriminatory industrial practices in any way. The high proportion of Australians who served and the large number of these who served in north Australia where they came into

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26. Gavin Long, To Benghazi, (Australia in the war of 1939-45), Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952, p. 14.

27. Peter Firkins, The Australians in Nine Wars: Waikato to Long Tan, Pan, London, 1971, p. 434.

contact with Aborigines, was another important aspect of the nation's role in the war.

In the Second World War, most white Australian servicemen were recruited from the cities and major towns of south-east Australia. Generally, few would have given much thought to the place of Aborigines and Islanders within Australia. The arousal of public interest in the plight of Aborigines is a relatively recent event, beginning in the late 1920s. Stanner suggests that reports of atrocities against outback Aborigines in 1926 was the catalyst.[28] He argues that there had been no increase in atrocities or in the watchfulness of government authorities, or in the effectiveness of Aboriginal welfare organisations and lobby groups, but that modes of communication - 'the road, the motor car, the aeroplane and the radio' - had ended the isolation of the bush. People in the great metropolitan areas of the south-east were brought uncomfortably close to events which had been going on unchanged for some time.

Throughout the period leading up to the Second World War, the media kept the Australian public aware of developments in northern and central Australia. On 8 November 1928, the Sydney Morning Herald published news of what later became known as the Conniston massacre. A police party had

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28. Professor W.E.H. Stanner, The 1968 Boyer Lectures: After the Dreaming, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1969, p. 18.

admitted to the killing of seventeen Aborigines as a reprisal for the killing of a white dogger in central Australia. Later, an inquiry into the matter found that 31 Aborigines had been killed. What was particularly unusual about this incident was the public outcry it triggered in capital cities.[29] Other incidents in north Australia attracted similar interest. In 1932, Aborigines at Port Keats killed the crew of a Japanese lugger and at Caledon Bay in east Arnhem Land, the Japanese crew members of two luggers were killed by local Aborigines. In 1933, east Arnhem Land Aborigines killed Constable McColl and almost succeeded in killing another constable,[30] members of a police patrol sent to apprehend the Aborigines for the earlier attacks. The Aborigines involved later gave themselves up and went to Darwin.[31] The subsequent trial of Tukiar, the killer of Constable McColl, attracted particularly intense interest. Other trials involving Aborigines and whites had already established the tone of

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29. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 288.

30. A spear passed through his hat.

31. Many of these killings had been in response to interference with Aboriginal women. The Aborigines involved lived in frontier areas beyond the immediate reach of white Australian law. Hence, there were compelling reasons for them to resort to their own law when Japanese pearlers or white Australians entered their domain. Accounts of the killings and of the subsequent 'surrender' of the various Aborigines involved differ in regard to the extent to which the killings were in self-defence or in defence of Aboriginal women, and the extent to which the 'surrender' was entirely voluntary and not achieved through trickery.

Northern Territory justice and by the time of the Tukiar trial the Darwin court proceedings were under intense scrutiny from interested observers. Tukiar had initially been found guilty and sentenced to death by Judge Wells of the Darwin court, under circumstances which reeked of injustice. Leading up to the trial, A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University and President of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, had commenced a campaign to highlight the plight of northern Aborigines in the press. Giving almost weekly press conferences, sending a constant stream of articles to various capital city newspapers and lobbying the Minister for the Interior, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and the Prime Minister's Department, Elkin with the support of others, raised the level of public interest in Aboriginal affairs, particularly the place of Aborigines in the justice system. So successful had Elkin's efforts been that when the death sentence was passed upon Tukiar, even the British press gave space to the story. The lobbying by Elkin and others eventually led to an appeal to the High Court against the sentence and the High Court overruled Judge Wells, acquitting Tukiar.[32] The controversy contributed to greatly broadening the interest in

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32. Tigger Wise, The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of A.P. Elkin, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 124-132. Tukiar disappeared shortly after being released from Darwin gaol leading to suspicion that he had been murdered by the Northern Territory police.

Aboriginal affairs among urban Australians. Despite this growing interest, sympathy or understanding of the plight of Aborigines was hardly universal and its application was uneven. It focussed on those Aborigines in north Australia, virtually ignoring the enormous problems faced by Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' in south east Australia.

Throughout south east Australia and the south of Western Australia, the Great Depression had had a devastating effect upon Aborigines. In New South Wales, the period from the late 1920s to 1937 was marked by severe unemployment, loss of land set aside for reserves and increased control by the Aborigines Protection Board.[33] Unemployed Aborigines were excluded from food and work relief to which white unemployed were entitled. This forced Aborigines into institutions under the control of the Protection Board. As the economic outlook began to improve after 1935, the Board imposed stricter controls over Aborigines. In this repressive environment, independent Aboriginal political and welfare movements, the Aborigines' Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines' League, were forced into coalition and with assistance from the labour movement, the Communist Party of Australia and the

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33. Heather Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1982, p. 354.

34. ibid, p. 362.

Australia First Movement,[34] achieved notable successes. Advocating citizenship, abolition of the Protection Board and political representation from a separate Aboriginal Federal electorate, the coalition organised the Aboriginal Day of Mourning, published an aggressive and outspoken pamphlet Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights, and met with the Prime Minister, J.A. Lyons. This 'was the first time that an Australian Prime Minister had found it politically expedient to acknowledge the Aboriginal political movement'.[35]

Although this activity forced the State government to reorganise the Protection Board and to improve relief rations to Aborigines the government response was disappointing. Under this disappointment and personal disagreements between the leaders of the coalition partners, the coalition had drifted apart by April 1938.

The Great Depression had brought similarly harsh conditions to Aborigines in Western Australia.[36] As more and more Aborigines became unemployed, government funding of Aboriginal welfare was also cut, plunging the Aboriginal community into desperate circumstances.[37] As in New South

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35. ibid, p. 370.

36. Anna Haebich, '"A Bunch of Cast-offs": Aborigines of the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900-1936', PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, 1985.

37. ibid, p. 515.

Wales, government powers over Aborigines increased during this period, but in Western Australia Aborigines lacked an effective political voice.

Despite these events, increased public interest in Aboriginal affairs led to the consideration of the question of Commonwealth responsibility for Aborigines and the relinquishing of State government responsibilities. Under the constitution, responsibility for Aborigines was vested with the State governments. The Commonwealth government had obtained an interest only when it had assumed responsibility for the Northern Territory from South Australia on 1 January 1911.[38] Although generally uninterested in assuming national power over Aboriginal affairs, the Commonwealth government argued that since foreign observers inevitably held the Commonwealth government responsible for the administration of Aboriginal affairs, it should have the power to control those affairs. State governments on the other hand, were reluctant to relinquish powers to the Commonwealth and argued that the requirements of Aborigines varied from State to State making decentralised administration

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38. Alan Powell, Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p. 142. At that time, the Northern Territory's white population was just 1,729, its Chinese population 1,302 and its Aboriginal population not precisely known but thought to be between twenty and fifty thousand. This was certainly an overestimate. The 1921 census estimated the number at 17,831.

essential.

As public attention focussed on brutality towards Aborigines in north Australia, the Commonwealth government commissioned the Bleakley report - an examination of the Commonwealth government's administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory. Bleakley, Queensland's Chief Protector of Aborigines, revealed the character of race relations in the Northern Territory in the late 1920s. Bleakley's report, published in 1929, exposed the poor conditions under which Aborigines were employed in the Northern Territory. Aborigines in pastoral employment were not generally paid wages while those who worked for wages in towns were generally underpaid. Accommodation for Aboriginal workers on many pastoral properties was appalling, with huts provided for the Aboriginal workers and their dependents resembling hot and insanitary kennels of galvanised iron.[39] Pastoralists made no attempt to educate Aboriginal children and the aged dependents of Aboriginal workers were often starving. Some notable exceptions to this otherwise gloomy picture did exist. Rosewood station achieved greater productivity than neighbouring stations through its policy of providing good conditions and training for its Aboriginal workforce. It

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39. The Aboriginals and Half-Castes of Central Australia and North Australia. Report by J.W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines, Queensland, 1928. Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper 21, Canberra, 1929, p. 1165.

represented a model of what could be achieved on other less progressive properties. Bleakley also criticised the Commonwealth government. Its Aboriginal institutions were 'badly situated, inadequately financed and insufficiently supervised'.[40]

Bleakley's recommendations reflected his view that Australia's multi-racialism was unfortunate. Like many of his contemporaries, he was convinced that the 'full-blood' Aboriginal population was dying out and was therefore not a continuing problem. On the other hand, his study of the Northern Territory had revealed that the 'part-Aboriginal' population was increasing and he recommended strong measures designed to limit further miscegenation. The problem posed by the existing population of 'part-Aborigines' was to be made to disappear by absorbing 'part-Aborigines' with a preponderance of white blood into the white population. Bleakley's report, in proposing that the solution of the 'Aboriginal problem' was the absorption of 'part-Aborigines' into the white population, had foreshadowed the arrival of the assimilation policy which was to make its appearance on the eve of the Second World War.

With continuing discussion of the role of the Commonwealth government in Aboriginal affairs, the State

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40. ibid, p. 1168.

Premiers' Conference of 1936 considered the need for a national Aboriginal policy. Reluctant as ever to relinquish powers to the Commonwealth, the Premiers agreed to a compromise solution. Rather than hand complete control to the Commonwealth, an annual conference of both State and Commonwealth governments was initiated. The first of these conferences took place in 1937 and the major expression of policy to come from it was an acceptance of the ideas outlined earlier by Bleakley.

> The Conference placed on record the belief that the destiny of natives of aboriginal origin, other than those of full-blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth and recommended that all efforts be directed to that end.[41]

'Full-bloods' were to receive different treatment. First, children living near centres of white population were to be educated to white standard and subsequently employed in 'lucrative occupations which would not bring them into economic or social conflict with the white community'.[42] It is difficult to imagine such occupations. Second, 'semi-civilized' Aborigines were to be restricted to their own tribal areas on 'small local reserves' where they would be permitted to perform 'unobjectionable' tribal ceremonies. Ultimately they would be 'elevated' to the status of the first group. Third, inviolable reserves were

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41. AA Canberra, series A659, item 39/1/10859; Racial Problems in Australia. Report on Conference Proceedings.

42. ibid.

to be established for the preservation of 'uncivilized' Aborigines in their normal tribal state. This desire to maintain segregation of 'full-bloods' was principally intended to limit the increase in the 'part-Aboriginal' population and to isolate 'full-bloods' for whom no government had yet developed a successful policy. Despite the quick response to the call for a national forum, the 1937 conference achieved very little apart from the emergence of these assimilationist ideas and although conferences were supposed to be held annually, no others were held until after the war.

Assimilation had become entrenched as the objective of both Commonwealth and State government policy, but it carried with it the implication that Aborigines would readily accept the role of student, pliantly endeavouring to learn about and adopt white culture while abandoning their own. Assimilation was formally adopted as Commonwealth policy in 1939 when John McEwen, Commonwealth Minister for the Interior, introduced his policy for the advancement of Aboriginal welfare. Though assimilation in the terms in which it was then considered was doomed to failure and represented what we would now regard as excessive cultural imperialism, it has been hailed as 'the first really humane statement of Aboriginal policy since the end of British colonial administration'.[43] McEwen

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43. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 328.

proposed the progress of Aborigines towards their eventual right to citizenship, the training of Aborigines for useful occupations and their instruction in the recognition of law, authority and the rights of property. But still, the Commonwealth had its eyes focussed upon the mainly 'full-blood' population in the Northern Territory.

The coming of the Second World War led to the direction of Commonwealth finances away from McEwen's policy, towards rearmament. This has been interpreted by some to mark the end of any chance that the McEwen policy would be carried out.[44] However, although the war brought about a sharp reduction in the availability of funding to support the assimilation policy, it did open other opportunities. It presented the Commonwealth government with the opportunity to put assimilation into practice within its own organs - the manpower intensive armed forces. The forces represented perhaps the ideal instrument with which to introduce the assimilation policy to Australia. They were under the control of the Commonwealth government and were generally disposed to do its bidding, were disciplined and needed manpower. Unlike the peace-time application of the McEwen policy to the Northern Territory alone, the armed forces had the potential to spread the assimilation policy to the States where most recruiting would take place.

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44. See for example, Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 332, and Powell, Far Country, p. 187.

Service in the armed forces would present Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the responsibilities and duties of citizenship, and would also demonstrate to white Australians that Aborigines were capable of making a major contribution to the national defence effort. Finally, military service for Aborigines would ensure that many returned to the workforce after the war, trained, disciplined and with an established place in the national ethos.

On the eve of the war therefore, the question remained as to whether Aborigines and Islanders would be admitted to the armed forces in accordance with the spirit of the McEwen policy. It was also unclear how the armed forces would react to the admission of Aborigines and Islanders. There were many dimensions to this question. Would the services, notably conservative bodies, embrace the role of social experimentation implied in the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders? Would the demand for military manpower force the Services to adopt this role? Would white Australian servicemen tolerate living and working with Aboriginal and Islander servicemen, and if not, would the Services opt for stability within the ranks and forego the opportunity to dip into the relatively small pool of manpower represented by Australia's Aboriginal and Islander populations?

CHAPTER 2

THE ENLISTMENT OF ABORIGINES AND ISLANDERS.

The coming of the Second World War presented the Commonwealth government with a test of its resolve to see McEwen's rhetoric put into action. The armed forces could lead the way in assimilating Aborigines and Islanders by opening enlistment to de-tribalised 'part-Aborigines' and 'full-bloods'. But this would require the Services to accept a role in social experimentation. They were reluctant to do this. The Services generally saw themselves as conservative bodies committed to the preservation of the State. Some social experimentation within the Services might be possible in peacetime, but in war when the defence of the State depended upon the cohesion and stability of the Services there could be little room for forms of experimentation which might lead to instability. However, Aborigines and Islanders represented a small but potentially valuable population pool from which recruits could be drawn in times of intense demand for manpower. Throughout the war, the Services would find themselves torn between their desire to maintain the stability of the Services by excluding Aborigines and Islanders from enlistment, and their desire to tap Aboriginal and Islander manpower to meet peak manpower demands and to exploit the potential military skills - bushcraft, local knowledge and survival skills - possessed

by Aborigines and Islanders. The Services' attitude to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders therefore passed through a series of phases, each representing a reaction to fluctuations in these pressures.

The war also presented opportunities for Aborigines and Islanders. Personal advancement could flow from Service employment through regular wages, trade training and the less tangible benefits of overseas travel and comradeship. Military service also carried the possibility of exerting pressure upon the State and Commonwealth governments for improvements in conditions for Aborigines, including the granting of full citizenship. While some Aborigines and Islanders saw military service as an argument for fundamental changes in the place of Aborigines and Islanders in the Australian community, the role the conservative armed forces might be willing to play in this process of change remained in doubt.

Before the Second World War, Aborigines and Islanders had already established a reputation as competent soldiers through their service in the First AIF. The sons of Aboriginal First World War veterans assumed that they would follow their fathers in defending Australia in the coming war. With the shadows of war lengthening across the world in 1938, a voluntary recruiting campaign[1] began for the

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1. Compulsory military training was suspended by the Scullin government in 1929.

Army. The strength of the Citizen Forces rose from 35,000 to 70,000 by the end of March 1939 and 80,000 by September.

As the prospect of war and the recruiting drive seized popular imagination, proposals for the formation of segregated Aboriginal units were put to the Department of Defence. These came from private citizens and from Aboriginal political and welfare organisations. As early as March 1938, the Australian Aborigines' League had suggested the formation of an 'Aboriginal citizen corps' and the enrolment of Aboriginal boys in cadet forces. A private citizen and veteran of the First World War, H.J. Clark also proposed the formation of an Aboriginal unit specialising in scouting and night attack.[2] Another proposal put forward by L.M. McMaugh, a private citizen and veteran of both the Boer War and the First World War, was for the use of Aborigines in the Northern Territory as guides and as labourers on defence works. 'Native tribes have a secret code of signalling', said McMaugh,

> and can glean what is happening at extraordinary long distances. With instruction, he is also a good rifle shot. He would also be employed in making depots, emplacements,

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2. AA Melbourne, series MP431/1, item 929/19/912; Australian Aborigines' League - Proposals for Training of Aboriginal Men and Boys. Letter, J. McEwen to A.P.A. Burdeu, President, Australian Aborigines' League, 17 March 1938. See also item 929/19/1049; Enlistment of Aborigines for Defence Purposes. Letter, H.J. Clark to the Minister for Defence, 6 February 1938.

3. MP431/1, item 929/19/1049. Letter, L.M. McMaugh to the Minister for Defence, 17 May 1939.

erecting, water conservation, road making etc.[3]

It was the threat to Australia and the perception that Aborigines possessed skills of particular value to the Services - skills like bushcraft, intimate knowledge of north Australia and 'secret codes of signalling' - which were often seen as opening the way to the formation of segregated Aboriginal units.

The Australian Aborigines' League proposal that an 'Aboriginal citizen corps' be formed had hinted that Aboriginal military service might result in a change in their status as citizens. The status of Aborigines and Islanders, particularly their right to vote, was complicated by the variety of State and Commonwealth laws in which their status was defined. The administration of Aboriginal affairs remained under the control of the States except in those territories administered by the Commonwealth. At this time the electoral Acts of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria made no mention of Aborigines or 'part-Aborigines', and enrolled Aborigines in those States were entitled to vote. In Queensland, Aborigines could not vote but 'part-Aborigines' not under the control of the Director of Native Affairs could. In Western Australia, no Aborigine or 'part-Aborigine' could vote. Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act Aborigines were generally excluded from the vote except that 'part-Aborigines' living independently were not defined as 'Aborigines' and were therefore eligible to vote. Any

Aborigine or 'part-Aborigine' entitled to vote under State law could also vote in any Commonwealth election.[4] The granting of uniform, full citizenship, including the franchise, for de-tribalised Aborigines, was an important goal of many Aboriginal political and welfare organisations. However, the term 'citizens rights', which became a shibboleth of the Aboriginal political movement, embraced a variety of issues including access to education and employment opportunities and a general demand for respect from white Australians.[5] The coming war presented the Australian Aborigines' League and other welfare groups with an opportunity to press these demands. These organisations saw that the strength of the moral argument for citizenship and other reforms would rest on the extent of Aboriginal service. Segregated units were a means of achieving high visibility.

Aboriginal welfare organisations were mainly interested in securing Aboriginal service in the Army. The Army was the most manpower intensive Service and the one most under public scrutiny. But the Army remained uninterested in the formation of Aboriginal units. The national effort was

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4. The definition of 'Aborigine' and 'part-Aborigine' differed from State to State as did the entitlement to vote. The defintions and entitlements which prevailed during the war are set out in A.P. Elkin, Citizenship for the Aborigines: A National Aboriginal Policy, Australian Publishing, Sydney, 1944.

5. Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales 1909-1939', p. 369.

directed towards shaping a strong and efficient Militia. Limited financial resources could not be stretched to form 'special' military organisations which would tend to detract from the unity of the defence effort.[6] Nevertheless, the establishment of an identifiably Aboriginal force was gaining interest among other Aboriginal welfare groups. On 9 December 1938 the Aborigines' Progressive Association[7] put to the Prime Minister a plan similar to that of the Aborigines' League.[8] But by January 1939, the Australian Aborigines' League had reversed its earlier support for an 'Aboriginal citizen corps' and embraced the tougher line of 'no enlistment without citizenship'. The League's Honorary Secretary, William Cooper, wrote to McEwen of the experience of the Aboriginal community in the First World War:

> I am father of a soldier who gave his life for his King on the battlefield and thousands of colored men enlisted in the [First] AIF. They will doubtless do so again though on their return last time, that is those who survived, were pushed back to the bush to resume the status of aboriginals. I feel that ... the aboriginal now has no status, no rights, no land and, though the native is more loyal to the person of the King and the throne than is the average white he has no country and nothing to fight for but the

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6. MP431/1, item 929/19/912. Letter, Secretary, Department of Defence to Department of the Interior, 22 April 1938.

7. Formed in New South Wales in 1937, the Aborigines' Progressive Association consisted of persons of Aboriginal descent.

8. MP431/1, item 929/19/912. Letter, J.T. Patten, The Aborigines' Progressive Association, to the Prime Minister, 9 December 1938.

> privilege of defending the land which was taken from him by the white race without compensation or even kindness. We submit that to put us in the trenches, until we have something to fight for, is not right ... the enlistment of natives should be preceded by the removal of all disabilities.[9]

Despite the League's protests, there were many Aborigines willing, even eager to enlist. In August 1939, a group of fifty 'part-Aborigines' in Darwin wanted to join up and the Minister for Defence authorised the Commandant of the 7th Military District at Darwin to enlist 'a limited number of selected types of half-caste aborigines' specifically to enable the enlistment of this group.[10] On 20 September 1939, the Premier of Queensland, proudly announced to the Prime Minister the offer of service of twenty 'part-Aborigines' from Cape Bedford Mission in north

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9. AA Canberra, series A659, item 40/1/858; Aust Aborigines' League. Letter, W. Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League, to J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, 3 January 1939. Born in the vicinity of Echuca in about 1861, William Cooper was over seventy when he left Cumeroogunga Aboriginal settlement to join the Aboriginal community in Melbourne in 1933. There he became a leading figure in the struggle to improve conditions for Aborigines. Cooper was at the heart of the ill-fated Aboriginal petition to King George V seeking Aboriginal representation in parliament and the prevention of the extinction of Aborigines. The progress of the petition was halted by Cabinet which decided that it should not proceed to its destination. Cooper had also been instrumental in establishing national Aborigines' day and in marking the 1938 Australian sesqui-centennial as an Aboriginal Day of Mourning.

10. AA Canberra, series A659, item 39/1/12995; Enlistment of Half-Caste Abos [sic.] in the Militia Forces at Darwin. Letter, Minister for Defence to the Minister for the Interior, Senator H.S. Foll, 8 September 1939. See also AA Melbourne, series MP431/1, item 849/3/1644; Enlistment of Selected Half-castes Into Darwin Militia.

Queensland.[11] These offers signalled a satisfying national unity and enthusiasm for military service and were eagerly taken up by politicians.

Shortly after the declaration of war on 3 September 1939, the Commonwealth initiated a recruiting drive to man the Second AIF. Men were to be recruited voluntarily for the duration of the war and for one year thereafter. Volunteers were sought from the existing Citizen Forces as well as the population at large, but the response from members of the Citizen Forces was disappointing. On 30 November 1939, the government imposed conscription to maintain the level of the Citizen Forces. Before the year's end, at least 22 Aborigines and Islanders had enlisted voluntarily.[12]

Aborigines were moved to enlist by the same motives that gripped white Australians. Particularly in the south where Aborigines had long since been de-tribalised, Aborigines tended to identify with the values and aspirations of the

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11. ibid. Letter, Premier of Queensland to the Prime Minister, 20 September 1939.

12. There may well have been many more. Generally, Army records did not record the race of recruits and it is now impossible to accurately identify all Aborigines or Islanders who enlisted. The first Aborigines to enlist appear to have been a group from the Northern Territory which included 561613 Jimma Fejo, 561614 Samuel Fejo, 561617 William Daniel Muir and 561624 Victor Edward Williams, all of whom joined the Militia on 4 September 1939 as a result of the intervention of the Minister for the Interior, Senator H.S. Foll. All served throughout the war. The Fejo brothers were noted trackers.

nation. They tended to enlist to defend the nation and because of the prospect of adventure and escape from the routine of their lives. Elsewhere, regular employment and pay were important factors.[13] In Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the State and Commonwealth governments had the power to control an Aborigine's earnings - a fact which caused many Aboriginal soldiers of the First World War to enlist under false names and to describe themselves as Maoris or other non-Australian 'natives'. These techniques enabled them to avoid the Protector's control of their Army pay.[14] Scant though Service pay was, military service in the First World War had been financially rewarding. Many Aborigines in the Second World War also saw military service as financially rewarding and particularly in the north, may have used similar means to avoid the Protector's control of their pay.

The introduction of conscription brought the moral issue of military service without representation into sharper focus. The question of the morality of conscripting those who did not have the vote was seized upon by Aboriginal political and welfare organisations leading to another wave

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13. Len Watson, '1945: Enter the Black Radical', The National Times Magazine, 1 April 1974, p. 4.

14. SA State Archives, SRG 250/41; Aboriginal Advancement League, Correspondence and Records 1940-65. Letter, President, Australian Aborigines' Advancement League, to the Prime Minister, 30 June 1941.

of pleas for 'citizens rights'. Mr H. Sawtell, the chairman of the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship, wrote to the Prime Minister that

> as we are at war to uphold democracy we do consider that democracy should begin at home in Australia. ... We feel sure that good loyal Australian citizens do not wish to see their aboriginal people, and those young men who are to defend our shores treated in such a poor manner.[15]

Like the Australian Aborigines' League, Sawtell referred to the failure of the government to provide the benefits of citizenship to Aboriginal veterans of the First World War. Many elderly veterans of that war were ineligible for the old age pension because they were Aborigines. Aboriginal military service, including service in the First World War, was increasingly used to place moral pressure upon the government for relaxation of attitudes to Aborigines in a widening variety of forums. The service of Aborigines in the First World War had been used, for example, to attack restrictions imposed in 1939 on the transport of Aborigines on Commonwealth Railways.[16]

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15. AA Melbourne, series MP431/1, item 929/19/1162; Liability of Aborigines for Compulsory Military Training Under the Defence Act. Letter, M. Sawtell, Chairman, Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship, to R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister, 21 October 1939.

16. AA Canberra, series A659, item 39/1/14726; Aborigines travelling on Commonwealth Railways. Clipping from The Guardian, 7 October 1939. Under general notice number 142 issued by the Commonwealth Railways in 1939, separate accommodation was to be provided for Aboriginal passengers and conductors were to see that Aborigines did not mix with other passengers.

This mounting moral pressure was initially shrugged off by a government concerned with more pressing issues. Sections 61 and 138 of the Defence Act 1903-1939, covering compulsory service, exempted persons not 'substantially of European descent' from any but non-combatant service. This clause had first appeared as part of the Universal Training scheme in the Defence Act 1909 and had applied ever since. In its replies to enquiries, the Commonwealth government emphasised that Aborigines and Islanders as non-Europeans could not be compulsorily enlisted into combatant service, but ignored the moral questions of the possible compulsory service of 'part-Aborigines' and the fact that compulsory non-combatant service still constituted a significant argument for full citizenship.[17]

By December 1939, the Australian Aborigines' League had launched a second demand for citizenship, this time based on the argument that if Australia was to take seriously its fight against facism, then it had to take steps to end the repression of Aborigines at home. William Cooper, the Honorary Secretary of the League, had frequently drawn adverse comparisons between the Nazi treatment of Jews in

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17. MP431/1, item 929/19/1162. Letter, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department to M. Sawtell, Chairman, Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship, 16 November 1939.

18. Andrew Markus, Blood From a Stone: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League, Monash Publications in History, Melbourne, 1986, p. 18.

Germany and the treatment of Aborigines in Australia.[18] He argued for 'full community rights' for Aborigines because '... this war is by reason of the tyranny over minorities and their cruel discriminating treatment. Australia cannot fight that cause in honesty while still oppressing her minority though we know that no white person sees this'.[19] Cooper hoped that the Second World War would bring about the emancipation of Aborigines as the First had done for women. The drive for citizenship continued into 1940, with private citizens and other Aboriginal welfare and community groups arguing that Aboriginal servicemen in particular should be given the vote. M.F. King, a private citizen, prayed that God would protect Australia from falling into the hands of 'bloodthirsty tyrants', but added 'that supernatural help from a righteous God cannot be expected by individuals or nations whose actions are inconsistent with righteousness.'[20] In King's view, granting the vote to Aborigines would restore Australia to a position of moral ascendancy thereby qualifying the nation for the Lord's support. The Aborigines' Uplift Society, yet another organisation to take up the cause, demanded that

> ...immediate and full citizenship should be

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19. AA Canberra, series A659, item 40/1/858; Australian Aborigines' League. Letter, W. Cooper, Honorary Secretary, Australian Aborigines' League to the Prime Minister, 3 December 1939.

20. AA Canberra. Series A431, item 49/822; Aborigines - Rights to Vote. Letter, M.F. King to the Prime Minister, 14 June 1940.

conferred on all aborigines accepted for service in the A.I.F. and that they retain the citizenship on their return to Australia. This will mean

- Rights to military pensions in the same conditions as will apply to white men

- Right to Old Age and Invalid Pensions

- Right of their wives to Maternity bonus and

- Right to Federal Franchise.[21]

Other Aboriginal welfare groups emphasised inconsistencies in existing legislation relating to Aborigines. A deputation of Aborigines from the Aborigines' Progressive Association, led by William Ferguson, a 'part-Aborigine' from Dubbo and seasoned advocate of Aboriginal advancement, and J.J. Clark, a member of Parliament, confronted Senator Foll on 8 January 1940 pointing out that naturalised Maoris and 'natives of British India' had the right to vote in Federal elections, but Aborigines did not. Clark argued, like others before him, that the Defence Act did not specifically exclude Aborigines from military service and this was 'inconsistent with the Commonwealth Government's refusal to recognise [Aborigines] as citizens'. The delegation put to Foll the Association's resolution that 'the Commonwealth Government proclaim full citizen rights to all aborigines having white

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21. ibid. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, Honorary Secretary, Aborigines' Uplift Society to the Prime Minister, 30 June 1940.

blood in their veins with a view to their taking their place in the defence of their country ... .'[22] This was a somewhat milder expression of the stance taken a year earlier by the Australian Aborigines' League and its president, William Cooper, that 'the enlistment of natives should be preceded by the removal of all disabilities'.[23]

Many Aborigines and Islanders had already taken their place in the defence of the nation. Aborigines and Islanders were among the first to join up and some like Islanders Charles Mene, Ted Loban and Victor Blanco were already serving with their units in England by mid-1940. Others like Neville Bonner and Willie Thaiday had attempted to enlist in 1939 and early 1940 but were refused.[24] The

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22. AA Canberra, series A659, item 40/1/1555; Aborigines' Progressive Association re Aboriginal Affairs NT. Record of Meeting, 8 January 1940.

23. Despite its long involvement in the pursuit of Aboriginal citizenship, the Aborigines' Progressive Association remained more pliant on the subject of Aboriginal enlistment than the Australia Aborigines' League. The only exception came in 1944, when a Federal Arbitration Court decision denied Aboriginal pastoral and agricultural workers the award wage. In protest, William Ferguson of the Aborigines' Progressive Association then demanded the release of Aboriginal servicemen from the Army. See Jack Horner, Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom, Australian and New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, 1974, p. 133.

24. W. Thaiday, Under the Act, NQ Black Publishing, Townsville, 1981, p. 23. Thaiday again attempted to enlist in 1940 but was rejected a second time. Like many other Aborigines, although never enlisted, Thaiday worked for the Army as a civilian labourer. See also Angela Burger, Neville Bonner: A Biography, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1979, p. 20.

Army gave various reasons for the rejection of Aborigines including that the Army needed literate soldiers and that Aborigines would not be able to tolerate the climate of the countries to which Australian soldiers were being sent.[25]

Initially Aborigines and Islanders had been permitted to enlist voluntarily, but early in 1940 pressure from Aboriginal welfare groups and others seeking full citizenship for Aboriginal soldiers and for Aborigines generally, prompted War Cabinet to consider the place of Aborigines in the defence forces. The Defence Committee was instructed to examine the question of the enlistment of aliens and persons of non-European descent. It recommended that the enlistment of these people was undesirable in principle but with an eye to the future when demands for manpower might increase, it recognised that a departure from this principle was justified in order to provide for the special needs of the Services during war. For the Navy and the Army the admission of aliens or British subjects of non-European origin was 'neither necessary nor desirable'. This phrase, which was to become an obstacle to Aboriginal service, concealed the Services' concern with the stability

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25. Horner, Vote Ferguson, p. 118 and Burger, Neville Bonner, p. 20. The adverse climate of foreign countries should not have prevented enlistment in the Militia which was formed for service in Australia and the Territories of Papua and New Guinea. On 19 February 1943 the government extended the area in which the Militia could serve to include most of the Netherlands East Indies but excluding mainland South East Asia.

Victor Blanco in London

Private Victor Blanco, a Torres Strait Islander, on leave from his Second AIF unit, is shown the sights of London by a policewoman.

Photo courtesy of London News Agency Photos Ltd.

of the forces if Aborigines and Islanders as well as other minority groups were freely admitted. The RAAF were permitted to enlist aliens and non-European Australians at the discretion of the Air Board due to the heavy personnel commitments imposed by the Empire Air Training Scheme.[26]

The Defence Committee examined the way the New Zealand government approached the question of the service of aliens, but as if to conceal from War Cabinet a possible model for the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders its report made no mention of the service of Maoris in the New Zealand forces. Maoris were enlisted freely in New Zealand, and had the option of serving in integrated units or in 28 (Maori) Battalion.[27]

The Defence Committee concluded that the enlistment of non-Europeans in the Army or Navy was warranted only under special conditions, such as intense demands for manpower, and these conditions did not exist - at least while Europe

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26. AA Canberra, series A2671, item 45/1940; Enlistment in Defence Forces of Aliens and of persons of non-European descent. War Cabinet Agendum number 45/1940.

27. J.F. Cody, 28 (Maori) Battalion, (Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45), War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington (NZ), 1956. 28 (Maori) Battalion was manned almost entirely by Maoris. Some officer positions were manned by white New Zealanders, but considerable care was taken to ensure that officers were as far as possible, either Maori or 'part-Maori'. The Battalion served in North Africa, Greece, Crete, and Italy. Support for the creation of the Maori battalion drew heavily upon the record of a Maori Pioneer Battalion which had served in the First World War.

remained the focus of the war. While there was no serious threat to Australia, the Defence Committee could afford to indulge this ethnocentric approach. The Committee accepted without question the assertion of the Acting Chief of the General Staff that

> the normal Australian would not serve satisfactorily with certain types of aliens, and ... on psychological grounds, the admission into the 2nd AIF of aliens or of persons of non-European descent would be inimical to the best interests of that force.[28]

Despite their service in the First World War, Aborigines and Islanders found themselves shut out of military service in the Second. The prejudices of senior officers were to prevail. 'Normal' Australians, they thought, would not tolerate serving with blacks.

By contrast, the RAAF had an important reason to modify any racist attitudes its senior officers might have harboured towards the service of Aborigines and Islanders. The personnel drain imposed by the Empire Air Training Scheme meant that personnel selection had to be made from as wide a field as possible. Applications to enlist had been received from highly qualified aliens and non-Europeans. It was most desirable that such persons be allowed to serve. Section 5 of the Commonwealth Air Force

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28. AA Canberra, series A2671, item 45/1940; Enlistment in Defence Forces of Aliens and of persons of non-European descent. Defence Committee Meeting Minute, 15 February 1940. Reported statement by the Acting Chief of the General Staff.

Act 1939, stated that the Act was to be applied in like manner to that of the Royal Air Force. This was interpreted by the Acting Chief of Air Staff to mean that Section 95 of the United Kingdom Air Force Act, which provided for the enlistment of aliens and others, could be applied to the RAAF. The United Kingdom Air Force Act permitted enlistment of aliens so long as a ratio of one alien to every fifty British subjects was not exceeded and that aliens were not permitted to advance to commissioned rank. It also allowed the enlistment of 'persons of colour'.[29] In response to the pressure to meet manpower targets, the Defence Committee agreed that aliens and non-Europeans be permitted to enlist in the RAAF. They were also permitted to hold commissioned rank.

It was in the political arena that McEwen's lofty rhetoric about 'part-Aborigines' taking their place in the community might have received some support, yet War Cabinet accepted the Defence Committee's recommendations on the question. Thus, soon after the issue of McEwen's policy, 'part-Aborigines' were excluded from taking their place in the Services. As a result of Service concern with the stability of the forces, in particular the perceived reaction of 'normal' Australians to service with aliens and non-Europeans, War Cabinet considered the subject of the enlistment of aliens and British non-Europeans and decided:

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29. ibid.

> First, that the admission of aliens or of British subjects of non-European origin or descent to the Australian Defence forces is undesirable in principle, but that a departure from this principle is justified in order to provide for the special needs of any of the Services during the war.
>
> Second, that so far as the Royal Australian Navy and the Army are concerned, the admission of aliens or of British subjects of non-European origin or descent is neither necessary nor desirable.
>
> Third, that as regards the RAAF, in view of the heavy personnel commitments under the Empire Air Scheme, aliens and British subjects of non-European origin or descent should be permitted, at the discretion of the Air Board, to serve in the RAAF during the war.[30]

Senior Service officers had had little information to guide them to any conclusion other than that the admission of Aborigines and Islanders would be counter to the interests of the Services. No studies had been conducted into the degree to which those Aborigines and Islanders already serving had been accepted by their white comrades and the lessons of other countries like New Zealand had been ignored. It was assumed that barrack and ship-board life, where men were forced to live in close proximity with one-another, might place intolerable pressures upon race relations leading to poor operational performance.

The three Services each produced their own regulations

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30. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1942, vol. 2, Agenda item 8: Aliens - Military Service for. Memorandum, Secretary, Department of Defence Co-ordination, to Secretary, Department of the Army, 6 March 1940.

governing the question of non-European enlistment. The Army published its regulations as Australian Military Regulations and Orders Number 177 which stated:

> Every person before his enlistment in the Military Forces will be medically examined, and no person is to be enlisted voluntarily unless he is substantially of European origin or descent and reaches the standards of medical fitness, age, height, chest measurement, eyesight and teeth authorised by the Military Board ...[31]

Air Force regulations insisted that recruits be the sons of persons of 'pure European descent', but permitted the waiving of this requirement in time of war.[32] These regulations were merely for the guidance of the Services and compared with the Defence Act, which permitted the voluntary enlistment of non-Europeans, carried no legal weight. Yet, although the regulations were frequently challenged on moral grounds, their legality remained unchallenged throughout the war.

On 6 May 1940 the Army circulated the decision on the matter to its various commands. Since the first recruiting campaigns of the war, many 'full-blood' Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines, and many 'part-Aborigines' had already joined the Services, particularly the Army. They

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31. AA Canberra, series A816, item 72/301/23; Requirement to be of Substantially European Origin. Appendix A to Report by the Principal Administrative Officers Committee (Personnel) at Meetings Held on 7th and 28th August 1950. The requirement to be 'substantially of European descent' was removed in 1948.

32. ibid.

had been admitted in the policy vacuum before War Cabinet had reached its decision and were already serving competently. The fact that they hardly qualified as 'substantially European' yet were already serving, was overlooked by the Army. So too was the fact that their presence in the Second AIF had not led to the deleterious effects the Acting Chief of the General Staff had claimed. But these issues were not overlooked by others. In the latter half of 1940, the continuing service of these Aboriginal and Islander soldiers was to prove a constant embarrassment to Service policy makers.

The interpretation of the War Cabinet decision and the Army regulation was taken to absurd lengths by senior Army officers. A 'part-Aborigine' volunteering for enlistment who was 'half-caste' was not considered to qualify as 'substantially European' regardless of the extent to which he may have adapted to European cultural values. Recruits had to be 'at least three-quarter-caste' before they could be considered.[33] The question of determining the race of would-be recruits was left to the Army's medical services. The Deputy General of Medical Services instructed that 'in general, the enlistment of half-caste aboriginals is not advisable. The Deputy Director of Medical Services or his representative is the judge of individual cases as to

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33. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 275/750/1310; Aborigines - Enlistment in AIF. Letter, GOC Western Command to the Secretary, Military Board, 7 May 1940.

whether an individual with non-European blood should be enlisted.'[34]

The introduction of this policy triggered another wave of complaints from individuals, Aboriginal welfare organisations and even State governments. The policy tended to class Aborigines as a group possessing uniform characteristics. It implied that all Aborigines, no matter to what degree they embraced white ideals, were unacceptable to white troops. These ideas were increasingly at odds with wartime propaganda which called for national unity and decried the concept of a 'master race'. In May 1940, within days of the Army issuing its policy, the Queensland Director of Native Affairs attacked the policy as unjust. In his view, the situation with regard to applicants for enlistment from Cherbourg Aboriginal settlement highlighted the idiocy of the Army policy. Of eleven men who had applied for entry to the AIF, five had been accepted[35], despite the fact that four were '50% European' and the remaining man was '25% European'. But the remainder, applying for enlistment a

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34. ibid. Minute, DGMS to DDMS Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western Commands, 29 May 1940. This policy decision is also to be found in AWM Canberra, series 60, item 200/3/249; Enlistment of Aborigines and Half-castes in AIF.

35. They were Frank Fisher, Charlie Gee Hoy, Leslie Purcell, Jim Edwards and Tom Bell.

36. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, Director, Queensland Department of Native Affairs, to Brigade Major, 7th Brigade Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, 30 May 1940.

A Recruiting Interview

The Bulletin, 18 November 1942

The cartoonist was probably not aware of the double irony in his cartoon. Although Aborigines clearly met the enlistment criteria of being natural born Australians, they were officially barred from enlistment because they were non-Europeans.

Reproduced by courtesy of The Bulletin magazine.

little later had been rejected.[36]

The Queensland Director of Native Affairs keenly supported the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders. He argued that the service of over 200 Aborigines and Islanders from Queensland in the First World War proved their worth. 'Judging by the number of those killed and wounded, ... these coloured men proved themselves capable soldiers', he wrote.[37] The service of Aboriginal and Islander soldiers in the First World War may also have convinced the Army that the dire predictions of instability as a result of the reaction of 'normal' Australians were largely unfounded. The Director also raised other objections. Under the Queensland Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939, those Aborigines and Islanders who were not under the control of the Department of Native Affairs were entitled to the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship, including by implication, the right to join the armed forces. Most of those not 'under the Act' were people with 25 per cent or less 'Aboriginal blood' but any exempt Aborigine had the right to enlist no matter what his parentage. The Director defended their right to join the Services and exposed the Army's policy as confused, difficult to apply and unjust. A.P.A. Burdeu, the president of the Australian Aborigines'

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37. ibid. Letter, Queensland Director of Native Affairs to the Colonel In Charge, Administration, Northern Command, 27 June 1940.

League also attacked the Army policy on the increasingly familiar argument that many 'full-blood' Aborigines and Islanders were already serving and that to bar further Aboriginal or Islander enlistments was unjust.[38]

The pressure brought to bear by the League, the Queensland Director of Native Affairs and others, forced the Army, in which most Aborigines and Islanders served, to soften its attitude to the service of 'part-Aborigines'. It remained inflexible on the subject of 'full-bloods'. Reviewing the question on 30 July 1940, the Military Board decided that 'part-Aborigines' could be treated on their merits to determine their suitability for enlistment, but that the enlistment of 'full-bloods' remained 'unadvisable'.[39] Despite the pressure to admit Aborigines and Islanders and the evidence of those Aborigines and Islanders already serving, the Army remained convinced that 'full-blood' Aborigines would not be acceptable to white Australian troops and that to allow their enlistment would threaten the stability of the Services.

The admission of acceptable 'part-Aborigines' was achieved by a subtle reinterpretation of the regulations. 'It seems that the situation can be met without departing in any way from the existing Regulations', wrote the

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38. ibid. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, President, Australian Aborigines' League, to the Prime Minister, 7 July 1940.

39. ibid. Military Board Submission, 30 July 1940.

Adjutant-General. 'Medical officers [would] be instructed that in deciding as to whether or not a person is substantially of European origin or descent they should be guided by the general suitability of the applicant and by the laws and practices of the State or Territory in which the enlistment takes place'.[40] Medical officers were to be asked to judge the extent to which a 'part-Aborigine' applicant for enlistment would be accepted by his white comrades and to determine whether he was or was not under the control of the relevant State Protector of Aborigines or his equivalent. This subtle change gave the policy more flexibility enabling it to be adapted to meet changing strategic circumstances. The 'general suitability of the applicant' might depend as much upon the Army's need for manpower as upon the individual's suitability for enlistment. Still, the policy remained essentially racist. Individual applicants for enlistment - whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal - could have been judged upon the extent to which they satisfied the established recruitment criteria. The fact that some applicants may not have been 'substantially European' need never have entered the question. The reference to the 'laws and practices of the State' in this new interpretation of the regulation also suggested that those Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' who had been granted exemptions from the

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40. ibid.

relevant State Aboriginal Acts - those who already possessed full citizenship - would be permitted to serve. Non-exempt Aborigines would be prevented from using military service as an important moral lever to achieve wider application of citizenship for Aborigines. The Military Board agreed with the Adjutant General's recommendations on 31 July 1940, and a Military Board minute promulgating the decision to Commands was sent on 13 August 1940. 'Full-blood' Aborigines were not to serve in future, but no action was to be taken against those already serving.

Despite the Military Board decision, recruiting stations remained confused over the policy. Two 'full-blood' aborigines were included in the draft of AIF recruits from Warwick, Queensland on 12 July 1940.[41] Other recruiting stations also reported that Aborigines had been enlisted. The Caloundra Infantry Training Depot reported on 31 July 1940 that eight Aborigines had been enlisted and had arrived for training. A further five soldiers of 'full blood or near full blood' had also been enlisted in the Townsville area.[42] Further investigations revealed another twelve Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' who had enlisted in Queensland contrary to the Military Board instructions.

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41. The two men were Albert Dennison and William Lawton.

42. Series 60, item 200/3/249; Reports, Caloundra Infantry Training Depot, 31 July 1940 and Area Brigade Major, Townsville. See also item 20/1/73; Aliens in the AMF.

The explanation was simple. The instructions to recruiting centres had been classified 'confidential' for security purposes and could not be made public. Honorary recruiting officers who manned many of the country recruiting centres, being civilians, could not be informed of the policy.[43] The public were also unaware of the policy.

Recruiters in other States, were equally confused. In Western Australia, at least one Aborigine was enlisted in June 1940, three in August and another three in October.[44] In Victoria, the Manager of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal station, reported that

> a fine spirit has been shown by the eligible natives of the Station, who, out of a total of 43 within the age limits, 37 volunteered, 26 passed the medical examinations, were enlisted and are now in the AIF camp at Albury. The men left in two drafts, each of which were given a fortnight's preliminary training in drill and rifle exercises on the Station before leaving.[45]

These men had been enlisted in July, once again contrary to

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43. AWM, series 60, item 87/1/1035; Enlistment of Half-castes. Letter, Area Brigade Major, 11 Brigade Area to HQ Northern Command, Brisbane, 23 February 1942.

44. WA State Archives, series 993, Item 529/40: Military and Defence - List of Natives under the Native Administration Act - in the 2nd AIF. Nominal Roll - Natives Enlisted in the Army, undated. This roll lists 75 Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' from Western Australia showing their service number, date of enlistment, place of enlistment, date of discharge and reason for discharge. Other documents on the file list a further 36 men who enlisted and a smaller group who joined the VDC.

45. AA Melbourne, series B356, item 54; Lake Tyers Manager's Reports, 1930-1944. Manager's report for period ended 31 July 1940.

the Military Board instructions. As a result of the confusion, the Military Board memo describing the new policy was again circulated on 13 August 1940. It asserted that no action was to be taken to discharge those who had already been enlisted.

Aboriginal welfare organisations, unaware of the Military Board policy, continued to press for the formation of Aboriginal units. The Aborigines' Progressive Association put yet another proposal for an 'Aboriginal unit' to the Prime Minister - this time for a Division no less! The Division was to be composed entirely of men with Aboriginal blood. Nurses too were to be Aborigines or 'part-Aborigines'. William Ferguson, the President of the Association, and an aggressive advocate of Aboriginal citizenship, had been carried away with enthusiasm for Aboriginal participation in the war. A Division numbered over 16,000 men, far in excess of the manpower resources of Australia's Aboriginal and Islander communities. However, Ferguson's real concern was not with military terminology but with creating a contribution to the war effort which could be identified as Aboriginal:

> In times of National crisis, when the Mother Country is facing the world in a fight for freedom, it behoves every member of the community to join together in the common cause. It is this which urges me to write to you, on behalf of the Aborigines of Australia, requesting that instead

> of Aborigines enlisting in the AIF that we be allowed to form an Aboriginal Division, ...[46]

For the moment, the Army remained inflexible. No Aboriginal units would be formed. However, despite the Army policy on the enlistment of Aborigines having been decided, Ferguson was led to believe that the question was still under consideration.[47] The government's reluctance to make the policy public signified the sensitivity of the issue. Publication of the policy would have exposed McEwen's recent Aboriginal policy as a sham and highlighted the hypocrisy of much of the government's anti-Nazi propaganda.

The strength of the moral argument and the scale of support for the granting of citizenship to serving Aborigines had a minor impact upon the government. On 24 January 1941, Cabinet approved an amendment to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1940 to give the Federal franchise to any Aborigine 'who has enlisted and done honourable service in the Australian Imperial Forces

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46. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 82/712/670; Letter from Mr Ferguson, Aborigines' Progressive Association. Letter, W. Ferguson, President, Aborigines' Progressive Association, to the Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, 8 July 1940.

47. ibid. Letter, Secretary, Department of the Army to W. Ferguson, President, Aborigines' Progressive Association, 2 August 1940.

48. A431, item 49/822. Memorandum, Secretary, Department of the Interior to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 4 February 1941. An undated copy of the Department of Interior Cabinet submission is also on this file.

abroad'.[48] Aborigines who had served in either the First or Second AIF and who had served overseas and had been honourably discharged or were still serving were to be enfranchised by the amendment. This proposed extension of the vote to Aboriginal servicemen represented a small but significant victory. But the amendment was not enacted. The Commonwealth Electoral (War-time) Act 1940, enacted on 19 September 1940, already gave the vote to all members of the forces over the age of 21, including Aborigines, who served outside Australia in the Second World War. Although it did not go as far as the planned amendment in giving the vote to Aboriginal ex-members of the First AIF, Cabinet decided to defer the amendment until the War-time Act had expired. Even though the War-time Act gave the vote to Aboriginal servicemen, the exclusion of most 'full-blood' Aborigines from enlistment under the Defence Act and the Service regulations meant that few Aborigines otherwise without suffrage would achieve it through their war service. Furthermore, little publicity was given to the implications of the War-time Act upon the franchise for serving Aborigines. For example, in reply to a request to grant full citizenship to Aboriginal servicemen in November 1941,[49] the Minister for the Army merely stated that Aboriginal soldiers would receive all the privileges of

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49. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, P.C. Spender, Minister for the Army to the Acting Honorary Secretary of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, 9 November 1941.

servicemen, but that no action was planned to grant them full citizenship. He made no mention of the War-time Act.

While Aboriginal welfare groups, private citizens and others attempted to ensure that Aborigines and Islanders could serve, even the retention of those already enlisted had to be closely defended. In March 1941, the President of the Australian Aborigines' League, A.P.A. Burdeu, accused the Army of discharging Aborigines who had already joined up. He claimed that 18 men from Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement and a further 5 from Point MacLeay in South Australia had been discharged for no reason. He knew the men personally and they were sober, industrious and loyal. Burdeu was concerned not only with the possibility that the Army was discharging men simply because they were Aborigines, but with the effect discharges might have on the morale of the Aboriginal community. 'I have labored [sic.] to prevent the creation of a hostile minority ...', wrote Burdeu, but 'now, by what appears to me to be a ruthless or haphazard action, much of my work is undermined'.[50] Aborigines he knew to be loyal, now refused to rise for the National Anthem and remarked 'we have no King now and no country'.[51] The Lake Tyers Aborigines who had shown such 'fine spirit' in enlisting in July 1940 had

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50. ibid. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, President Australian Aborigines' League, to The Secretary to the Prime Minister, 30 March 1941.

51. ibid.

returned to the settlement in a sullen and uncooperative, even hostile mood. Of the 26 men who had enlisted, 18 had been discharged. The manager of the settlement recorded:

> The return home of the natives ignominiously discharged from the AIF and who appear to be completely demoralised, upset the morale of the whole Station. For a time the position was that of a community on strike, and threats of violence against the Management were of daily occurence [sic.].[52]

In response to the discharge of the Lake Tyers men, other Aborigines began to question their service. Some asked Burdeu to secure their discharge. '"We volunteered and so have the boys from Lake Tyers Mission. We can't see them out of it and we in it. That is the way we feel about it"', they argued.[53] As a result, another three Aboriginal soldiers were discharged.

The Army had the power to discharge a soldier if the soldier himself requested it, if he had committed a serious civil or military offence, if he was medically unfit or lastly, if he was judged 'unfitted for duty'. The 'fitness' of a soldier for military duty was sufficiently vague and subjective to permit the discharge of any individual whose service was no longer desired for any

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52. B356, item 54. Managers' report for period ended 2 June 1941.

53. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, Honorary General Secretary Aborigines' Uplift Society, to The Secretary to the Prime Minister, 30 March 1941 reporting conversations he had had with the soldiers.

reason. It was already enshrined in Army policy that the enlistment of Aborigines was not 'desirable' and some senior officers accepted without question that 'the normal Australian would not serve satisfactorily with certain types of aliens'.[54] It was quite likely then that Aboriginal recruits might readily be judged to be 'unfitted for duty'. Faced with Burdeu's enquiries into the discharge of the Lake Tyers men, Headquarters Southern Command conducted an inexpert enquiry into the suitability of Aborigines as soldiers. The Commanding Officers of units in Victoria were asked if they would be happy to have Aborigines serving in their units. Predictably, the Commanding Officers responded that Aborigines were undesirable and gave these reasons:

> (a) On account of their habits, other men were very resentful of having to be quartered with them.
>
> (b) Their continued and protracted AWL [Absence Without Leave] and their general unsuitability for training. They were incorrigible in the matter of cleanliness and attention to training and parades - in fact were entirely disinterested in the whole Army life - other than the pay they received and the uniform with which they were issued.

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54. A2671, item 45/1940. Minutes of Defence Committee Meeting, 15 February 1940.

(c) The repeated applications from the representatives of Lake Tyers Aboriginal Mission Station for escorts to proceed to that area to escort these men back to camp, where their newly formed habits were a detriment to other aborigines in the station.[55]

The Army had done little to remove the Lake Tyers soldiers from temptation. The soldiers had been taken to Albury, near Lake Tyers and had remained there for almost a year without being posted to units. They had been drawing Army pay and the temptation of visiting their wives and friends at Lake Tyers had been too great to resist.[56] Other Victorian Aborigines like Reg Saunders and Stewart Murray[57] who were posted to units shortly after their initial training, gave exemplary service. The Army's insensitivity to the close kinship ties among Aborigines had contributed to the poor disciplinary record of some of the Lake Tyers soldiers.

As Burdeu had pointed out, the morale of the Aboriginal community had begun to suffer by mid 1941. The introduction

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55. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, Brigadier in Charge, Administration, Southern Command, to the Secretary of the Military Board, 5 May 1941.

56. ibid. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, Honorary Secretary, Aborigines' Uplift Society to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, 19 May 1941.

57. Stewart Murray enlisted in December 1941 and began his Army training at various Army camps in Victoria. However, after several months, he moved north to Atherton, Queensland, where he finished his training before joining the 2/12 Battalion, 18th Brigade in New Guinea. Shortly after joining his battalion he found himself in the battles of Buna and Sanananda. He served throughout the war and was promoted to Corporal in 1945.

of McEwen's Aboriginal policy, the change in approach to Aboriginal affairs in the States and anti-fascist propaganda which emphasised national unity and the rejection of the master-race concept, had buoyed Aborigines in the first year of the war. But by mid-1941 these improvements in their relations with whites had seemed to come to an end. The tough line adopted by the Army and the Navy particularly, to the admission of Aborigines and the discharge of the Lake Tyers and South Australian men underlined this perception. More importantly, the perceived failure of the government to concede the moral argument in relation to granting the franchise left Aborigines frustrated. Some began to question where their loyalty lay. The President of the Australian Aborigines' Advancement League, pleading for Aboriginal citizenship, told the Prime Minister that the failure to grant citizenship - particularly to Aboriginal servicemen - had resulted in half-hearted support for the war effort. 'The battlefields of Flanders and Palestine were sanctified by the mingling of native blood with that of their white comrades who together died for the freedom the native race did not achieve', he wrote, referring to Aboriginal military service in the First World War. 'There are some ... whose resentment at the discriminatory treatment received by their race has made them indifferent altogether, their attitude being summed up by one Native who remarked that "the natives are being asked to fight to

make Australia safe for those who took it from their people"'.[58] Once again, the Prime Minister failed to respond to this plea with a clear statement that Aboriginal servicemen like other servicemen already possessed the vote under the Commonwealth Electoral (War-time) Act.

In early 1941 in response to the possibility of Japan entering the war, Australian troops were sent to Singapore where there was a small chance that they might find themselves under the temporary command of Indian officers.[59] Menzies, concerned at the implications, had cabled from London that this might occur from time to time and Spender, the Minister for the Army, was equally concerned.[60] The issue was not the national command of Australian forces. The Indian officers who concerned both Menzies and Spender were those junior officers likely to be occupying positions as town majors or railway transport officers who would have temporary command of Australian troops as they moved to their areas of operations. Like Menzies and Spender, the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sturdee, also assumed that Australian

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58. SRG 250/41; Aboriginal Advancement League, Correspondence and Records 1940-65. Letter, President, Australian Aborigines' Advancement League, to the Prime Minister, 30 June 1941.

59. The first troops arrived on 18 February 1941.

60. AA Canberra, series A 2653, item 1941, vol. 5, Agenda item M29: Indian Army Officers - Aust troops serving under. Minute, Minister for the Army to Chief of the General Staff, 10 March 1941.

troops would resent coming under command of Indian officers, but he called for caution in determining the official Australian policy. His reaction did not stem from any doubt about his judgement of the attitude of Australian troops, but from a consideration of the broader strategic issue of the sensitivity of race relations in India. He argued that Australia's response to the Indian officers should be the same as Britain's. A response which carried any taint of racism, could upset Indian sympathy for the Allied war effort.[61] Menzies, Spender and Sturdee had each assumed that Australian soldiers would not tolerate coming under the temporary command of 'coloured' officers. Although there were still no Aboriginal or Islander officers in any of Australia's armed forces by March 1941, many were already serving as Corporals and Sergeants - in positions of authority and sometimes command over white Australians.

As the Japanese threat materialised, the Services and particularly the Army, demanded increasing numbers of men. To find this additional manpower, the Army turned to those groups it had previously regarded as of marginal value. Thus the deteriorating strategic situation forced the Army to relax its attitude to the admission of Aborigines and

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61. ibid. Minute, Chief of the General Staff to Minister for the Army, 11 March 1941. Sturdee took the precaution of cabling London to find out the British Army attitude to the Indian officers. The British Army response is not available.

Islanders.[62] It also abandoned its opposition to the formation of segregated units. Concerned about the security of the Torres Strait, it sought the creation of a segregated Islander garrison there and by March 1941, War Cabinet had approved their enlistment. The Islanders contribution to the defence of the Torres Strait was eventually to involve over 800 men.[63] At the same time, the possibility of raising a battalion of Papuans for service in New Guinea was examined.[64] The wholesale enlistment of Torres Strait Islanders, contrary to the Army's own orders, and their formation into segregated units, might have led to a resurgence of demands for segregated Aboriginal units if it had become known to the public. Little publicity was given to the service of the Islanders throughout the war and Aboriginal political or welfare organisations never used the Islander units as an example of what Aborigines might achieve.

The Torres Strait, Papua and New Guinea were of the highest strategic concern and the Army was slower to relax

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62. Other manpower groups left till last to be conscripted included married men aged 35-45 and single men or widowers without children aged 45-60. These groups were called up in March 1942.

63. The segregated Islander units of the Torres Strait Force are described in the next chapter.

64. AA Canberra, series A2676, item War Cabinet Minute 901(b)(i); Native Forces for Defence of Commonwealth Territories. Extract from War Cabinet Minute, 18 March 1941.

its attitude to Aborigines on the mainland. In Western Australia, in June 1941, Army officers had visited the Moore River Native Settlement to 'look over' the Aborigines there as prospective recruits. 'They only want the best class', recorded the Settlement Superintendent, Mr Paget, 'i.e. a very light half caste. We may be able to enlist a few'.[65] At the same time, a 'full-blood' Aborigine who was exempt from the Native Administration Act, 1905-1936 of Western Australia, and who therefore was not legally a 'native', required the personal intervention of the Commissioner of Native Affairs, H.I. Bray, before the Army would accept his enlistment.

Early in the war, Bray had been a supporter of the enlistment of Aborigines. A veteran of the First World War, he was sympathetic to the idea that military service should form an entitlement to full citizenship. 'The enlistment of these [Aboriginal] boys will do a lot of good,' he wrote. 'If they are good enough to fight for world liberty they should be accorded the liberty of social justice. ... all natives except nomads should enjoy the benefits and privileges of social legislation irrespective of colour ....'[66] But though he supported the aspirations of those

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65. 993, item 529/40. Letter, Superintendent Moore River Native Settlement to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 7 June 1941.

66. ibid. Letter, H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs to a Protector of Aborigines (unnamed), 2 September 1941.

Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' who had managed to enlist, he later attempted to prevent many from enlisting. His aim was to preserve Aboriginal labour for civilian employment.

The war had opened opportunities for the civilian employment of Aborigines throughout Australia. As whites left employment to enlist, Aborigines tended to move into their jobs. The pastoral and agricultural industries became particularly important sources of employment. In Queensland, men left missions and settlements to join the labour force in unprecedented numbers.[67] Some were given little choice. The Aborigines from Hope Vale Lutheran Mission north of Cooktown were evacuated to Woorabinda Settlement near Brisbane for security reasons, and the able bodied men put to work harvesting crops and doing road work.[68] Gangs of Aborigines harvested cane, maize, arrowroot, cotton, peanuts and other crops.[69] Across north Australia, Aborigines moved into the pastoral industry taking over jobs which had previously been left to white or Asian workers.[70] In New South Wales, employment of able

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67. J.P.M. Long, Aboriginal Settlements: A Survey of Institutional Communities in Eastern Australia, ANU Press, Canberra, 1970, p. 99.

68. Howard J. Pohlner, Gangurru, Hope Vale Mission Board, Brisbane, 1986, pp. 113, 172 and 175.

69. Long, Aboriginal Settlements, p. 99.

70. Dawn May, Aboriginal Labour in the North Queensland Cattle Industry 1897-1968, PhD thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1986, pp. 354-355.

bodied men on reserves rose from 64 per cent in 1940 to 96.2 per cent in 1944.[71] Aborigines in South Australia and Victoria also made a similar contribution to the national war effort through their work in war industries.

In Western Australia, Bray employed draconian methods to boost Aborigines' contribution to the labour force. In December 1941, in response to the labour shortage brought about by the enlistment of white Australians, Bray instructed police officers to ensure that as many Aborigines as possible were employed.[72] Aborigines who refused to work were to be removed to a Native Settlement where they would undergo discipline until placed in employment.[73] This would result in 'able-bodied natives being compelled to accept employment more freely [sic.].'[74] Later, Bray reported 'today we are forcefully carrying out the instructions issued, and warrants are in process of

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71. Long, Aboriginal Settlements, p. 31. In this statement Long comes closest to quantifying the increase in Aboriginal employment brought about by the war. There is no statistical analysis of the move from unemployment to employment during the war years despite widespread evidence that such a move took place. This is partly due to the poor quality of statistical data on the Aboriginal population during this and earlier periods.

72. WA State Archives, series 993, item 4/42; Unemployed Natives - Utilization of services during war period. Letter, H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs to the Commissioner of Police, 30 December 1941.

73. Bray did not specify the form the 'discipline' would take.

74. ibid.

execution for the removal of quite a number of indolent natives from various districts for disciplinary treatment at our Settlements.'[75] Once released from the Settlements for employment, Aborigines who failed 'to show any evidence of the corrective disciplinary treatment accorded to them at the Settlement, [would be] ... immediately returned to the Settlement for further discipline.'[76] Proudly, Bray announced, 'elsewhere, except in Germany, I doubt whether methods such as these have been adopted in dealing with the forced labour of natives... .'[77]

Although the war had brought about an increase in the demand for Aboriginal labour, those in employment had little room in which to bargain for a just wage. Employers were empowered to identify and report 'shirkers' who would be returned to the settlements immediately for more disciplinary training. Although some employers offered higher wages to attract Aboriginal workers, the offer of a higher paying job to an Aborigine was regarded as 'enticement' away from lawful employment and was illegal under the Native Administration Act of Western

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75. ibid. Letter, H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs to the Minister for the North-West, undated.

76. ibid.

77. ibid. Interestingly, William Cooper, the Honorary Secretary of the Australian Aborigines' League had earlier accused the Western Australian government of 'out Hitlering Hitler' in its treatment of Aborigines. See Andrew Markus, Blood from a stone, pp. 18 and 86.

Australia.[78] With the Country Party in power in Western Australia, Bray moved to ensure that the pastoral and agricultural industries did not have to compete for Aboriginal labour with other industries and with the armed forces. Offers of higher pay to Aborigines working in the Carnarvon area were met with Bray's terse refusal:

> PASTORAL AND FARM NATIVE EMPLOYEES MUST REMAIN IN SUCH PURSUITS THEY CANNOT LEAVE SUCH EMPLOYMENT FOR MORE REMUNERATIVE OTHER TYPES EMPLOYMENT... .[79]

In other areas, Aborigines employed as banana pickers at £3/10/- and £4 per week were found by the police and forced to rejoin the pastoral industry at average rates as low as 30/- per week. Aborigines were denied the opportunity to advance themselves through the greater demand for their labour. In 1939, 4,996 Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' had been recorded as employed in Western Australia. By June 1944, this figure had risen to 7,838.[80]

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78. Native Administration Act, 1905-1936 (WA), section 47. However, Bray himself had been forced to increase the wages budget of State government Aboriginal settlements to meet the rising cost of Aboriginal wages. The annual budget of Carrolup Native Settlement rose from £50 to £100 in 1942. See WA State Archives, series 993, item 3/1940; Carrolup Native Settlement - Employment of Native Labour - Conditions and rates of Pay. Letter, Superintendent Carrolup Native Settlement to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 6 July 1942.

79. 993, item 4/42. Telegram, Commissioner for Native Affairs to Protector of Aborigines, Carnarvon, undated.

80. Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, no. 33, 1940, p. 577 and no. 37, 1946-47, p. 741.

Bray's concern with protecting the cheap labour supply of the pastoral and agricultural industries led him to reverse his once favourable attitude to Aboriginal enlistment. His change of heart was soon apparent. A proposal by the Army to enlist Aborigines into an Employment Company at full military rates of pay was regarded by Bray as a threat to the supply of cheap labour and was therefore scotched. 'The natives in a Labour Corps would receive higher wages than ... peacefully employed people', he wrote. 'I felt it would be unwise to endorse the suggestion... '.[81]

Despite the desire of Bray and others, including senior Army officers, to keep Aborigines from serving, by late 1941 the Japanese threat increased the demand for manpower and hence forced the reluctant Services to accept Aborigines and other recruits previously regarded as of 'marginal value'. Most Aborigines and Islanders enlisted in the period mid-1941 to mid-1942. Of 276 Aboriginal and Islander soldiers who served in integrated Army units and for whom the dates of enlistment and discharge are known, 135 or almost half, enlisted in that period. In the first six months of 1942, 82 men enlisted - almost a third of the

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81. 993, item 4/42. Letter, H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs, to the Minister for the North-West, undated.

group.[82] Though they accepted the enlistment of Aborigines more freely, the Army and Navy kept their policies barring the enlistment of non-Europeans unchanged.

The RAAF however, gave explicit expression to the pressure applied by the Japanese threat. Air Force Order 8/A/5 insisted that applicants for enlistment in the RAAF be the 'sons of natural born or naturalised British subjects of pure European descent'.[83] However, the Defence Committee had agreed early in 1940 that under special conditions such as a shortage of manpower, this rule could be varied.[84] In response to the demand for manpower created by the Empire Air Training Scheme, the Air Board modified its policy to allow non-Europeans to be enlisted. Initially, the service of non-Europeans was limited to ground crew and although they could be appointed or enlisted for service anywhere, they were retained for

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82. The Army generally did not record the race of its recruits. It is therefore difficult to identify Aboriginal or Islander servicemen who served in integrated units. A list of names of 276 soldiers was compiled by locating names of soldiers in Commonwealth and State Government records, correspondence with ex-servicemen and assistance from other researchers working in the field of Aboriginal military service. Dates of enlistment and discharge were provided by Central Army Records Office. The 276 Aboriginal or Islander soldiers do not include any who served as members of the Torres Strait Defence Force in segregated units. These men are discussed in Chapter 3.

83. AA Canberra, series A1196, item 59/501/4; Admission of Aliens/Suspected Persons to RAAF. Air Board Submission, Air Member for Personnel, to the Air Board, undated.

84. A2671, item 45/1940. War Cabinet Agendum, 45/1940.

service inside Australia. Each non-European applicant was carefully scrutinised by Air Force Headquarters before approval to enlist was given. This policy remained acceptable to the Air Force as long as the demand for manpower remained relatively low.

Arguing '... that this policy should be reviewed in the light of changed circumstances arising from the spread of war to the Pacific',[85] the Air Member for Personnel called for the policy to be modified to allow the freer enlistment of non-Europeans. Several applications for enlistment from Chinese and 'part-Chinese' had been refused although the applicants were suitable in every other way. It was foreseen that applications could also come from other groups of persons who, strangely, were not regarded as 'substantially European'. These included north and south Americans. The Air Board clearly regarded the term 'substantially European' as synonymous with 'British'. The RAAF had confused race with culture.

When Japan entered the war, and particularly by January 1942 when Australia itself seemed under threat, the urgency of the national crisis triggered a new wave of agitation for the enlistment of Aborigines and the formation of all-Aborigine units. The focus of this second wave was the rejection by the Army of three Aborigines who had presented

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85. A1196, item 59/501/4. Letter, Air Member for Personnel to the Air Board, undated but early 1942.

themselves for enlistment at Murwillumbah and South Grafton and had been passed medically fit by the country recruiting centres, obviously still not familiar with the regulations forbidding the service of Aborigines. The men had been sent by rail from Murwillumbah to Sydney where, on their arrival, they had been put back on the train and sent home. The story of the men's rejection appeared in the Sunday Sun on 4 January 1942. One of the men, Sendy Togo, complained 'the military brought me down. I am anxious to serve Australia, but, without any examination or explanation I am being sent back - a thousand mile journey for nothing'.[86] The news of the men's rejection by the Army seemed at odds with the dire situation Australia faced. The rapid Japanese advance in Malaya, the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse and the fall of Hong Kong only weeks earlier, suggested that the urgency of the situation demanded a re-examination of the Army attitude to Aboriginal service.

The publication of the treatment of Togo and the other two men immediately brought forth letters complaining about their rejection and renewing the earlier calls for the formation of segregated Aboriginal Army units. Mr Onus, the Secretary of the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship,

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86. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Clipping, Sunday Sun, 4 January 1942. See also, item 275/701/556; Enlistment of Aborigines 1942 and AWM Canberra, series 60, item 87/1/1035; Enlistment of Half-castes.

called for the formation of an Aboriginal battalion along the lines of the New Zealand Maori battalion and the Penrith Branch of the Australian Labor Party wrote to the Minister for the Army suggesting that Aborigines could be formed into 'native' units like those of the Netherlands East Indies, enclosing a newspaper clipping with a photograph of two 'native' machinegunners to support their case. An edge of impatience had crept into some of the complaints. 'We consider it a gross injustice that such men should be refused the right to take their place in the AIF on account of their colour', wrote the Secretary of the Boulia sub-branch of the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia. 'Many served in the last war. ... With the war at our doors this is no time to allow petty prejudices to interfere with the defence of Australia'.[87] But the Army remained unmoved - at least in so far as its stated policy was concerned. The Secretary of the Department of the Army replied that persons who were substantially non-European would not be enlisted and that an Aboriginal battalion would not be formed.[88] In response to the New South Wales Premier's suggested Aboriginal unit, the Prime Minister wrote 'it is considered, in light of

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87. 60, item 87/1/1035. Letter, Secretary Boulia sub-branch Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia to the Townsville Branch, 23 January 1942.

88. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Association for the Protection of Native Races, 11 May 1942.

experience, that the disabilities associated with the formation and maintenance of such a unit would be out of all proportion to its value as a combatant force, and that as a non-combatant unit it would be even less effective'.[89] But despite these uncompromising replies, the Army was in the process of rapidly expanding its force of Torres Strait Islanders at Thursday Island, raising an Aboriginal unit for the surveillance of east Arnhem Land, and generally permitting the enlistment of Aborigines in unprecedented numbers.

Throughout 1942, with Australia under threat of invasion, other suggestions regarding the formation of Aboriginal units were pressed upon the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Army. The Army found some difficult to ignore. A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University, anthropological representative on the NSW Aborigines' Welfare Board and a man of considerable political power who was deeply involved with every aspect of Aboriginal affairs, forwarded some suggestions made by one of his research workers. They concerned the formation of a 'part-Aboriginal' battalion and closer cooperation between whites and Aborigines.[90] Elkin suggested that they should

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89. MP 508, item 275/701/556. Letter, Prime Minister to the Premier of NSW, 18 March 1942.

90. For a description of Elkin's power and influence leading up to the Second World War, see Wise, The Self-Made Anthropologist. Elkin does not name the research worker.

be seriously examined. 'I think that at this juncture we should take every opportunity we can for giving the aborigines a chance of helping their country either in the fighting services or in auxiliaries to these services or in factories'.[91] Elkin recognised that war service would assist Aborigines to be seen as qualifying for citizenship.

The Administrator of the Northern Territory, C.L.A. Abbott, remained sceptical. 'I would think, and I have in mind the recent bombing of Darwin, that aboriginals would not hold their ground against bombing and machine gunning', he wrote.[92] But Abbott's own Native Affairs Branch had evacuated almost all Aborigines from the vicinity of Darwin before 19 February and Abbott therefore had little to base his thoughts upon. Furthermore, Abbott was well aware of the panic which gripped many of Darwin's white citizens and some RAAF personnel after the first Japanese

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91. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 240/701/217; Role of Aborigines in Defence - Suggestions. Letter, Professor A.P. Elkin to the Prime Minister, 2 April 1942. Elkin's proposal and discussion of it can also be found in series MP24/2, item 42/70/1024; Cooperation Between Aborigines and Whites to Combat Possible Liaison with Japanese Landed in Remote Parts of Australia and AA Canberra, series A659, item 42/1/3043; Co-operation - Aborigines/Whites after invasion.

92. A659, item 42/1/3043. Letter, C.L.A. Abbott, Administrator of the Northern Territory, to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 17 April 1942.

raid.[93] Yet he was unable to draw the conclusion that like whites, with proper training, Aborigines might be trained to withstand the pressures of air attack. The Aborigines' 'Chief Protector' was too ready to deprecate their abilities.

Despite Abbott's rejection of the idea, E.W.P. Chinnery, the Commonwealth government's advisor on native matters and Director of Native Affairs, gave his support to the plan.[94] So too did Lieutenant F.E. Williams. Williams had previously been the government anthropologist of Papua and was a man with wide practical experience in anthropology.[95] He knew both Elkin and Chinnery well. Asked to comment on the plan, Williams turned immediately

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93. Powell, Far Country, pp. 199-200. See also Timothy Hall, Darwin 1942, Methuen, Sydney, 1980 and Owen Griffiths, Darwin Drama, Bloxham & Chambers, Sydney, n.d. Griffiths' account of the period immediately following the Japanese air raid on 19 February minimises any suggestion of panic among the white civilian population.

94. Chinnery had served as a Lieutenant in the Australian Flying Corps in the First World War. From 1924 to 1932 he was government anthropologist in New Guinea. Partly as a result of support from A.P. Elkin, Chinnery was appointed Commonwealth government advisor on native matters and Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory as part of the wave of reform of Aboriginal affairs introduced by McEwen in the late 1930s.

95. On the outbreak of war, Williams returned to Australia and enlisted. He served initially as a Lieutenant in the Intelligence Department of the Allied Geographical Section but in 1943, joined the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. His role there was to train officers in native affairs and to monitor the effect of the war upon the Papuans. Williams was killed in an air crash in New Guinea on 12 May 1943.

to the military advantages which would flow from the cooperation of Aborigines in military operations. 'The attitude of the natives in any theatre of war is clearly of first-rate Military significance', wrote Williams.[96] Just as it was important to keep the sympathy of the Papuans, Williams argued, the side which held the sympathy of the Aborigines would reap the benefits of greater mobility along the north Australian coast and hinterland. Aborigines were the masters of the north Australian environment and without the assistance of Aborigines, white servicemen would quickly become lost. Williams supported the formation of units of de-tribalised 'part-Aborigines' and 'full-bloods', and the attachment of Aborigines to guerilla forces with Aborigines working in their own tribal areas where they knew the country. Williams made no mention of the impact upon white servicemen of the enlistment of Aborigines, yet prior to Japan's entry into the war, this had been regarded by many senior officers as sufficiently important to outweigh the operational benefits of Aboriginal enlistment.

On 20 May 1942, F.R. Sinclair, the Secretary of the Department of the Army replied to the Prime Minister's Department that steps had already been taken towards implementing Elkin's suggestions. He may have been

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96. A659, item 42/1/3043. Report, Lieutenant Williams, 12 May 1941[sic. The report was actually prepared in 1942.]

referring here to a small force of Aboriginal guerillas operating in east Arnhem Land, but this force, consisting of a mere 48 'full-blood' Aborigines hardly matched Elkin's grand scheme. No Aboriginal unit similar to the Islander units of the Torres Strait Defence Force was ever raised.

Other requests for the formation of Aboriginal units came from within the Army. Headquarters Northern Territory Force proposed the formation of an Aboriginal Employment Company.[97] Faced with the problem of providing logistic support to units operating in the Northern Territory in areas where there was virtually no white civilian labour, the Headquarters had turned to the Aboriginal population. By June 1942, the Headquarters was seeking greater control over its Aboriginal workforce and hoped to achieve this by enlisting 100 of the labourers into an Employment Company.[98] The idea was rejected by Allied Land Force Headquarters in Melbourne. In September 1943, Headquarters Northern Territory Force put forward a second plan for the enlistment of Aborigines. This time the plan called for the enlistment of 'full-blood' Aborigines to man an infantry battalion, which although armed and trained as infantry, would perform labouring tasks in the Northern Territory.

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97. An Employment Company was a force trained and paid as soldiers and generally employed as labourers.

98. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 275/701/634; Establishment of Labour Unit. Letter, Commander Number 11 Central Australian Lines of Communications Sub Area to Land Headquarters, Melbourne, 25 June 1942.

The idea sprang from Brigadier Dollery, the Administrative Commander of Northern Territory Force, and reflected his and his Headquarters growing interest in the post-war development of the Northern Territory Aborigines. This humanitarian aspect of the plan, foreshadowing improved conditions for Aborigines in the post-war period, found favour with the Secretary of the Department of the Army, F.R. Sinclair. Allied Land Force Headquarters continued to be obstructive. At Melbourne, continual delays plagued the proposal until it was finally ready to be put to War Cabinet in June 1945. The Adjutant General then quashed the plan.[99]

Although it had failed to gain acceptance, Dollery's plan marked a significant change in the attitude of parts of the Army. While Land Headquarters in Melbourne remained set against the idea of Aboriginal units, Dollery and Headquarters Northern Territory Force - in daily contact with Aborigines - had begun to see them as an important component of military operations in north Australia. Furthermore, Dollery had clearly begun to embrace the role of social experimentation. His plea for the formation of an Aboriginal battalion was couched as much in terms of the benefits to Aboriginal people and the Northern Territory in

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99. AA Melbourne, series MP742, item 92/1/302; Employment of Aboriginal Labour in Army. Minute, Adjutant General to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, 20 June 1945. See also AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 55; NT - Raising Native Employment Companies.

Recruit Training

An Aboriginal recruit training with the Vickers machine gun.

AWM 182088

the post-war period as in terms of the immediate benefits an Aboriginal unit might bring the Army. Surprisingly, Dollery and Headquarters Northern Territory Force seemed more willing to view the Army as an arm of government with responsibility for shaping the future as well as the present, than did Land Headquarters.

Some light can be shed on the response of the government and the Services to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders by a brief examination of their response to the proposed military service of Chinese. The Chinese Legation had suggested to the Minister for the Army on 13 February 1942, that a Chinese unit manned below the rank of junior officers by Chinese, be formed to assist the defence effort. Unlike the response to similar suggestions for Aboriginal units, which had been met with repeated rejections, the Minister replied that some Chinese were already being employed and that the Army was investigating the matter further.[100] The Minister's only concern was whether there would be sufficient Chinese with the necessary experience to fill officer and NCO positions within such a unit.

Like Aboriginal political and welfare organisations, the Chinese Legation saw the war service of Chinese as an

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100. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 240/701/158; Formation of Chinese Units. Letter, Minister for the Army to Chinese Legation, 26 February 1942. See also, item 275/705/10; Utilization of Chinese - March 1942.

opportunity to press for improved status for Chinese in the post-war period. The Chinese community shared some of the disadvantages of Aborigines. 'Chinese nationals in this country cannot but feel that they reside and carry on business here only on sufference, and that their status, compared with that of the nationals of other countries, is one of inequality which always places them at a great disadvantage',[101] wrote the Chinese Legation. It asked that Chinese nationals serving in the armed forces be given equal status to the nationals of other countries, including the right to remain in Australia as long as they wished.[102] This request threatened the basis of the 'White

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101. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1943, vol. 3, Agenda item 160: Chinese Nationals - Service in AMF. Memorandum, Chinese Legation, 19 March 1942.

102. ibid. As at 25 November 1943, 3,360 'aliens' of various nationality were serving in the Labour Corps of the Australian Military Forces. The following were the numerically significant groups:

Greeks	797
Germans	724
Yugoslavs	366
Austrians	353
Poles	276
Italians	274
Russians	51

See AA Canberra, series A373, item 8503; List of Aliens by Nationality at Present Serving in the Labour Corps of the Australian Military Forces. Some of these men may have been naturalised Australians. In one particular unit, 9 Australian Employment Company, many of the men classed as 'aliens' had been born in Australia while others had lived in Australia for over thirty years. See AWM, series 60, item 13/1253/43; Australian Personnel Under Command of Aliens.

Australia Policy' and brought about a rapid change in the government's attitude. Faced with this demand, Forde, the Minister for the Army, recommended to the Prime Minister that Chinese should not be called up for military service and that no publicity should be given to the matter lest other nationals' representatives use the same argument to achieve special consideration.[103] But as the war progressed, pressures to meet the demand for labour led to the enlistment of Chinese for service in Labour Battalions. By June 1942, 400 Chinese who had deserted their ships at Fremantle or had been evacuated from Ocean and Nauru Islands had been enlisted and a few individuals had been recruited for interpreting duties.[104] By late 1943, General MacArthur was anxious to obtain additional labour to support his operations and requested that the government permit him to bring to Australia 25,000 East Indies coolies for work in 'forward areas'. This plan collapsed, but the government seized upon MacArthur's demands for manpower to rid itself of most of its Chinese servicemen, discharging

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103. A2653, item 1943, vol. 3, Agenda item 160. Letter, Minister for the Army to the Prime Minister, undated.

104. ibid.

them to work with the US Army.[105]

The attempts by Aborigines to link citizenship to Aboriginal military service had elicited a similar response. Rather than permit Aborigines and Islanders to acquire the experience and sense of responsibility which would mark them as worthy of full citizenship, the Services and the government had imposed strict limits on their enlistment. This policy, and the contribution of those Aborigines and Islanders who had enlisted were largely kept from the public and from concerned Aboriginal political and welfare organisations.[106] Capital city newspapers throughout Australia reduced their coverage of Aboriginal affairs during the war years and those few articles and letters which were published tended not to report the

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105. AA Canberra, series A816, item 54/301/252; Employment of Chinese and Indians. Letter, Curtin to MacArthur, 24 September 1943. See also series A659, item 44/1/2810; Chinese Employed by US Army - Exit permits, and AWM, series 60, item 13/1277/43; 7 Aust Employment Company - Chinese. A key reason for their transfer to the US Army had been MacArthur's promise that they would be moved to 'forward areas', which the government took to mean areas of operations beyond Australia. MacArthur however, regarded north Queensland as a 'forward area', and employed the Chinese there. On discharge from the Australian Army, the Chinese employed by the US Army received much higher pay. This became a cause of discontent for those few who remained in the Australian Army, and some refused to obey orders until they too were discharged. Ironically, when the US Army finally proposed to move 885 of its Chinese labourers forward to New Guinea, the Commonwealth government intervened because the Chinese had not paid their taxes.

106. Horner, Vote Ferguson, p. 118. Horner notes that as the war worsened it became more difficult to get news of Aboriginal affairs into the press.

Aboriginal contribution to the war effort.[107] Between January 1940 and December 1945, The Sydney Morning Herald carried only eight articles which dealt specifically with Aboriginal war service. Only one of these referred to the service of formally enlisted Aborigines. The remainder discussed the contribution of civilian Aborigines in north Australia. Despite the scale of their service, or perhaps because of it, the service of Torres Strait Islanders was not mentioned. Wartime censorship contributed to the poor coverage of the Aboriginal contribution to the war effort, but in doing so, an opportunity to cast Aborigines and Islanders in a new and positive light had been lost.

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107. The Index to The Sydney Morning Herald, John Fairfax and Sons, Sydney, (quarterly), copies for the period January 1935 to December 1950, (numbers 33 to 96) show a sharp decline in the number of articles of all types, relating to Aborigines, over the war period. The following are the number of articles appearing each year from 1935 to 1950 under the category 'Aborigines' in the index:

Year	Number of Articles	Year	Number of Articles
1935	141	1943	10
1936	81	1944	7
1937	108	1945	6
1938	127	1946	15
1939	40	1947	36
1940	25	1948	23
1941	19	1949	56
1942	14	1950	47

The indexes for The Argus and the Adelaide Advertiser show a similar decline in the number of articles relating to Aboriginal affairs.

Where exclusion of Aborigines and Islanders from military service had not been possible for strategic reasons, such as in the Torres Strait, the fact of this service had been kept from the public. This resulted in the Aborigines' moral argument - that full citizenship should follow military service - losing much of its persuasive power, since it depended upon Aboriginal war service being visible to the white Australian community.

Nevertheless, the drive for citizenship through military service did meet with some success. The Western Australian Government passed the Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944 which gave the vote to Western Australian Aboriginal servicemen who were still serving or who had received an honourable discharge.[108] But few Aborigines achieved the vote through this Bill. H.D. Moseley, a magistrate appointed in 1934 as Royal Commissioner for an inquiry into the social and economic conditions of Aborigines in Western Australia and through the war, a Lieutenant Colonel responsible for security, regarded Aborigines who had achieved citizenship under this Act as apprentices who 'must be taught, much as a child is taught' about their new

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108. 993, item 529/40. Several documents on this file indicate that at least 25 Aboriginal ex-servicemen received their 'citizens rights' through this Act.

status.[109] By March 1946, Moseley believed only two Aborigines had achieved citizenship through the Act. One of these was Private WX19177 Samuel Isaacs who had enlisted in January 1942. Yet 'upwards of four hundred natives' had been enlisted in Western Australia.[110]

After the war, the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia continued to lobby for citizenship and the easing of controls over the lives of Aboriginal servicemen. 'In view of the high service rendered by Australian Aborigines whilst members of the Defence Forces', argued the League, 'their subsequent treatment as civilians is not in keeping with the high regard the general public has for their service in war

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109. WA State Archives, series 993, item 522/46; 'Western Australian Aboriginal and Citizenship' - Broadcast talk given by H.D. Moseley. Transcript of broadcast by H.D. Moseley, 24 March 1946. To qualify for citizenship under the Act, Aborigines had to 'dissolve tribal and native association'. Moseley argued that government Aboriginal settlements should wean Aboriginal children from Aboriginal influence in order that they may later qualify as citizens.

110. WA State Archives, series 993, item 365/44; Effects of War in Tropical Australia on future white Development with Particular Reference to Welfare of Natives - Pamphlet by Professor Elkin for Institute of International Affairs. Letter, H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs to Professor A.P. Elkin, April 1944. Western Australia was the only State to attempt to maintain accurate records of the enlistment of Aborigines. Even in Western Australia, the shortage of manpower due to the war resulted in the abandonment of the attempt. Although the Commissioner for Native Affairs acknowledged that over 400 men had served, his staff had been able to collect the names of only 111.

time'.[111] The League asked that the Commonwealth government ease the 'restrictions' on the social life of Aboriginal ex-servicemen. But Aborigines' contribution to the war was to remain hidden. The Commonwealth Government claimed that no 'full-blood' Aborigines from the Territories had served and those 'part-Aborigines' who served already had full citizenship. This was untrue. Many 'full-blood' Aborigines such as the Fejo brothers, had served as formally enlisted servicemen and an additional 85 had served without the benefit of formal enlistment.[112] The Returned Service's League continued to press for recognition of the service of Aborigines, including the grant of citizenship, into the 1950s.[113]

The Commonwealth Electoral Act was finally amended in 1949 to give the vote to Aboriginal ex-servicemen, regardless of where they had served or whether they had

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111. AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/1357; Aboriginal ex-servicemen - Restrictions in Civil Life - Easing of. Letter, Assistant Secretary Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia NSW Branch, to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 17 April 1946. A similar letter was also sent from the Victorian Branch. Much later, the attitude of the RSL to Aboriginal ex-servicemen changed. In 1965, the Walgett RSL club was a target of Charles Perkins' 'Freedom Ride' because it refused entry to Aboriginal ex-servicemen (Richard Broome, Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p. 176.)

112. These de facto servicemen are discussed in Chapter 5.

113. AA Canberra, series A518, item RM112/1; ex-servicemen and the Territories. Draft statement, Minister for External Territories, 3 January 1952.

received an honourable discharge. A.P. Elkin had been partly responsible for having overseas service and an honourable discharge disregarded. He had successfully argued that these provisions did not apply to white servicemen and higher standards should not be demanded from Aborigines.

In summary, the Services' view of the acceptability of Aboriginal and Islander enlistments fluctuated through the course of the war. Initially, Aborigines and Islanders enlisted freely, but by mid-1940, the Services had established policies which barred the voluntary enlistment of non-Europeans. The notable exception had been the Air Force which had been compelled to accept non-European enlistments because of its demand for manpower to meet the needs of the Empire Air Training Scheme. The policies of the Navy and the Army excluded Aborigines and Islanders because it was felt that the presence of these men in the ranks would be unsettling for the white servicemen. This was quite at odds with the Government policy of assimilation which advocated that Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' should be encouraged to take their place in the Australian community. By mid-1941, the emerging threat posed by Japan had forced the Army to abandon its policy of excluding non-Europeans and it began to enlist Aborigines and Islanders in larger numbers than previously. It also formed segregated units to meet particular strategic needs. Though the Army now admitted

Aborigines and Islanders, it did not amend its policy of excluding them and publicly strove to maintain the impression that its policy had not changed.

While the Services sought the exclusion of Aborigines and Islanders, Aboriginal political and welfare groups and others who supported Aboriginal advancement, sought to ensure that Aborigines and Islanders were both admitted to the armed forces and that their service was visible to the Australian community. They hoped to achieve both by the creation of 'Aboriginal units'. An Aboriginal contribution to the defence of Australia could be translated into an argument for the extension of Aboriginal citizenship and for improved conditions for Aborigines, but this would depend on the extent to which the contribution became known to the general public. Little publicity was given to the contribution made by Aborigines and Islanders to the national war effort and the argument for citizenship was robbed of much of its power. Nevertheless, some success was achieved with limited numbers of Aboriginal servicemen becoming enfranchised in Commonwealth and Western Australian elections.

The Army's enlistment of large numbers of Torres Strait Islanders, beginning in mid-1941, marks the abandonment of its policy of excluding non-Europeans. The segregated Islander units so created could have formed a model for similar Aboriginal units and for the wider enlistment of

Aborigines, but the service of the Islanders was never widely publicised. Although the service of the Islanders was not immediately translated into political agitation for Aboriginal units or general acceptance of Aboriginal enlistment, their enlistment in the Army led to profound social changes within the Islands. The impact of military service upon the Islanders is examined in the next chapter.

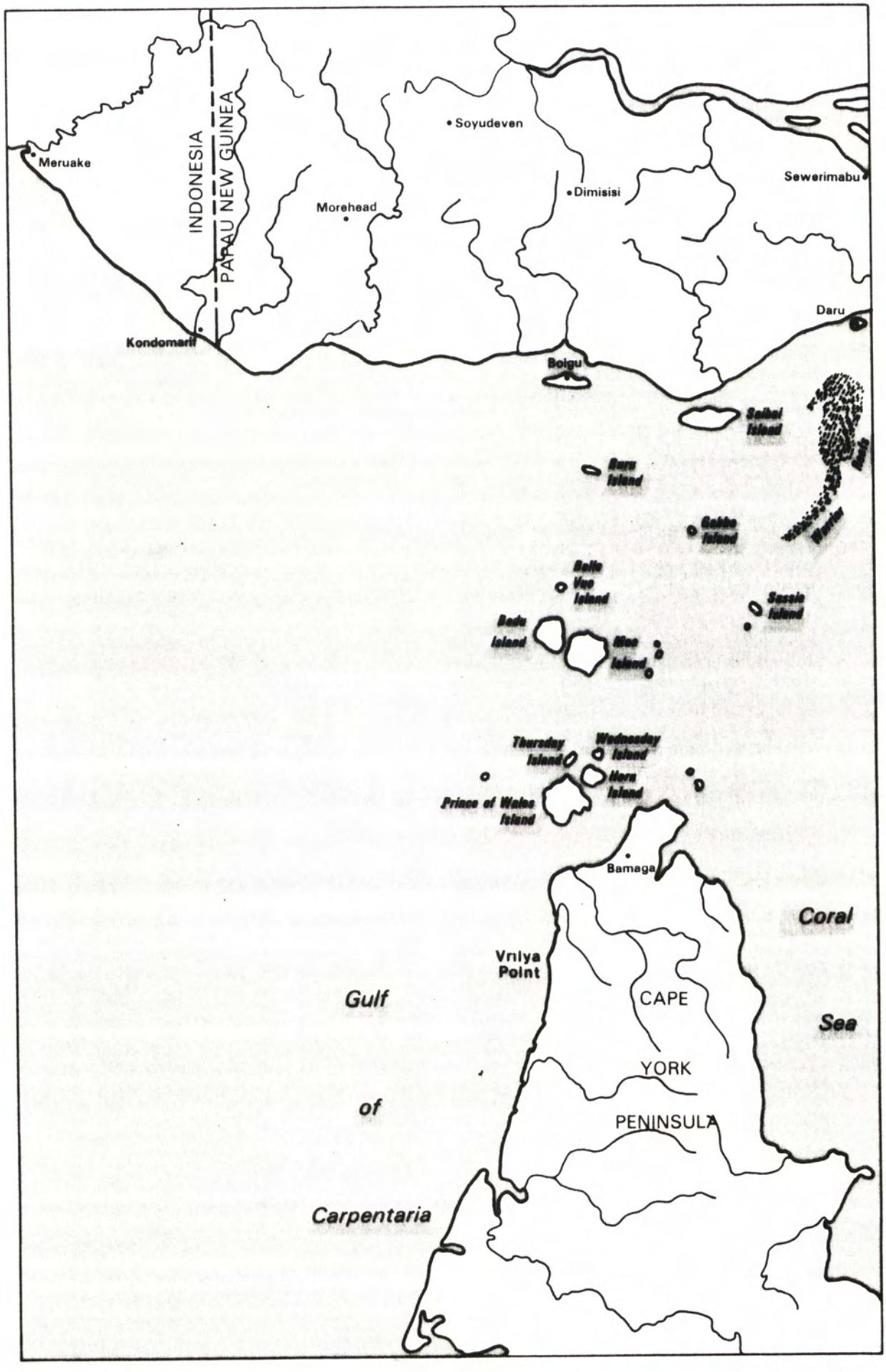
CHAPTER 3

THE TORRES STRAIT DEFENCE FORCE

Although the policies adopted by the Army in mid-1940 excluded Aborigines and Islanders from voluntary service, by June 1941 the Army had begun an aggressive recruiting campaign which would see the enlistment of over 800 Islanders and Aborigines for the defence of the Torres Strait. Despite this recruiting campaign, the Army's policy rejecting the service of non-Europeans remained unchanged as did its stated opposition to the formation of 'Aboriginal units'. This contradiction between stated policy and practice can be explained in terms of the Army's attempts to balance strategic pressures against preservation of existing social values. The Army's concern with preserving the status quo in the Torres Strait resulted in it adopting various discriminatory practices against its Islander and Aboriginal soldiers who served there.

The Torres Strait Islands lie between the tip of Cape York and the southern shore of New Guinea. The population of between 3,000 and 4,000 Islanders occupied about twenty of the islands in the area while Thursday Island was the seat of white administration. Thursday Island was relatively small and infertile and Islanders had not traditionally lived there but it was sheltered by a series of larger islands, was situated on the best channel through

THE TORRES STRAIT



the Strait and possessed the deepest port. Thursday Island also became the base of the Strait pearling fleet. Before the war, the Islanders' economy depended on a combination of pearling and subsistence hunting and gathering. Pearling operations were seasonal, freeing the Islanders to concentrate on gardening and hunting for marine food in the off-season.

The strategic significance of the Torres Strait had been recognised even in the colonial period. The Strait permitted sea traffic to pass between the Pacific and Indian oceans across north Australia and a military garrison with coastal defence guns had been sited on Thursday Island to control this traffic. But in 1938, with the threat of war with Japan looming, the Military and Naval Boards disagreed about the security of the Strait. While the Navy argued that the Japanese were unlikely to seize the Islands of the Strait because 'mobile forces' would make such an advanced outpost untenable, the Army took the view that the Navy's 'mobile forces' might never eventuate. Furthermore, argued the Military Board, by seizing the Strait Islands, the Japanese would deny the use of the Strait to allied shipping. As the islands were virtually undefended, their seizure could be easily achieved.[1] As the war progressed and Darwin and Port Moresby took on greater strategic importance, the Torres

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1. AA Canberra, series A816, item 14/301/153; Defence of Thursday Island. Military Board Minute, November 1938.

Strait too began to be regarded as a strategically important bottle-neck and transhipment point for the supplies destined for the Cape York area and for the forces deployed around Port Moresby and Darwin.

Throughout the 1930s, the defence of Thursday Island depended upon a rifle club of thirty men armed with rifles and a Vickers machine gun. This club guarded the local wireless station and acted as a check against threats to the local white population. Whites felt themselves isolated and threatened in the midst of a larger population of 1,500 Japanese, Islanders, Malays and others. They saw this non-European population as a threat to their economic dominance and social prestige - the two were almost inseparable. They also feared external invasion. The arming of the rifle club with a machine gun had been urged by the Mayor of Thursday Island in 1936. He felt it would

> ... make an excellent impression and give the whites that feeling of confidence that they should enjoy at this outpost which is one of the first approaches from the East. As giving an indication of the local troubles which beset the community, you may be aware that there is still a strike existent among many of the Torres Strait Islanders, and in 1922 there was serious trouble with the Japanese who have made increased demands recently from the pearlers ...[2]

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2. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 25/401/5; Machine Gun for Thursday Island Rifle Club. Letter, T.W. White, Minister for Trade and Customs quoting the Mayor of Thursday island, to the Minister for Defence, 20 June 1936. The machine gun and a quantity of ammunition had been issued to the club by the Army. This was not uncommon. Other rifle clubs expected to perform defence duties were those at Flying Boat bases at Karumba and Groote Eylandt.

The issue of the machine gun underlined the colonial atmosphere which prevailed at Thursday Island.

Until 1937 the rifle club had been manned entirely by whites, but disenchantment with the rigours of service had resulted in several of its members leaving. The Commanding Officer of the club, who was held in low regard by the local white community because he had married an Islander and was the garbage contractor, had begun to fill these vacancies with Islanders. This had further alienated him from the white population. Young whites on the Island refused to join the unit because some of the Islanders held NCO rank. Others questioned the legality of appointing Islanders to these positions. By October 1939, the Naval Officer in Charge of Thursday Island had contacted his Headquarters suggesting that the Army send an officer to the Island to resolve the issue.[3] But on 9 November 1939, the tension within the guard came to a head. The guard commander, drunk and in a fit of jealousy over relations between a subordinate and an Islander woman, shot another subordinate in the leg. The resulting Army investigation solved the community's unease by segregating the unit into two sub-units; a white section which, significantly, retained use of the machine gun, and an Islander section

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3. AWM, series 60, item 125/39: Military Guard - Thursday Island. Letter, Lieutenant Commander Briggs, RN, NOIC Thursday Island to District Naval Officer, Queensland, 9 November 1939. Briggs noted that 'whites who are not members of the detachment ... say that they won't serve under coloured NCOs and under a CO who has a black wife, which is understandable'.

trained as riflemen and commanded by a white NCO.[4] Whites retained the symbol of power, the machine gun, and the segregation of the unit established the pattern which was to be applied to much larger Islander units during the course of the War.

The purpose of defending the Torres Strait Islands was to control shipping using the Strait. This was to be achieved by siting heavy coastal artillery to cover likely shipping routes and by establishing a RAAF airbase on Horn Island. A 600 man garrison with searchlights and coast artillery was recommended.[5] In December 1940, with mounting pressure upon the manpower resources of Australia, the Director of Organization and Recruiting suggested that Islanders could be enlisted to 'replace' some of the white troops destined to form the garrison.[6] He discussed the enlistment of Islanders with the Queensland Protector of Aborigines who supported the idea and provided handy advice: Islanders should be recruited from all the islands to exploit their inter-island rivalry to get the best out of them; Islanders and Aborigines should not be permitted to have 'grog ...

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4. ibid. Thursday Island Guard; Interim Report by Captain (unnamed) AIC, Thursday Island, 5 December 1939.

5. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1940, vol. 5, Agenda item WN94; Thursday Island, Projected Proposals. Minute, Secretary of the Military Board to the Secretary, Department of the Army, 30 October 1940.

6. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 247/704/56; Employment of Torres Strait Islanders on Military Duty at Thursday Island. Letter, Director of Organisation and Recruiting to Director of Military Operations, 13 December 1940.

for he might do anything if he gets it, especially if he is armed'; despite their apparently poor physique, Aborigines could 'walk the feet off the average white man'.[7] As for pay, the Protector had suggested that £3 per month with appropriate increases for non-commissioned rank would be in keeping with the Islanders' earning power in civilian employment. The Protector's views were encouraging and the Army proceeded with its plan.

The Army's high command saw the benefit of Islander soldiers as the release of white soldiers to other duties. Specifically, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff planned to use the Islanders to replace a company of 49 Battalion which would then be redeployed to either Darwin or Port Moresby. The Deputy Chief of the General Staff noted that '... in the existing circumstances, it is considered most desirable that these Islanders should be utilised in the manner suggested',[8] a statement sharply at odds with the Military Board's policy of May 1940, reasserted throughout the war, that the admission of non-Europeans was '... neither necessary nor desirable'.[9] In fact, the enlistment of the Islanders was treated by the Army as a matter of urgency. Arrangements were made for the Minister's approval to begin recruiting, to be telephoned to the Chief

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7. ibid.

8. ibid. Letter, Deputy Chief of the General Staff to Minister for Defence, 4 January 1941.

9. MP 508, item 275/750/1310. Military Board Minute, 6 May 1940.

of the General Staff. This avoided the delay (over a weekend) in the receipt of his written approval.

The desire to use Islanders to replace white units inevitably led to the formation of segregated Islander units. There had been no discussion of alternatives such as enlisting Islanders into integrated service - although many Islanders were already serving beside whites in units of the Second AIF. As plans for the Islander unit developed, the segregation of the Islanders distinguished them from the remainder of the Australian Army enabling the Army to introduce discriminatory practices. In addition to the reduced pay scale - the single most pernicious discriminatory practice aimed at the Islander soldiers - other more subtle discriminatory practices were also introduced. Initially, Islander soldiers were not to wear the slouch hat - a potent symbol of the Australian Army - but forage caps;[10] the Islander soldiers were not to receive family allowance like other Australian soldiers; their pay scale was compared to that of the Royal Papuan Constabulary, not to that of the Australian Army; no advancement beyond the rank of Corporal was permitted. Although these discriminatory practices were to be modified over the course of the war, they were never completely removed and it was segregation which made them possible in the first place.

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10. Later, 'giggle' hats were issued. These were shapeless cloth hats. See the photograph at page 108.

Recruiting for the Islander unit began on 10 June 1941 with Captain Cadzow, the Commanding Officer, Dr. Redshaw of the Army Medical Corps and the Protector of Islanders, visiting the islands in the Queensland Government Ketch 'Melbidir'. Recruiting was initially disappointing, only 66 men joining. Many fit men had already signed up in the pearling fleet and could not breach their contracts to join the Army. Most Island communities were enthusiastic about the prospect of their menfolk joining the Army. The Island Council on Saibai Island was the only one not to favour enlistment.[11] The pay scales of the Islander soldiers were a problem from the outset. Assured by the Protector of Islanders that £3 per month would be comparable to the earning power of the men employed in the pearling industry, the Army agreed to the figure as the basic pay for an Islander private. Long service and promotion to NCO rank brought additional pay. But during the first recruiting drive in June 1941 many prospective recruits complained that the pay was too low. On the outbreak of the Second World War, some Islander ex-servicemen of the First World War had enlisted in the Garrison Battalion Guard at Thursday Island - later transferred to 49 Battalion - and

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11. Queensland State Archives, Series A/4218: Employment of Islanders on Military Duties. This is one of the few records available from the Queensland State Archives on this subject. Most Queensland government Department of Aboriginal Affairs records are still held by the Department of Community Services which inherited responsibility for Aboriginal and Islander affairs. Most of those records which have been deposited with the Queensland State Archives are not available for public access until 1995.

received the full pay authorised under the Army's financial regulations: about £8 per month. The offer of £3 per month did not impress the remaining Islanders. Despite an unenthusiastic response, by October 1941, 106 men, enough to form a full strength company, had joined.

The Army Fortress Commander, commanding the defence of the Straits, greeted the enlistment of the Islanders with enthusiasm:

> The reaction to camp routine, discipline, and training in such a short time is most encouraging. Certain of the personnel are respected by the remainder and exercise authority by reason of this respect. These men are being closely watched with a view to promotion ...
>
> The men show a great keenness to become soldiers and look upon such tasks as cooking and mess orderlies' duties with disfavour as "women's work". Fortunately, most are able to cook and the difficulty is overcome by roster duty. Officers of the Unit pronounce the Quality of the food prepared as "excellent". All members take part in island dances, and the rhythm and timeing [sic.] of these dances have prepared them well for marching and drill movements.
>
> Camp life suits these men. They are all Christians and take their religious observances very seriously. They are allowed to have their daily prayers conducted by certified "lay readers" who are members of the unit.[12]

Later, the Fortress Commander was to report '... discipline is excellent. Obedience is implicit and their

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12. MP508, item 247/704/56. Fortress Commander's report, 22 August 1941. So concerned was the Military Board that the enlistment of the Islanders should proceed that it instructed the Fortress Commander to submit regular reports on the progress of raising the unit.

faith in their instructors absolute'.[13] The Commander planned to introduce the Army Education Service to the Island and to encourage Islander soldiers to learn trades to assist them in their post-war lives.

When Japan entered the war, Japanese pearlers at Thursday Island were interned and evacuated to the south. Torres Strait Islander soldiers were among those who mounted guard over the Japanese internees, many of whom were well known to the Islanders who had worked on the pearling luggers.[14] By early 1942 the Japanese advance had seen the bombing of Darwin and the Japanese occupation of Timor and Lae. On 14 March, the Japanese struck at the RAAF base at Horn Island with eight bombers and twelve Zero fighters. The Islander soldiers watched from nearby Thursday Island as plumes of smoke and dust rose over the airfield and dog-fights developed overhead.

Following the air raid, the tempo of defensive preparations increased with the erection of barbed wire entanglements, the digging of trenches and strongpoints and

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13. ibid. Fortress Commander's report, 18 October 1941. The Naval Officer in Charge, Thursday Island was less impressed with the potential of the Islanders as Naval ratings. See AA Melbourne, series MP1049, item 1924/4/600; Mine Watching Organisation - Thursday Island. Report, NOIC Thursday Island to The Secretary, Naval Board, 31 October 1941.

14. AWM, series 60, item 126/41; Internment of Japanese. Telegrams, Headquarters Torres Strait Force to Milcommand Brisbane, 2 September 1941 and 2 December 1941. See also item 20/1/1604; Property of Japanese Internees ex Thursday Island, and interview with Elia Ware, 25 October 1986.

The Torres Strait Light Infantry

A squad of the Torres Strait Light Infantry training in their company lines.

AWM 119170

the continuous round of training in small arms and tactical manoeuvres. White and mixed race civilians, including representatives of the Queensland government, were evacuated to the south. This had left the Fortress Commander, Colonel Langford, with a reduced local labour force and he was faced with abandoning military training so that his soldiers, white and black, could supply the labour needs of his command.[15] Forgan-Smith, the Premier of Queensland, had become increasingly worried about the approaching Japanese. On 26 February 1942 he had written to the Prime Minister concerned that there were over 100 luggers and other small craft in the Torres Strait which could be used by the Japanese to support operations against north Queensland.[16] Navy Headquarters proposed the removal of all but the essential luggers from the area, leaving one lugger for RAAF use and four for the Protector of Islanders. The Islanders depended on their vessels for inter-island trade and communications and for the harvesting of seafoods which formed a major part of their

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15. AWM, series 60, item 228/42: Situation Report Thursday Island. Situation Report, Fortress Commander Thursday Island, 20 March 1942.

16. AA Melbourne, series MP1049, item 603/201/770; Luggers - Thursday Island. Letter, Premier of Queensland, W. Forgan-Smith, to the Prime Minister, 26 February 1942. See also AA Canberra, series A816, item 40/301/312; Control of Pearling Luggers North and West Australia. On 24 March, Forgan-Smith wrote to the Minister for the Army submitting a long list itemising his view of the defence needs of Queensland. The Premier's demands were unrealistic and could not be met from the resources then available to the Commonwealth government. See AA Canberra, series A816, item 14/301/238; Defence of Queensland.

diet. The Naval Officer in Charge, Thursday Island, was well aware of the impact of this plan on the Islanders. 'To deprive the northern islands of all except four boats is in these waters, like tearing up the roads and railways between Brisbane and Melbourne', he wrote.[17] But the luggers were impounded under the control of the Army, beached and prepared for burning in the event of a Japanese landing.[18] The Islanders lost the use of their vessels with repercussions which were only to emerge much later.

Among the evacuated whites had been the Protector of Islanders. Islanders regarded his evacuation as a form of 'desertion', complaining that they had been left 'uncared for and unprovided for' and were 'so disgusted with the action of the late Protector ... in running out on them, That [sic.] they do not wish him to return, as they have lost all faith in him'.[19] Islander soldiers began to see

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17. MP1049, item 603/201/770. Letter, NOIC Thursday Island, to the Secretary Naval Board, 21 March 1942.

18. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 16/401/571; Pearling Luggers at Thursday Island and Neighbouring Islands.

19. AWM, series 52, item 1/6/8; Headquarters Thursday Island Forces. Appendix C to War Diary for April 1942 - Letter, Fortress Commander Thursday Island to HQ Northern Command, 18 April 1942. See also Gerald Peel, Isles of the Torres Straits: An Australian Responsibility, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1947, p. 115.

20. Interviews, Tom Lowah, 22 October 1986, Peter Tapau, 24 October 1986 and Elia Ware, 25 October 1986. Elia Ware had planned to join the Second AIF but after witnessing the evacuation of whites from Thursday Island and from Merauke in Dutch New Guinea, reasoned that he should stay to defend his family. See also AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 16/402/126; Issues to Civilians - Thursday Island.

themselves as heroically staying to defend the islands. Furthermore, in the absence of the Protector, Island Councillors were forced to enter into administrative areas previously reserved for him. These included the provision of food to the islands, the reopening of schools under the remaining Islander teachers and the provision of vessels for inter-island travel. The disgust of the Islanders at their abandonment by the Protector marked an important step in their politicisation. They began to see themselves from this point onwards as increasingly independent of the traditional paternalistic government control imposed by the Queensland government.[21]

With the Japanese forces landing in Timor and Java, the Army was anxious to increase the contribution to the war effort being made by the Islanders. From March 1942 until the end of the year an aggressive recruiting drive saw the single company of just over 100 men rapidly expand to a force of over 730 Islanders and mainland Aborigines and a small group described by the Army as 'Torres Straits Malays'. These were men whose parentage included Malays, Aborigines, Islanders, Phillipinos, Portuguese, Chinese, Samoan and others.[22] These mixed race men, unlike the

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21. Islander ex-servicemen interviewed in October 1986 still expressed resentment against the Protector over this incident.

22. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 247/1/1290; Conditions of Service - Natives of Papua/New Guinea and Torres Strait. Various documents on this file show that a total of nine men were of mixed race.

'full-blood' Islanders, had full citizenship. All of these groups served in the following units:[23]

	Islanders	Aborigines	'Malays'
Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion	417	-	-
Torres Strait Pioneer Company	159	1	-
2 Australian Water Transport Group	58	41	9
Fixed Defences [Coast Artillery]	59	-	-
Unallotted	31	-	-
Total	724	42	9

About 400 whites served in the same units, but mainly in the coast artillery batteries and the water transport group. War Establishments - the documents which described the equipment and personnel entitlements of particular units - allowed for the enlistment of as many as 1,355 'natives', but this figure was never reached owing to the shortage of able bodied men. The Aborigines in the units were recruited from mission stations at Cowal Creek, Mapoon, Weipa and Aurukun and were employed in water transport to make use of their detailed knowledge of Cape

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23. AWM series 54, item 628/1/1; Torres Strait Islanders - Enlistment, Pay etc. War Establishments for the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion, Coast Artillery Torres Strait, Headquarters of a Water Transport Group, 32 Aust Water Transport Maintenance Company, 14 Aust Water Transport Operating Company and Torres Strait Pioneer Company. A War Establishment is a document which describes a unit in terms of its manpower and equipment requirements. The table shows the strength of the units as at 18 January 1944.

York waters. The expansion took place during the tense months between the Japanese landing at Gona on 21 July and the recapture of Kokoda on 2 November 1942 and was in response to the deteriorating strategic situation. An additional group of Islanders, as well as Aborigines from north Queensland mission stations, were employed by the US Army, and the Australian Navy and Air Force, but their numbers were quite small - perhaps no more than twenty.[24]

By mid 1942, the Army was anxious to complete the manning of the Islander units and to move small craft from Australia to Papua and New Guinea. These small craft were required to support operations there and the Army estimated that it required about 100 vessels of lugger size as well as a range of larger vessels. Australian coastal waters were scoured for luggers which were then impressed for Army use. The luggers were to be sailed to New Guinea via Thursday Island where they were to be repaired within the limited resources available, fettled and then dispatched forward to New Guinea in flotillas of ten. A powered lugger or launch fitted with machine guns accompanied each flotilla to shepherd stragglers and provide limited protection against air attack. Crews were to be found in the main from Torres Strait Islanders living on the

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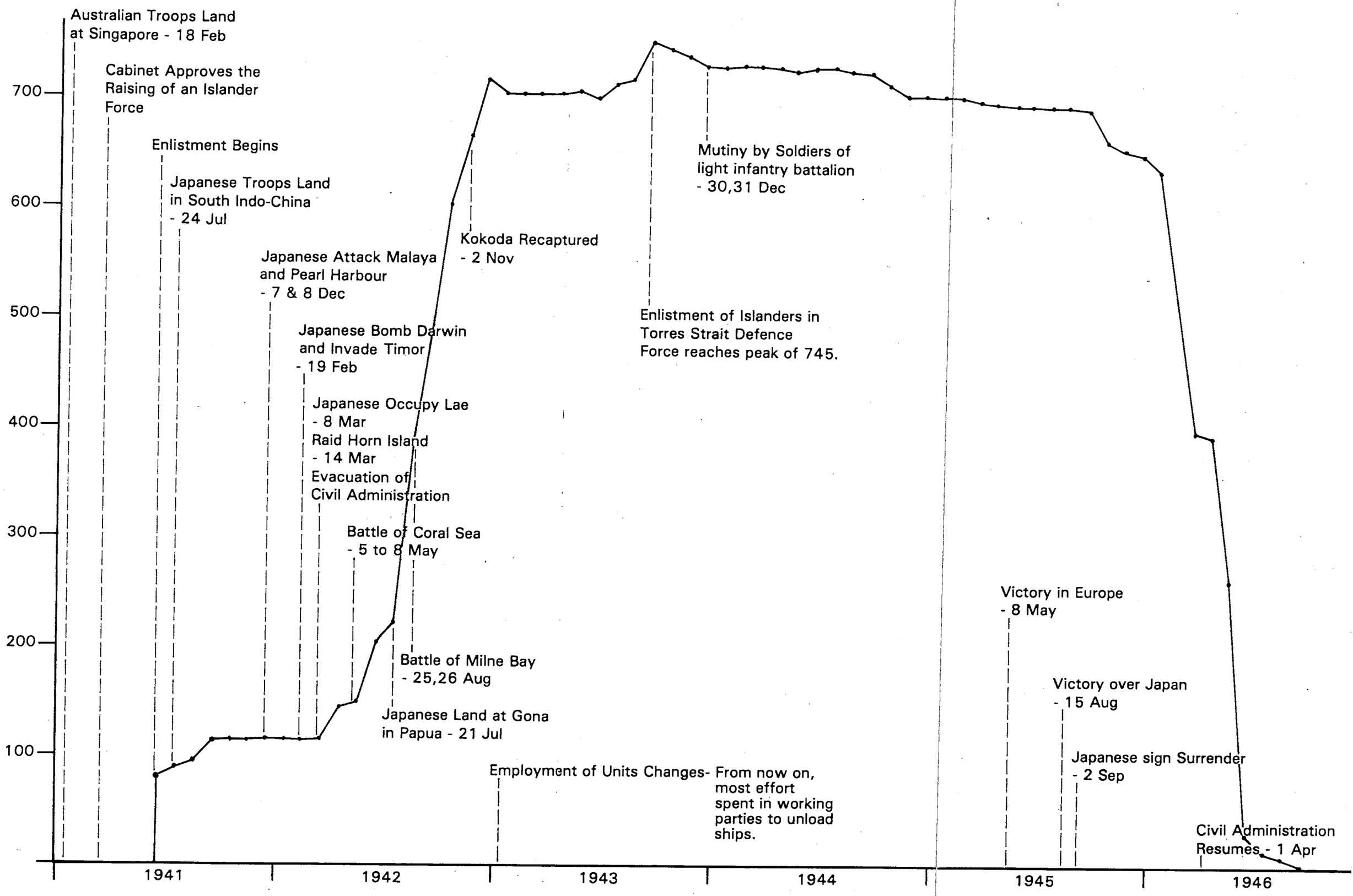
24. See for example AA Melbourne, series MP151, item 463/208/1142; Australian Native Labour for Luggers - Thursday Island. Minute, NOIC Thursday Island to the Secretary, Naval Board, 10 January 1944. Although employed as civilians, without formal enlistment, some of these men performed work which was indistinguishable from military service and they could be regarded as de facto servicemen.

FLUCTUATIONS IN THE STRENGTH OF TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS IN THE TORRES STRAIT DEFENCE FORCE



Queensland mainland. Cairns and Mackay were the two ports at which the luggers would be handed over from their civilian owners to the Army, and crewed. The Islander crewmen were enlisted into the Army before sailing so that the problems of manning the Islander units and moving the luggers could be solved at the same time.[25]

Recruiting the Islanders from Queensland was not as easy as it had first appeared. The job of finding both men and luggers fell to Colonel Thirkell at Cairns. Short of his target by 400 men, Thirkell began to enlist Aborigines from Lockhart River Mission and contemplated enlisting those at Palm Island, despite instructions that enlistment was to be restricted to Islanders. His gaze also fell upon Daru in Papua, as a potential source of recruits.[26] Even Islanders employed in reserved occupations were not beyond the Army's reach. Thirkell signalled his Headquarters on 6 August 1942, that he had

> ...located 20 Islander boys in cane camp. Cane cutters reserved occupations. May locate similarly placed. Suggest you speak [to Land Headquarters, Melbourne] and ... arrange for branch get release all suitable boys [sic.].[27]

The task of finding the luggers, crewing them and properly outfitting them for their service in the Army took

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25. AWM, series 54, item 963/22/14; Water Transport Luggers and Small Craft. Report on Coastal Shipping 1942 by Lt Dexter.

26. ibid. Signal, Colonel Thirkell to HQ Land Operations, Brisbane, 6 August 1942.

27. ibid.

some time. They were urgently needed in Papua and New Guinea and Headquarters Land Operations at Brisbane was losing patience. On 13 August 1942, Thirkell was signalled:

> you appear to view this scheme as America Cup involving lengthy preparation perfect equipment. Assure you it has vital and immediate operational importance. Luggers capable of mov[emen]t must repeat must Leave next week or earlier. ... Anything that floats must go now...[28]

The urgent need for both luggers and Islander soldiers led to the abandonment of any but the most cursory of medical examinations of the recruits - indeed, the Islanders were to be enlisted 'irrespective of medical qualification'.[29] Generally, the Islander soldiers were required to meet the medical standards of a Garrison Battalion, but even this reduced requirement had not been observed. Those with flat feet - a disability which would have normally excluded men from service - had been admitted, and X-rays of chests to test for Tuberculosis - normally standard procedure for all enlistments - had not been performed on the Islander recruits. Neither had standard blood and urine tests. Even Islanders with a

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28. ibid. Signal, Headquarters Land Operations, Brisbane to Colonel Thirkell, 13 August 1942.

29. AWM, series 60, item 13/1/42; Enlistment of Torres Strait Islanders. Secret Minute, Assistant Adjutant General, HQ Queensland Lines of Communication Area to HQ (2HQ) Lines of Communication Sub Area and other addressees, 8 August 1942. In the haste to enlist the Islanders, one man was enlisted twice, under the names Charlie Lockhardt and Sali Lockhardt. See Memorandum, Depot Paymaster, Thursday Island to Pay Ledger Sub Section, 16 October 1942.

history of spitting blood were admitted so long as they had previously been pearl divers - and most had. Even as late in the war as January 1944, Islanders who had been discharged had not been subjected to a final medical examination.[30]

These lax standards and the rush to fill the ranks resulted in the enlistment of almost all the Islander men of military age in the Torres Strait. In many families, every male of military age was serving, fathers often serving side by side with their sons. On a roll of 788 of the Islander soldiers, only 409 different surnames appear. The Islanders had enlisted voluntarily, but the impressment of pearling luggers and other small craft had deprived many of them of their normal means of employment and in some cases, of winning seafood. Many were faced with little option but to join the Army. About 830 Islanders served during the war (812 served in the Torres Strait Force alone), drawn from a population base of about 4000.[31] Thus, one in every 4.8 Islanders or 20.75 per cent of the total Islander population, served in the Army. By comparison, only about one in every 7.5 Australians or 13.3 per cent of

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30. AA Canberra, series A1196, item 12/501/185; Inter-departmental Conference to Discuss Conditions of Service - Native Units, 1943-45. Memorandum, Secretary Department of the Army to Assistant Secretary Department of the Treasury, Defence Division, 7 July 1943. Medical examinations on discharge were introduced in 1944.

31. The Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, no. 34 - 1941, p. 307. The total Islander population in 1941 was 3737.

Australia's population served in one or other of the armed forces throughout the war. Islanders therefore, made a contribution to the national defence effort which in terms of their population, was greater than that made by white Australians. The extent of their contribution testified to the eagerness with which the Army exploited this source of cheap military manpower and to the difficulties into which the Island economy was plunged following the impressment of the small craft operating in the area.

The high rate of Islander participation in the Army had not been achieved without cost. As recruiting parties scoured the islands for more recruits, they left behind island communities in which only the womenfolk, the aged and the young remained.[32] By July 1943, recruiting parties visiting Murray Island in the Eastern group noted that

> the actual number of able bodied men remaining in these islands is not definitely known but is believed to be about 10 only.[33]

By September the population of able-bodied men had thinned further. The Commander First Australian Army reported to Land Headquarters that

> ... the number of able bodied men remaining in the Murray Islands is practically nil. This has been confirmed by the return of the recruiting

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32. Some Islanders had put up their age to enlist.

33. AWM, series 54, item 506/5/10; Native Labour: Torres Strait Malayans serving with AMF - Conditions of Service 1944. Report, Recruiting Party, 23 July 1943.

34. ibid. Letter, Commander First Australian Army to Land Headquarters, 15 September 1943.

party who obtained only 4 recruits.[34]

Enlisted in response to the Japanese threat, the Islander soldiers spent 1942 engaged in intensive defence preparation. This included recruit training, range practices including rifle, 'tommy' gun, Bren and Lewis machine guns, further construction of defensive field works, reconnaissance and dispersal of ammunition and other stores. Exercises were conducted jointly with the non-Islander units which were also part of the Torres Strait Defence Force. Spasmodic Japanese air raids concentrated upon the RAAF base at Horn Island, served to remind the soldiers and their officers of the immediacy of the threat to their islands. Throughout November, the Islanders practiced tactical exercises in attack, defence, withdrawal and patrolling.[35] But after the crisis of 1942, the role of the Islander units changed. From early 1943 onwards, the soldiers became increasingly involved in unloading ships. By December 1943 practically no weapons or tactical training was being done. Unloading and loading of shipping proceeded around the clock and even on Christmas day 1943, a working party of 45 men was required.[36] The Islanders achieved a reputation for hard

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35. AWM, series 52, item 8/4/9; Torres Strait Infantry. See War Diary entries for November 1942. Throughout 1942, the War Diary emphasises recruit and advanced training and intensive defence preparations.

36. AWM, series 52, item 8/4/7; Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion. Throughout 1943, the War Diary shows that the provision of working parties, primarily for the unloading of shipping, was the main role performed by the battalion.

work and took pride in being able to unload in two days, ships which had taken white waterside workers in Sydney or Melbourne a week to load. Islander units in the Torres Straits had become an essential element in the logistic support of operations in the Strait and in New Guinea and Darwin.

They also became essential to logistic support in New Guinea for another reason. As military operations moved further into New Guinea, there was a growing demand for New Guinea labour. The supply of this labour depended on the supply of the local currency - gold lip shell and cowries. The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit had attempted to purchase labour with axes and knives but the supply of these had diminished, resulting in labour shortages. The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit was aware that the Japanese had apparently found no difficulty in meeting the New Guinea labourers' demands for a suitable currency and was fearful that the Australian forces would be outbid by the Japanese.[37] The acquisition of gold lip shell and cowries therefore became an important issue for both Australian prestige and the logistic support of Australian operations in New Guinea. Sixty Islander soldiers of the Light Infantry Battalion were put to work on Army pay at their old trade - pearling. Between July and December 1943

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37. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1944, vol. 1, Agenda item 31; Gold Lip Shell for ANGAU. Letter, GOC ANGAU to Assistant Secretary, Department of External Territories, 15 November 1943.

they recovered twenty tons of shell including about 9,000 shells suitable for currency. These represented £23,987 to the Commonwealth when used to purchase labour. The Islanders' operations were so successful that consideration was given to extending the use of shell currency to other areas of New Guinea and Dutch New Guinea.[38] Fishing for shell continued throughout the war. Their employment on this task while still in the Army, created some resentment among the soldiers who felt that they should have been given the opportunity to make a profit from the war as they believed many whites were.[39]

Other pressures upon the Islanders in the latter half of 1943 contributed to an upwelling of resentment and hostility. The main issues of concern to the Islanders were the disruption to Island politics brought about by the war and the economic impact of the war being faced by the Islander soldiers and their families. The Islands of the Torres Strait had nearly all been set aside as reserves for the Islanders.[40] The Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939 (Queensland) provided for the election of Islander Councillors who had the duty of making and enforcing by-laws concerning the domestic affairs of the local island

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38. ibid. Report, Lieutenant Colonel Thirkell, LHQ Liaison Officer, Pearl Shell Fishing Project, to LHQ, 9 February 1945.

39. Peel, Isles of the Torres Straits, p. 117.

40. Thursday Island as the seat of white administration was an exception.

reserves. The Councillors also sat on an island court and had the power to fine up to £5 and to imprison for up to three months. Elections for Island Chief Councillors and Councillors were normally held every three years and for village councils, annually. But the mass enlistment of men and their removal to Thursday Island, had upset this procedure. The islands were thrown into political turmoil. This was reflected in the breakdown of the traditional form of community support.

The Commanding Officer of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion was alerted to the increasing discontent on the islands by returning leave parties, as early as August 1943.[41] Over the remaining four months of 1943, soldiers returning from leave were to report in detail on the tensions building on their home islands. On 30 October 1943, two soldiers returning to their unit from leave on Moa Island, Privates Namok and Ware, complained to their Company Commander that their wives were being victimised by the Island's Wolfram miners. The island had two stores; one for the whole community and another for the use of the miners. The miners and their wives had access to both and according to Namok and Ware, would purchase all they could from the general store thereby depleting everybody's share, then retire to the miner's store leaving the rest of the community on hard times. Furthermore, the property and gardens of the Army men were being neglected by the miners

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41. 52, item 8/4/7. Diary entry, 8 August 1943.

and the 'home' men while the crops of the 'home' men flourished. The houses of Namok and Ware and another two soldiers remained uncompleted even though the men had worked on them single handed during their fourteen day leave period.[42] Their families faced the prospect of living in uncompleted houses until the men's next leave period, a year distant. The poor state of their houses was a concern to many soldiers, who regarded them as insufficiently weatherproof to resist the coming wet season. The traditional bush materials used in house construction required constant maintenance which the soldiers had been unable to provide since their removal to Thursday Island. Normally able to rely upon community support, the soldiers had found that they were expected to spend their leave in hard labour trying to fix their houses in only fourteen days.

Ware was particularly concerned about his wife. She was expecting another child and already had other children to look after. As well she had to fetch water, cut firewood and purchase her supplies from the store over a mile away. Private Ware could not afford to pay someone to help his wife and he requested four months leave to look after his wife and children until she was well enough to carry on

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42. AWM, series 54, item 628/4/5; Torres Strait Islands Pay Issue and Moa Island Sit-down Strike. Minute, OC 'A' Company, Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion, to CO, 30 October 1943.

43. ibid.

alone.[43] On returning from leave, another soldier claimed that his wife had been beaten by the Island councillor when she disputed the councillor's claim to part of her land. Her husband had not been there to defend her claim. Difficulties of this sort, stemming from the absence of many of the menfolk, were becoming increasingly common and were affecting the soldiers' morale.

The soldiers' Company Commanders were sympathetic to their plight. Demands by the Island Councils of Murray, Darnley and Moa Islands that Army canteens be established on their Islands to improve civilian access to stores to purchase foodstuffs, were initially regarded as 'thoroughly fantastic on the surface'. But the Commander of 'A' Company conceded that the idea was worthy of consideration if the soldiers' families were in difficulty on their home islands.[44] This acknowledgement carried with it an admission that the problem had been created by the Army in the first place.

On Darnley Island, Corporal Benjamin who had been Chief councillor before joining the Army, deposed the incumbent councillors during his return to the Island on leave. On his return from leave he had been told by Colonel Langford that he was to return to the Island as Chief councillor once again, but while absent from the Island, Mr Curtis, a civilian appointed Acting Protector of Islanders in the

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44. ibid.

absence of the Protector, had reinstated the deposed Councillors.[45] In the absence of organised civilian administration, Langford had apparently taken it upon himself to appoint Councillors without bothering with elections. Langford's exercise of civil powers under National Security Regulations had been imperfect in other areas as well.[46] Considerable confusion and dissatisfaction existed in the communities between councillors, the people and the soldiers. The soldiers began to see themselves as a bloc - supported by the Army heirarchy at Thursday Island which in their eyes, had displaced the discredited Protector of Islanders as their primary source of contact with government. The Army had largely usurped the place of the Queensland government in its contact with civilians on the outer islands. Hospitals built during the war on Badu and York islands by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs, were manned by Army personnel because the Queensland government could not provide resident doctors and dentists. Navy coastwatchers, Army observation posts and Air Force radar stations on many of the islands had taken over the roles of the white teachers and other minor officials who had represented the

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45. ibid. Minute, CO Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion to Intelligence Officer, Torres Strait Force, 29 November 1943.

46. AWM, series 60, item 142/1/394; Administration of Justice, Torres Strait Area. Langford established his own civil court and issued instructions that breaches of Queensland law would be tried by him, but he was not empowered to do this under the National Security Regulations and his actions were invalid.

Queensland government before the war. The councillors tended to represent the old order; the Protector and the paternalistic Queensland administration. The soldiers also began to see themselves as superior to the councillors who despite their onerous jobs, received only £1 per month - less pay than the soldiers. After all, the councillors were 'only civilians'.

Under the difficult conditions which gripped the Strait during the war, the councils needed strong and decisive guidance best provided, thought the soldiers, by councillors drawn from among the disciplined ranks of the servicemen. Support for the wives of soldiers, maintenance of the gardens, control of alcohol[47] and maintenance of soldiers' houses would all be met by the election of soldiers to the councils.

By early December 1943 the efficacy of soldiers being elected to council positions was well established. On Dauan Island, ex-Private Wellington Aragu was Chief councillor, and the people were working in the gardens and building the houses of the enlisted men. Soldiers from Dauan Island were returning from leave content that their interests were being looked after in their absence. On Saibai however, the Chief councillor - an ex-soldier named Mareko - was not sure of his position and was not carrying out his duties. He was another of Langford's appointees.

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47. An alcoholic drink called Tuba, was commonly distilled from coconuts.

Langford had insisted that the Island gardens should be maintained at a high standard to offset the dependency of the people on the island store. The discipline that Mareko would need to enforce to achieve this was bound to make him unpopular with those who would have to do the hard work. Normally, parties of soldiers returning on leave were welcomed by the community, but the Saibai leave party had arrived without welcome to a strained and sullen atmosphere.[48]

Shortly after the arrival of the leave party, a public meeting had been held so that the 48 Saibai soldiers could discuss grievances that had mounted in their absence. Their main complaint was that elections had not been held for four years. The enlistment of the soldiers had left the council unsure of the soldier's right to vote and in the absence of advice, no election had been held. The soldiers wanted to replace the Chief councillor. Despite their desire to hold an election, the legal status of the soldiers was still not clarified by the time their leave expired and they returned to Thursday Island frustrated and unhappy with the situation on their home island.[49]

Because of the implications for the soldiers' morale, the

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48. 54, item 628/4/5. Minute, CO Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion to Intelligence Officer Torres Strait Force, 6 December 1943.

49. ibid. Report, Sibai Island Leave Personnel - Request for Replacement of the Chief councillor, Mareko, by Officer in Charge Sibai Leave Party, 3 November 1943.

Intelligence Officer, Thursday Island Fortress, had taken a keen interest in the political tensions on the Islands. The Commanding Officer of the Battalion submitted regular reports to him as each leave party returned. The Commanding Officer argued that a policy on the eligibility of the soldiers to participate in the Island elections should be determined quickly and circulated to the men to relieve their anxiety on the matter. The issues of most concern to the soldiers were; first, were the elections going to be held and if so were the Islander soldiers to have a vote; second, could men serving in the Army be accepted as nominees for council positions?. Failure to resolve these issues had left the soldiers concerned about the well being of their families. Indeed, the Commanding Officer had endeavoured to keep the soldiers advised of the political situation on the home islands[50]

The dislocation of Island politics and the resultant tensions concerning the welfare of the soldiers' families was complicated by the question of the soldiers' pay. Since the enlistment of the first Islanders in June 1941, they had complained that their pay was too low. Policy concerning the soldiers' pay had been dominated by the idea that it should conform to what they had generally received in civilian employment before the war. In consultation with the Queensland government, Headquarters Northern Command suggested the following pay scale:

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50. 52, item 8/4/7. Diary entry, 29 September 1943.

Private, first year of service	- £3	per month
second year of service	- £3/5/-	per month
third year of service	- £3/10/-	per month
Lance Corporal	- £3/17/6	per month
Corporal	- £4/5/-	per month

Privates employed as tradesmen or specialists were to be paid an additional 5/- per month.[51] Married soldiers were to make an allotment to their wives of £1 to £1/10/- per month but they were not to receive dependents' allowance as other Australian soldiers did. To minimise disputes about pay, the Director of Native Affairs insisted that single soldiers should make a similar allotment to their own account. In submitting its recommended pay scale, Headquarters Northern Command emphasised that 'the earnings of these men under civilian conditions would range from £3 to £4 per month. In addition, they receive accommodation and rations but not bedding and clothing'.[52] The Queensland Deputy Director of Native Affairs supported the Army's progressive scale of payments but argued that each should be increased by 10/- per month '... to bring them into line with the average earnings in civil employment'.[53]

Other Australian soldiers, including some Islanders enlisted in the Second AIF, Militia units serving on the

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51. MP508, item 247/704/56. Letter, HQ Northern Command to LHQ, 6 February 1941.

52. ibid.

53. ibid.

mainland and in some full time duty units of the Volunteer Defence Corps, were paid £8 per month. But comparisons between the Islander soldiers of the Torres Strait Force and other Australian soldiers were never made. Instead, the Islanders' pay was compared with that of the Royal Papuan Constabulary - suggesting that the Army viewed the Islander soldiers very much in terms of a colonial force rather than as part of the Australian Army. Indeed, some early copies of unit War Establishments referred to the white members of the units as 'Australian personnel' and to the Islanders as 'Natives', as if they were not Australians.[54] The Islanders' pay compared very favourably with the Papuan Constabulary permitting both the Queensland government and the Army to feel satisfied that the Islanders were being adequately paid.

The Army regarded cost as an important consideration in forming the Islander unit. The initial cost of establishing the unit had been estimated at £30,500 with annual maintenance costs expected to be about £18,500 per

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54. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 37/401/1609; Formation Torres Strait Pioneer Company. War Establishment, Torres Strait Pioneer Company, 3 April 1943. Jeremy Beckett, who has referred to the Torres Strait Islanders involvement in the pearling industry as a case of 'internal colonialism' defines that term as 'a region or enclave which is exploited and controlled from without through a set of distinctive institutions. One of these institutions is a body of doctrines stating the difference between the colonized and the colonizers, typically in terms of ethnicity or race, but also by reference to religion or cultivation'. See Michael Howard (ed.), Aboriginal Power in Australian Society, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1982, p. 132. The Army's exploitation of the Torres Strait Islanders meets this definition.

year. The question of whether dependents' allowance would be paid to the Islander soldiers had been sufficient to throw the whole project into doubt. When the formation of the first Islander unit was being considered, the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence thought that the Army would need to provide dependents' allowance because the Islanders were a sophisticated community and would expect it:

> ... the provision of a company of native infantry at Thursday Island to relieve white troops on garrison duty would cost approximately £30,500, plus an unknown amount for recruiting and transport, plus a probable expenditure for family allowance. As it would be about nine months before the company could assume duty, it is open to question whether the project is justified.[55]

The Army was clearly interested in raising the Islander unit, but only if financial savings resulted from doing so. Dependents' allowance was not to be included in the soldiers' pay.

The Army accepted the advice of the Queensland Director of Native Affairs concerning the soldiers' pay, and rates were increased by 10/- per month. By June 1941 when enlistment had begun, the Queensland Director of Native Affairs had expressed his satisfaction that the soldiers' pay was '... generally equal to if not better than the

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55. MP508, item 247/704/56. Letter, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, 4 April 1941.

rates earned by men in the marine industry'.[56] But it was not long before the question of dependents' allowance was raised by the Queensland government. By December 1941, the Premier of Queensland had written to the Prime Minister asking that dependents' allowance be paid to the soldiers. Forgan-Smith wrote that 'a large percentage of them has a dependent mother, father or some other relative, and it is a characteristic of this race that they consistently support their dependents'.[57] He suggested a modest scale of dependents' allowances which he believed would encourage enlistments. But the State government wanted to retain control over a portion of the soldiers' earnings and insisted upon the payment of allotments. This, they argued, was in the best interests of the soldiers. It was also the traditional method of payment to Islanders and had been a well established practice in their pre-war employment. As a result, the Fortress Commander Thursday Island was authorised to pay the soldiers only 10/6 per fortnight [£1/1/- per month] while the balance of their pay was allotted to the control of the Protector of Islanders. This arrangement was not favoured by the Army which wanted to pay the Islanders in exactly the same way it paid other

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56. A/4218 (this is a series of one item). Letter, Director of Native Affairs to the Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 4 June 1941. The Department of Native Affairs was a sub-Department of the Department of Health and Home Affairs.

57. MP508, item 247/704/56. Letter, Premier of Queensland to the Prime Minister, December 1941.

soldiers - albeit at a lower rate. The Army's District Finance Officer argued that

> the mentality of the islanders recruited would approximate that of any other man educated to the 7th Grade of a Primary School. It is pointed out that many white personnel in the army are not above this educational standard and appear to have no difficulty in understanding pay arrangements made on their behalf.[58]

But this appeal, primarily intended to eliminate the administrative burden created by establishing a unique pay system for the Islander soldiers failed and the Army arranged the allotments as the State government requested.

The allotment system was capable of providing for the soldiers' dependents so long as the Protector of Islanders and his staff remained in the islands to administer it and to allot the appropriate credit to the wives at the island stores. But the Islanders themselves resented it and found it difficult to make ends meet with only 10/6 take home pay per fortnight. They were

> ... very dissatisfied with the allotments and about January [1942] the Protector was requested to interview the personnel and endeavour to satisfy the lads in regards to allotments and to see if same could be reduced so as to allow the lads a few shillings more pocket money. [But] about the end of March ... the Protector of Islanders and staff evacuated from Thursday Island and did not make any arrangements for the future well-being of the coloured troops or their dependents, as a matter of fact many of the dependents on adjacent islands had difficulty in obtaining supplies of food-stuffs until the

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58. 54, item 628/1/1. Letter, District Finance Officer to the Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 15 September 1941.

Fortress Commander made the necessary arrangements on their behalf.[59]

The pay scales for the Islander soldiers had no legal foundation. Army pay scales were governed by two documents; War Financial (Military Forces) Regulations - which set down the pay scales for members of the Second AIF and for those compulsorily enlisted, and Military Financial Regulations - which set down the scale for voluntarily enlisted members of the Citizen Military Forces. By early 1944, staff officers in Land Headquarters were acknowledging that 'neither War Financial (MF) Regualations nor Military Financial Regulations provide for different rates of pay for Torres Strait Islanders and they appear to be entitled to full rates and not those which are in fact in operation'.[60] The Islanders' pay scales had been set by reference to another criterion - the likely impact of high wages upon the post-war economy of the Torres Strait. Although the appropriate regulations had been ignored in setting the pay scales, they were strictly applied when reductions in pay were called for as a result of disciplinary action. Islander soldiers who managed to contract venereal diseases for example, suffered a

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59. ibid. Letter, Acting District Finance Officer to Deputy Director of Native Affairs, undated but about June 1942.

60. ibid. Notes prepared by Major Myers on Enlistment of Torres Strait Islanders, undated, but probably prepared as briefing material for an inter-Departmental conference held on 1 February 1944.

reduction in pay as specified in War Financial Regulation number 25.[61]

Although soldiers elsewhere in the Australian Army received regular pay rises, the Islander soldiers did not. They gradually slipped behind relative to others. The following table shows the steady erosion of their pay in relative terms:

ISLANDERS' PAY AS A PERCENTAGE OF THAT RECEIVED BY WHITE SOLDIERS

	Private	Lance Corporal	Corporal
June 1941 To November 1941	50 - 57%*	62.5%	37.7%
November 1941 To August 1942	41.7 - 47.6%*	52.1%	33.9%
August 1942 To July 1943	38.5 - 43.9%*	48.1%	32.3%

* Depending upon length of service

As the soldiers struggled with their diminishing pay, wartime conditions brought inflation to the Strait. Before the war, families relied upon their gardens and on fishing for most of their foodstuffs, but the absence of their

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61. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 247/704/62; Torres Strait Infantry. Letter, District Finance Officer, Northern Command to HQ Torres Strait Force, 26 February 1942.

menfolk and the impounding of vessels forced the soldiers' families to rely more and more heavily upon the local island stores to purchase food. Later, Colonel Langford was to learn of overcharging by the island stores. Poor quality shorts were sold for as much as £1 when good quality trousers should have been available for as little as 15/-, but since surplus profits were turned back into the community through various works, the Army did not pursue the matter vigorously.[62] Still, the overcharging represented a form of taxation on the Islanders. Faced with decreasing spending power coupled with inflation on the home islands, the Islanders were put under great pressure.

Meanwhile, in January 1942, relatively minor discrepancies between the pay of members of the Second AIF and members of the Militia were being considered by the Army. The Minister for the Army, Mr Forde, seeking to establish uniform conditions for all members of the Australian Military Forces and the Australian Imperial Force argued in War Cabinet that

> there is no justification for differences of treatment as between personnel facing the same danger in the defence of Australia, especially as there are many serving members who have volunteered for service in AIF [sic.], but have not been permitted to enlist for various reasons. ... all military personnel serving in Australia should be brought under the same

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62. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1943, vol. 3, Agenda item 137/43; Civil Administration in the Torres Strait Area. Report, Commander 4 Aust Div, Major General J.J. Murray, to HQ First Aust Army, 14 September 1944.

> conditions of pay and allowances etc. as the AIF.[63]

This line of argument was supported by the Military Board which went even further, saying

> the Military Board is anxious that at this stage the principle should be accepted that the whole of the AMF [consisting of the CMF, PMF and AIF] is equally charged with the defence of the Commonwealth, and that nothing should be permitted to continue which will tend to divide those Forces into sections [author's emphasis]. In the past, it has been clearly established that differentiation in matters of pay and the like have created such sub-divisions and have had a harmful effect on the Forces.[64]

But the Military Board's concern for uniformity of pay did not extend to the Islander soldiers. Although War Cabinet approved the Army's plan to create 'uniform conditions' for all branches of the Army on 2 March 1942, no mention was ever made of the discriminatory pay levels imposed upon the Torres Strait Islanders. Like a colonial Army within Australia, the Islanders continued to be denied their legal pay scales despite the Military Board's lofty rhetoric. The segregation of the Islander units permitted the Military Board to exclude those units from the argument it had put to the War Cabinet. The Minister for the Army and the Military Board had recognised the moral issues involved

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63. AA Canberra, series A2671, item 7/1942; Uniform Conditions of Service for all members of the AMF and AIF Serving in Australia. Draft War Cabinet Agendum, 5 January 1942.

64. ibid. Letter, Secretary of the Military Board to Secretary Department of the Army, 25 February 1942.

in paying soldiers at different scales, but chose not to apply these to the Islanders.

Between October and December 1943, seven Islander soldiers joined white Australian troops led by Wing Commander Donald Thomson on patrols into areas of Dutch New Guinea which were disputed by the Japanese.[65] During the patrols, two Islanders were wounded. One patrol was attacked by New Guineans friendly with the Japanese and both Thomson and Corporal Gagai Kapiu were badly wounded with axe blows. A later patrol, moving up a river aboard two launches, was attacked by a Japanese patrol. In the fire fight which followed, one man was killed and six wounded including private Bunai Marama who was wounded in the arm and head.[66] These patrols were an important event in the minds of the Islanders. They were a signal that Islanders were accepted as soldiers and even to those who stayed behind on Thursday Island, helped to dispel any thought that Islanders were somehow second class soldiers suited only for labouring. This new found self esteem triggered a demand for the scrapping of their discriminatory pay scales. The members of the patrol asked

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65. Donald Thomson is discussed in Chapter 5.

66. For detailed accounts of the patrols, see AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 42/401/586: Eilandoen River Patrol and AWM series 54, items 605/7/2 and 605/7/3. Also, interviews with Jerry Anau, 2 July 1986, by R. Topping (Jerry Anau was one of the Islander soldiers on the patrol), and Vince Egan, 18 August 1986, by the author.

Thomson if they could receive full AMF rates of pay for the period of the patrols. Their logic was unassailable, and similar to that of the Military Board. They were doing the same job as white soldiers and should get the same pay.[67]

These demands for better pay were met with irritation by the officers of the Light Infantry Battalion. An officer interviewing the soldiers about their demands told them that

> a soldier's pay is not influenced by the sphere in which he is engaged ... [soldiers] engaged in duties in [Line of Communication] Areas in the South were paid equally to those facing the enemy in New Guinea.
>
> Although there appears a considerable difference in the pays of the Torres Strait Islanders and the white soldiers it is not as great as it seems by mere figure comparison. Comparisons were made upon the standards of living - (i) The white Australian soldier (ii) the Torres Strait Islander - in the case of (i), it was explained the living costs such as rent, food, clothes, amusement, travelling etc., as compared to (ii), simple standards of living in the Torres Strait islands, (Although it was admitted that costs of living here [in the Strait] had somewhat increased since the war began) were considerable [sic.].[68]

The argument that pay should be determined by the pre-war standard of living of the soldier was contrary to the intent of the Military Board and acted to preserve the

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67. 54, item 628/4/5. Report Upon an Investigation of Alleged Promises of Increase in Pay for Certain Members of 'D' Company who were Det[ached] for Special Duty with Wing Commander Thomson, RAAF and Capt C.C. Woolfe, 16 Fd Coy, 5 January 1944.

68. ibid.

economic status quo of the Straits. It would ensure that the Islanders were unable to break free of their position of dependence. Although the soldiers' request for additional pay had been couched in terms of their recent patrol, it was really a request on behalf of the entire Battalion. Similar requests had been made in the past on the grounds that the soldiers faced increased costs of living due to inflation and that they wanted to improve their standard of living, particularly by building better homes. They could no longer repair their traditional style homes because of their absence in the Army. The heart of the problem had been the decision to base the soldiers' pay on their pre-war earnings in the pearling industry. As well as not consuming as much of the available Islander manpower, the pearling industry had been seasonal. The off-season had given the Islanders an opportunity to repair houses and tend to gardens. In fact, Beckett argues that the pearling industry's exploitation of the Islanders was based on 'the articulation of capitalism with non-capitalistic [that is, subsistence] modes of production'.[69] The off-season had assisted the exploitation of Islander labour in the pearling industry because it permitted the supplementation of pearling income with subsistence gardening and fishing. While still paying

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69. See Beckett, 'The Torres Strait Islanders and the Pearling Industry: A Case of Internal Colonialism', in Howard, Aboriginal Power, p. 152.

the soldiers at the approximate rates they had earned in the pearling industry, military service prevented them from effectively supplementing their incomes. The additional money they earned as soldiers failed to offset the cost of foregone house repair and gardening. Even if their pay had been greater they would still have been unable to have their houses fixed or their gardens tended because there was simply not enough labour available on the home islands.

The 'cost of living' argument had never been applied to white Australian soldiers. Nor had it been applied to those Islanders who were serving in the Second AIF or in Militia units on the mainland. The Mene family, for example, had two sons in the AIF receiving full rates of pay, while another two sons served in the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion at reduced rates.[70] Nor had this argument been applied to the nine 'Torres Strait Malays', who although they lived in the Torres Strait and served in the Light Infantry Battalion, received full rates of pay. These men were primarily distinguished from other Islanders by the fact that they had full citizenship. The Islanders were constantly irritated by the presence of these men - similar to themselves but earning much more money for doing

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70. Interview with Charles Mene, 19 October 1986. Charles Mene, who served in the Second AIF, did not learn of the underpayment of his brothers in the Torres Strait Defence Force until after the war. He rarely received news from home throughout his wartime service.

the same job. The 'cost of living' argument had also not been applied to the thirteen members of the Thursday Island Independent Volunteer Defence Corps Company, who were enlisted early in 1942 serving on full time duty - and full pay - for ten months before their discharge. These men too, were Islanders or mixed race men with full citizenship. The discharge of these men had probably been arranged to eliminate them as a source of friction among the Islander soldiers. Indeed, the Army had been very conscious of the need to keep Islander soldiers on reduced pay away from others who might be earning full AMF rates. The possibility that Islander soldiers serving aboard luggers might visit the mainland and come into contact with white troops on full pay had elicited the warning from Headquarters Torres Strait Force that 'care will need be exercised ensure coloured boys work exclusively away from whites owing rates of pay and labour conditions [sic.]'.[71] At other times, Aboriginal and 'part-Aboriginal' soldiers earning full AMF pay in units posted from the Queensland mainland for service in the Torres Strait were removed from their units lest they cause discontent among the Islanders. The Fortress Commander Thursday Island would not permit them to stay at Thursday Island.[72]

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71. 54, item 963/22/14. Report on Coastal Shipping 1942 by Lt Dexter.

72. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 128/1/1; Half-caste Aboriginal Personnel with 14 Aust Grn Bn. Minute, GOC 5 Aust Div to First Aust Army, 12 August 1942.

The Military Board's belief that 'differentiation in matters of pay' could lead to 'harmful effects', was about to be vindicated. Underpaid, worried about their families, frustrated at the political situation on the islands and overworked, the crisis finally came on 30 December 1943 when A, B and C Companies of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion refused to work.[73] The unit officers spoke to the men about the seriousness of their action and convinced all but 'A' company to resume work. 'A' company was mainly made up of Murray Islanders. In addition to the cohesion this provided,[74] Murray Islanders had been instrumental in the 1936 strike in the pearling industry and were familiar with the strike as an industrial weapon. That strike had occurred when the relative prosperity of the pearling industry in the 1920s came to an end with the Great Depression. A reduction in average earnings triggered a wave of resentment among Islanders working on the luggers under the control of the Queensland government. A strike lasting four months followed. The main grievance had been the poor pay and the lack of congruence between the wages

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73. Documents variously describe the incident as a 'sit-down strike' and a 'virtual mutiny'.

74. Discussions with Islander ex-servicemen in October 1986 revealed that threats of violence may have been used against those whose resolve appeared to waver - thus contributing to the cohesion. This is supported in an Intelligence report dated 9 January 1944 which can be found in AWM series 54, item 628/4/5, which refers to 'sorcery' and threats being used by the striking soldiers.

paid and the effort expended.[75] Conditions leading to the Army strike of December 1943 must have seemed familiar to the Murray Islanders. But by the afternoon of 31 December, unit officers had persuaded the 'A' company soldiers to resume work on the assurance that their complaints would receive a hearing.

The soldiers' spokesmen put their case to the Commanding Officer. The men demanded:

- Equal pay with white soldiers.

- The scrapping of 'island laws' in the Army. Under the Torres Strait Islanders Protection Act 1939 (Queensland), certain laws were imposed upon the Islanders. One which the soldiers found particularly galling banned them from drinking alcohol. Several soldiers had been punished the day before the strike, for drinking.

- That discipline should apply equally to Islanders and whites. Islander NCO's had no authority over white private soldiers and the Islander deputation cited the case of an Islander NCO who had recently apprehended white soldiers drinking in the hold of a vessel. The white soldiers, unlike Islanders, were not punished.

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75. Howard, Aboriginal Power, p. 142. See also J.A. Boutilier, D.T. Hughes and S.W. Tiffany (eds.), Mission, Church and Sect in Oceania, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1978, p. 223.

- That leave was too infrequent. Some soldiers had not had leave for over 18 months. Combined with the problems being experienced by their families in their absence, this issue was an important one.[76]

Despite attempts by unit officers, the ring leaders of the mutiny could not be identified. Punishments inevitably followed the event. Twelve soldiers were severely reprimanded and a further 49 were fined £1 and confined to barracks for fourteen days.

The brief strike had succeeded in raising the question of the soldiers' pay at Land Headquarters mainly because it threatened the steady flow of supplies through Thursday Island. On 1 February 1944, representatives of the Army and Navy and the Departments of External Territories, Interior, Repatriation and Treasury, as well as the Queensland government, attended a conference to discuss the conditions of employment of 'natives' in the Army. With the Islander's

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76. 54, item 628/4/5. Report of Sit-Down Strike by A, B & C Coys on 30 Dec 43. See also AA Melbourne, series MP 742/1, item 85/1/445; Torres Strait Islanders - Discipline. Report, Major General J.J. Murray, to LHQ, 18 February 1944. A second strike occurred on 29 February 1944, this time in the Islander Pioneer Company. This strike was triggered by a trivial incident - the Company Sergeant Major's confiscation of a football kicked onto the roof of his hut by relaxing soldiers! Later, the soldiers threw stones onto his roof and when the Company Sergeant Major ordered the entire company on parade in an endeavour to identify the culprits, the men refused. Similar grievances were expressed by the Pioneer company soldiers. See also interviews with Tom Lowah, 22 October 1986, Peter Tapau, 24 October 1986, Elia Ware, 25 October 1986 and Lui Bon, 26 October 1986.

mutiny fresh in their minds, the main question discussed was the pay of the Islander soldiers. The meeting acknowledged that

> ... paying them at a lower rate was illegal and that serious repercussions might follow. An estimate of the amount of under-payment together with Repatriation liability was £30,000,000. Strong dissatisfaction had been expressed by certain of these native personnel ...

But despite this acknowledgement of the illegality of the level of pay, the conference decided that

> ... although from a strictly legal point of view, the above personnel, both Torres Strait Islanders and Australian Aboriginals, were entitled to full rates of pay, such payment should not, in fact, be made. There were two reasons for this:-
>
> (a) the sum involved; and
>
> (b) that if such natives were paid at such rates - far above the rates earned by them in civil life before the war - it would cause considerable trouble when they eventually left the Army.
>
> It was considered, however, that these rates of pay should be raised.[77]

Those attending the conference had seen themselves as

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77. 54, item 628/1/1. Minutes, Inter-Departmental Meeting to Discuss Employment of Natives in the Army, 1 February 1944. It is noteworthy that this version of the minutes - recorded by the Army representatives at the meeting - is the only one to mention the illegality of the payments, the estimated sum involved and the reasons for not paying the Islanders their full entitlement. Other records which relate to this meeting are AA Canberra, series A1308, items 762/1/67; Torres Strait Islanders - Conditions of Service 1944, and 762/1/135; Torres Strait Islanders - Clothing Allowance on Discharge, and series A 2671, item 145/1944; Rates of Pay and Conditions of Service - Torres Strait Islanders Enlisted in the Forces.

defending the status quo in the Strait and they were prepared to conduct this defence aware of the illegality of doing so. The conference decided that the Islanders' pay should be fixed at 66.6 per cent of that of white soldiers even though such a rate of pay was not authorised under the relevant Army financial instructions. Other decisions made by the conference were the removal of the 'Torres Strait Malays' to Militia units on the mainland where their higher pay would cease to be an irritant to the Islander soldiers and the introduction of a modified repatriation scheme for the Islanders. Under the previous repatriation scheme, Islander soldiers could be in the unusual position of being eligible for war pension payments higher than their active pay, because standard repatriation benefits applied to all servicemen regardless of their pay rate. The conference decided that a modified repatriation scheme for Islanders, fixing their benefits at 66.6 per cent of those for white soldiers should be introduced.[78] This carried the discrimination embodied in their pay scales into the soldiers' post-war lives.

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78. A2671, item 145/1944. War Cabinet Agendum number 145/1944, 14 March 1944. See also the Native Members of the Forces Benefits Act 1957 and Hon. J. Toose, Independent Enquiry Into the Repatriation System, June 1975, vol. 1. In his report Toose found that the special repatriation benefits for Islanders provided as a result of the War Cabinet decision and later through the Act, were in fact denials of the Islanders' rights to full benefits. Full repatriation benefits were finally provided to Islander members of the Torres Strait Defence Force in 1972 through the Repatriation (Torres Strait Islanders) Act 1972.

Buglers of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion

AWM 119195

As the Islanders settled down to work with the knowledge that their grievances had been brought to the attention of the Army, the Army began the task of identifying those it thought may have had a hand in starting the mutiny. Whites in the Army and in the Civil Construction Corps had been encouraging the Islanders to agitate for higher wages. The local Field Security Section had identified two men whom it was claimed were 'wielding a definitely bad influence on coloured troops in [the] area'.[79] Both were removed. A month later, Field Security had located an Islander Lance Bombadier in the Coast Artillery, who had told his subordinates that 'he would welcome the Japs to the area'.[80] Since he belonged to a unit which had not been involved in the strike, his influence was probably minimal. Nevertheless, the Fortress Headquarters regarded him as guilty of 'subversive activity' and he was disciplined.[81]

It took longer for the Army to fix the real reasons for the mutiny. War Cabinet approved higher rates of pay for the soldiers on 20 March 1944 and these rates were backdated to 1 July 1943 though this too had met resistance

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79. AWM Canberra, series 52, item 9/5/10; 'P' Field Security Section. See War Diary entries for 16 January and 23 January 1944.

80. ibid. See War Diary entry for 23 February 1944.

81. MP742/1, item 85/1/445. Report, Major General J.J. Murray to LHQ, 18 February 1944. Murray's report does not specify the disciplinary action taken.

because of the size of the sum involved.[82] The political situation in the islands was resolved on 24 July 1944 when Island Council elections were held, with the soldiers able to participate in the elections both as voters and as candidates, but it was not until September 1944 that those soldiers who had been elected Councillors were released from the Army to take up their positions. When it came, the release of the soldiers to the council positions led to dramatic improvements in conditions on the islands. An Army report noted that one particular island

> ... was dirty, civil pride was lacking, hygiene and water supply arrangements unsatisfactory, and gardens non-existent. ...
>
> Since the election of a Native Soldier as Councillor a vast improvement is noticeable. Army assistance during the occupation of the Island as a Coast Watching Post improved the Water Supply, and the new Councillor has taken in hand the matter of Gardens. These now flourish due to regimentation of the women of the Village; Latrines have been established, and the Village is clean and healthy. A weekly hygiene inspection of all houses is carried out by this Councillor, who was previously a member of a Hygiene squad in the Army.
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> ... Similar improvements are equally apparent in other Villages.[83]

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82. A2671, item 145/1944. Notes on War Cabinet Agendum, undated. The file contains no indication that War Cabinet raised the question of the earlier decision to create 'uniform conditions of service for all members of the AMF and AIF'.

83. AWM series 52, item 1/9/6: Headquarters Torres Strait Force. Report on Torres Strait Defence Force, by Captain J.J. Squires, GIII Intelligence, HQ Torres Strait Area, undated.

Improved health conditions and maintenance of island gardens had been recognised by the Army as an important issue. By January 1944, the Army was attempting to encourage civilian Islanders on outlying islands to develop their gardens. The Army was already aware that the Islanders had turned away from their traditional foods and were relying on Army rations and food purchased at the island stores. This had led to 'dietary lack'.[84] Major General J.J. Murray, Commander of 4th Australian Division, had noted that health inspections conducted by the Queensland government before the war had been 'quite inadequate' and stressed that the decline in the health of the people over the war period had made it necessary to enforce rigorous hygiene regulations throughout all the islands. He also acknowledged that an effect of the enlistment of large numbers of Islanders into the Army had been that with more money to spend

> ... those left behind have neglected their gardens and acquired the habit of buying tinned goods from the island stores. It appears from the medical reports that the natives are inclined to buy the wrong foods. No known attempt has been made by the civil administration to educate the natives as to what are good and bad foods, and it seems that the supply of many good items has been discontinued, and the supply of the poor ones maintained, simply because the first are the non-paying lines and the latter are the

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84. MP742/1, item 247/1/1290. Report, Condition of Service Torres Strait Islanders as at 29 January 1944.

85. A2653, item 1943, vol. 3, agenda item 137/43. Report, Commander 4th Aust Div, Major-General J.J. Murray, to HQ First Aust Army, 14 September 1944.

reverse.[85]

But the removal of their menfolk to Thursday Island had played an equally important part.

The situation on the islands was even worse than Murray was prepared to admit. It was not until 1946 when the Northern Australian Development Committee considered the Torres Strait Area that the full impact of the war began to be recognised. In April 1946 the Committee reported '... practically every able-bodied man in the area enlisted in the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion. The dependents of these men over war years were deprived of many essentials of livelihood by the immobilization of their floating plant and the restricted transport of foodstuffs to their area. ... The incidence of Tuberculosis has increased considerably over the war years, due mainly to malnutrition, through inability of the people to obtain marine foodstuffs as their boats were immobilised or impressed'.[86] The release of soldiers in September 1944 to council positions with instructions to maintain hygiene and to develop gardens had perhaps averted a greater tragedy.

Despite the discriminatory pay levels and the health

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86. AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/1614; Northern Australia Development Committee - Minutes and Report of the 2nd Meeting - 30 April 1946. Minutes of Meeting, 30 April 1946. The Queensland Director of Native Affairs sought the transfer of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion campsite to the State government to establish a hospital to cope with the number of Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases cases which had developed during the war.

Islander Dancers with Aeroplane Headdress

Although the quality of this photograph is poor, it illustrates the cultural impact of the war upon the Torres Strait Islanders. The soldiers performing this dance have replaced their traditional feather headdress with accurately carved models of Allied warplanes. The man closest to the camera is wearing a model of a US Lightning fighter with its distinctive twin boom tail.

Courtesy of RAAF Historical Section, Canberra.

problems which flowed from the economic difficulties into which the Islanders were plunged, military service brought some important benefits. White Australian soldiers, including officers, developed a deep respect for the Islander soldiers readily acknowledging that the Islanders had mastered military skills and attitudes which set soldiers apart from civilians. The Islanders were acknowledged as fellow soldiers. In November 1942, one white soldier had noted:

> These Islanders are a fine strong looking lot of men. They look well and savage in uniform. They are keen as mustard and can give us lessons in drilling and marching. I would rather fight with them than against them.[87]

His remarks were included in an intelligence report for circulation around other units stationed in Queensland. These remarks were presented as a model attitude and assisted other white servicemen to formulate their attitudes to Islanders. Sapper A.C. Thompson, who served in the Fortress Engineers in the Torres Strait Force, continued this process in an article he wrote for Salt, an Army newspaper, entitled 'My impressions of the Torres Strait Islander'. Thompson saw Islanders with a mixture of paternalism and admiration. 'When it comes to the more technical side of Army training they are easily bamboozled', he wrote, 'but they excell in the vigorous

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87. AWM, series 60, item 9/785/42; Intelligence Reports. HQ Queensland Lines of Communications Intelligence Report for the week ending 20 November 1942.

bayonet drill. ... It allows an expression of their dormant warlike spirit and in a headlong charge these boys would take some stopping'.[88] Though patronising, this view was far more constructive than another soldier's view of Papuans. Warrant Officer Dean of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit declared that equality was an impossibility in relations with Papuans because 'any suggestion of treating him as an equal is immediately construed ... as a sign of weakness and ... will earn his unremitting contempt and total loss of respect'.[89] This hackneyed attitude seems to have been generally absent in relations between the Islander and white soldiers of the Torres Strait Defence Force. As the war continued, the Islanders' heavy commitment to working parties prevented them from maintaining high standards of military training. Combat efficiency reports for the Islander units assessed their standard of musketry for example, as very low, and some units had only partially completed their tactical training. But other White units in the area were judged equally harshly.[90] By June 1944, however, the Light Infantry Battalion's musketry had improved considerably.

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88. AWM, series 54, item 422/7/8; Articles Written for Salt. Article by Sapper A.C. Thompson, Fortress Engineers, Torres Strait Force, titled 'My Impressions of the Torres Strait Islander', undated.

89. ibid. Article by Warrant Officer L.G. Dean, 16 June 1943.

90. AWM, series 52, item 1/5/58; HQ Torres Strait Force. Combat Efficiency Report dated 16 December 1943.

Competing against all the other units in the area it had scored second place in a shooting competition, being beaten by an AIF Machine gun Battalion.[91] The Islanders skills at drill impressed all who saw them on parade. On 29 July 1944, the Battalion had paraded for a visiting General. 'We did not expect to witness a military display of such excellent standard', enthused the editor of the Torres Strait Force newspaper, The Zero Post:

> We have all studied the native boy. His politness and infectious smile and good humour have endeared him to the most stonehearted soldier, but in their display yesterday they gained our unbounded admiration as soldiers.
>
> We owe a great deal to the coloured boys here. We must never forget that.[92]

This high estimation of the worth of the Islanders as soldiers had benefits for them. By December 1944, the shortage of trained trade specialists within the Army prompted the Commander Torres Strait Area to consider the trade training of Islander soldiers. He was not confident of success:

> All known "experts" on what the native Torres Strait Islander could be taught poo poohed the idea. However, trainees were selected and attached to various units [for training] ... Immediate results were startling and on arrival of [the Land Headquarters Order Of Battle] Committee it was suggested that the duties of docks operating, water transport, and road transport units in this area could be taken over

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91. The Zero Post, 22 June 1944. The Zero Post was the newspaper of the Torres Strait Force.

92. ibid, 29 July 1944.

by these native soldiers.[93]

As a result, Islander soldiers received training as air compressor operators, blacksmiths, bootmakers, barge coxswains, crane drivers, carpenters, motor transport drivers, marine engineers' assistants, motor cyclists, plumbers and tinsmiths, shipwrights, tractor drivers and many other trades. Individual Islanders performed outstandingly. A report on Corporal Lui, undergoing a signallers' course, said for example, 'best student, most conscientious worker, - could not be classed as anything but outstanding. Has good command'.[94] Other Islander trainees received equally glowing praise - 'Good boy shows excellent promise ... keen and enthusiastic ... [has] shown ability to learn quickly ... possesses good knowledge of the work', while others 'have their good days as well as

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93. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 240/1/1683; Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion - Reorganisation of. Proposed Reorganisation of Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion and Raising of Torres Strait Transportation Company, 29 March 1945, by Lieutenant Colonel A.W. Aubrey, Commander Torres Strait Area. The Order of Battle Committee had the role of determining what types of units should be on the Army's Order of Battle. The type and number of units was determined by establishing the desired capabilities of the Army.

94. AWM, series 54, item 628/4/4; Specialist Training Native Personnel Reports on Wireless Exercises - Progress Coloured Labour used as Assistants Unit Tradesmen - 1945. Course report, Corporal Lui, undated. Other course reports and monthly reports on training held on this file also testify to the Islanders eagerness to learn and to the generally good response to their training. See also interview, Tom Lowah, 22 October 1986.

95. ibid. Course reports, Privates Cris, Ahmatt and Toby, undated.

Learning New Trades

As part of their military training, Torres Strait Islanders learnt new skills. These soldiers are servicing an Army vehicle.

AWM 119184

their bad days'.[95]

The success of this training led the Commander of the Torres Strait Force to advocate the employment of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion on operating a docks area, transporting supplies and carrying out local field engineering tasks in support of an Independent Brigade. This would not only free additional white personnel, he argued, but would also be 'a fitting reward for the loyal service its members have rendered in the Torres Strait Area'.[96] The Commander was suggesting the use of the Islanders outside Queensland waters in a forward area, and was a form of recognition of their worthiness as soldiers which the Islanders would have appreciated. Many had wished to join the AIF but had been denied that opportunity.

Despite the discriminatory pay and the sharp decline in living standards endured by the Islander civilian population, the Islander servicemen had benefited in some ways from their military service. Many had learned valuable trades which could be applied to their post-war lives, many had built up savings, but the most significant benefit had been intangible. The Islanders' war service had changed their perceptions of themselves and of whites.

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96. AWM, series 54, item 628/2/6; Reorganisation Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion - 1945. Letter, Commander Torres Strait Area to HQ 11 Aust Div, 1 July 1945.

They had come into contact with white soldiers who regarded them as equals[97] and they had been unified by the experience of their service. The enlistment of so many men had bonded the community. Old inter-island rivalries remained, but close ties built upon shared experience in the Army, had also been forged. Queensland government officials returning after the war found that pre-war conditions could not be re-established. The maintenance of pre-war labour conditions had been an important aim of the government, forming the rationale for the discriminatory pay scales, but it had not succeeded. The Islanders emerged from the war politicised, more aware of their potential within the Australian community and prepared to demand their rights.[98] Perhaps recalling the 'desertion' of the Protector, perhaps because their demands for greater control of their own affairs were slow to be met, the Islanders came to regard returning Queensland government

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97. Peel, Isles of the Torres Strait, p. 117. Peel, a communist, states that militant unionists among the white servicemen at Thursday Island were responsible for implanting a desire to fight for a better deal after the war.

98. House of Representatives Report from the Select Committee on Voting Rights for Aborigines, Part II - Minutes of Evidence, 19 October 1961. See for example, evidence given by Waraka Adidi, p. 137. At least ten other Islander ex-servicemen gave similar evidence. Noting the preponderance of ex-servicemen giving evidence, Mr Beazley, a Committee member, said to Mapoo Gela, 'I am disturbed by the fact that all the island witnesses who are coming here [to give evidence] are men in their forties. Could young men in their twenties speak for themselves ... or is it the custom to leave it to the older people'. Gela replied that young people could indeed speak for themselves.

officials as their 'enemy'.[99] Certainly, the Islanders' expectations about the post-war period had been raised by their war service.

While McEwen's assimilationist Commonwealth Policy on Aborigines represented the official statement of Commonwealth attitude to Aborigines and Islanders, the Army had built barriers against the enlistment of non-Europeans on racist grounds. The enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders was, according to the Army, neither necessary nor desirable, yet in the Torres Strait the Army had found it highly desirable to enlist both. Almost every able-bodied man in the islands had been enlisted. This rate of participation was not matched by white Australians yet today, Islanders remain generally excluded from the 'digger myth' and most white Australians are ignorant of their wartime contribution. Those white Australians who served with the Islanders came to respect them as soldiers. The Islander soldiers too formed a new view of themselves through their contact with whites who treated them as equals. The development of improved inter-personal relations between black and white servicemen through enforced contact brought about by the war affected not only the Islander and white soldiers of the Torres Strait Force,

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99. Boutilier, Hughes and Tiffany, (eds.), Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania, p. 220. See also J. Bayton, Cross Over Carpentaria, Smith and Paterson, Brisbane, 1965, p. 167.

but others who served elsewhere in the Second AIF or Militia, or in the Air Force or the Navy. These relationships are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXPERIENCE OF ENLISTED SERVICE

Despite the Defence Act's bar to the compulsory service of non-Europeans and the Services' bar to voluntary enlistment, many Aborigines and Islanders managed to serve. Generally, they experienced a working environment which was different from that of their pre-war civilian lives. It was relatively free from racism and discrimination, with Aboriginal and Islander servicemen accepted on their personal merits within their own small working group. This was different from what one might have expected, given the opposition of the Service policy-makers to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders, based as it was on racism and the notion that 'normal' Australians would not tolerate serving with non-Europeans. How then did this relatively tolerant relationship between black and white Australian soldiers come about, and how did it come to exist within organisations whose public policies and senior officers were hostile to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders?

In the 1930s, discrimination against Aborigines was widespread but varied in intensity from place to place. In north Australia, discrimination generally took more overt and intrusive forms than in the south. In Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, for example, Aborigines were generally not entitled to the vote and were

subject to restrictive legislation which among other things, permitted the State and Commonwealth governments to control their earnings. The Native Administration Act, 1905-1936 of Western Australia was regarded by Aboriginal welfare groups as the most restrictive legislation in Australia. By comparison, government sponsored discrimination in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, was milder although repressive and discriminatory practices such as the segregation of Aboriginal school children and insensitive administration of government settlements, flourished. Throughout Australia, caste barriers tended to shape personal relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The dominant white society had marked out the boundaries within which Aborigines were expected to remain and few opportunities existed for Aborigines to cross these. Although attitudes towards Aborigines varied from town to town and among individuals, there generally existed a separateness almost akin to apartheid. Most Aborigines resided in country districts where they offered their labour in the main, to the pastoral and agricultural industries. Aboriginal women were sometimes employed as 'domestics', while men were employed as general hands, sleeper cutters, timber millers, and on seasonal work such as potato digging, bean harvesting and corn pulling. Of the Aboriginal population in any given area, only a small proportion tended to be in employment and of those, not all would have had a permanent income. About half the 8,000

Aborigines in New South Wales lived on reserves and during the years of the Great Depression, police had forced many unemployed Aborigines back to the reserves in order to eliminate their eligibility for dole payments. On the reserves, Aborigines were subject to the often rigid, paternalistic control of the white superintendents and the local police. Most Aborigines in Victoria and New South Wales therefore lived as fringe dwellers on the outskirts of country towns, or, particularly in New South Wales, as residents of the various reserves. A few Aboriginal families lived within country towns and even fewer owned their own farms.[1]

Those Aborigines and Islanders who managed to enlist in integrated units of the Army, or in the Navy or Air Force, found that, in contrast to their pre-war lives, their service experience was rich, rewarding and exciting. On the eve of the war, Charles Mene, Victor Blanco, Ted Loban and other Torres Strait Islanders faced a future of pearl diving and trochus fishing. Few other employment options existed for Islanders living in the Torres Strait, and the

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1. Richard Broome, Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788 - 1980, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p. 143. See also Goodall, A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939, and Haebich, "A Bunch of Cast-Offs": Aborigines of the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900-1936, for detailed accounts of the impact of the Great Depression on Aboriginal communities in New South Wales and the south west of Western Australia. For a description of the dynamics of Aboriginal employment in a country district of New South Wales see R.G. Castle and J.S. Hagan, 'Dependence and Independence,' in Curthoys and Markus, Who Are Our Enemies?, p. 158.

Queensland government strictly limited the migration of Islanders out of the Straits area to mainland Queensland. On joining the Second AIF however, their horizons were considerably expanded. They and a number of their fellow Islander servicemen, found themselves first, at training camps in Queensland and later, attached to units destined for overseas service. Charles Mene departed with his unit, the 2/1 Anti-Tank Regiment, for Greenock, Scotland, aboard the Queen Mary on 5 May 1940. Later, he transferred to the 72 Battalion (later redesignated 2/33 Battalion) and after training in England, moved with his unit to Palestine where the battalion fought through the Syrian campaign as part of 25th Brigade. When Japan entered the war, Charles' battalion returned to Australia and after retraining was deployed to New Guinea, where it fought along the Kokoda Trail and on to Gona. Later, Charles was involved in other battles at Ramu Valley, and Shaggy Ridge in New Guinea and Balikpapan, Borneo. At the war's end, Charles, then a Corporal, volunteered for service in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan and served in Japan and throughout the Korean war, winning the Military Medal there. Charles later served in Malaya and finally, in Australia. He was eventually discharged from the Army in April 1961 after extensive service which had taken him around the world.[2]

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2. Interview, Charles Mene, 19 October 1986. See also Anzac Day Commemoration Committee Queensland, Anzac Day 1985: Their name Liveth for Evermore, Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, Brisbane, 1985, p. 10.

Charles Mene's experience was not unique. Service in the Second AIF or in the Navy or Air Force offered many Aborigines and Islanders opportunities for travel and adventure which they would otherwise never have had. Jim Brennan, a Western Australian Aborigine, enlisted in the Second AIF on 1 August 1940 and saw service in north Africa. He was taken prisoner during the battle of El Alamein and removed to a Prisoner of War camp in northern Italy. He escaped from there and joined Italian partisans conducting guerilla operations against the German forces until the war in Europe came to an end, eventually returning to Australia in July 1945.[3] Although other Aborigines and Islanders may not have travelled as widely as Charles Mene or had such extreme adventures as Jim Brennan, enlistment did offer Aborigines and Islanders experiences which would broaden their perspectives. Though enlistment was seen by many whites as a means of seeing the world and escaping the boredom of life on the farm or in the factory, it presented even more important opportunities for Aborigines and Islanders who faced much more limited social horizons.

Enlisted service also offered opportunities for personal advancement, including the acquisition of new skills and work experiences and the opportunity to be placed in command of white Australians. Such opportunities had been

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3. Telephone conversation, Jim Brennan, 13 August 1986.

extremely rare for Aborigines and Islanders. The Service careers of Leonard Waters, an Aborigine from Nindigully near St George, Queensland, and Reg Saunders, from Lake Condah, Victoria, exemplify the extent to which new work horizons and positions of authority opened for Aborigines.

An intelligent man, Waters had been forced to abandon his schooling to assist his father during the depression. Like most Aborigines in the pre-war period, Waters and his father were employed in the country on pastoral or agricultural work. Working seven days a week for just 10/- as a ring-barker until 1939, Waters later became a shearer at slightly better pay. On 24 August 1942, he joined the RAAF, working as ground staff, and training as a flight mechanic. By December 1943, he had volunteered for air crew, had been selected and was training in Victoria. Studying at night to improve his chances, Waters excelled at the various courses:

> I was terribly keen to prove myself in the elite ... which it is. There is no doubt about that, the flying part of the Air Force was the elite. Well, I was the coloured boy in it and ... I might add that there were 375 [students] on that course that started and 48 of us finished up as pilots. ... and the end result when we got our wings ... there were only three blokes in front of me on my average. ... From my humble beginning I was pretty proud of what I am ... accomplished like.[4]

Throughout his training, Waters was aware that his chances of success were slight. His Aboriginality and poor

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4. Interview, Leonard Waters, 1 September 1986.

education told against him. But the RAAF provided him with an environment in which he could advance through his own efforts. Finally, after devoting much of his spare time to additional study, and achieving remarkable success, Waters went before the categorisation board, which would decide whether he was to be a pilot, or fill some other air crew position. Asked by the Board to imagine himself sitting in the tail of a Halifax or Lancaster bomber behind four .303 machine guns, Waters with his heart set on becoming a pilot, not a tail gunner, replied 'I had a very disappointed look on my face, sir!'[5] Next day he found his hard work had been rewarded. He had been appointed as a pilot, later going on to be selected as a fighter pilot - which he regarded as the elite of the elite.

Joining Number 78 Fighter Squadron, Waters served first at Noemfoor and later at Balikpapan, flying many ground attack sorties. After almost a year of operational service and with 95 operational sorties completed, Waters, by then an experienced combat pilot, was occasionally given command

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5. ibid.

6. Brief details of the service careers of Waters and other Aboriginal airmen was provided by the Director of Personnel Services, Air Force Office, Russell Offices, Canberra. Other Aboriginal airmen included Alex Taylor, a flight rigger, Reginald Barnes, an electrical fitter, and Arnold Lockyer, a flight engineer and air gunner. Arnold Lockyer's bomber was shot down during an operation over the Celebes on 17 July 1945 and he died while a prisoner of war on 21 August 1945. George Tongerie, another Aborigine who served in the RAAF, was a mechanic and worked on Vultee Vengeance aircraft at Merauke, Hollandia and Borneo. Letters, George Tongerie to the author, 12 November 1986 and 28 April 1987.

Leonard Waters

Leonard Waters, from Nindigully Queensland, became a RAAF fighter pilot and was promoted to Warrant Officer by the war's end.

Courtesy of Leonard Waters.

of flights which included commissioned officers.[6] By the war's end Waters had been promoted to Warrant Officer. After his discharge from the RAAF, he attempted to capitalise upon his flying training by starting an aerial taxi service in south west Queensland, but lacking financial support, this plan lapsed. Eventually, he returned to the work force as a shearer.

Perhaps the best known of all Aboriginal servicemen of the Second World War, was Reg Saunders. Typical of almost all the Aborigines and Islanders who joined the Second AIF, Saunders came from a socio-economically depressed, de-tribalised family. His father, Chris Saunders, had served in the First AIF, and between the wars, eked out a livelihood as a sleeper cutter and railway ganger in Victoria. His mother died in 1924 and Reg and his younger brother Harry, were raised by their father near Lake Condah Mission. Reg Saunders finished school at age fourteen and went on to work as a millhand in a timber yard.[7]

Enlisting in the Second AIF in April 1940, Reg's outstanding leadership qualities, personable nature and sporting skills were quickly recognised by his superiors, resulting in rapid promotion. His visibility as an

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7. Gordon, The Embarrassing Australian, p. 37-43.

8. Interview, Reg Saunders, 2 December 1986. In this interview, Saunders emphasises the influence of his sporting skills and his visibility as an Aborigine but refrains from mentioning his obvious talent as a leader. It was this talent which more than anything else, resulted in his rapid promotion.

Aborigine also contributed.[8] Within six weeks of enlistment he had been promoted to Lance-Corporal and three months later he had been promoted to Sergeant.[9] By September 1940, Reg's brother Harry had also joined up and was undergoing recruit training. Both brothers served with their battalions in north Africa, Reg in the 2/7 Battalion, also serving in the ill-fated campaigns in Greece and Crete. Later, both men served in the New Guinea campaigns, Harry Saunders being killed in action on the Kokoda Track.

As a platoon Sergeant in New Guinea, Reg Saunders had taken command of his platoon when the platoon commander was wounded. His Commanding Officer, recognising his leadership qualities, nominated him for promotion to commissioned rank. This was recognised by his Commanding Officer and by the Selection Board as the establishment of an important precedent. One of the Board members, a Lieutenant Colonel, remarked:

> We were conscious of the fact that if we recommended that he should be an officer, we would be setting a tremendous precedent. It could not be anything but a decision of some significance ... if an aboriginal was going to take charge of white troops, he'd need to be an exceptionally fine one. Saunders stood out. ... [Saunders] was, frankly, the first abo I'd ever spoken to.[10]

Saunders' selection for promotion, unlike that of white candidates, was referred to the Commander-in-Chief, for his

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9. Gordon, The Embarrassing Australian, p. 46.

10. ibid, pp. 121-122.

approval. To his credit, Blamey insisted on following the usual procedure in such matters, accepting without question the Commanding Officer's opinion that Saunders was eminently suitable for promotion.[11]

After graduation from the Officer Cadet Training Unit, Saunders' ascent to officer status was hailed in daily newspapers around the country. Typical of the attitude expressed was the Melbourne Herald of 25 November 1944. It praised Saunders for his achievement but in so doing, tended to confirm some of the worst patterns of white thinking about Aborigines:

> The physical resources and stamina of the original Australians has been attested. Their mental capacity has been more in question mainly among people who know next to nothing about them. Actually it has frequently been demonstrated that an aboriginal of normal intelligence, when all things are more or less equal, can lift himself to the standard of his white brethren.
>
> The case of Lieut. Saunders emphasises this truth; and he, on his part, is to be complimented on his pride of race ...[12]

Still, the article, through Saunders' example, carried the message that Aborigines did not necessarily conform to the widely accepted stereotype of the time.

Reg Saunders is often hailed as the first Aboriginal commissioned officer to serve in the Australian forces. While this is true, a Torres Strait Islander, Kamuel

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11. ibid, pp. 15-16.

12. ibid, p. 128.

Abednego, served with the rank of Lieutenant in the US Army at about the same time as Reg Saunders.[13] US military forces have traditionally recognised a role for aliens and in the Second World War, cobelligerent and neutral aliens were admissible if otherwise qualified. The citizens of allied countries could also be appointed as officers.[14] Under these circumstances, the US Army employed about twenty Islanders as crewmen on several of its small ships operating in the Torres Strait and in the coastal waters of Papua and New Guinea. Kamuel Abednego served on a number of US Army vessels and was first mate on the 'Two Freddy's', an Australian vessel on loan to the US Army.[15]

The Services had demonstrated through their promotion of Waters and many others to non-commissioned officer rank and of Saunders to commissioned rank, that Aborigines and

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13. Peel, Isles of the Torres Straits, p. 7. Peel states that an Islander Lieutenant called on him in his Sydney office but does not name him. Correspondence with the Abednego family confirms that the man was Kamuel Abednego. However, the US National Personnel Records Centre was unable to confirm that Kamuel Abednego served with the US Army. Abednego served on a vessel which was sunk by the Japanese and lost his personal papers in the process. His surviving relatives now have no documentary record of his service and do not know his service number. Without this vital piece of information it is impossible for the US National Personnel Records Centre to locate his records. However, whether his commission was 'honorary' or formal, the evidence suggests that Abednego served with the status and worn rank of a US Army Lieutenant.

14. James B. Jacobs and Leslie Anne Hayes, 'Aliens in the US Armed Forces: A Historico-legal Analysis', Armed Forces and Society, vol. 7, no. 2, Winter 1981, pp. 189 and 190.

15. Correspondence with Mrs Abednego via R. Topping, 12 April 1987 and 16 June 1987.

Islanders with leadership qualities could advance to positions of authority over white Australians. But despite Kamuel Abednego's commissioned service, Reg Saunders remained an exception within the Australian forces, perhaps demonstrating that there was a limit to the extent to which prevailing stereotypes of Aboriginal employment would be abandoned. However, this assumes that other Aborigines or Islanders had the potential to be commissioned and were so identified but were not promoted. There is no evidence of this.[16] Unlike commissioned officers, the selection and promotion of non-commissioned officers up to the rank of Sergeant, remained within the authority of the unit Commanding Officer. Faced with manpower shortages and the requirement to achieve their alloted tasks, Commanding Officers were relatively free from the influence of prevailing civilian stereotypes and could appoint Aborigines and Islanders to NCO rank on the basis of personal merit. This generally contrasted with attitudes to the employment of Aborigines in the civilian workforce. Although Reg Saunders served the remainder of the war as a Lieutenant in command of a rifle platoon in New Guinea, on discharge from the Army at the end of the war, he drifted through a succession of poorly paying jobs - foundry worker, tram conductor, tally clerk - none remotely comparable with the responsibility of commanding thirty men

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16. However, Leonard Waters may be an example. Graduating third in his class at flying training, perhaps Waters should have been considered for a commission.

in battle. Saunders' return to traditional Aboriginal status within the civilian community was echoed by many others - including Waters - who found that their obvious competence, personal endeavour and new-found skills counted for little in the civilian work force.

Besides offering Aborigines employment opportunities like those enjoyed by Reg Saunders and Leonard Waters, or the adventure of overseas travel enjoyed by Charles Mene and Jim Brennan, service in the Army, Navy or Air Force could also result in less pleasant experiences. A number of Aboriginal soldiers including Bill Carlyon, Bill Lawson, Kath Walker's two brothers and others, endured lengthy periods as prisoners of war. Some, like Cyril Brockman and Bill Lawson died in captivity as a result of the brutal treatment of their Japanese captors. Several men, including Ted Loban, an Islander, Reg Saunders, and Henry Mippy were wounded in action, some being physically maimed. Others returned with psychological scars.[17] Still others like Herbert Mallard, Thomas Gray and John Ninyett were killed in action.[18] Some Aboriginal soldiers like Tim Hughes and Clive Upright, both winners of the Military

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17. Interview, Kath Walker, 20 October 1986. Kath Walker's two brothers both suffered psychological problems as a result of lengthy periods as prisoners of war of the Japanese.

18. Herbert Mallard and John Ninyett both enlisted in 1941 and were both killed in action in May 1945, within a few months of the end of the war. Thomas Gray enlisted in August 1940 and was killed in action in June the following year.

Medal, displayed outstanding courage in battle.

Although the experiences of travel, adventure, new skills and authority were important issues, perhaps the most important legacy for those Aborigines and Islanders who enlisted was the quality of the relationships they were able to establish with white Australians. Life within the Services for those men who enlisted in the fully integrated parts of the Services - the Second AIF or in mainland Militia units of the Army, or in the Navy or the Air Force - offered an environment in which interpersonal relations were remarkably free from racism. Throughout numerous conversations, interviews and correspondence with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ex-servicemen, little evidence of racism at an inter-personal level was revealed. Instead, a remarkable cohesion - one which seems to have surpassed even the most thoroughly integrated of pre-war civilian communities - is evident. This relative absence of racism was a result of the nature of service in the armed forces.

For both black and white recruits, enlistment entailed the sloughing off of connections to the civilian environment. Civilian social relationships which have sustained the individual in his or her civilian life are abruptly severed when the recruit is removed to recruit training camp. Here the Services endeavour to replace the severed connections with new connections wedding the recruit to the Service world. The issue of uniforms,

haircuts, drill, the adoption of a Service jargon and the imposition of a new social hierarchy in the form of the rank structure and other elements of the Service system, serve to establish a new social structure for the recruit. As the recruit completes his initial training and moves to his unit and the possibility of operations against the enemy, great emphasis is placed upon the mutual support of members of the small group in which he serves. The civilian social environment to which the serviceman once belonged is no longer relevant to his new Service life and many of the ideas and attitudes which fitted him to that social environment are abandoned. He loses touch with his civilian friends and replaces them with his new-found comrades-in-arms. He comes to rely upon them for his emotional support and in combat units where men are often subject to intense emotional trauma, his comrades-in-arms become extremely important to him. The cohesion of the small group in combat - the infantry section, the gun crew, the tank crew - is sufficient to overcome the divisive effects of racism when the group contains both black and white servicemen.

Accounts of inter-racial relationships between men who endured combat conditions support this view. Infantrymen are not known for their willingness to express love for other soldiers, yet one Infantry Section Commander said of the relationship which existed between the Aboriginal and white soldiers of his Section,

> we came to love one another in that section.

> We depended on each other, and throughout some fairly stiff actions we got to know just about everything about each other ... we lived with Harry Saunders [an Aborigine] as a brother ... Our love for him was such that there could be no place for any colour barriers ... we were forced together by events, and our comradeship was completely necessary.[19]

Others support this view. Joe Valadian of the 2/2 Machine Gun Battalion was 'as black as the ace of spades, [but he] acted like and was treated like a real white man - as the saying goes'.[20] 'Darkie' Simon, an Aboriginal prisoner of war in Sumatra was treated by his fellow prisoners as an equal, and was admired for his sense of humour in adversity.[21] K.R. Baker echoed the attitudes of many other white servicemen when he wrote of Martin Connolly, a 'full-blood' from Normanton, 'he was the "whitest" black man I have ever met, had the privilege to train with and to enjoy his company [sic.] ... I had the utmost regard for this man ...'[22] Others who came into brief contact with Aboriginal or Islander servicemen, remained impressed.

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19. Gordon, The Embarrassing Australian, p. 47. Harry Saunders was later killed in action.

20. Letter, P. O'Driscoll, 24 May 1978.

21. Letter, H.A. Stanton, 7 January 1978. Asked by his captors whether he was really an Australian, Simon replied 'I am the only true Australian amongst the lot of them!'

22. AWM, private records, no. 87/78. Letter, K.R. Baker, to Don Cameron, 24 August 1981. During 1981, Don Cameron, MHR, sought public support for the compilation of a list of the names of all Aboriginal and 'part-Aboriginal' servicemen who had fought in any of Australia's wars. He received almost 1,000 letters, many of which not only forwarded the names of Aboriginal or Islander servicemen, but also included testimony as to the strength of the relationship which existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal servicemen.

John Chate, a member of the crew of the Army trawler 'Joyce Oakes', remembered meeting his first Torres Strait Islander soldier as he came ashore at Thursday Island after almost a year at sea. Chate felt embarrassed in his dishevelled state before the Islander 'a magnificent man ... every inch a soldier'.[23] Serving with the Islanders, Chate developed a lasting respect for them.

But perhaps the most significant indicator of the strength of the relationship which developed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal servicemen was the public expression of support for Aboriginal servicemen by the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia. The League had begun to lobby for the extension of full citizenship rights to Aboriginal servicemen in 1941[24] and continued lobbying on behalf of their Aboriginal comrades-in-arms into the 1950s.[25]

Aboriginal and Islander servicemen themselves agree that little racism existed within the Services at the inter-personal level. Reg Saunders noted after the war that the white soldiers he served with 'were not

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23. Letter, John Chate, 25 February 1986.

24. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, P.C. Spender, Minister for the Army, to the Acting Honorary Secretary, Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, 9 November 1941.

25. AA Canberra, series A518, item RM112/1; ex-servicemen and the Territories. Draft statement, Minister for External Territories, 3 January 1952.

26. Gordon, The Embarrassing Australian, p. 137.

colour-conscious towards the Aboriginal',[26] although he also recalled brawls with several white soldiers who, from time to time, took exception to his colour. However, these incidents were rare and generally occurred outside the confines of Saunders' unit where he was highly respected. On one occasion his assailant was an Australian soldier in a reinforcement holding unit, a unit unlikely to engender close bonds between its members, on another, a group of British soldiers. During this second incident, it is noteworthy that Saunders was helped by his white 'mate'. Saunders also recalled that he and his white comrades often chose to sit in the segregated 'Aboriginal' section of north Queensland picture theatres to the consternation of white civilians.[27] Islander soldiers like Charles Mene, recall deep friendships with their white comrades and with his lengthy service, Charles now boasts that there is no large town in the eastern States where he cannot find at least one mate he served with at one time or another, to share a quiet drink.

The phenomenon of diminished racism among combat servicemen has been remarked upon in relation to the service of Africans and US Negroes. It has been noted that

> among those Africans whose racial attitudes changed, the most important determinant of direction is whether or not the Africans were in combat. One must accept the consistent accounts of the comradeship of combat. Racial discrimination disappeared on the battle field; blacks and whites risked their lives to rescue

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27. Interview, Reg Saunders, 2 December 1986.

> the wounded of any race; food and utensils were shared. There are no accusations of discrimination in medical care or battle assignments ... Even labour units serving in combat zones had few complaints.[28]

While Headrick overstates the argument when she asserts that racial discrimination 'disappeared', she is nevertheless close to the mark. In the Australian context at least, racism certainly diminished.

In the US forces, strict segregation had been practiced early in the war, Negro service being generally restricted to the more mundane combat support and logistic support roles. A vocal and aggressive campaign had been mounted by Civil Rights organisations, particularly the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, to abandon the practice of the First World War and embrace integration in the armed forces. Like the far less powerful Aboriginal welfare organisations in Australia, the NAACP argued that segregation was unacceptable and hypocritical in a democratic struggle against fascism. Although unable to secure the desegregation of the forces during the war, the NAACP was able to extract from the President an agreement that Negroes would be enlisted in numbers approximately in proportion to their numbers in the community.[29] Generally, this ratio of Negro to white

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28. Rita Headrick, 'African Soldiers in World War II', Armed Forces and Society, vol. 4, no. 3, Spring 1978, p. 512.

29. Morris J. MacGregor, Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965, (Defense Studies), Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington D.C., 1981, pp. 13-16.

servicemen was to be carried over into specific sections of the military such as the Infantry, the Air Corps and the Engineers. In practice, Negroes tended to gravitate to the non-combat related sections such as the Quartermaster Corps and the Engineers, mainly as a result of obstacles put in their path by the chiefs of the combat arms which had traditionally been all-white preserves.[30] So wedded to the idea of segregation were the US forces, that even Red Cross blood banks segregated stocks of blood plasma.[31] Some small experiments in fully integrated service were conducted and these tended to highlight the administrative burden and military inefficiency of segregation but no widening of integration was permitted until the demand for manpower began to be felt late in the war. Heavy battle casualties particularly among combat units in Europe in 1944, forced the US Army to consider the employment of Negroes to fill the vacancies. This led to a modified form of integration whereby Negro sub-units were admitted to white combat units. A sharp reduction in racism within those units exposed to this 'integrated' service followed. The US Army's Research Branch which studied the integration process, noted that

> an especially significant piece of evidence is that about two-thirds of the men in an average

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30. ibid, p. 24. By 1941, Negroes represented approximately 10 per cent of the population but made up only 5 per cent of the Infantry and 2 per cent of the Air Corps, and 15 per cent of the Quartermaster Corps and 25 per cent of the Engineer Corps.

31. ibid, p. 36.

> white company said that they disliked the idea of mixed [race] companies very much before a Negro platoon was introduced to their company. After having been in a mixed company, the proportion of men who said they disliked mixed companies very much fell to 7 per cent. From this, the Research Branch writers comment "we can get some conception of the revolution in attitudes that took place among these men as a result of enforced contacts".[32]

No similar studies were conducted in Australia. Nor did the Services attempt to draw upon the US research. Aborigines and Islanders represented a mere 1 per cent of the total population and were represented below that level within the Services. In America, Negroes represented about 8 per cent of the population and the response of white soldiers to service with them was therefore a significant defence issue worthy of intense study. However, despite the small proportion of Aborigines and Islanders in the Australian forces, a similar if less sharply defined change also took place among servicemen here.

In Australia, the change in attitudes brought about by enforced contact between black and white servicemen was not revolutionary, and in many cases lasted only as long as the war, but it was nevertheless an important phenomenon

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32. D.G. Mandelbaum, Soldier Groups and Negro Soldiers, Los Angeles, 1952, p. 104. See also, MacGregor, Integration, pp. 53-56. Trained interviewers questioned 250 company officers and platoon sergeants and a questionnaire was issued to 1,700 white private soldiers. 80 per cent of the white officers and sergeants reported that Negroes had performed 'very well' in combat. 75 per cent of the white private soldiers reported that their opinions of Negroes had changed as a result of combat service with them 'their distrust turning into respect and friendliness'. The remainder reported no change in their attitude. None reported a deterioration in their attitude to Negroes.

establishing a new model of inter-racial behaviour by which Aborigines and Islanders could judge post-war relations. Wrote a white ex-serviceman,

> Generally, aborigines were well accepted by white soldiers ...
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> I would say that some of our fellows knew little about darkies in Civil life and I think their experiences with Henry and Joe [two black servicemen] changed their opinions quite a bit. One fellow in particular who got on the grog occasionally ... would run around looking for Arabs (wogs) to "whip", always treated Henry with respect. I doubt whether he would have treated Henry as an equal in civil life.[33]

This new perception was also reflected in other events. When the Army planned to move 14 Garrison Battalion to Thursday Island it decided to remove fourteen Aboriginal and 'part-Aboriginal' soldiers from the unit. It was thought that their service at Thursday Island on full pay would lead to unrest among the underpaid Torres Strait Islanders. But white soldiers in the unit resented the removal of their Aboriginal comrades. Through the Cairns Trades and Labour Council they wrote 'it is the opinion of the men of the 14th Garrison Btn that these men should be returned to their original Units and that no further aboriginals or Half casts be taken away from their Units

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33. Letter, Jim Hunt, 4 April 1978.

34. MP742/1, item 128/1/1. Letter Cairns and District Trades and Labour Council to the Minister for the Army, 6 November 1942. The Garrison Battalion had been enlisted in the Cairns district and many of the soldiers may have had pre-war connections with the Council. Unfortunately, there is no indication of the extent to which the demand for the return of the Aboriginal soldiers was supported by the non-Aborigines in the Battalion.

under any pretex [sic.] what so ever'.[34] Such an expression of concern at the departure of their Aboriginal mates would have been most unusual in pre-war north Queensland.

The modification of attitudes did not depend entirely upon personal contact with black soldiers and the Army socialising process. The Army Education Service set out to deliberately shape the soldier's opinion of Aborigines, Papuans and New Guineans. Major Groves, the Army's Deputy Assistant Director of Education, had had considerable experience of problems of education of indigenous people at Nauru and in New Guinea.[35] He was an acquaintence of A.P. Elkin. Together with Lieutenant F.E. Williams of the Intelligence Department of the Allied Geographical Section, Groves had produced a booklet, You and the Native, to guide soldiers in their relations with Papuans and New Guineans. Groves enthusiastically embraced the opportunity presented by the war to distribute among the soldiers an educated view of the 'natives' they came in contact with. 'This little piece of work will do more towards mutual understanding between native and European than all

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35. Major W.C. Groves was a trained anthropologist and educationist. He had served in the First AIF and in the inter-war period had been the Director of Education at Nauru and later, an advisor on education matters to the government of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.

36. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 89/2/878; Australian Aboriginal Art - Education. Letter, Major Groves to F.D. McCarthy, Ethnologist, the Australian Museum, Sydney, undated but about February 1943.

Charles Mene With Friends

Charles Mene, a Torres Strait Islander, joined the Second AIF on 15 December 1939. After service in England, Charles moved with his unit, the 2/33 Battalion, to Palestine and took part in the Syrian campaign. The war presented opportunities for the formation of close bonds between black and white servicemen. Charles is pictured here, arm in arm with his friends Frank Dredge (left) and Jack Doran, at Ceylon, 1942. Charles served throughout the Second World War, the occupation of Japan and the Korean War where he won the Military Medal.

Courtesy of Charles Mene.

[Williams'] 11 larger tomes',[36] he said. Groves planned a similar booklet about the Australian Aborigine. In addition to a brief examination of Aboriginal culture, it would include illustrations of Aboriginal patterns and designs, then very popular among soldiers stationed in north Australia as inspiration for their craft work, a necessary diversion from the boredom and monotony of lengthy service in remote camps. Wrote Groves, with typical enthusiasm, 'the average digger who will be using the designs knows nothing about the aborigines except such popular ideas as that of their being "the lowest race on Earth" etc. Here's a unique chance of catching the chaps' interest, and giving them at least a reasonably true and intelligible picture'.[37] Groves' booklet on the Aborigines was never produced by the Australian Army because other printing jobs were judged to have higher priority, but it was later taken up by the American Red Cross and produced by them in limited numbers. Nevertheless, Williams' booklet <u>You and the Native</u> gave soldiers a different and more balanced view of Papuans and New Guineans and the modification of outlook this produced had obvious relevance to the soldiers' attitudes to Aborigines and Islanders as well.

Another important influence upon the development of new relations between black and white Australian servicemen was the arrival in Australia of black US troops. The impending arrival of the black US troops confronted the Commonwealth

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37. <u>ibid</u>.

government with what it saw as an uncomfortable situation. The maintenance of the 'white Australia policy' and the desire to stem the increase in the 'part-Aboriginal' population, were perceived to be important during the 1940s and the arrival of perhaps many thousands of black Americans therefore caused considerable concern. On 20 January 1942, the Advisory War Council agreed to tell the United States government that Australia's reaction to the dispatch of negro troops would not be favourable, but that the composition of the American forces was a matter for the American government. Steering a careful course between limiting the number of black troops in Australia and offending the United States, the Advisory War Council assumed that the US government would be aware of Australia's 'susceptibilities' in deciding upon the numbers of black troops they might send.[38]

Three days later, the Japanese captured Rabaul. 'Bombs and shells are now falling on the territories of this nation', lamented the leading article of the Sydney Morning Herald. 'That obliterates or should obliterate everything except the fact that we are all Australians. Divisions of faith, divisions of opinion, inequalities of status, contrasts of wealth and poverty, all fade out into nothingness in the blinding light of our new danger'.[39]

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38. A816, item 54/301/252. Advisory War Council Minute, 20 January 1942.

39. The Sydney Morning Herald, 24 January 1942.

Divisions of race were left conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, this call for national unity in the face of the Japanese threat was taken up by the government. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Forde, said that Australia would seek no quarter from Japan and alone or with the help of others would fight to the finish. Forde called for an all out, do-or-die effort.[40] Curtin's appeal however, may have left non-Anglo-Saxon Australians perplexed. 'From the day that Captain Arthur Phillip landed here, until this hour, this land has been governed by men and women of our race', he said.

> We do not intend that that tradition shall be destroyed merely because an aggressor marches against us.
>
> Australians, you are the sons and daughters of Britishers ... '.[41]

Though calculated to be a stirring call to the flag, this speech can only have alienated those cultural groups who wanted to assist the national war effort but did not see themselves as the 'sons and daughters of Britishers'.[42] Aborigines in particular wanted to participate in the 'all-out' effort but many were continually being denied the opportunity to do so. The reluctance of the government to accept the service of black US troops in Australia would

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40. The Sydney Morning Herald, 26 January 1942.

41. The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 February 1942.

42. Australians were overwhelmingly of British ancestry during the 1940s and while ignoring a small minority of non-British Australians, Curtin's speech would have been received enthusiastically by most.

also have strained the credibility of their rhetoric had it been public knowledge. Obviously, the Commonwealth government thought that unity in the face of adversity could be taken too far.

Initially, there was some resentment at the arrival of American Negroes. In February, black US troops disembarking at Melbourne were initially prevented from landing by customs officials, and in April 1942, thinking that the black troops were civilian labourers, the Townsville Trades and Labour Council complained that US Negroes had arrived to do work which was normally reserved for white Australian workers.[43] But the concerns of the Labour Council were quickly assuaged when it was made clear that the men were American soldiers. By May 1942 there were 5,000 black US troops in Australia, mainly in Townsville and Sydney but with smaller groups at Cloncurry and Charters Towers in Queensland and at Birdum in the Northern Territory.

Black American soldiers had much in common with Aborigines and the two groups tended to associate, drawn

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43. AA Canberra, series A816, item 19/312/116; Employment of Coloured Labour by US Forces. War Cabinet Minute, 2 February 1942 and letter, Townsville Trades and Labour Council to the Minister for Labour and National Service, 9 April 1942.

44. See for example, Mavis Thorpe Clark, Pastor Doug - The Story of an Aboriginal Leader, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1965, p. 123, and Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, From Black to White in South Australia, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951, pp. 266-267 briefly describing contacts between Aborigines and black US troops in Melbourne and Adelaide respectively.

together through their common experience of racism.[44] The black US troops presented Aborigines with a different model of the black man. Len Watson, a child in Rockhampton during the war, recalled:

> In Rockhampton most of the Aborigines lived on what they called the north side, so a lot of black Americans used to go there as well.
>
> One thing that made a big impact on us was the amount of money they had. The other thing was the way they told us how they were treated by whites. I heard my dad and others talking about how they saw black Americans being belted by white American soldiers. Until we saw it happen to other black people from other countries we thought we were the only ones who were recipients of this kind of treatment.[45]

Len Watson notes that black Americans changed white perceptions of Aborigines as well. Whites saw blacks with money in their hands and who were mechanics, bulldozer operators and truck drivers.[46] An easy and intimate association developed between black troops and some white Australian women[47] which also contributed to changing attitudes, among the women and the Negro servicemen. Experience of these relations triggered resentment among some Negro soldiers at the restraints that were customarily imposed on them at home. Improved relations between white Australians and black US troops were an effective counter to Japanese propaganda which attempted to portray the

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45. Watson, '1945: Enter the Black Radical', The National Times Magazine, 1 April 1974, p. 5.

46. ibid.

47. Darryl McIntyre, 'Black GI's in Australia - 1942-45', ANU Seminar Paper, pp. 8-9.

'White Australia' policy as Anglo-Saxon racial bias against coloured people.[48] Social contact between black US troops and Aboriginal women was common, but unlike white US troops, few Negroes took war brides. Although legal impediments stood in the way of all Australian war brides, Aboriginal women faced almost insurmountable obstacles in becoming American citizens. As far as the US immigration authorities were concerned, any degree of coloured blood presented 'grave difficulties' for eventual US citizenship.[49] The Queensland Department of Native Affairs warned Aboriginal women of the difficulties they faced should they wish to marry a Negro soldier.[50] But some Aboriginal women and at least one 'part-Aboriginal' child, the daughter of a black American soldier and an Aboriginal woman, went to live in America but well after the end of

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48. ibid, p. 12. See also E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, Yanks Down Under 1941-45: The American Impact on Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 188-189.

49. McKernan, All In!: Australia During the Second World War, p. 198 and E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, Yanks, pp. 368-369. The Potts' describe an attempt by a 'part-Aboriginal' woman to pass herself off as a person of Greek and Swedish descent in order to be permitted to marry an American soldier.

50. AA Canberra, series A659, item 45/1/1563; Queensland Aboriginal Department General Circulars. Circular, 20 January 1944. The circular advised that 'the Australian will not, under the law of the United States of America, be permitted to enter the country if she has a strain of Aboriginal blood of 50% or more', and that permission for such unions should be refused. See also E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, Yanks, p. 368.

51. Interview, Kath Walker, 20 October 1986. The 'part-Aboriginal' girl went to live with her father in America at the age of fifteen.

the war.[51]

The Australian Army's response to the Negro troops was as ambiguous as its attitude to Aborigines. At the bureaucratic level, it embraced the attitudes of the US Army. But these were often out of step with the attitudes of the Australian civilian community and with the attitudes of the Australian soldier. White Australians, both civilians and soldiers, had generally come to quickly accept the presence of the Negro troops.[52] But this acceptance confronted the Australian Army with a new problem - the need to conform to the social attitudes of another nation. 'American white troops do not fraternise nor drink with negro troops - it is an unwritten law',[53] noted the Assistant Adjutant General, and immediately set about making the same social division a written law for Australian Army personnel. The need to achieve cooperation with the US Forces led to concern within the Australian Army that social relations between black and white soldiers should conform to the American model. A confidential instruction to Australian Army units warned that it was

> undesirable that Australian troops should fraternise or drink with American coloured soldiers. ... Australian troops have in certain instances been associating with the coloured troops to an extent which would not be permitted in the case of American white troops. ... Action

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52. Apart from evidence given earlier, see E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, Yanks, pp. 48-50 and 187-189.

53. AWM, series 60, item 59/1/730; American Coloured Soldiers. Letter, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Northern Command, to Assistant Adjutant General, undated.

> taken [to discourage fraternisation] should be as tactful as possible since it is of course not desired that any offence be caused to American coloured troops.[54]

The order had been initiated in response to a request by an American Military Police officer in Brisbane, concerned that the negro troops associating with white Australian troops were 'getting on a higher plane than is good for the city's safety'.[55] Although the higher command of the Australian Army readily embraced the US Army's prejudices, the common soldier did not. That there existed a perceived need to issue this order demonstrates a widespread acceptance of social mixing.

While the social division between black and white US servicemen was accepted by them as an 'unwritten law', official US Army policy was quite different. The Adjutant General of the US Army Services of Supply had informed the Australian Army that 'it is the attitude of the United States Army to accord the same treatment and rights to all United States Army soldiers, regardless of race, color or religion'.[56] While the US Forces claimed to possess non-discriminatory policies, social controls continued to operate as 'unwritten law'. In attempting to

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54. 60, item 59/1/730. Instruction, Headquarters Queensland Line of Communications Area to subordinate formations. See also item 75/1/74.

55. ibid.

56. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 50/703/35; Protest - Refusal to Serve US Coloured Troops. Letter, Adjutant General Headquarters USASOS, to military liaison officer, 6 August 1942.

conform to the US social model, the Australian Army on the other hand had been forced to enshrine its attempts at social modelling in official instructions - signifying that the desired social distance between white Australian soldiers and black Americans was Army and hence Commonwealth policy. This attracted immediate opposition. 'As the black skinned soldiers are members of the working class, are here to defend Australia and defeat Fascism, we urge that our Army Authorities not be allowed to succumb to such racial superiority theories which are Fascist in character',[57] demanded the Secretary of the Ipswich Trades and Labour Council. The Army remained unmoved. Although its instructions remained in force, it is unlikely that they had great effect. Attempts to model social relationships by instruction or order were notoriously ineffective and although tensions developed between the American and Australian forces from time to time, these seldom, if ever, owed anything to racism.

While military service generally presented both black and white Australians with new models of relations - partly through the dynamics of small group psychology, partly through the example of US Negro servicemen - some Army units remained bastions of pre-war civilian values. These were generally the units of the Volunteer Defence Corps. The Volunteer Defence Corps was an unpaid force of

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57. ibid. Letter, Secretary, Ipswich Trades and Labour Council, to the Prime Minister, 8 July 1942.

volunteers who for a variety of reasons, were ineligible for service in either the Second AIF or the Militia. Generally, the men of the Volunteer Defence Corps were those who failed to meet the recruitment standards of the other forces or who worked in reserved occupations. But the most telling aspects of the Volunteer Defence Corps was that it was a part-time service and was raised from the men of the district in which the unit was based. These two factors meant that unlike other conventional Army units in which the severance of links to civilian social values was encouraged by the Army sub-culture, the Volunteer Defence Corps tended to maintain, and perhaps even focus these civilian attitudes. The less rigid standards accepted for enlistment in the Volunteer Defence Corps may have provided an opening through which Aborigines and Islanders could have satisfied their desire to serve Australia, but as in the remainder of the Army, the service of Aborigines in the Volunteer Defence Corps was regarded as '... neither necessary nor desirable'.

Units of the Volunteer Defence Corps - particularly those in the north of Western Australia and Queensland - tended to open themselves only to the local white population. In these areas it was difficult to share the comradeship of the Volunteer Defence Corps unit with Aborigines, while daily practising the exploitation of Aboriginal labour which was common on north Australian pastoral properties. Nevertheless, some Volunteer Defence Corps units did attempt to enlist Aborigines. Detachments at Babinda and

Cardwell in north Queensland each had at least ten prospective Aboriginal recruits and were anxious to enlist them. They were 'expert in guide work and conversant with all topographic features of the country,'[58] ideal men to carry out the detachment's role of guerilla warfare. The Aborigines were very keen to join the unit and had good records in the community, but the Volunteer Defence Corps higher command quashed the idea.

In April 1943 the sighting of what was believed to be a Japanese landing north of Normanton in the Gulf of Carpentaria sent a wave of panic through the local community, including the local Volunteer Defence Corps unit (the incident was later known as the 'Gulf Scare'). The apparent Japanese threat led to a greater willingness to enlist Aborigines in the local Volunteer Defence Corps unit. Frank Douglas, an Aborigine from the Burketown district, had earlier made several attempts to join the Army. First he applied to join the Second AIF only to be told that he could not be admitted because he was an Aborigine. A sympathetic recruiting officer had told him to try again at Brisbane where Aborigines were being admitted. Not having the rail fare to Brisbane, Frank settled for trying again at Cairns but was turned down a

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58. AWM, series 60, item 253/1/180; (When examined, this item had not been registered by the AWM and hence, had no file title). Letter, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Corps Headquarters, Volunteer Defence Corps Queensland, to Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps, Queensland, 22 July 1942.

second time. Frank next offered himself for service in the Burketown Volunteer Defence Corps but was turned down there also. But during the 'Gulf Scare', Frank was hurriedly enlisted, assisted in patrolling to the site of the supposed Japanese landing and remained in the Volunteer Defence Corps till the end of the war.[59]

For those Aborigines and Islanders who managed to enlist and serve in integrated units of the Army, Navy or Air Force, the working environment of the Services often proved to be a new experience, relatively free from the caste barriers they had often faced in their civilian lives. Kath Walker, who served as a signaller, remembered a sharp difference between her pre-war and Army employment. There was 'a complete difference because in the Army they didn't give a stuff what colour you were. There was a job to be done, ... and all of a sudden the colour line disappeared'.[60] This tended to raise expectations about their return to civilian life. The failure to meet these raised expectations became a source of tension for some Aboriginal and Islander servicemen and women. This phenomenon was noted by H.I. Bray, the Western Australian Commissioner for Native Affairs. Initially supportive of Aboriginal enlistment, by early 1943, he had changed his mind. As described in Chapter 2, this change of mind was mainly aimed at preserving cheap Aboriginal labour for the

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59. Telephone conversation, Frank Douglas, 12 May 1985.

60. Interview, Kath Walker, 20 October 1986.

pastoral and agricultural industries, but he was also concerned with the unsettling effects of Aborigines returning to the control of the Western Australian Native Administration Act after the relative freedom of Service life. Bray thought that the Aboriginal soldiers'

> remuneration at enhanced rates is a source of irritation to the other working natives. Then again, it has been found that enlistment has unsettled the natives. This effect is much more apparent upon their discharge from the Services. As soldiers certain privileges are extended to them, but this is not possible after discharge, the net result being a disgruntled native with a definite grouch against authority which compels him to observe the law.[61]

The 'unsettling effects' of discharge were clearly the result not of enlistment, but of the overly paternalistic Native Administration Act, but Bray never acknowledged this.

Although Bray and local Army authorities had struck a bargain to bar the enlistment of Aborigines in Western Australia, he insisted that Aborigines continue to enrol for compulsory military service as they were obliged to comply with the law. Bray's apparent concern for the law did not extend to the protection of the rights of Aborigines to voluntarily enlistment. He conspired with the Army to deny them their right to this form of entry.

Although Bray's concern that enlistment may result in

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61. WA State Archives, series 993, item 38/40; Military and Defence - Liability of Natives for Military Service. Letter, Commissioner of Native Affairs to HQ Western Command dated 1943.

Aborigines being disgruntled on discharge may be seen as a rationalisation of the need to preserve cheap labour, he was correct when he stressed that tensions were set up between the status of Aborigines within the services, and their status after discharge. The contrast between their lives inside and outside the services had been a bitter issue with Aboriginal servicemen of the First World War and had been commented upon by many of the Aboriginal welfare groups seeking the franchise for enlisted Aborigines. Mr Milera, an Aborigine of Point Pearce Mission in South Australia and a veteran of the First World War expressed the resentment felt by many in the Aboriginal community:

> While I was in the military uniform, I was granted all the privileges one could think of, even to going into an hotel and having a glass of beer. Now it is all over, as far as the Last War is concerned. I am practically No-Body.[62]

Milera had attempted to join up for the Second World War only to find that he was barred from service because he was an Aborigine. 'We Dark Men are now Black Bald right throughout the Commonwealth. So much for that lot',[63] he wrote in disgust. The contrast in their lives in and out of the services also affected serving Aborigines. Gunner Alexander Bell, conscripted into the Army, found that when

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62. AA Melbourne, series MP 508, item 50/703/12; Refusal to enlist World War I Veteran and other Aborigines. Letter, H.J. Milera, Point Pearce, South Australia, to the Prime Minister, undated. Milera had enlisted in the First AIF in 1916, had been wounded at Messines and served for the remainder of the war in England.

63. ibid.

he went into hotels with his 'white cobbers', the staff would not serve him. 'It is not the drink I worry about', he said, 'it is the principle'. When he went on leave he 'did not receive treatment that should be given to a man in the King's uniform'.[64] Embittered by this experience, Bell went absent without leave and was court martialled. The 'white cobbers' of Aboriginal servicemen also reacted to these tensions. As early as 1941, the Secretary of the Barmen and Barmaids Union wrote to Bray about the question of serving drinks to Aboriginal soldiers. If they served the Aborigines they broke the law, if they didn't, the white soldiers with the Aborigines invariably started a brawl.[65] The union requested that Aboriginal servicemen be given an exemption to permit them to drink. Bray refused. As a body, they were unsuitable for that privilege, he claimed.[66] To Bray, the white soldiers who 'invariably started brawls' were suited to the privilege, but the inoffensive Aboriginal servicemen were not. By contrast, the Aborigines' 'white cobbers' had no doubt about the suitability of their comrades.

Apparently arbitrary discharge from the services often triggered resentment among Aborigines. The Lake Tyers Aborigines discharged from the Army infected the Lake Tyers

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64. West Australian, 8 January 1943.

65. Peter Biskup, Not Slaves, Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem in Western Australia 1898-1954, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1973, p. 206.

66. ibid.

community with their resentment. At Port Hedland, 'part-Aborigines' in the local Volunteer Defence Corps unit were keenly disappointed when discharged, demanding to know who had been responsible for the decision. Their discharge had been prompted by the unfounded fear that they were a security threat. Headquarters Western Command had received a report from the Military Reporting Officer at Onslow saying that Aborigines were not to be trusted and should not be permitted to have access to military training and weapons. The Reporting Officer's concern was directed at groups of Aborigines being trained as guerillas at inland Kimberley pastoral properties - along with whites - those being trained at 'various inland training depots'.[67] Over-reacting to these suggestions, Headquarters Western Command discharged the 'part-Aborigines' from the Port Hedland Volunteer Defence Corps about whom there had never been any suggestion of disloyalty.

A Member of the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia, Mr W. Hegney, took up the cause of the men arguing that they were not of mixed Asian race as had been alleged and were 'anxious to assist in the country's defence'.[68] He also pointed out that while these men were

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67. AA Melbourne, series MP 742/1, item 286/1/96; Service of Half-castes in VDC. Letter, Commander, Western Australian Line of Communication Area to HQ Allied Land Forces Melbourne, 3 October 1943. The training of these Aboriginal guerillas is discussed further in the following chapter.

68. ibid. Letter, W. Hegney, MLA Western Australia, to H.V. Johnson, MP, 28 August 1943.

Australian born and were prevented from serving, 'Koepangers' were serving in the Navy at Port Hedland.

The view of events from Allied Land Force Headquarters in Melbourne was different. The Headquarters, immersed in the values of the Melbourne community, held to racist stereotypes and blamed these for the exclusion of the Port Hedland men. After describing the various legislative bars to Aboriginal service, the Army's Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation, Colonel E.J. Parks, admitted that 'the main reason for [the "part-Aborigines"] rejection for non-combatant compulsory service and for voluntary service, ... is expediency - not regulation - in that certain of their characteristics make their proximity objectionable to white men'.[69]

Ironically, the resentment harboured by the men over their discharge from the Volunteer Defence Corps came to the attention of the Army's local Field Security Section which began to view them with suspicion. Furthermore, the Field Security Section had also identified two other 'part-Aborigines' of suspicious character who it recommended should be drafted into an Army Labour Company where an eye could be kept on them.[70] While some 'part-Aborigines' were being discharged for supposed

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69. ibid. Minute, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation to the Director of the Volunteer Defence Corps, 12 October 1943.

70. AWM, series 52, item 9/5/21; Field Security Section, North Australia. See War Diary entries for March 1943.

disloyalty, the Army was contemplating the enlistment of others for the same reason.

The discharge of the Port Hedland men illustrates the extent to which higher Army headquarters assumed the prevailing attitudes towards Aborigines from the communities in which they were based. These attitudes led the headquarters into conflict with junior headquarters and units in which Aborigines were serving. The junior headquarters, motivated more by the desire to get their assigned tasks completed and less by conformity to prevailing social values, tended to foster an egalitarian attitude in which Aboriginal soldiers found themselves accepted on their own merits. The disbandment of 10 Employment Company illustrates this further.

In September 1943, 10 Employment Company, which consisted of Aboriginal and Greek personnel, was to be disbanded. The Aborigines were to be transferred to 25 Employment Company under the control of Headquarters Northern Territory Force and the Greeks were to be transferred to 4 Employment Company at Albury. The Army had considered the possibility of discharging the Greek personnel to ameliorate the pressure upon the Army to release service personnel for projects under the control of the Director-General of Manpower but it was decided that they should remain enlisted soldiers and transfer to another Employment Company.

The Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation thought

differently about the 76 Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' transferred to 25 Employment Company. He thought the Army should 'discharge the lot'. From the vantage point of his Melbourne office he added that 'they are not satisfactory soldiers, go "walkabout" when it suits them, and their "smell" is most unpleasant to white personnel'.[71] This view was so at odds with that of the Commanding Officer of the unit and with Brigadier Dollery, the Brigadier in charge of Administration of Northern Territory Force, that it is difficult to believe the same individuals were under discussion. Dollery reported that only five of the 76 'Aborigines' in the unit were 'full-bloods' and with the exception of one man who was illiterate, their standard of education was good. The illiterate man was studying under the Army Education Service, held the rank of Lance Corporal and was regarded by his officer as one of the best conducted and hardest working men in the unit. Dollery went on to say that the men were intelligent and their discipline excellent. They all spoke excellent English. Dollery not only argued that no action should be taken to discharge the men from the unit but that an additional

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71. MP742, item 92/1/302. Minute, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation to Director of Organization, 29 September 1943.

72. ibid. Minute, E.M. Dollery, Commander Northern Territory Lines of Communication Area to Headquarters Allied Land Forces, 18 November 1943. This correspondence can also be found on AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 55; NT - Raising Native Employment Companies. Dollery's proposal to form this unit has been briefly described in Chapter 2.

Aboriginal Employment Company should be formed.[72]

Dollery envisaged that 421 selected Aborigines from the Northern Territory would serve in the unit. He saw the unit as much in terms of a social experiment as a useful unit for the conduct of Army operations in the Territory. He argued that two advantages would flow from raising the unit: first, the Army would obtain high standard service from the enlisted Aborigines and second,

> this proposal would be a much-needed contribution towards improving the lot of the native after the war. ... If the Army can show that at least a proportion of the natives are capable of more skilled work and are fitted to hold the status of soldiers, there is reason to hope that these natives may, after the war, be able to hold their position in the Territory as skilled or semi-skilled labourers and to command a higher reward for their services than the periodic stick of tobacco which they received before the war.[73]

This humanitarian aspect of the plan found favour with the Secretary of the Department of the Army, F.R. Sinclair who wrote 'these people are obviously useful and if neglected are a wasting asset. Any improvement in their living conditions or ways of life must be of benefit both to themselves and the country as a whole'.[74]

Dollery's plan was far from being adopted even though it had the support of the Adjutant General, the Administrator

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73. ibid.

74. ibid. Memorandum, Secretary Department of the Army, to Assistant Secretary, Defence Division, Department of the Treasury, 24 January 1944.

of the Northern Territory and F.R. Sinclair. By August 1944 it had reached an advanced stage of development and was about to be submitted to War Cabinet for approval. Ten months had already elapsed since Dollery first raised the proposal but now, Colonel E.J. Parks, the Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation raised his opposition. He stated that

> in the past it has been Army policy not to permit the enlistment of aboriginals. Experience showed that generally they did not make satisfactory soldiers.
>
> Recent efforts have been directed to raising the standard of recruits by rejecting those whose medical classification is below A class, and those who are illiterates or of low mental standard.
>
> If aboriginals are enlisted it would be necessary to ensure that they would be excluded from the quota of recruits allotted to Army by War Cabinet.[75]

The Director's attitude to Aboriginal soldiers had already been made clear in his statements about their desire to 'go walk-about' and their 'smell'. Now he suggested that Aboriginal soldiers would by definition be of poor medical standard, illiterate or unintelligent. He sought to further confound Dollery's plan by raising questions about the administration of the Aboriginal soldiers. Would service in the planned unit be limited to volunteers, what was the unit's area of service, what was the period of enlistment to be, were special considerations

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75. ibid. Minute, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation to the Director of Organization, 5 September 1944.

for discipline necessary and did special records need to be maintained?[76]

On 6 October 1944 the Land Headquarters Order Of Battle Investigation Committee examined Dollery's proposal. The Committee, referring to civilian Aborigine labourers employed by HQ NT Force, was of the opinion that 'the employment of natives by the Army is not economic. ... [generally] it appeared that one [Australian Military Forces] personnel was required to supervise and direct every two or three natives who are in the main only 50% efficient. ... [The Army had] apparently accepted ... a large scale obligation, which is fraught with difficulties and complications - political and otherwise'.[77] The Committee decided that the question of whether this policy should continue should be referred to Blamey for his information and policy direction. Blamey in turn directed the question to War Cabinet. Blamey gave guarded support to the plan, but recognised that the changed strategic circumstances since Dollery first raised the issue in late 1943 called for considerable modifications to the idea if it were to be approved by War Cabinet. He instructed that the submission to War Cabinet should not make a strong recommendation for the raising of the unit, but should mention the value to the Army of using native labour and

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76. ibid.

77. ibid. Report of the Order of Battle Investigation Committee, 6 October 1944.

the impact the proposal would have upon the morale of Aborigines. He also insisted that HQ NT Force prepare a new War Establishment for the unit, reducing its strength by half, and describing it as an unarmed labour unit instead of an infantry battalion as initially proposed by Dollery.

By December 1944 it had become apparent that the reason for suggesting the raising of the Aboriginal Employment Company was fast vanishing. There were plans to relax National Security Regulations in the Northern Territory and to have the civil administration gradually resume its pre-war functions, including the full control of Aborigines. The strength of Northern Territory Force was declining, leading to reduced requirements for logistic support and correspondingly, reduced requirements for labour. For those tasks which still needed to be performed, the Army could continue to employ civilian Aborigines on lower pay than enlisted Aboriginal soldiers. This saving did not go unnoticed.

By the time the proposal was ready for submission to War Cabinet, too much time had been allowed to elapse. On 20 June 1945 the Adjutant General recommended that the submission be withdrawn. 'While the proposal had much to commend it when first submitted in Nov[ember] 43, it is considered that, in view of the drastic reduction in the size and task of NT Force which has occurred since that time and the arrangements which are in train for the civil administration to resume the majority of its normal

functions in the area, no practical purpose would be served by raising a Native Labour Company at this stage'.[78] Dollery's plan was therefore shelved.

Throughout the war there had been a division between the way in which the higher command of the Services, and the common soldier, sailor or airman viewed Aborigines. Personal relations within the Services proved to be remarkably free from racism - an outcome brought about by a combination of factors including the psychology of the small group in battle, the nature of the military as a sub-culture and the presence of new models of behaviour. The higher command tended to retain a prejudiced view of Aborigines and Islanders because of its isolation from the soldiery, and its immersion in community values. It tended to project these views on to the common soldier, the 'normal Australian' as the Acting Chief of the General Staff had called them in 1940 when he had barred the service of non-Europeans in the Second AIF. The 'normal Australian' was far more ready to adopt new models of behaviour than the high command was willing to believe.

Military service had presented opportunities for Aborigines and Islanders which many would otherwise never have had. They found that they were accepted on their merits and that caste barriers which had often ruled their lives before enlistment, had tended to disappear. They

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78. ibid. Minute, Adjutant General to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, 20 June 1945.

were also trained in skills which were marketable in their post-war lives. Finally, to Aborigines and Islanders, military service offered the prospect of adventure and overseas travel which, to a greater extent than other Australians, would have been beyond their reach before the war. Ironically, these benefits of military service carried the seeds of greater tensions for many Aboriginal and Islander servicemen. Expectations were raised which were to be dashed as they returned to civilain life. Still, those Aborigines and Islanders who had served, had surely performed well above the expectations of Service high commands which despite the evidence of outstanding individual performances like Reg Saunders and Leonard Waters, tended to maintain a low regard for Aboriginal service in integrated units throughout the war.

As far as the higher command was concerned, Aborigines tended to make poor servicemen particularly if their service brought them into close contact with white Australians. It was believed at the highest level that the 'normal' Australian would not tolerate serving with them. Although at odds with reality, this reflected the view that Aborigines or Islanders serving in white units were a threat to the stability of the unit, and by extension, to the stability of the Service. It followed that where Aborigines or Islanders could be employed in relative isolation, thus avoiding this threat to stability, the Services would be less reluctant to seize the opportunity to enlist them. One such case had been the enlistment of

Torres Strait Islanders in the defence of far north Queensland. Here there had been a strong strategic motive for the enlistment of Islanders as well as an opportunity to ensure their relative isolation from the bulk of the Australian Defence Force. Similar strategic pressures combined with opportunities for isolation occurred elsewhere in north Australia leading to the 'enlistment' of Aborigines as *de facto* servicemen.

CHAPTER 5

ABORIGINAL DE FACTO SERVICEMEN

Like the Torres Strait Islanders, who were exploited for their cheap military manpower, 'full-blood' Aborigines in other parts of north Australia also came to be employed as servicemen despite the Service ban on the enlistment of non-Europeans. Although the deteriorating strategic situation from December 1941 to mid-1942 had forced the Services to enlist de-tribalised Aborigines into integrated conventional forces, in the remote areas of north Australia, the Services were dealing with tribal or partly de-tribalised Aborigines. These people called for a different approach from that which had been applied to the totally de-tribalised Aborigines elsewhere in Australia or to the Torres Strait Islanders who had had lengthy exposure to white Australian and other influences through the pearling industry, the Queensland government and missions. There were military benefits to be gained in enlisting these tribal and partly de-tribalised Aborigines. They possessed remarkably detailed local knowledge of areas of tactical and strategic vulnerability for which there were no maps, and in the hostile environment of remote parts of north Australia, their survival and bushcraft skills could not be matched. The Aborigines of north Australia were also essentially non-urban. Whereas the white population of north Australia tended to cluster together into a small

number of isolated townships like Darwin, Katherine, Wyndham or Burketown, Aborigines tended to reside permanently in even the remotest parts of the north. Whites, including white servicemen, sent to these areas required extensive support and periodic rests in more salubrious surroundings. But the formal enlistment of tribal 'full-blood' Aborigines could not be tolerated by the Services despite their desire to exploit the military value of these remote Aborigines. The compromise was to employ these people as servicemen while ignoring the requirements of formal enlistment. To do this, the Services exploited the relationship which existed between the instruments of pre-war government authority and these Aborigines.

The military service of tribal Aborigines in north Australia hinged on the security of Darwin. By the late 1930s, Darwin was seen as a nascent defence base acting as a southern complement to the fully developed base at Singapore. Both bases were well sited to dominate the important sea traffic passing between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. But Darwin was vulnerable. As yet undeveloped, it lay exposed and unsupported on the north Australian coast. For over 1,000 kilometers in either direction, the north Australian coast was virtually deserted, the only population centres being isolated Aboriginal missions and occasional settlements like Burketown and Normanton to the east or Wyndham to the west,

each with a mere handful of white citizens. By October 1936, Major General Lavarack, the Chief of the General Staff, had acknowledged that Darwin was vulnerable to even small scale attacks of the type which could be launched from within the manpower resources of the Japanese pearling fleet operating in the area,[1] and as a result, the Darwin Mobile Force was stationed there to provide essential defence.

In the late 1930s vast areas of north Australia were little known to white Australians and even larger areas remained unmapped. This was partly the result of the lack of economic exploitation of these isolated areas and partly attributable to the aggressive defence of these areas by the Aborigines there. Although the pastoral industry had penetrated into many remote areas of north Australia, like the Kimberley district of Western Australia, or the Gulf hinterland in the Northern Territory and western Queensland, these areas were known to only a handful of whites. Other areas like Arnhem Land were generally unsuitable for pastoral exploitation. The likelihood of Aboriginal attacks had also ensured that some areas such as Arnhem Land, remained little explored by whites.

Aborigines in the Northern Territory had a long history

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1. AA Canberra, series A816, item 14/301/14; Darwin Defences 1936 Report. Report by Major General Lavarack, Chief of the General Staff, 16 October 1936.

of attacks on Japanese seamen and other intruders on their territory. In 1923, two trepang luggers, each with a crew of three Japanese and two Aborigines, were attacked at Caledon Bay in east Arnhem Land. Two Japanese and an Aborigine were killed and the others escaped to Groote Eylandt in a dinghy. On 20 July 1931, three Japanese of the lugger 'Ouida' were killed by Aborigines at Port Keats. In 1932, the crews of two Japanese luggers were attacked at Caledon Bay while they were ashore curing trepang. Five Japanese were killed and one Japanese and six Aboriginal crewmen escaped overland to Milingimbi mission.[2] By 1933, the Balamumu of east Arnhem Land had killed 21 intruders on their territory and largely for this reason eastern Arnhem Land had been gazetted an Aboriginal reserve into which entry was prohibited without a licence. The Balamumu killings of 1932 and 1933 had made an impression on the hardy souls engaged in trepanging on the east Arnhem Land coast. Trepang production fell from 600 hundredweight in 1932/33 to just 97 hundredweight in 1933/34,[3] testimony to the effect of the killings upon the willingness of whites

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2. D.C.S. Sissons, 'The Japanese and the Australian Pearling Industry', Research Paper, ANU Research School of Pacific Studies, Department of International Relations, 1979. Some of these killings had been triggered by Japanese interference with Aboriginal women. In the 1932 incident at Caledon Bay for example, there is evidence that the Japanese had 'kidnapped' three women locking them in a smoke house. See Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, p. 32.

3. AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 58; Location of Native Population in the Northern Territory 1929-39. Statistical Report, 1934.

and Japanese to enter these areas. By 1939, faced with the need to defend north Australia, the Commonwealth government was embarrassed by its own neglect of Arnhem Land and other remote areas.

Defence preparations at Darwin increased with the coming of the war. The construction of the strategic road from Alice Springs to Darwin began in 1940 and provided a reliable overland route to Darwin. By May 1941, the RAAF had arranged the construction of airstrips at remote Aboriginal mission stations at Drysdale River, Port Keats, Bathurst Island, Milingimbi and Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt. These strips were intended to extend air cover over the shipping routes to Darwin and to extend reconnaissance and surveillance to the north. By mid-1941 however, the Army had become concerned that these strips could be seized by the Japanese and used as bases from which to attack Darwin. They were isolated and virtually undefended.[4] The Army had decided that it would not be possible to detach troops from the field force for the defence of individual airfields because this would result in the dispersion of limited troop resources in small detachments across north Australia. By May 1941 in the

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4. In 1939 the defence of the Empire Airways flying boat base at Groote Eylandt depended upon a single rifle. Later, additional arms were made available and a rifle club formed. See AA Canberra, series A816, item 14/301/252; Defence of Karumba and Groote Eylandt Flying Boat Bases. Letter, Minister for Civil Aviation to the Minister for Defence, 27 July 1939.

absence of either RAAF or Army defences, the services contemplated calling upon the missionaries and their Aboriginal charges to provide at least some defence at these airstrips.[5] But this plan was abandoned. The missionaries and their Aborigines were already involved in the Navy's coastwatching network and that was judged to be about the limit of any realistic contribution they might make to the defence of the airstrips.

By June 1941, the Army had found an answer to the problem of defending these isolated airstrips and of providing surveillance and early warning over the deserted flanks of Darwin. On 11 June 1941, the anthropologist, Donald Thomson, then a Flight Lieutenant in the RAAF, gave a lecture to an Army audience which included the Chief of the General Staff and the Director of Military Operations, at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. Thomson's lecture, 'Arnhem Land and the Native Tribes who inhabit that area' was based on his field research there for two and a half years following the 1932 and 1933 killings by the Balamumu. Thomson had graduated from Melbourne University in 1925 after studying zoology and botany. After graduation he had joined the staff of the Melbourne Herald but he remained

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5. AA Canberra, series A1196, item 15/501/176; Defence of Air Bases Against Land Attack. Letter, Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Department of Air, 3 May 1941. The Army assessed that Drysdale River Mission would be able to provide 'Spanish priests and Aborigines' to form a guard and at Milingimbi Mission 'three Europeans and 250 Aborigines' were thought to be available.

desperately keen to join a scientific expedition to remote parts. He applied for field work funds from the Australian National Research Council's Committee on Anthropological Research and was told that although funds were available, he would need to train as an anthropologist. He then completed the first of the one-year diploma courses in anthropology conducted at Sydney University, graduating in 1928 and was awarded an Australian National Research Council grant of £600 to study the Aboriginal people of Cape York. During his field work, a minor problem relating to his submission of accounts to the Council's treasurer and his later insistence that he retain ownership of the photographs he had taken, resulted in loss of support from the Sydney school of anthropologists which dominated anthropology in Australia into the 1960s. Thomson was faced with finding other means of supporting his field work and this he did through grants from Melbourne University and by continuing to publish articles through the Melbourne Herald. On his third field trip to Cape York, Thomson gained first hand experience of the ill-treatment of Aborigines at Aurukun Mission Station. There he witnessed the summary imprisonment of Aborigines for minor misdemeanours and their permanent exile, without trial, to Palm Island, as well as other punishments such as head shaving and flogging. Back in Melbourne, the Presbyterian church, of which Thomson was a member, refused to listen to his protests. It was against this background of moral

outrage that Thomson became involved in anthropological field work in Arnhem Land.[6]

Thomson's fieldwork with the Aborigines of east Arnhem Land had come about as a result of the 1932 killings of the Japanese and the killing of two whites on Woodah Island the following year. In August 1933, a police party had visited east Arnhem Land in an attempt to apprehend the Aborigines responsible for the killings. During this patrol Constable McColl was speared by an Aborigine named Tuckiar on Woodah Island.[7] These killings, and particularly that of Constable McColl, triggered widespread fear among the white community that the Aborigines of east Arnhem Land were defying any white intrusion on their territory and were massing for an attack on the Emerald River Mission at Groote Eylandt.[8] Both assumptions were quite incorrect[9] but the Northern Territory Administration called for a police punitive expedition to teach the Aborigines a lesson. The possibility that a punitive expedition might be mounted met

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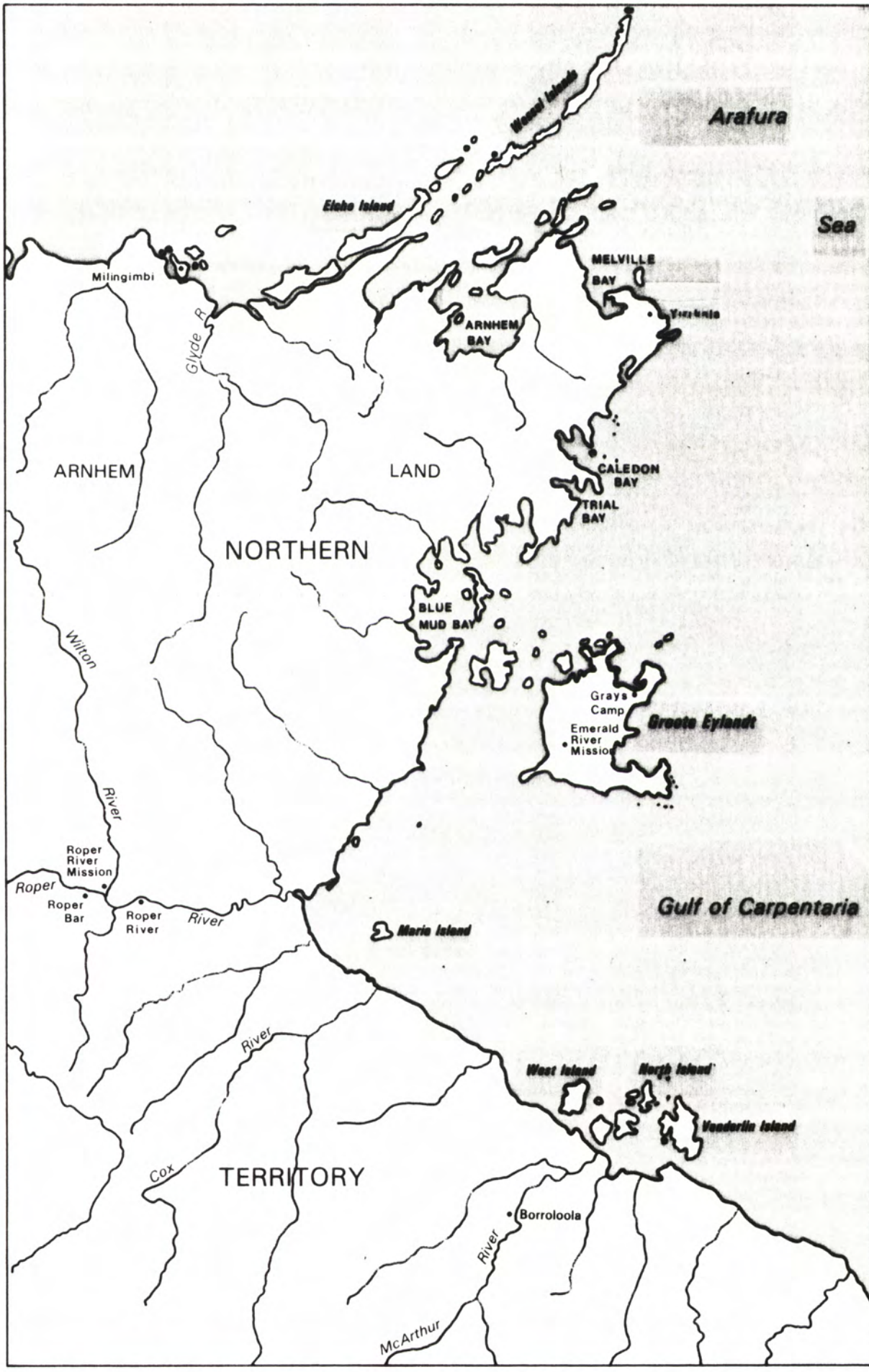
6. Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, pp. 1-7.

7. There are various accounts of this event. The most accurate is probably that in Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, pp. 34-35. For a contrasting version of the event see Vic Hall, Outback Policeman, Rigby, Sydney, 1970, pp. 155-160.

8. Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, p. 19. Broken glass was scattered around the mission to deter the bare-footed warriors.

9. Fred Gray and his crew were shipwrecked on the east Arnhem Land coast in 1934 and lived for a while with the Balamumu quite amicably. Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, pp. 38-42.

EAST ARNHEM LAND



with staunch public opposition particularly in south east Australia. Under these circumstances, Thomson was commissioned by the Commonwealth government to go alone to east Arnhem Land and to establish friendly relations with the Aborigines, attempt to control inter-tribal fighting, study their culture and unearth the underlying causes of the killings. During his two and a half years with the Balamumu, Thomson learnt their language, lived their life-style and established intimate and long lasting friendship and mutual respect with their leaders.

As Thomson reviewed his involvement with the Balamumu for his Army audience, he drew three points of military significance. First, neither the Northern Territory Administration nor the Department of Defence knew very much about east Arnhem Land - 25,000 square miles on the east flank of Darwin. Second, although the Balamumu had been hostile to the Japanese, many Japanese pearlers had made considerable efforts to ingratiate themselves with other Aboriginal groups. Third, the Aborigines of the area were accustomed over many centuries to the visit of Macassans from the north west. Thomson was particularly concerned about the influence of the Japanese among the Aborigines, warning the Army that as many as 700 Japanese may have visited the Arnhem Land coast in each pearling season and that their presence and association with the local

Aborigines had undermined the prestige of whites in the area.[10] Thomson argued that the Arnhem Land coast should now be visited to destroy any remaining influence the Japanese might have among the Aborigines and to establish a coastwatching network manned by the Aborigines. Furthermore, Thomson argued, some Arnhem Land Aborigines should be taken to the Islands of Timor, Laut and neighbouring areas to establish contacts with the native people there. The close ties between the Aborigines and the people of the Malayan archipelago through the centuries of Macassan visits would, he thought, render the Aborigines valuable for reconnaissance in these areas.[11]

One of those who had attended Thomson's lecture was Lieutenant Colonel Scott, Director of Special Operations.[12] After discussing the employment of the Arnhem Land Aborigines for the flank protection of Darwin with Thomson, Scott became convinced that Thomson was the man to organise a unit manned by the Arnhem Land Aborigines. There was 'no

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10. AWM, series 54, item 741/5/9; Report: the Organisation of the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit 1941-1943. Report, The Place of the Natives of Arnhem Land in the Defence of the Coast of Northern Australia with a Proposal for the Organization of a Force for Scouting and Reconnaissance, Flight Lieutenant D.F. Thomson, June 1941.

11. ibid.

12. Scott had been involved with the formation of right wing paramilitary organisations in the 1920s and 30s and is thought to have been the model for Callcott in D.H. Lawrence's Kangaroo. Thomson, Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, p. 11.

other man in Australia more suited to organise and carry out this work than is Thompson [sic.]'.[13] As a result, Thomson was seconded to the Army to command the force planned by Scott.

In Scott's view, the cost of raising this Aboriginal surveillance force was a major consideration:

> The cost of the services provided by the natives would be repaid in trade tobacco ... fish hooks, wire for fish spears, tomahawks and pipes. ... It will be seen that the costs would be very moderate for a plan which ... [would] ensure a very considerable degree of safety to Darwin, at present denied, preventing enemy movement over a vast area in which Japanese have shown interest, which at present offers neither resistance nor reporting and watching organisation.[14]

Scott judged the areas vital to the defence of Darwin to be Bathurst and Melville Islands and the Line of Communications - the Stuart Highway. An overland attack against the line of communications was unlikely because in mounting it the enemy would over-extend his own lines of communication, making himself vulnerable to guerilla attack. Scott argued that the main threat to Darwin lay in the enemy seizing an isolated airfield to use as a base from which to launch airborne attacks intended to cut Darwin's overland access to the rest of Australia. He noted

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13. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 38/401/138; 'Aroetta' - Movements. Most Secret Minute, Lieutenant Colonel Scott, Special Operations Section, to Director Military Operations and Intelligence, 30 June 1941.

14. ibid.

that RAAF airfields at Groote Eylandt, Milingimbi and Bathurst Island were unguarded and could easily be seized. To defend against this possibility, Scott conceived a radical plan for the mobilisation of north Australia. Pastoral properties and local police stations were to form the basis of volunteer guerilla bands while the Aborigines over the entire area were to be formed into regional groups forming a network of coastwatching stations.[15] Thomson was to recruit local Aborigines to form a guerilla force for the defence of the airfields and a coastwatching force for early warning of enemy intentions.

Thomson's command consisted of the ketch 'Aroetta', crewed by six Solomon Islanders - employed as soldiers at discriminatory rates of pay[16] - with two white NCOs, Kapiu, a Torres Strait Islander soldier and Raiwalla, a formally enlisted 'full-blood' Aborigine from the Glyde River area of Arnhem Land. Both Kapiu and Raiwalla had served with Thomson during his stay with the Balamumu from 1935 to 1937. Thomson's tasks were:

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15. 54, item 741/5/9. Appreciation, Lieutenant Colonel W.J.R. Scott, 18 August 1941.

16. MP729/6, item 38/401/138. Letter, Thomson to Colonel Hoare, 28 December 1942. Thomson wrote 'I found that the crew had either been got at by agitators or that as a result of their mingling with troops, including native troops, from all over the world, were in a difficult mood'. The 'native troops' Thomson refers to were probably American Negroes. The low pay of the Solomon Islanders was the problem. Their pay was from 30/- to £2 per month. See also item 37/401/1643; Repatriation of Solomon Islands Natives.

a. Reconnaissance.

(1) To carry out a reconnaissance of the area including islands off the coast, Borroloola on the McArthur River, Gulf of Carpentaria, to Wyndham in the North West of WA.

(2) To re-establish friendly relations with the natives of this area, which were established in 1935, 1936 and 1937 to assess the kind and degree of influence exerted upon the natives especially in Arnhem Land, by the Japanese who have visited the area in numbers, to take active steps to dispel any Japanese influence and to undermine their prestige.

b. Flank Protection for Darwin.

(1) To provide flank protection for Darwin by organizing the natives of this coastline to form an efficient coastwatching organization, based on their own local organization, and reporting, in each district, through posts equipped with WT [Wireless Transmitters].

(2) To organize the natives into a potential mobile force or patrol, retaining for the most part their local grouping, so that the natives can be readily gathered into efficient units to carry out guerilla warfare in the event of landing by enemy forces, and led by the reconnaissance party.

(3) To gather together a small unit of the aborigines who possess special prowess in hunting, in craftsmanship and bushcraft, and who are skilled in guerilla warfare and ambush, and to use these natives for the instruction of members of the Independent Companies in tropical bushcraft and in living on the resources of the country.[17]

Scott had originally intended that Thomson would perform these tasks on both flanks of Darwin but by April 1942

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17. 54, item 741/5/9. Proposed Plan for Discussion with Commandant 7 MD, undated. See also MP729/6, item 38/401/138. Letter, Director of Military Operations to HQ Northern Command, 13 September 1941.

Thomson's role was restricted to the Arnhem Land area. Thomson was also given the additional task of being responsible to order the evacuation of any remaining whites in his area, if it should become necessary. This responsibility mainly referred to the missions at Milingimbi, Yirrkala, and Emerald River and to Gray's Camp - a privately run camp for Aborigines. Thomson was reluctant to order the evacuation of these whites as this would leave a large population of mission Aborigines without any form of civil administration, presenting problems for his unit.

Thomson's unit was operating along the Arnhem Land coast by late February 1942. As 'Aroetta' made its way towards east Arnhem Land, Thomson made contact with the local Aborigines countering any sympathy they may have had for the Japanese. Raiwalla conducted anti-Japanese propaganda in the Aborigines' own language, and to underscore the message, Thomson arranged for firepower demonstrations. The assembled local Aborigines would witness the firing of one of Thomson's Vickers machine guns and view the racks of rifles 'Aroetta' carried. Thomson hoped that this would impress upon the Aborigines that 'Aroetta' was a far more powerful vessel than the Japanese pearling luggers which had visited previously. But the Aborigines must also have recognised a veiled threat in these demonstrations.

At Arnhem Bay, Thomson began the recruitment of the

Aborigines for his unit. There he met Bindjarpuma, a powerful and aggressive leader of a group which dominated this part of the Arnhem Land coast. Bindjarpuma and 35 of his warriors, 'all good travellers, and hunters, some of them renowned as fighting men in single combat'[18] joined Thomson's unit. At Trial Bay, Thomson was reunited with the Aborigines he had worked among in the 1930s. Led by Wonggu, they were another powerful and aggressive group. After explaining his mission to them, he was inundated with offers of service, but had to turn many away. His plan was to train a nucleus of warriors leaving others undisturbed. Thomson believed that Aborigines living their traditional life-style had as much right to practice their beliefs as did other people. This led him to support the idea that Aborigines should have the protection of sanctuaries or reserves within which they could live their lives relatively free from disturbance by white influences. This view was at odds with the prevailing anthropological conventional wisdom, led by A.P. Elkin, which argued that it was inevitable that Aborigines would need to come to terms with white culture, modifying their own.[19] Thomson's

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18. 54, item 741/5/9. Report, Organization of the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit 1941-1943, p. 25.

19. Wise, The Self-Made Anthropologist, pp. 131-132 and 170-171. Wise makes it clear that in many ways, Thomson was ahead of his time recognising that Aborigines possessed a fundamental right to recognition of their hereditary ownership of land and the right to follow the life-style they chose.

plan to form a nucleus of a force conformed to his broader philosophical viewpoint because it limited the number of Aboriginal warriors who would be exposed to the stress and cultural shock of military training adapted to white Australian needs. Nevertheless, Thomson recognised that in the event of a Japanese landing, his trained nucleus would return to their clans to mobilise the others. He hoped this would never be required.

Three of the warriors from Wonggu's clan had been gaoled in Darwin for the 1932 killings of the Japanese[20] and, recalled Thomson, 'it took some time to convince these people that they could really kill Japanese who landed in this territory, without incurring the ire of the Government, and being visited by yet another punitive expedition'.[21] But the Japanese were almost hereditary enemies of the Balamumu and Thomson's Aboriginal force were soon preparing for a possible Japanese attack. They began manufacturing spear points out of odds and ends of metal.

Bindjarpuma and Wonggu were enemies, and ill feeling between the two groups had to be expunged before Thomson could weld his force into a military unit. This was achieved through a traditional 'squaring up' ritual. Scapegoats selected from each group, had to run the

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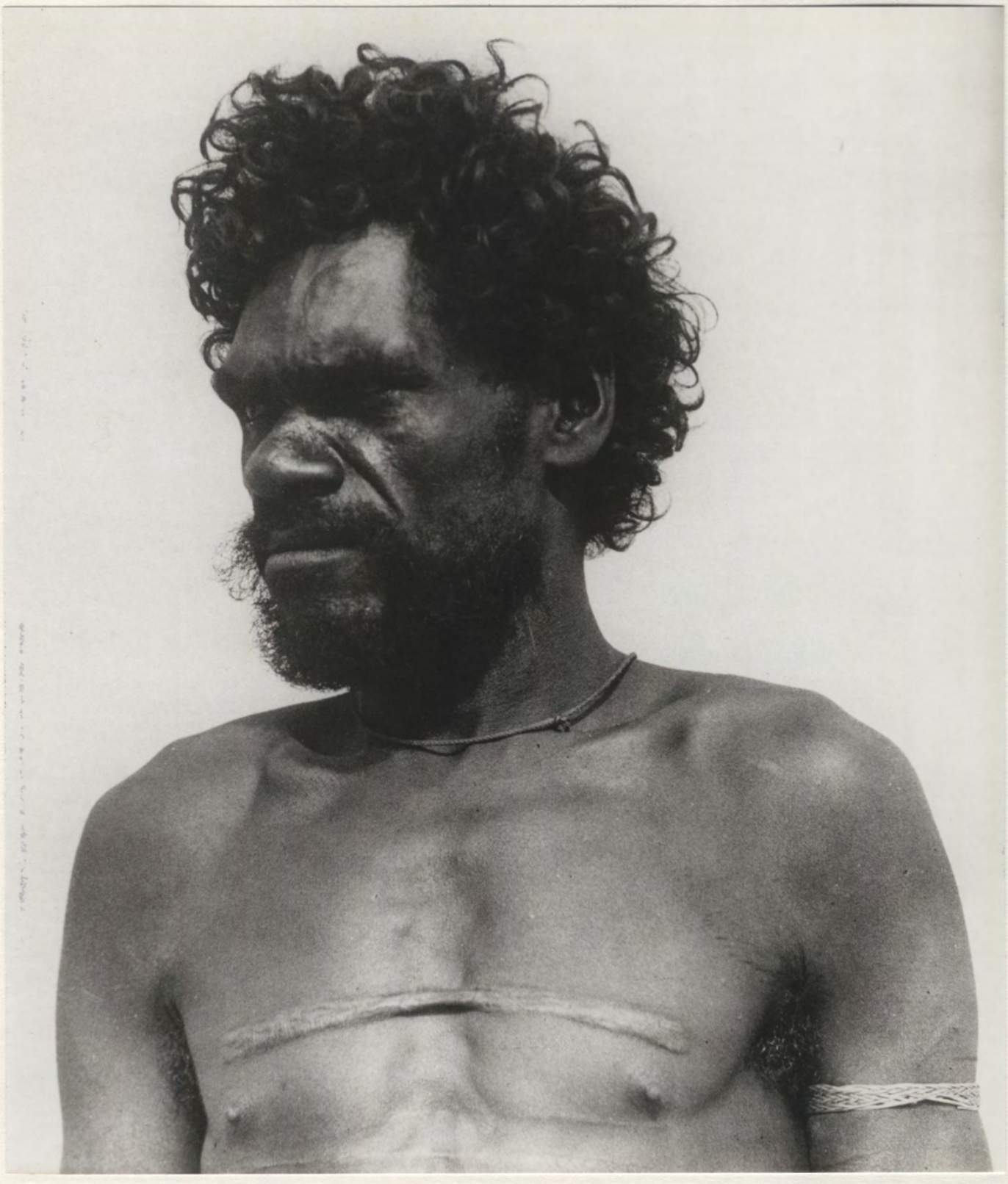
20. They were Mau, Natjialma and Ngarkaiya.

21. 54, item 741/5/9. Thomson's Report, p. 48.



Bindjarpuma

Bindjarpuma was a patrol commander in Donald Thomson's Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit.

Courtesy, Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria.

Natjialma

Natjialma manufacturing spear points from scrap metal.

Courtesy of the Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria.

gauntlet while the offended clan threw spears at them. Those who survived this ordeal uninjured had still to present their thighs for spearing - a spear being thrust through the thigh muscle. After this blood letting, the wrong was considered expiated and the two groups were able to work harmoniously together. Here Thomson demonstrated the importance of his selection to command the unit. As an anthropologist sympathetic to the Aborigines, Thomson had resolved the tension within his command in accordance with Aboriginal law. In doing so he had cemented the Aborigines' confidence in him and had established his position of authority over them.

By March 1942, Thomson had begun intensive training of his command. He had divided his force into three sections under the command of Raiwalla, Bindjarpuma and Natjialma and established his base at the Roper River Mission. While Aborigines from the mission station mounted a watch over the mouth of the river, Thomson drilled and trained his Aboriginal soldiers and conducted intensive reconnaissance around the mouth of the Roper:

> To have the full confidence of these complex "primitive" people sufficiently to lead them it is necessary to know their language and to be prepared literally to live and work with them. In return, however, they will give loyalty and an unswerving devotion to duty which, if it rests on personal respect and attachment and has something of hero worship, is nevertheless very real. ... Properly led, under the severe conditions of their own territory, these people are capable of enduring hardships and suffering sustained privations without flinching, that would be

impossible to most white soldiers.[22]

The Aborigines of east Arnhem Land practised a traditional mode of inter-tribal warfare which had honed their military skills to perfection over many generations. The traditional Aboriginal raid against a neighbouring clan usually consisted of a long approach march by a small 'patrol' of selected warriors. On nearing their objective they would establish a hide from which one or two men would move forward to reconnoitre their opponent's position. This reconnaissance 'patrol' would then report back to the main body and the attack would be planned. The attack would generally be made at night, the fighting patrol closing in on their enemies using their considerable bushcraft skills to achieve maximum surprise. Once close enough, the attack would be launched, the Aborigines rushing forward to spear their enemies, then quickly withdrawing into the night. After the attack, the Aborigines would make their way individually to a pre-selected rendezvous to avoid the possibility of being followed. From the rendezvous, they would return to their own country by a series of forced marches. The logic of the battlefield had produced in these Aborigines a system of patrol tactics which would have been recognised by any soldier. These tactics required very little adaptation by Thomson to make them useful against the Japanese.

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22. 54, item 741/5/9. Thomson's Report, pp. 48-49.

A Patrol Resting

Thomson's unit carried out extensive patrolling of the east Arnhem Land area. The Aboriginal members of the unit were skilled bushmen, capable of enduring the hardships of living off the land for lengthy periods.

Courtesy of the Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria.

Machine Gun Training

Thomson trained the Aboriginal members of his unit in methods of attacking machine gun emplacements.

Courtesy of the Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria.

Thomson insisted that his warriors use their traditional weapons - the weapons they were familiar with and which they handled with great skill. The issue of rifles and other weapons to the Aboriginal soldiers would result in the Japanese recognising them as an organised military unit, possibly leading to Japanese retaliations against other Aborigines. Thomson was convinced that the Aborigines could still be a potent force using only their traditional weapons. He recalled their performance against the Japanese pearlers, and the Northern Territory police during the early 1930s and felt that so long as they acted as guerillas, attacking small parties of Japanese and leaving larger enemy parties to the conventional forces, they could be effective. Thomson may also have been motivated by his desire to limit the impact of the war upon the Aborigines. His only concession to technology was the use of 'Molotov cocktails' which he thought would be useful against targets such as parked aircraft and stores dumps. To maintain the impression that his soldiers were not a formal military organisation, Thomson trained himself to go barefoot. Boot tracks would have signalled that a white was in command. An extremely tough minded individual, Thomson had other reasons for going barefoot. He was aware that his soldiers could endure the privations imposed upon them by their harsh environment without complaint. They would expect him to do the same. To maintain his authority he accepted that he would have to live the life of his soldiers - in every

detail.

Training exercises conducted by Thomson included infiltration, night approaches, attacks, ex-filtration and re-grouping at pre-selected rendezvous. One such exercise involved a long night swim through a mangrove fringed river to reach the objective. Despite the tangle of mangroves, the Aborigines managed the approach, attack, disperal and rendezvous silently and unerringly. Thomson assessed his guerillas as far more adept at the skills of guerilla warfare than the men of 2/4 Independent Company or the North Australia Observer Unit, both of which had operated near Thomson's force in the Roper River area and required the assistance of Aboriginal guides to find their way and to locate water on the patrols they conducted.

The omission of formal enlistment for Thomson's Aboriginal soldiers served not only to set them apart from the remainder of the Army and to maintain, at least superficially, the Army policy of excluding non-Europeans. It also enabled the Army to reap the benefits of the Aborigines' service at almost no cost. Because they were not enlisted, the Aborigines were not paid and were not eligible for repatriation benefits in the event of injury. 'Pay' for the soldiers consisted of the issue of three sticks of tobacco per week. The men were only issued Army rations while they were undergoing intensive training which prevented them from gathering their own 'bush tucker'. On

patrol, the Aborigines were expected to feed themselves and to facilitate this, Thomson had issued them with tomahawks, knives, fishing lines and hooks. These permitted more efficient food gathering, freeing more time for patrolling, training and if necessary, operations against the Japanese. There could be few units in any Army raised and maintained at such little cost. Scott's claim that the cost of the unit would be 'very moderate' was something of an understatement.

After sixteen months of training and patrols, Thomson's tasks were completed. He had made a thorough reconnaissance of east Arnhem Land, had destroyed any remaining Aboriginal sympathy for the Japanese, had established an Aboriginal coastwatching network and had raised and trained his Aboriginal guerilla force. With the threat to Darwin receding and the responsibility for flank protection and early warning being met by the North Australia Observer Unit, Thomson's unit was disbanded. The Aborigines returned to their tribal groups where they remained alert to the Japanese threat. The security of east Arnhem Land was largely entrusted to them. Although east Arnhem Land was within the area of responsibility of the North Australia Observer Unit, that unit's operations were concentrated on the most likely areas of Japanese interest and the Observer Unit never patrolled extensively through east Arnhem Land as Thomson's unit had. Though their service had been relatively brief, the Aborigines of

The Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit

on Parade

Note that each man is equipped with at least three shovel nosed fighting spears. The three men closest to the camera are Solomon Islanders - members of the crew of Thomson's ketch 'Aroetta'.

Courtesy of the Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria.

Thomson's Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit had surely formed one of Australia's most remarkable Army units.

How successful would the unit have been? The success of Thomson's unit lay in three areas. First, the Aborigines were total masters of their environment. Their bushcraft skills were superb. Even the soldiers of the North Australia Observer Unit, selected for that unit because of their bushcraft skills, acknowledged that the local Aborigines were far superior to themselves.[23] The Aborigines knew the country in intimate detail; in particular they knew where water was to be found. Their bushcraft skills and local knowledge gave them a mobility which could never have been matched by the Japanese. Second, the unit had no supply line to protect. The Aborigines found their food, water and even weapons, where they were. The Japanese on the other hand, had they landed, would have been at the end of an extended and vulnerable supply line - presenting ideal opportunities for guerilla operations. Third, the Aborigines' individual skills as warriors, their ability to silently stalk their enemies and their understanding of the importance of surprise would have made them as formidable to the Japanese as they had been to the intruders who had ventured into

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23. Richard and Helen Walker, Curtin's Cowboys, pp. 138-150.

their country in the 1930s. So long as it remained within the limits of its role as a guerilla force, the unit may have performed very well.

By May 1942 the Inter-Allied Services Department, an arm of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, considered the organisation of 'partisan and similar activities' in Australia to meet the Japanese threat. Acknowledging the important role which Thomson's unit had already played, Major Trappes-Lomax recommended the raising of units similar to Thomson's to extend a surveillance screen across the whole of north Australia including Cape York and the Kimberleys. 'Wild Abos' were to be recruited to man these additional units.[24] The employment of Aborigines as guerillas in remote parts of the north was recognised by the Inter-Allied Services Department as of 'vital importance'. The Department sought a free hand in its use of Aborigines, suggesting that 'an official edict from the highest authority' be provided to scotch any interference from State government authorities.[25] This plan was not implemented, but indicates that Thomson's unit successfully performed an important role.

Thomson's Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit

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24. AWM, the Blamey collection, item 56.8: Special Units. Report by Major Trappes-Lomax, 11 May 1942.

25. ibid. Minute, Lieutenant Colonel Mott to the Chief of the General Staff, 19 May 1942.

provided much needed surveillance over the east flank of Darwin at a time when the possibility of a Japanese invasion was at its highest. On the northern and western flanks of Darwin, other groups of Aborigines were providing similar service, forming what amounted to a loose surveillance screen around Darwin. This screen came into existence not through a coordinated approach to the value of Aborigines in providing this type of military skill, but as the uncoordinated result of similar pressures on local military commanders. Whereas Thomson's unit had explicit Army backing - Scott after all had ordered Thomson to form the unit - other groups of Aboriginal de facto servicemen were created on the initiative of local Service commanders without any formal Service recognition at all.

As Thomson had been forming his unit in east Arnhem Land, other Aboriginal units were formed at Bathurst and Melville Islands and at Delissaville on Cox peninsula, south west of Darwin. At Bathurst and Melville Islands, which as Scott had noted were of vital importance to the security of Darwin, Aborigines performed important de facto service for the RAAF and the Navy. Like east Arnhem Land, Bathurst and Melville Islands were known in intimate detail by the Aborigines who lived there, but less so by whites. RAAF airstrips at Bathurst Island Mission and Snake Bay on Melville Island were used to extend fighter cover over the north western approaches to Darwin, but at the same time, offered the Japanese a tempting target. The capture of

Bathurst and Melville Islands by the Japanese would provide them with the airstrips from which to dominate the sea and air approaches to Darwin. Like east Arnhem Land, the security of Bathurst and Melville Island depended upon early warning of Japanese interest in the area. It was to provide this early warning that the Aborigines were employed.

At both Bathurst and Melville Islands, the association between the Services and the Aborigines developed as an extension of the existing relationship between civil authorities and the Aborigines. This was to be the typical model for the involvement of tribal or partly de-tribalised Aborigines in de facto military operations in north Australia and existed to some extent with the Army's use of Thomson's earlier experience with the Balamumu in east Arnhem Land. The RAAF had based a two man detachment of 'aerodrome guards' at Bathurst Island Mission to defend the newly constructed airfield. On 19 February 1942, Japanese fighters on their way to attack Darwin, peeled off from the bomber formations they were escorting and attacked Bathurst Island Mission and its nearby aerodrome. Immediately following the attack, the mission Aborigines were sent into the bush by the missionaries who feared further attacks and possibly a Japanese landing. A Japanese fighter, damaged in the raid on Darwin, crash-landed on Melville Island and a mission Aborigine, Matthias Ulungura captured the pilot:

> I walked after him and grabbed his wrist near

> gun. He got proper big fright. I take revolver from his right side near his knee. Then I walk backwards pointing gun; I say "Stick 'em up, right up, two hands, no more holding hands on head". I point revolver more close.[26]

Matthias took his Japanese prisoner to Corporal Moore, the RAAF aerodrome guard at Bathurst Island Mission. From that time on Moore employed Matthias as his personal bodyguard:

> Naturally, I could not put him on a payroll or enlist him, but I fed him and he served with me for almost the whole of 1942. ... He went on foot patrols with me all over Bathurst Island and on to Melville Island. He and Clement [another Aborigine] also accompanied me on patrols around the island in a sailing craft and he helped me organize a mine laying project ...[27]

Clearly, Matthias and other Aborigines were of great assistance to the overstretched two man RAAF guard.

Louie Piraptameli, another Bathurst Island Aborigine captured another five Japanese airmen, the crew of a downed bomber. He too led them to the Bathurst Island Mission and to the RAAF guards. Louie also figured in the rescue of several downed Allied airmen. Like Matthias, he developed close ties with the RAAF personnel on Bathurst Island, working with them continuously and eventually being granted

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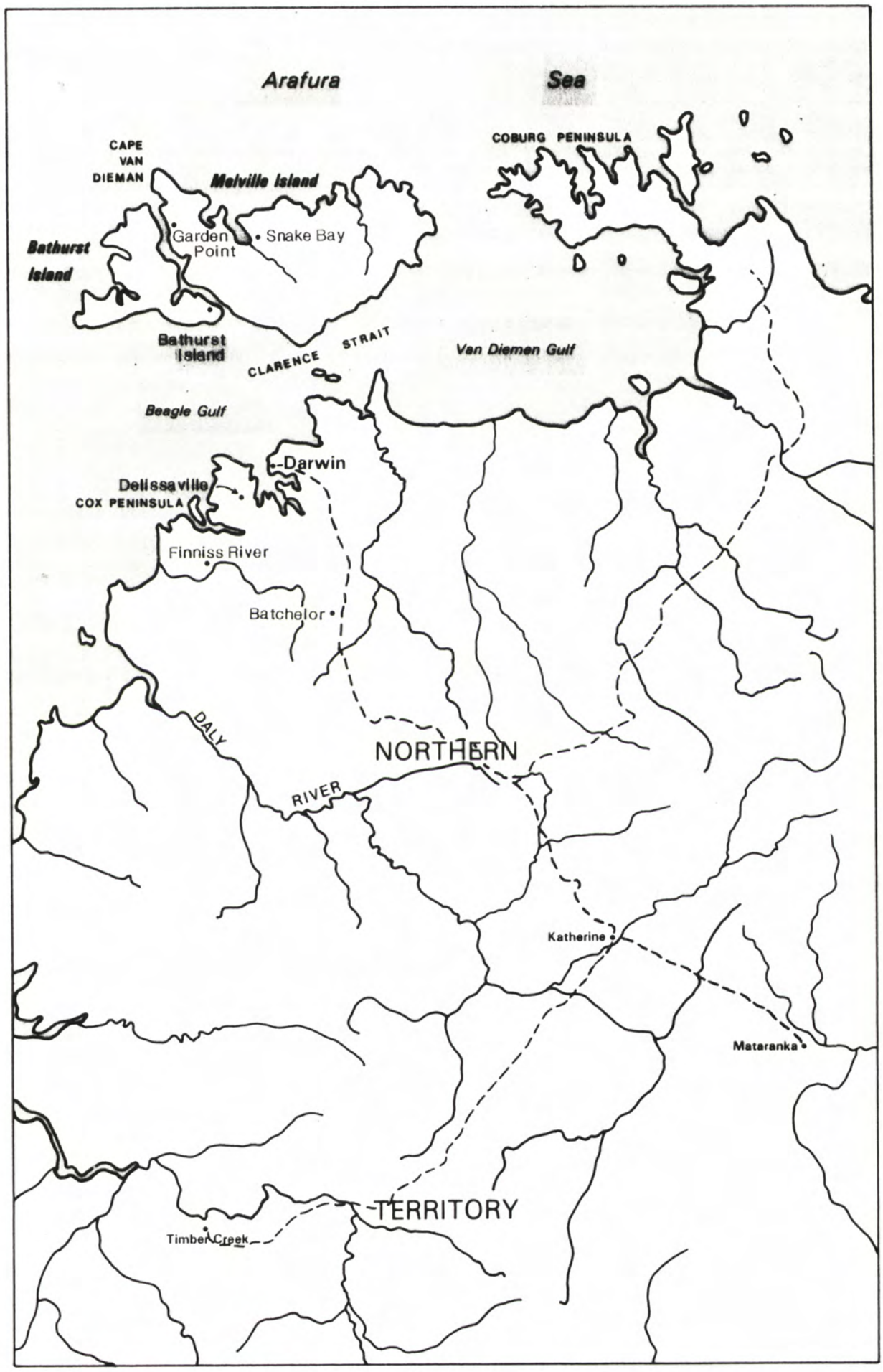
26. John Pye, M.S.C., The Tiwi Islands, Colemans Printing, Darwin, 1977, p. 49. The capture of the Japanese airman is also recounted in Owen Griffiths, Darwin Drama, Bloxham and Chambers, Sydney, n.d., p. 89, although Pye's account is more detailed and includes Matthias' own story.

27. RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interview File. Statement by the Administrator of the Northern Territory, 5 February 1964 which includes a statement by Moore.

MELVILLE AND BATHURST ISLANDS, DARWIN AND SURROUNDS



the 'honorary rank' of Flight Sergeant.[28] In both cases, the Aborigines' association with the mission had led them into contact with the RAAF personnel stationed there.

In 1940, at Snake Bay on Melville Island, the Northern Territory Administration had established an Aboriginal rationing depot under the control of Jack Gribble. Throughout 1941, this ration depot remained a small affair, but the Native Affairs Branch began to use it as a disciplinary settlement for Aborigines removed from Darwin, particularly those who were persistent drinkers or opium addicts. Many of these 'incorrigibles' were those who were simply uncooperative - those who did not obey the instructions of the Native Affairs Branch in every detail. Initially Gribble acted as a volunteer coastwatcher, but in September 1942 he was formally enlisted into the Navy, staying on Melville Island until May 1945. As a civilian coastwatcher, Gribble had already begun employing selected Aborigines to assist his coastwatching. After his enlistment, the relationship between the Aborigines and the Navy grew even closer. The 36 Aborigines of his 'patrol', some of them regarded by the Native Affairs Branch as 'incorrigibles', began to be used more and more as servicemen. Harry One, a member of the 'patrol' recalled:

> Mr Gribble, he said, "well we got to ring up [Naval Headquarters, Darwin] to make you all a

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28. RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interview File. Clipping from Melbourne Sun, 28 October 1944.

> patrol work ... Navy" ... He never put a paper for us [enlisted us]. ... We only doing the right thing all the time ... tobacco and tucker, that's all we get to do ... no money. ... Hard work for nothing. ... He had money himself. Not us.[29]

Gribble regarded the Aboriginal members of his 'patrol' as servicemen. The Aborigines too, regarded themselves as servicemen, quickly adopting the Navy's traditional superior attitude towards the other Services. Though they were never formally enlisted, Gribble had his force issued with Navy uniforms, rations and weapons. They regularly trained at rifle and machine gun practice and grenade throwing as well as the skills of minor tactics.[30] Some, such as Ginger One, were given the rank of Petty Officer. But despite these trimmings of formal recognition, and Gribble's repeated promises, they remained unenlisted and unpaid throughout the war.[31]

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29. Interview, Harry One, 16 September 1986.

30. AA Darwin, series NTAC 1980/111, Miscellaneous records maintained by E.J. Murray, Superintendent of Delissaville Settlement. Letter, Murray to the Director of Native Affairs, undated. Murray visited Snake Bay and commented upon the training and loyalty of Gribble's Aboriginal patrol members. Patrol Officer W.E. Harney also commented favourably upon the Aboriginal patrol. His comments may be found in AA Darwin, series F1, item 44/275; Patrol Officer W.E. Harney - Patrols and Reports. Report on Bathurst Island Mission, 6 April 1944.

31. Their service was recognised by the Commonwealth government in 1962 when they were awarded their war service medals and were given an Act-of-Grace payment of up to £200 each, depending upon length of service. Despite overwhelming evidence that they had served in a military capacity, the 1962 payments did not reflect the pay they might have expected as enlisted Naval ratings.

Gribble's Patrol

The men of Gribble's patrol mounting guard at Naval Headquarters, Darwin. The men are, from the left, Harry One, Holder Adams, Ali Miller Mungatopi, Francis Butcher Tippaklippa, Victor Adams, Charlie One Tippaklippa, Melon, Brownie Araku, Man Fong and Charlie Two (partly hidden). The inspecting officer is accompanied by Ginger Two.

AWM 62385

Gribble with Patrol Members

The Aborigines are, from the left, Ginger Two, Harry One and Ginger One. Harry One and Ginger One performed the roles of NCOs.

AWM 62345

Gribble's patrol performed valuable service throughout the war. They rescued several downed Allied airmen including the crew of a Dutch bomber, one of whom had a broken leg and had to be carried many miles. Other rescues, like that of Lieutenant J. Martin, an American fighter pilot, involved considerable feats of patrolling. Martin's rescue involved the Aborigines in a walk of 119 miles. Members of Gribble's unit also found and cared for 11 survivors of the SS 'Florence D', a US supply ship sunk by Japanese aircraft 60 miles off Melville Island.[32] But the most significant contribution made by these Aborigines was the security they provided to the island. Melville Island was the site of two RAAF radar stations and the coast watching station at Snake Bay and it dominated Bathurst Island with its important aerodrome. Gribble's Aboriginal patrol carried out extensive patrols around the island ensuring that these installations were given the maximum warning of any Japanese landing. In a period of 15 months, Gribble's Aboriginal servicemen patrolled over 2,000 miles by boat and a further 1,000 miles by foot to

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32. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 164/1/209; Aust Abo - Participation in War Effort. Reply to A.G. Cameron, prepared by Captain F.R. Morris, undated. Similar information is also available in RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interview File, 105 Fighter Control Unit File - Searches.

33. RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interview File, 105 Fighter Control Unit File - Searches. For other information on the typical work carried out by the members of this patrol see AA Melbourne, series MP151, item 533/201/368; Mines Washed Ashore - Melville Island.

provide this security.[33] Perhaps the most remarkable contribution made by these men was their involvement in clandestine visits to Timor - a role for Aborigines which Donald Thomson had first identified. Two Aborigines, Strangler McKenzie and Charlie One, both Indonesian speakers, made several visits to Timor over a period of about three months, aboard Allied submarines to assist with the landing of stores and Allied personnel.[34]

The Navy Headquarters in Darwin knew of Gribble's unauthorised enlistment of the 36 Aborigines. Even the Naval Board knew of Gribble's demands for weapons far beyond those necessary for his personal use.[35] Yet both were content to let the Aborigines give unpaid and unrecognised service of a type more dangerous than that expected of many servicemen in Darwin. This acceptance of the Aborigines' ambiguous status suited the Naval authorities. The Navy after all, was receiving the benefit of the service of the Aborigines without having to meet any of the usual responsibilities like pay or repatriation benefits. Here the Navy was exploiting Gribble's pre-war association with the Snake Bay Aborigines. The

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34. Pye, The Tiwi Islands, p. 95. Pye's assertions are supported by my own interviews with surviving members of the force including Harry One and Holder Adams.

35. AA Melbourne, series MP151, item 412/201/77; Launch 'Amity' - Supply of Armaments. Minute, NOIC Darwin, to the Secretary of the Naval Board, 1 February 1944. Gribble requested a Vickers machinegun, sub-machineguns and several rifles.

commissioning of Gribble - who was paid for his service - had given the Navy free use of the able-bodied men in Gribble's camp.

This type of exploitation was not confined to the Navy. At the Delissaville Aboriginal settlement on Cox Peninsula, south west of Darwin, the settlement superintendent, Jack Murray, was enlisted into the Army's Volunteer Defence Corps on full time duty, specifically so that the Aborigines at his settlement would be brought under the control of the Army.[36] Immediately following the first air raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942, Murray had put forty of the able-bodied Aborigines to work for the Army, searching for planes thought to have crash landed on Cox Peninsula.[37] As the air raids continued, the Aborigines' rescue efforts became better organised with Murray establishing permanent watching posts manned by Aborigines and food caches for downed pilots. Pilots were issued with maps showing the location of these.

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36. AA NT Region, series NTAC 1980/111; Instructions, Fortress Command, HQ NT Force to Mr Murray, 19 June 1942.

37. AA Darwin, series NTAC 1980/111; File of Papers Containing Reports Written by E.J. Murray Concerning Native Patrols Around Delissaville 1942-43. Report on Delissaville Native Settlement for 1942, E.J. Murray, Superintendent to Director of Native Affairs, March 1945. See also NTAC 1980/111; Miscellaneous Records Maintained by E.J. Murray, Superintendent of Delissaville Settlement, Snake Bay Settlement (Melville Island) and Native Affairs Branch, Katherine - 1941-46. Superintendent's Diary for 1942 - Delissaville.

By June 1942, the Army had decided to take greater control over Murray and the Aborigines. Murray's Aboriginal patrol had already become known as the 'Black Watch', and on 19 June 1942, instructions were issued to 'bring the Black Watch under proper Military Control'. This was achieved by enlisting Murray and detailing him for '... Special duty on COX PENINSULAR [sic.]'.[38] Knowing that the Aborigines would have little choice but to comply with instructions issued by Murray, the 7th Military District Fortress Command set down Murray's duties:

> Your primary duty will be to organise and carry out patrols of those areas directed, to search for and locate:-
>
> (a) Allied pilots from crashed aircraft.
>
> (b) Personnel from crashed enemy aircraft.
>
> (c) Crashed Allied aircraft.
>
> (d) Crashed Enemy aircraft.
>
> Your secondary duty is to serve West [Point Coast Defence Artillery Battery] in any capacity directed by the Battery Commander.[39]

Like Gribble's enlistment in the Navy, Murray's enlistment ensured for the Army that the Aborigines' labour would be made available. The similarity with Gribble's force did not end there. The Delissaville Aborigines who served the

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38. AA Darwin, series NTAC 1980/111; Miscellaneous Records. Letter, Intelligence Officer, Fortress Command, 7th Military District, to Mr Murray, Delissaville, 19 June 1942.

39. ibid.

Army under Murray's command also did so without the benefit of being paid. Rations were provided by the Army, but as Murray's depot was a Native Affairs Branch ration station, the Aborigines were entitled to these rations in any case.

Until April 1943, when the Army evacuated the Delissaville settlement to Katherine, Murray and the Aborigines maintained constant patrols and manned observation posts over the hinterland of Cox Peninsula and Fog Bay.[40] Throughout the period, they had provided a measure of reassurance to the pilots who faced the possibility of crash landing or parachuting into the deserted bush and wide mangrove forests of Cox Peninsula - so near Darwin, yet so inhospitable.

On one patrol, Jack Mulberry, the 'boss boy' of the Aboriginal patrol, rescued an American pilot named Johnson, of 7th Squadron, 49th Fighter Group:

> By and by one fella white man bin sing out alonga mangrove another side of creek. We fella bin go alonga that side now. We bin leavum boat. We two fella, Mr Murray bin look about amonga mangrove. We bin hearum one fella white man singin out all the time alright. We fella bin go follerum up that one white man singin out. We bin go long way amonga mangrove, alright. We bin find him. Him up alonga tree. That one white man him close to bugger up. ... We bin cookim tucker. That one American him properly hungry bugger. He bin eatim tucker no

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40. Even after the evacuation of the Aborigines from Delissaville they continued to assist with occasional patrols to search for downed airmen. A typical patrol is described in AWM, series 64, item RAAF Operations Record Book, Service Police Unit (Darwin Section) 1942-1944.

more little bit.[41]

Johnson's life had undoubtedly been saved by the 'Black Watch'. Occasionally, the Aborigines were sent searching for downed Japanese airmen. On these occasions they were armed with service rifles.[42]

The three Aboriginal de facto military units - Thomson's, Gribble's and Murray's - formed a barrier around Darwin providing early warning and rescue service. Similar services could not have been provided by white servicemen. First, white servicemen lacked the necessary local knowledge to operate efficiently in isolated areas; and second, white servicemen would have become rapidly bored with the isolation and hardships of the remote areas in which they would have been required to work. By contrast, the Aborigines of these de facto military forces never took leave and never required rotation to other duties.

At some RAAF airbases, local Aborigines were expected to perform similar de facto military service without the benefit of formal enlistment. At the RAAF airbase at Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, an isolated and vulnerable post, the Officer Commanding involved local

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41. RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interviews - Number 5 Fighter Sector, extract from file 5/1/16 AIR.

42. AA Darwin, series NTAC 1980/111; Miscellaneous Records. Superintendents Diary for 1942. See entry for 29 April 1942. However, the Aborigines seem to have generally been unarmed.

Aborigines in his defence plan. Selected Aborigines were to lead detachments of RAAF personnel in patrols against the Japanese. On 24 August 1942, the sound of an unidentified flying boat caused the Officer Commanding to believe his base about to be attacked by a party of Japanese. While the RAAF personnel took cover, manning their defences, patrols of Aborigines were sent out to locate the enemy! Similar patrols of Aborigines were sent out over the next two days to satisfy the Commander that the Japanese had not landed. After seeing mysterious lights on 17 September 1942, the RAAF personnel were again afraid an enemy party had landed and Aborigines were again sent forward to locate them.[43] Later, the RAAF commander employed at least eight Aborigines from the nearby mission to stand guard with his white personnel at night. The Aborigines were armed with service rifles for this duty.[44] They were much more accustomed to the night-time noises of the bush than were the edgy whites.

The RAAF employed Aborigines on similar security patrols at Mornington Island. At Bathurst Island, Aborigines were

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43. RAAF Historical Section, Russell Offices Canberra. Unit History Sheet, 51 Operational Base Unit, entries for 24 August and 17 September 1942.

44. Northern Territory Archives Service, series NTRS, interview transcript TS64: Reverend Len Harris, wartime missionary at Groote Eylandt. See also monologue by Gerald Blitner. Gerald Blitner was the foreman of the Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt and during the war worked for the RAAF as supervisor of Aboriginal labour.

also employed by a Radar unit to act as guides during the withdrawal of the unit personnel in the event of a Japanese attack. The Navy coastwatcher at Wessel Island employed four Aborigines for similar duties.

While Aborigines were performing de facto military service on the flanks of Darwin, others were assisting to extend surveillance over areas further afield. Like east Arnhem Land, the Kimberley hinterland was virtually unknown to white Australians. Although the pastoral industry had penetrated into the Kimberley district, the density of the white population in the area remained very low and there were few whites on whom the Army or Navy could call to provide first hand experience of the region. Those who lived there were generally fully occupied with maintaining beef production and could not be spared from their properties. Military strength through the Kimberley district was very low. By March 1942 there were 50 servicemen in Broome, 20 in Derby, 15 in Wyndham, over 100 in Port Hedland, and small detachments in Roebourne and Onslow - a total of about 250 men, mostly poorly trained and equipped members of the Volunteer Defence Corps, concentrated in the major towns of the area. Most of these servicemen were whites although a sprinkling of 'part-Aborigines' and an occasional 'full-blood' had been admitted to the Volunteer Defence Corps in these districts. By contrast, within the Kimberley district there were estimated to be about 6,000 Aborigines of whom

about 1,000 might have been able-bodied men suitable for military service.[45] Although the Kimberley district was vulnerable, it did possess the manpower resources to make a significant contribution towards its own defence - providing that Aborigines were used. The dilemma facing the Army - whether to use Aborigines for the defence of the Kimberley district - was to be the subject of an argument between the Army and the Western Australian Commissioner for Native Affairs, who opposed the use of Aborigines, and the Prime Minister and his personal friend, Cyril Longmore, who supported their use. The argument was to continue from 1942 till January 1944.

When Japan entered the war and the vulnerability of the Kimberley coast became evident, the Army and Navy quickly recognised that Aborigines, with their detailed local knowledge of the convoluted coastline, were invaluable as guides. The Naval Officer in Charge at Broome, Lieutenant D.L. 'Beau' Davis, who was responsible for patrolling the coast between Broome and Darwin, employed two Aborigines, Lockie Bin Sali and Lenny Leonard, aboard his lugger,

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45. WA State Archives, series 1298A, item 41; Newspaper Articles on Bombing of Broome and Training of Native Guerillas. Article published in the West Australian, 14 August 1945. The article was by Cyril Longmore and the estimates of population and of able bodied Aborigines are his.

'Heather' Number 16.[46] The remainder of the crew consisted of seven Chinese, Timorese and Malays.[47] Lockie Bin Sali and Lenny Leonard were employed because of their intimate knowledge of the coast between Broome and Admiralty Gulf and because of their ability to contact the coastal Aborigines. Davis depended upon these contacts to provide information on Japanese movements and he encouraged the coastal Aborigines to stay along the coast by trading tobacco and clay pipes for turtle shell, occasional pearls

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46. Davis had spent many years in the Western Australian pearling industry including seven years as master of his own fleet of six luggers. He spoke Russian and German and had a knowledge of several Aboriginal languages of the north west of Australia as well as some knowledge of Japanese. He had been recruited by the Navy to sail a fleet of luggers to Ceylon where it was planned they would be used as harbour craft for the British Navy. This plan collapsed and instead, Davis was given responsibility for patrolling the Kimberley coast from Broome to Darwin. See MP1049/3, item 603/201/770.

47. AA Melbourne, series MP138, item 603/217/1277; Crews of Luggers. Minute, NOIC Broome to Finance Member re Luggers Requisitioned on North West Coast - Agents Accounts, undated. These men were also de facto servicemen and were underpaid for their service. The two Aborigines appear not to have been paid at all. See also AA Melbourne, series MP151, item 556/226/1920; Lugger 'Heather' - Crew. Minute, NOIC Port Hedland to NOIC Fremantle, 12 August 1943. By August 1943, the Asian crewmen complained to Davis about their discriminatory pay rates but it was not till over a year later that their pay was increased - and even then to a level still below that of conventional servicemen. Additional information supporting Davis' employment of the Aborigines was obtained from the Department of Defence.

and dingo scalps.[48] Other Aborigines were also involved in similar surveillance patrols. Albert Barunga from Kunmunya Mission acted as crewman and guide aboard an Army vessel also patrolling the Kimberley coast:

> It was exacting and arduous work, sailing up every inlet on the indented coast, fitting time-tables with tides, exploring streams through dense mangrove swamps, working under the difficulties of black-outs, intense heat, humidity, mud, mosquitoes, flies and prickly heat. The men had to be on the alert, twenty-four hours a day. There could be a Japanese encampment around the next bend.[49]

The bombing of Drysdale River Mission, Broome, and Wyndham and Japanese attacks on aircraft and vessels operating along the coast, underlined the extent to which these meagre patrols were exposed to the possibility of air attack.

While these patrols scoured the coast, the Army began to implement Scott's plan to arm the pastoral properties. Small detachments of Army personnel were sent to the Kimberleys and other parts of northern Australia, to train the white station workers in weapon handling and guerilla

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48. AA Melbourne, series MP151, item 474/201/435; Proceeds of Sale of Wild Dog Scalps from Natives. Minute, Lieutenant D.L. Davis, NOIC Port Hedland to NOIC Fremantle, undated and minute NOIC Fremantle to the Secretary of the Naval Board, 11 October 1945. The Navy did quite well out of this trade. Davis was issued with tobacco valued at £12/14/2 and clay pipes valued at 8/-, and after trading only part of this supply, had acquired turtle shell and a pearl valued at £12/10/-.

49. Maisie McKenzie, The Road to Mowanjum, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1969, p. 166.

warfare techniques. The Director of Military Training recognised that these guerilla groups based on pastoral properties 'would be invaluable particularly when coupled with the influence these groups are able to exert over the indigenous aboriginals',[50] but training was to be restricted to white personnel.[51] In the Kimberleys however, the Army estimated that there were only 72 whites, some of whom were over 60 years old and most of the remainder could not contribute to a guerilla force because they were too heavily committed to the pastoral industry.[52] The job of training those whites who could be found fell to Major Mitchell.

An AIF guerilla warfare instructor, Mitchell was a flamboyant personality,[53] well suited to instilling urgency and enthusiasm in his civilian students. But he was also a pragmatist. Although he had no particular

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50. AWM, series 60, item 1459/42; Training of Station Personnel in Guerilla Warfare. Letter, Director of Military Training to various pastoral properties in north Australia, undated. Stations mentioned included 'Lorraine', 'Miranda Downs', 'Millungera' and 'Dunbar', all located in the Gulf hinterland of north Queensland.

51. AA Melbourne, series MP 729/6, item 4/401/177; Training Personnel in Sparsely Populated Areas. Letter, Director of Military Training to Director of Staff Duties, 13 April 1942.

52. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 286/1/93; Disposal VDC Personnel NT. Letter, Commander NT Force, to Headquarters Allied Land Forces, Melbourne, 28 January 1943.

53. He delighted in demonstrating to his classes his ability at pistol and rifle shooting while treading water!

sympathy for Aborigines, he recognised that their assistance in the Kimberley district could transform his network of isolated guerilla outposts into a more formidable force. 'Most Station men - the best judges - consider that their natives will be vital in commando work. This too is my view', wrote Mitchell.[54] Ignoring his orders to limit training to white station personnel, he began to include small numbers of Aborigines in his classes. He was assisted by a journalist, Cyril Longmore, who had initially gone on patrol with Mitchell simply to report on the war in the Kimberleys, but later became responsible for the training of an Aboriginal detachment at Liveringa Station. Longmore had been a Captain in the First AIF and had worked among Aborigines in north Australia where he had developed a sympathy for them. But it was Longmore's friendship with the Prime Minister - established when Curtin had himself been a journalist - that was to prove his most valuable asset in later having the Army take seriously his plan to form an Aboriginal guerilla force. Longmore trained a group of 13 Aboriginal volunteers over a period of eight days in drill, cleaning, loading and firing rifles, throwing grenades and minor tactics. Although none had previously fired a rifle, nine of the Aborigines averaged three hits out of five shots at a target 400 yards

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54. WA State Archives, series 1298A, item 40; Cyril Longmore - Dispatches as War Correspondent in North West in 1942. Report, Major Mitchell to Commander 3 Aust Corps, 20 June 1942.

distant. Longmore wrote 'in night operations, attached to white patrol leaders, their keen eyesight and hearing were invaluable. They saw and heard targets minutes before their white companions'.[55] The Aborigines were also able to throw grenades with uncanny accuracy - better than Mitchell's trained instructors. Longmore had also conducted a simulated battle with the Aborigines in which they and the white recruits sheltered in a trench while machine gun and rifle fire crackled inches overhead and gelignite blasts threw dust and stones over them. 'It was thought by some white station men that [the Aborigines] would panic, but they were as cool as the whites'.[56] After initial unease, the Aborigines took quickly to the training and offered to find Longmore another 300 Aboriginal recruits to train. They told Longmore 'we fight blurry Japs alonga you'.[57]

Enthused with the success of his training experiment, Longmore proposed the formation of a 'Native Auxilliary Corps', 250 strong, to assist with the defence of the

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55. 1298A, item 41. Clipping, West Australian, 14 August 1945, by Cyril Longmore.

56. AWM, the Blamey collection, item 32.3; Native Units, including Report on the Training of Natives in 3 Aust Corps Area; Sing Sings: and Raising Papuan Maintenance Company, July 1942 - September 1945. Report by C. Longmore on Training of Natives on Liveringa Station Near Broome - 25 July 1942.

57. 1298A, item 41. Clipping, West Australian, 14 August 1945, by Cyril Longmore.

Kimberley district. Longmore recognised the significance of his plan for post-war race relations in the district and knew that it would meet with opposition from those who were too ready to deprecate the capabilities of Aborigines. He tried to forestall this opposition, arguing that Aborigines were more capable than many whites were prepared to admit. 'Most white men have no confidence in the natives and no belief in their capacity, yet strangely enough the natives perform most of the station work. ... On police patrols, it is the native tracker who makes the final reconnaissance and capture'.[58]

Longmore explained his plan to Curtin, who passed the plan to the Minister for the Army for his consideration. Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett, the Commander of 3 Aust Corps in Western Australia, wrote to F.I. Bray, the Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs, baldly suggesting the 'formation of a unit recruited from the natives of the Kimberley district',[59] and seeking his comments. Without any advice on how the unit might be organised, and with no knowledge of the existence of Thomson's force in Arnhem Land or Gribble's patrol on

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58. Blamey Papers, item 32.3. Report by C. Longmore on Training of Natives on Liveringa Station Near Broome - 25 July 1942.

59. WA State Archives, series 993, item 1032/42; Native Auxilliary Corps in the Kimberley District - Proposal re Organisation of. Letter, GOC 3 Aust Corps to H.I. Bray, Commissioner for Native Affairs, undated.

Melville Island, Bray replied that the plan was inadvisable.[60] Gordon Bennett's omission of any supporting information, including his omission of any mention of the success of Longmore's experiment, suggests that he did not support the plan and had set out to seek Bray's comments in such a way as to ensure his comments would be negative. He was not disappointed.

Bray had been a Warrant Officer in the First AIF and this connection with conventional soldiering shaped his attitude to Longmore's plan. Without any guidance to the contrary from Gordon Bennett, Bray seems to have thought the Aborigines were to form a conventional Army unit. His objections betrayed his strictly regimental approach to their service:

> In the first place it must be realised that the Kimberley native is totally uneducated. Furthermore, he knows nothing about patriotism or loyalty to His Majesty the King and the British Empire as we whites understand the words and the virtues of allegiance.[61]

Nor, he argued, did they understand the requirements of obedience to military regulations. Thus, argued Bray, the Kimberley Aborigines could not form a military unit as Longmore planned. But these 'failings' had not prevented

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60. AA Melbourne, series MP 742/1, item 240/1/358; Formation of Native Auxilliary Corps - Kimberley. Letter, Bray to Brigadier General Staff III Aust Corps, 19 November 1942.

61. MP742/1, item 240/1/358. Letter, Bray to Brigadier General Staff 3 Aust Corps, 19 November 1942.

Thomson's or Gribble's units from giving valuable service and it could be argued that had Torres Strait Islanders had a fuller understanding of military regulations - particularly those governing pay - their units would have been riven with morale problems to a greater extent than was the case in the event.

Having dismissed Longmore's plan, Bray then set out to bend the plan to his own interests. He proposed that if Aborigines were to be organised into a military unit, then this should consist of a series of platoons based on Kimberley pastoral properties. Arms and ammunition for the Aborigines should be held for safekeeping by the pastoralists. Whereas Longmore's plan would remove Aborigines from the control of the pastoralists, Bray's plan was to wed the Aborigines to the pastoral properties and was sure to consolidate the pastoralists' control over them. As with his decision to resist the enlistment of Aborigines into the Army, Bray's first concern remained not the Aborigines who were his responsibility, but the continued supply of cheap labour to the pastoral industry. He wrote that 'the organisation of a corps would ... disturb the peaceful employment conditions of the Kimberleys, and possibly station owners would be bereft of their ordinary labour requirements',[62] if Longmore's plan went ahead unchanged. Bray also raised the question of the

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62. ibid.

wisdom of arming the Aborigines. He wrote that it was

> inadvisable ... to furnish them with firearms and ammunition. They may use them tribally, and native tragedies may result.[63]

Bray's comments found their way back to the Prime Minister who passed them to Longmore. But Longmore would not accept defeat and a squabble developed between Longmore on the one hand and the Army and Bray on the other, with Curtin stuck uncomfortably in the middle. Longmore rejected Bray's arguments claiming that only six months earlier the government would never have dreamt of using Papuans as soldiers but was eagerly doing so now. He asked that he be given permission to raise an experimental force to test the validity of his own claims as well as the counter-claims of those who opposed the idea:

> If I am wrong, then little harm will be done. ... If I am right then the natives might be fitted into the war effort and so, some day we might feel that they too have earned their right to the freedom for which we are fighting.[64]

Gordon Bennett responded that the Commanding Officer of 11 (North West) VDC Battalion 'who had considerable experience in areas concerned', had gathered the views of whites who had lived in the district and worked with the Aborigines for many years. Not surprisingly, their view was that 95 per cent of the Aborigines could not be used as Longmore

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63. ibid.

64. ibid. Letter, Longmore to Curtin, January 1943.

suggested and that 'any proposal to form a Native Auxilliary Corps ... would be strongly resented by the white population in the KIMBERLEYS'.[65] Gordon Bennett also referred to the failure of Aboriginal Volunteer Defence Corpsmen to stand their ground during the Japanese air raid on Broome on 3 March 1942. They had broken and run and this, claimed Gordon Bennett, proved that they would not make good soldiers.

Still Longmore would not give up. Facing continuing opposition, Longmore began to lose patience. Abandoning the controlled and measured tone of his earlier correspondence, he began to put some unpalatable facts before Curtin:

> The white men who have lived and worked with the natives for years have exploited them shamefully and are exploiting them shamefully now. Those white men do not wish to see any scheme functioning which in the end would see an improvement in the natives' condition. There are 250 white [sic.] ... in the Kimberleys and 7000 natives who form a valuable labour reserve - slave labour. ... These are the people who strongly resent the formation of a native auxilliary corps. They know, as I know, that if the natives were organised for war ... they would also be organised automatically for the peace and would not be willing to suffer further exploitation after the war. They might even demand justice.[66]

As for the Broome Volunteer Defence Corpsmen, Longmore had

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65. ibid. Letter, Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett, to Land Headquarters, 26 March 1943.

66. ibid. Letter, Longmore to Curtin, 19 April 1943.

been in Broome shortly after the raid to report for his newspaper. He knew that the white members of the Corps, white civilians and members of the US Army Air Force had also fled. If Aborigines would not make good soldiers because some had fled at Broome, it followed that the same argument applied to white Australians.

Despite Gordon Bennett's argument that Aborigines would not make good soldiers, Longmore was aware that Army patrols operating in the Kimberleys were using Aborigines as guides. Mitchell had been involved in extensive patrols through the Kimberleys and freely admitted that he 'depended absolutely' on them.[67] Mitchell freely acknowledged that in the absence of maps, Aborigines were the key to military mobility in these isolated areas. 'Whoever controls the natives can move freely through the Kimberleys', he reported.[68] Other Army patrols did the same. Longmore was incensed that Gordon Bennett could deny that Kimberley Aborigines had any military value while simultaneously exploiting their survival skills and local knowledge:

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67. AWM, series 54, item 380/6/1; Kimberley Ranges Patrol by 3 Aust Corps Guerilla Warfare Group, 1943. Patrol Report, Major S.D. Mitchell, undated. This item makes brief reference to the training of the Aborigines at Liveringa station. For other Kimberley patrols using Aboriginal guides see item 13/2/12; Report to General Headquarters by Captain R.W. Dungan - On Aerodromes in North West Australia - 1943.

68. ibid.

> When the patrol is over the native goes back to the bush or his station. The white soldier will get a medal, repatriation, honour - the poor devil of a black will still be a "useless bastard", although without him the white patrol would not have been able to move 50 miles.[69]

This had been an important theme of Longmore's argument. Formally recognised military service attracted tangible and intangible rewards from which Aborigines were being excluded. Perhaps the greatest reward was the right to be seen to protect their own tribal areas and by extension, Australia. Longmore had referred to this earlier, for example, in his reference to Aborigines being better prepared to resist exploitation if they were organised for war.

Curtin, still undecided, asked Forde if he could see a copy of Major Mitchell's report on the Liveringa experiment. Gordon Bennett forwarded Mitchell's favourable report but enclosed with it negative reports from Bray and from Lieutenant Colonel Moseley who had been Royal Commissioner on Native Problems in Western Australia before the war, but who was now responsible for security in Western Australia, including the implementation of draconian controls over Aborigines. Gordon Bennett rejected the advice of Major Mitchell, the commander on the spot, in favour of the advice of Bray and Moseley. This was

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69. MP742/1, item 240/1/358. Letter, Curtin to Forde, 10 May 1943. Curtin quotes at length from a letter to himself from Longmore dated 19 April 1943.

uncharacteristic. The opinion of the commander on the spot is highly valued in the Army and it generally prevails over the opinions of those who are removed from events. Indeed, the value of his experience as the commander on the spot had formed the major justification for Gordon Bennett's own return from Singapore.

Despite these counter arguments, Curtin remained unconvinced. He wrote to Forde, 'I must say I consider that Major Mitchell and Captain Longmore have submitted what to me is a convincing case in favour of ... a Native Auxilliary Corps'[70] Seeking a way out of the impasse, and perhaps a means of overcoming Gordon Bennett's opposition, Curtin asked that Blamey's opinion be sought.

Blamey's view was that in the improving strategic situation, there was no longer a requirement to form the unit. By arguing against the plan, Gordon Bennett and Bray had imposed sufficient delay to ensure that the plan was never adopted.

Defeated, Longmore now sought vindication. In January 1944, he wrote a last time to 'Dear Jack... '. He had at last learned of the service of Aborigines on Melville Island under Gribble and argued that Gribble's unit proved

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70. ibid. Letter, Curtin to Forde, undated but after 22 June 1943. It is interesting that Curtin had begun to refer to Longmore by his First AIF military rank. Perhaps this lent Longmore's opinion more authority.

that he had been correct. The Army officers who had frustrated his plans were 'incompetent soldiers ... incapable of adapting' the available manpower to the job.[71] Had he known of Thomson's unit or Murray's patrol, of the service of Lockie Bin Sali, Lenny leonard and Albert Barunga, or even of the formation of formally organised units like the Torres Strait Force, his denunciation of the Army officers who had thwarted his plans may have been even more vitriolic.

In addition to obstructionist Army officers, Longmore had to contend with entrenched civilian interests ably represented by Bray as Commissioner for Native Affairs, and by A.A. Coverley, Bray's Minister and the member for the Kimberley constituency. Even before his appointment as a Minister, Coverley had opposed Aboriginal legislation which would disadvantage whites in the State's north.[72] Kimberley pastoralists had a vested interest in maintaining the Aborigines as a source of cheap labour and in ensuring that they remained pliant. They also had the political apparatus to resist changes to their continued control over Aboriginal labour. Although Bray had claimed that the Aborigines should not be armed because it might lead to inter-tribal warfare, his real concern seems to have been

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71. WA State Archives, series 1298A, item 44: Letters Between Longmore and Curtin re Use of Aborigines in War. Letter, Longmore to Curtin, 2 January 1944.

72. Curthoys and Markus, Who Are Our Enemies, p. 143.

with the security of whites. Mitchell had discussed the arming of the Aborigines with white station hands he had trained:

> At our night conferences in the woolshed [at Liveringa] we continually returned to the subject of training the natives as scouts. Opinion among the sheep and cattle men was about equally divided. On the one hand was our certainty that the Jap would invade, but against that many remembered the deadly killer, Pidgeon, who turned a rifle against whites ...[73]

Although there was a risk that Aborigines might use their new found military skills against whites after the war, Mitchell believed that most white pastoralists were confident of their mateship with their station Aborigines and in any case, he argued, 'we have to face the nearer danger'[74] - a possible invasion. But hostility to the idea of armed Aborigines was entrenched. A poll of white residents in the Kimberleys found that 95 per cent thought that the formation of an Aboriginal unit would be strongly resented.[75] This attitude was widespread throughout north Australia and persisted in areas where whites had long

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73. 1298A, item 41. Unpublished article written by Major Mitchell. In the 1890s, 'Pidgeon' terrorised the Kimberley district with his attacks on whites and their cattle. An ex-police tracker, he avoided capture for almost three years.

74. 1298A, item 40. Report by Major Mitchell to Commander 3 Aust Corps, 20 June 1942.

75. MP742/1, item 240/1/358. Letter, Commander 3 Aust Corps to Land Headquarters, 26 March 1943.

since established their dominance.[76]

The argument between Bray and Longmore about the service of Kimberley Aborigines had ultimately been about whether strategic considerations - the threatened Japanese invasion - would be permitted to interfere with existing labour relations in the Kimberleys. Longmore had been correct when he had suggested that organising the Aborigines for war would leave them organised for peace. In his final letter to Curtin, Longmore had made an impassioned plea for general improvement in the lot of Aborigines. He urged Curtin to 'adopt a wide, generous, long-term Atlantic Charter policy', liberating the Aborigines. Longmore told Curtin that if he did this, in time, the emancipation of the Aborigines would be regarded as more epoch making than Curtin's role in the war.[77]

The employment of tribal 'full-blood' Aborigines in north Australia had confronted the Services with a dilemma. On the flanks of Darwin and in the Kimberley district, Aborigines had much to offer. In particular, their

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76. AA Darwin, series F1, item 44/497; A. Kerr - Delny Station - Complaints re Natives Carrying Firearms. Letter, Malcolm Chalmers and other pastoralists to Senator Collings, Minister for the Interior, 15 March 1945. As late as 1945 in central Australia, whites objected to an Aborigine who was the holder of a police licence, carrying firearms. They threatened that 'this will make the usual plea of the whites of self-defence much more justified than it has ever been before'.

77. 1298A, item 44. Letter, Longmore to Curtin, 2 January 1944.

detailed knowledge of these vulnerable areas - a product of their cultural bonds with the land and their permanent residence in remote parts of north Australia - was of great value to the Services in areas where few whites had any knowledge of the local terrain, and where map coverage was very limited. Yet it was their Aboriginality which was at the heart of the Services' dilemma. The Services faced not only their stated policy against the admission of 'full-blood' Aborigines, but the entrenched racism which had led that policy into being. Wanting to employ the Aborigines as servicemen, yet unwilling formally to enrol them, the Services decided that they should serve under a series of informal arrangements. These arrangements exploited the Aborigines' loyalty to particular individuals. At the same time, they barred these tribal Aborigines from the tangible and intangible benefits which were to flow to formally enlisted servicemen during and after the war. These benefits included pay, service pensions and medals, but more importantly, the right to a claim for citizenship and to the social, political and economic benefits of being numbered among those who had contributed to the defence of the nation rather than those who had passively accepted the protection of others.

Although those Aborigines who had been employed as de facto servicemen had not been motivated by the high ideals Bray had assumed were necessary, they had nevertheless given valuable service. Maintaining patrols over large

areas of deserted and vulnerable coastline, they had contributed to the security of Darwin by establishing a loose surveillance screen across the north. Had their service been more widely known, it is likely that Longmore would have presented to Curtin an even more convincing argument for the raising of an Aboriginal force in the Kimberleys. Instead, without the example of Thomson's or Gribble's units, or the example of the Torres Strait Force to draw upon, Longmore's plan had eventually collapsed against the entrenched opposition of both the Army and pastoral interests.

The de facto service performed by tribal Aborigines in the Northern Territory began to emerge only in 1961 when the House of Representatives Select Committee on Voting Rights for Aborigines began taking evidence in the Northern Territory. After a number of white residents had given evidence that Aborigines were unable to understand that citizenship carried responsibilities as well as conferring rights, the Committee heard from Leo John, an ex-member of Gribble's 'patrol'. John made it perfectly clear that he understood the responsibilities of citizenship - and that he understood injustice:

> I worked for five years patrolling [Melville] ... island during the war. ... I carried on in wartime. I got nothing for it. Black people

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78. House of Representatives Report from the Select Committee on Voting Rights for Aborigines, Part II - Minutes of Evidence, 19 October 1961, pp. 402-403.

were working hard and getting nothing out of it.[78]

John's evidence, with its clear message of injustice, had a dramatic impact on the Committee. Kim Beazley, a member of the Committee, wrote to Senator Gorton, Minister for the Navy, about the service of the Aborigines in Gribble's 'patrol'. 'It would be a deplorable thing if there developed among the Aboriginals of the north a concept that their loyal services to their Australian nation were not reciprocated by the nation's good faith with them', he wrote.[79] Beazley's motives were not entirely altruistic. His Committee had heard how the cooperation of Aborigines would be vital if the Australian Defence Force was to be able to prevent enemy infiltration along the north coast in future wars. As Beazley wrote to Gorton with the Malayan Emergency a fresh memory and Soekarno's Konfrontasi looming, his mind was perhaps on the instability of Malaya and Indonesia and the need to preserve the cooperation of Aborigines for future wars.

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79. Letter, Mr Kim Beazley to Senator Gorton, Minister for the Navy, 13 September 1961. This and other documents relating to the service of Aborigines in Gribble's 'patrol' and aboard the lugger 'Heather' were made available by the Department of Defence.

CHAPTER 6

ARMY LABOURERS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

In addition to those Aborigines serving as de facto servicemen, Aborigines in north Australia also served as civilian labourers. Although this role was perhaps less glamorous than the performance of military duty, it made a significant contribution to the national war effort by assisting the logistic support of military operations in the north. While small groups totalling approximately 150 men contributed de facto service, over 700 Aborigines were employed as labourers at Army labour settlements at the height of the war. The Army became the major employer of Aborigines in the Northern Territory and introduced reforms which had considerable impact on race relations in the Northern Territory.

The employment of Aborigines by the Services in the Northern Territory began well before the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1923 the Navy employed six Aborigines on its survey vessel HMAS 'Geranium'.[1] This continued until 1939. The Army too, employed Aborigines in Darwin as early

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1. AA Melbourne, series MP1049/7, item 712/205/621; Employment of Natives by RAN - Darwin. Signal, Navy Office to warship 'Geranium', 23 June 1923, and minute, Commanding Officer HMAS 'Geranium' to the Secretary of the Naval Board, 11 August 1923. The Commanding Officer reported that the Aborigines '... carried out their work ... in an excellent manner, and their conduct was all that could be desired'. A Tiwi Aborigine, Micky Geranium, was so named as a result of his lengthy service on the vessel before the war.

as September 1932.[2]

Before Japan entered the war, Service employment of Aborigines was characterised by the adoption of existing civilian attitudes towards conditions of employment for Aborigines. Darwin's white civilian community set the tone of employment conditions. These reflected the colonial attitudes which prevailed in Darwin at the time. This colonial outlook was acknowledged in the Military Board's approval of the employment of Aborigines:

> It is understood that there is certain work at Darwin in clearing grounds of undergrowth, sanitation, fatigue work generally, and perhaps also the duties of mess orderlies, batmen, waiters, etc., which, in that locality, is customarily performed by aborigines and from which soldiers in tropical stations might be relieved.[3]

The work to be performed by the Aborigines consisted of 'those [tasks] which are normally carried out in all tropical countries by cheap labour, not being assigned to Europeans for climatic and racial reasons',[4] and included menial tasks around the kitchens, barrack sanitation and fatigues, and the provision of firewood. Aboriginal labour was generally poorly regarded throughout the Northern

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2. AA Melbourne, series MP508/1, item 61/701/68; Employment of Aboriginal Labour, Darwin. Letter, OC Troops, Darwin, to the Acting Secretary of the Military Board, 20 September 1932.

3. AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 82/710/2; Employment of Full Blood Aborigines at Darwin, 1940. Letter, Secretary of the Military Board to the Officer Commanding Troops, Darwin, 26 September 1933.

4. ibid.

Territory. Although Aborigines formed the backbone of the Territory pastoral industry, they were commonly held to be lazy, dirty and prone to 'go walkabout' without warning. Embracing these perceptions, the Army employed its labourers on written contracts for periods of five months. Longer periods were thought unacceptable because the Aborigines would inevitably 'go walkabout'. Contracts were negotiated with Protectors of Aborigines - officers of the Administration appointed under the Northern Territory Aborigines Ordinance with wide ranging powers over Aborigines' affairs, including the power to act as the legal guardian of an Aborigine.

The Aborigines Ordinance and regulations passed under it also set out the conditions under which Aborigines could be employed.[5] Rates of pay for Aboriginal labourers were set by Regulation at a minimum of 5/- per week. Of this, 2/- was paid into an Aboriginal Trust Fund administered by the Chief Protector of Aborigines - the Administrator of the Northern Territory. In the case of Aborigines employed by the Army, the credit in the Trust Fund was not to drop below £2. The Army regarded this as an important safeguard against the possibility that the labourer would 'go walkabout' taking with him items issued by the Army. The £2 could be used to recover the cost of any issues.

Other working conditions also reflected the colonial

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5. Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance 1918, Part IV.

conditions applying to Aboriginal labour in Darwin. Labourers received half a soldier's ration of meat, bread and vegetables but were expected to perform the hard manual labour for which whites were thought unsuitable. Although judged sufficient, this ration was 'supplemented on occasions by kitchen scraps'.[6] Accommodation consisted of a lean-to against the wall of the barrack kitchen with beds made of hessian strung over a wooden frame. Army blankets were supplied. The lean-to was to be 'well ventillated [sic.] but windowless owing to native superstitions at night'.[7] As if apologising for providing superior conditions the Officer Commanding Troops in Darwin noted that 'the average civilian employer in Darwin gives little thought to the provision of shelter for the native; but it has been discovered that a modicum of comfort returns better service'.[8] His concern with the conditions provided by the 'average employer' reflected the garrison's desire to conform to the standards set by Darwin's white citizens. This desire also extended to the labourers' pay. The Army adjusted the Aborigines' pay from 6/- per week to 5/- per week with a weekly issue of 1/- worth of

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6. MP508, item 82/710/2. Letter, OC Troops, Darwin, to the Secretary of the Military Board, 12 October 1933. Discussion of the conditions offered to Aboriginal labourers is also to be found on item 61/701/68. See for example, letter, OC Troops, Darwin, to Acting Secretary of the Military Board, 18 February 1933.

7. ibid.

8. ibid.

tobacco to 'be in keeping with local practice'.[9] In the period 1933 to 1939 the small Army garrison in Darwin was immersed in the social milieu of the Territory's white population. In shaping its relations with its Aboriginal labourers it took its lead from Darwin's citizenry.

In September 1933 the Military Board approved the employment of only six Aborigines but the demand for Aboriginal labour grew at such pace that within a year, this figure doubled. By April 1939 the number of Aborigines employed had risen to 30. This demand resulted from the expansion of Darwin's small garrison by the inclusion of engineers and artillerymen and the arrival of the Darwin Mobile Force. This force was created in 1938 as a result of an examination of Darwin's defence needs by Major General Lavarack. Lavarack argued that the Japanese pearling fleet possessed manpower sufficient to threaten Darwin and proposed that a 'mobile defending force' of battalion strength be based there.[10]

In addition to the 30 Aborigines employed by the Army, other Aborigines were employed as the domestic servants of officers. These Aborigines were employed privately and every married officer employed at least one. Prevailing attitudes to Aborigines dominated this mode of employment

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9. MP508, item 61/701/68. Letter, OC Troops, Darwin, to the Secretary of the Military Board, 15 November 1932.

10. A816, item 14/301/14. Report by Major General Lavarack, 16 October 1936.

as well. Domestic servants were

> specially selected by [the] Department of Native Affairs [sic. In fact the Native Affairs Branch of the Northern Territory Administration.] for private employment as having some degree of reliability, training, and sense of cleanliness. In view of the dangers to health from aborigines even being close to places where food is kept or prepared, it is unlikely that officers would permit any other aboriginals to enter their houses.[11]

The employment of Aborigines by the Army carried with it the possibility of confrontation with the North Australian Workers Union. But apart from a brief expression of concern over the Army's employment of Aboriginal prisoners undergoing sentences of hard labour, the union remained disinterested in the question of the place of Aborigines in the Darwin work force.[12] During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the union's main concern was the occasional employment of servicemen on the Darwin wharves to unload the defence stores flooding into Darwin. Later, the union was preoccupied with maintaining its position in the Territory. It was to suffer the twin blows of having many of its members scattered throughout Australia as a result of civilian evacuation from Darwin and the loss of its relevance as union members and their employers collaborated to support the war effort. Faced with these problems the union largely ignored Aborigines in the work force until

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11. MP508, item 82/710/2. Letter, Commandant 7th Military District to the Secretary, Military Board, 25 January 1940.

12. ibid. House of Representatives Notice Paper, 1 October 1936. See also, Curthoys and Markus, Who Are Our Enemies?, p. 150.

after the war when the union leadership was taken over by communists.[13]

As work on the defence preparations of Darwin continued, the Army placed greater demands on the Native Affairs Branch of the Northern Territory Administration to supply additional Aboriginal labourers. The Administrator, C.L.A. Abbott, remained unmoved. 'There is not a sufficient number of aboriginals available for the increasing demands which are made by the Navy, the Army and the Royal Australian Air Force', he wrote, and 'a position is now arising when old and established citizens in the Town of Darwin, who for years have been able to use aboriginal labour, are now not able to do so with consequent hardship and inconvenience'.[14] The demands of the Services were in competition with Darwin's civilian community and Abbott sided with the latter. He was particularly opposed to the idea of recruiting additional Aboriginal labourers from Bathurst and Melville Islands or other coastal areas to meet the Services' demands. It had been a long standing

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13. ANU, Archives of Business and Labour. North Australian Workers Union Correspondence. The correspondence of the union makes no mention of Aborigines whether connected with the union or not throughout the war period. See also Curthoys and Markus, Who Are Our Enemies, p. 152. Conflict between the North Australian Workers' Union and the Services in Darwin is recorded in AA Canberra, series A659, items 40/1/2670; Industrial Unrest at Darwin - 1940, 40/1/6075; Sanitary Strike Darwin - 1940, and 40/1/7417; Darwin Strikes - April 1940, October 1940, January 1941.

14. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 15/401/243; Darwin - Employment of Native Labour. Letter, C.L.A. Abbott to the Chairman, Darwin Defence Co-ordination Committee, 29 April 1940.

policy that these Aborigines should remain in the care of local mission stations and should be discouraged from coming to Darwin.

The Defence Co-ordination Committee, concerned with developing Darwin's defences, strongly opposed Abbott's decision arguing that the employment of Aboriginal labour on defence works would free skilled white troops for more important defence related work while otherwise idle mission Aborigines would benefit from earning an income. Echoing colonial attitudes, the Committee also argued that the work involved was more suited 'to black than to white labour'.[15] The Committee appealed to Abbott and the three Service Boards, that immediate steps be taken to 'admit of adequate native labour being made available for Defence purposes'.[16] The Services estimated their requirements at 76 labourers immediately with a further 96 required in the 'immediate future'. The labour shortfall was already leading to serious maintenance problems at the Navy's oil fuel tanks, the Army's camps and the RAAF aerodrome.

Despite these pleas, Abbott and the Department of the Interior remained inflexible. In August 1940, J.A. Carrodus, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, replied to the Department of the Army that it was 'the policy of the Government to keep natives out of town areas

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15. ibid. Darwin Defence Co-ordination Committee Report Number 22, 11 May 1940.

16. ibid.

where the influence is demoralising'.[17] Despite the urgency of the defence related construction effort in Darwin, the Department of the Interior would not alter its policy to cater for the needs of the Services.

Abbott's reluctance to accede to the Services' demands for additional Aboriginal labour stemmed from his interest in maintaining control of race relations in the Northern Territory and particularly in Darwin. The defence works taking place in Darwin attracted large numbers of white labourers and turned Darwin into a frontier boom town. Darwin's taxi fleet for example, grew from 10 vehicles in 1939 to 75 by October 1941 in response to additional business generated by the boom conditions.[18] Abbott began to receive a stream of letters from citizens concerned with the moral environment for Aboriginal women in Darwin.[19] He responded by removing as many Aborigines from Darwin as he

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17. ibid. Letter, J.A. Carrodus, Secretary, Department of the Interior, to the Secretary, Department of the Army, 7 August 1940.

18. AA Canberra, series A659, item 43/1/893; Development of the Northern Territory - Government Proposals re. Clipping, The Sydney Morning Herald, 22 October 1941. The newspaper attributes these figures to Abbott.

19. See for example AA Canberra, series A659, item 40/1/7025; Aborigines Protection of - North South Road Construction. The Department of the Interior and Abbott received letters from Miss Olive Pink (28 August 1940), the President of the Feminists' Club (9 September 1940), the Honorary Secretary of the League of Women Voters (17 September 1940), and others. The League of Women Voters claimed that 69 'half-caste' women were pregnant as a result of liaisons with soldiers. Similar correspondence can be found on AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 5/701/47; Report - Europeans Consorting with Half-castes and item 259/708/143; Removal of Aboriginal Compound Darwin.

could, closing down the Bagot Aboriginal Compound about four miles from Darwin and staunchly resisting the Services' demands for more Aboriginal labourers.[20] Abbott conceded that the Second AIF soldiers stationed at Darwin had behaved well towards the town's Aboriginal population but that some civilians and some members of the Garrison Battalion had not. One Garrison Battalion soldier was arrested in the Bagot Aboriginal Compound and fined £20 only to be re-arrested there a few nights later.[21]

By late 1941 then, the Services viewed Aboriginal labour in ways which conformed with the attitudes of the white population in the north. Aborigines were seen in colonial terms as being better suited to manual labour and menial tasks in the tropics than whites. Furthermore, the Services accepted that there were standards for the rationing, pay and accommodation of Aboriginal labourers which had been established by the civilian community - in both practice and law - and had set out to conform to these. Because Aborigines lacked the support of local unions, these standards were very low and showed no prospect of improvement. The Services regarded Aborigines

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20. AA Canberra, series A659, item 40/1/5385; Aboriginal Labour for Defence. Letter, C.L.A. Abbott to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 20 May 1940.

21. MP508, item 5/701/47. Letter, Abbott to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 10 December 1940. Under the Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance, it was an offence for anyone other than a select group of authorised persons to enter an Aboriginal reserve (section 19) and for non-Aboriginals to consort with Aboriginal females (section 53).

as a labour force of growing importance as the Japanese threat developed, placing greater urgency on Darwin's defence works. Abbott however, steadfastly refused to provide Aboriginal labourers in the numbers demanded. He hoped to maintain the supply of cheap labour to Darwin's civilian population and to reduce, as far as possible, the exposure of Aborigines to the conditions which existed in Darwin. The Japanese threat to north Australia was to bring great changes to this relationship between the Services, Aboriginal labour and the Northern Territory Administration.

In December 1941, the Administration began the evacuation of people judged non-essential to the war effort from the northern half of the Territory. Whites were sent to the south by ship. Abbott had originally planned to 'scatter' the 'part-Aboriginal' and Asian populations of Darwin at centres along the Stuart Highway but this plan was dropped after complaints from Darwin's Chinese community. Later, Asians and some 'part-Aborigines' were also evacuated to the south by sea.[22] Approximately 1,300 'part-Aborigines' were evacuated from the Territory but although 'full-bloods' were moved out of Darwin, no attempt was made to evacuate them from the Territory. Most 'part-Aborigines' were evacuated overland to other centres within the

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22. AA Canberra, series A659, item 42/1/641; Evacuation policy. The first two ship loads of evacuees to leave Darwin included no Chinese. The 'part-Aboriginal wives of some whites were only evacuated by ship when their husbands demanded 'equal rights'.

Territory, and to South Australia. At Balaclava in South Australia, the evacuation of 'part-Aborigines' from the Northern Territory created conditions similar to enforced contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal soldiers in the Army discussed in Chapter 4. After initial apprehension, the people of Balaclava developed a respect for the evacuees.[23] Other evacuees did not fare so well. Displaying a remarkable lack of sensitivity, the Administration evacuated a small group of 'part-Aboriginal' women from the isolation of Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt to Sydney where they were to work as domestic servants. They were unprepared for wartime Sydney. Several were soon pregnant, apparently as a result of liaisons with soldiers.

Only about 100 Aboriginal men were in the Darwin area on 19 February 1942, the day of the first Japanese air raid. Of these, 30 were employed by the Army, Navy or Air Force, and 24 were prisoners in Darwin's Fanny Bay Gaol. The remainder were employed by private individuals in wood cutting camps about 10 to 20 miles from Darwin. These men and a party of 40 'part-Aboriginal' children from Melville

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23. AA Canberra, series A659, item 45/1/2493; Transfer of Half-castes, NT, to Racecourse at Balaclava South Australia. Clippings, Adelaide Advertiser, April 1946. When the evacuees returned to the Northern Territory, several of the citizens of Balaclava wished the evacuees well on their return north. One citizen wrote, 'admittedly, there was some [initial] apprehension [but] today we ... watched ... the evacuees with a degree of sadness and yet thankful that balaklava [sic.] was given the privilege ... of knowing so many fine people'.

Island who had arrived in Darwin on 15 February were evacuated after the air raid. By late on 20 February, no Aborigines remained in Darwin.[24] Although some Aborigines had been in Darwin during the first air raid, none had been injured. To avoid possible injury to the Aboriginal prisoners in Fanny Bay Gaol, Mr Justice Wells ordered their release and they returned to their homelands.[25] Abbott also ordered the evacuation of his Administration from Darwin to Alice Springs.

By late March, some Aborigines had moved back into the Darwin area and F.R. Morris, a member of the Native Affairs Branch who had enlisted in the Army on 18 March, was given the job of patrolling the country around Darwin to remove the Aborigines to camps further inland. Together with a police officer and a Roman Catholic missionary, Morris located the Aborigines' camps at Shoal Bay and Knukey's lagoon and

> the camps were raided at dawn and all natives transported to 10 Mile siding where arrangements had been made for a special train to pick them up that afternoon and convey them to Mataranka. At first the natives resented being sent away but later became reconciled and boarded the train quite voluntarily. ... Natives were evacuated on

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24. AA Canberra, series A2124; Folder of Unregistered Files 1936-1950. Report, F.R. Morris, 15 November 1944.

25. AA Canberra, series A659, item 42/1/2234; Release of Prisoners From Fanny Bay Gaol, Darwin. Telegram, Judge Wells to the Department of the Interior, Canberra, undated and letter, Abbott to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 5 March 1942.

several other occasions.[26]

Once at Mataranka, a group of 25 Aborigines were put to work on the aerodrome, implementing a policy espoused by V.J. White, the Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 'that if we do not intelligently utilise aboriginal labour, the enemy would do so'.[27] White's employment of the Aborigines marked the beginning of the reversal of previous Administration policy.

As a result of the evacuation of non-essential whites, Asians and 'part-Aborigines' and the influx of servicemen to the Northern Territory, the population ratio there was suddenly reversed. Before the war, the ratio of Aborigines to whites had been about 7:1. Having been outnumbered by Aborigines in the pre-war period, many white Territorians felt threatened by them and endeavoured to maintain their dominance of Aborigines by racism and violence. After Japan's entry into the war on 7-8 December 1941 the strength of the Services in the Territory grew rapidly, reaching a peak in late 1942 of over 100,000 men.[28] This influx of servicemen reversed the ratio of Aborigines to whites to approximately 1:6. The servicemen who flooded

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26. A2124; Folder of Unregistered Files 1936-1950. Report, F.R. Morris, 15 November 1944. See also F.R. Morris, 'The War Effort of The Northern Territory Aborigines', Australian Territories, vol. 5, no. 1, January 1965, p. 2.

27. ibid. Report, V.J. White, Deputy Director of Native Affairs, undated.

28. C.L.A. Abbott, Australia's Frontier Province, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1950, p. 102.

into the Northern Territory were mainly recruited from the cities and towns of south east Australia. For many, service in the Northern Territory provided their first contact with Aborigines. They were generally free from any preconceived ideas about Aborigines, had no long term commitment to the Territory and no economic dependence upon the exploitation of Aboriginal labour. The servicemen replaced the attitudes of the white civilian population with new attitudes fashioned from the liberalism of the big cities, an ignorance of pre-war race relations in the Territory and the egalitarian influences of the Service society. The Services, and particularly the Army, became the dominant social force in the Northern Territory. The Army abandoned its earlier subservience to social norms established by white Territorians and began to shape race relations in a way not previously seen.

Complementing this change in the social structure of the Territory was a change in the labour market. The influx of servicemen had created the problem of supporting about 100,000 servicemen in an area in which the industrial infrastructure was designed to meet the needs of only about 2,000 whites. This created a requirement for large scale employment and the only available work force was the Aboriginal population.

As Army combat units moved into the Northern Territory, supporting logistic units followed. These were the units

which maintained the flow of reinforcements of men and equipment, rations, fuel, ammunition and spare parts and a host of other supplies and services to the combat units. The bulk of these supplies arrived at Darwin by ship, but after the construction of the strategic roads from Alice Springs to Larrimah - the Stuart Highway - completed early in 1941, and from Mt Isa to Tennant Creek - the Barkly Highway - completed early in 1942, many of the supplies proceeded to Darwin along these routes.[29] Army logistic units such as bakeries, butcheries, staging camps, hospitals, ordnance depots and the like, blossomed along the Stuart Highway. The Aborigines evacuated from Darwin and coastal areas to centres along the Stuart Highway, formed a ready labour force to support these units.

The Native Affairs Branch evacuated Aborigines from the coast for a number of reasons. Evacuation had primarily been aimed at removing Aborigines from the danger of bombing and possible invasion, but other factors such as the need to preserve the security of defence preparations near the coast, the need to provide rations and accommodation for Aborigines previously employed by whites

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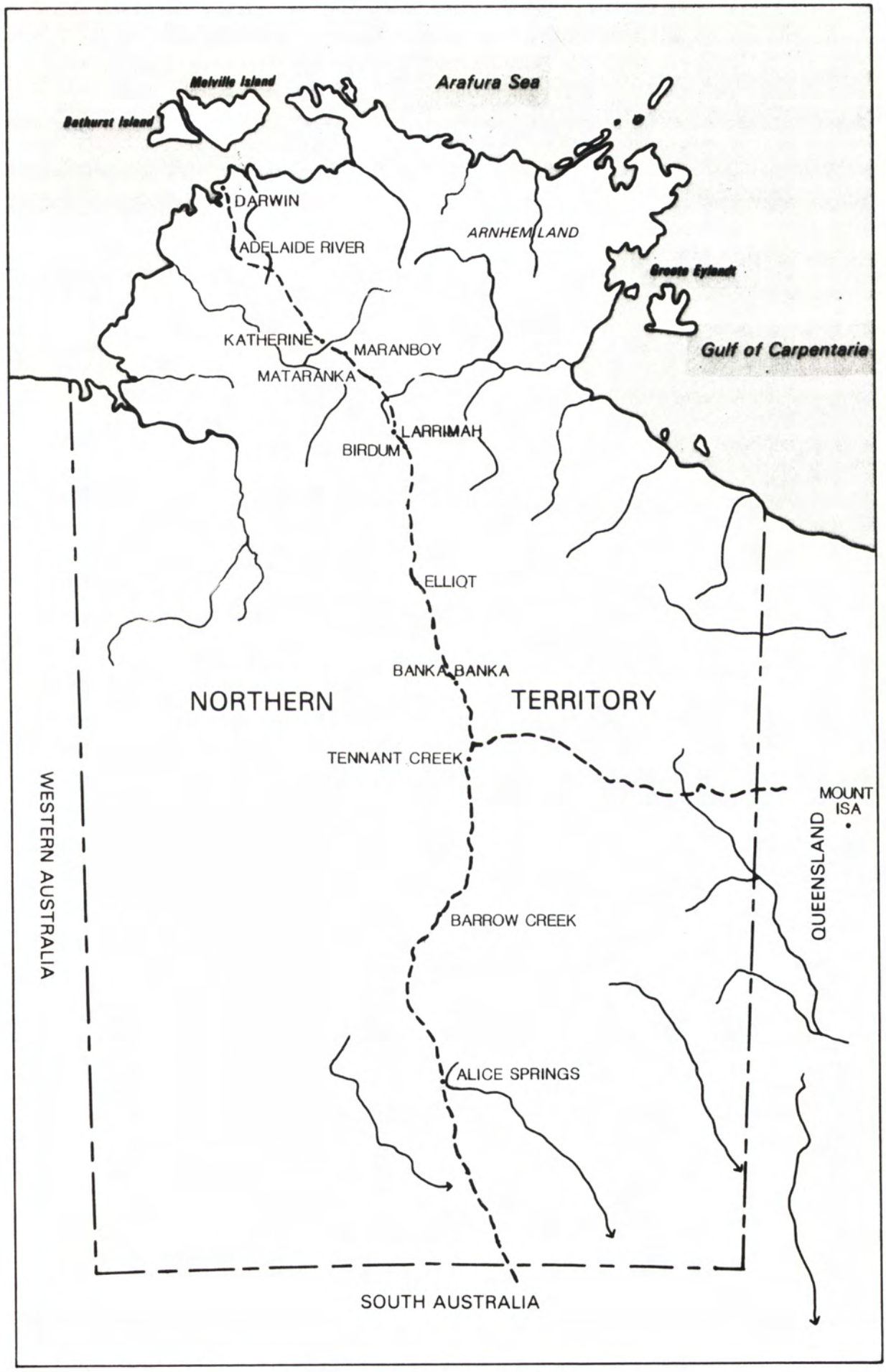
29. The construction of these strategic roads led to concern for the welfare of Aborigines who lived along the routes. See A659, item 40/1/7025. Letter, Miss Olive Pink, to the Administrator of the Northern Territory, 28 August 1940. Also see AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 256/701/90; Article in 'Woman' re. Aborigines. Clipping, Woman, 21 October 1940 and letter, Commander, Darwin Overland Maintenance Force to Director, Supply and Transport, Melbourne, 6 November 1940.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY



who had since been evacuated and the need to prevent the spread of malaria and other diseases to the troops, were important considerations.[30] After settling the evacuated Aborigines into a series of camps, the Native Affairs Branch asked nearby Army units to employ some Aborigines on useful work.

By as early as March 1942, Patrol Officer Harney[31] reported upon Aborigines working for the Army. The Aborigines were involved in

> ... cement work, carting and shovelling sand and gravel, timber cutting, and cartage and stacking of ammunition. The hours worked by this unit are from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. ... The natives are contented. The opinion of those in charge is that the natives are good toilers, and capable of exertion far in excess of soldiers and

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30. AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/915; Employment of Natives on Work For Army (NT). Report by the Deputy Director of Native Affairs, V.J. White, for the Administrator, undated but mid-1942.

31. Bill Harney had served in the First AIF and after the First World War took up a variety of jobs including trepang fishing and managing a cattle station near Borroloola. During the Second World War, Harney was employed in the Native Affairs Branch as a Patrol Officer. From his years in the Territory and his contact with Aborigines there, he had developed a deep respect for and understanding of their culture. Throughout the war years, Harney kept A.P. Elkin informed of developments in the Northern Territory, particularly those relating to the Army's employment of Aborigines. Harney was the author of a number of books about Aborigines including Taboo, Australasian Publishing Co., Sydney, 1944, which was a popular account of Aboriginal culture published in time to assist soldiers to understand the Aborigines they came in contact with. In the 1960s, Harney again burst into print with Life Among the Aborigines (1960), Tales From the Aborigines (1961), To Ayers Rock and Beyond and Brimming Billabongs (1963), Content to Lie in the Sun (1965), and Songs of the Songmen; Aboriginal Myths Retold (1968).

labour units in the Middle East.[32]

Army officers also reported satisfaction with the work of the labourers and at the Mataranka workshops, Major Stokes, the local commander, requested that a further 20 labourers and a 'part-Aboriginal' 'boss boy' be supplied by the Native Affairs Branch.[33]

By mid 1942, the Aboriginal labourers had established themselves as an indispensable part of the defence effort in the Northern Territory and were acknowledged as such by the officers of the Native Affairs Branch. 'It must be realised that the native population of the Northern Territory has made a valuable contribution to the war effort', wrote V.J, White, 'and at present may be regarded as indispensable towards its furtherance'.[34] The Army had also acknowledged a growing role for Aboriginal labour in the Territory through its regular demands for additional

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32. A431, item 46/915. Report by Patrol Officer Harney, 24 March 1942. See also AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 164/1/283; Aborigines in the Forces - Request for Enlistment.

33. ibid.

34. ibid. Report by V.J. White, Deputy Director of Native Affairs, to the Administrator, undated but about mid-1942.

Civilian Labourers Parade for Work Allocation

These central Australian Aborigines provided labour for a wide variety of tasks required by the Army in the vicinity of Alice Springs. Note that although Army slouch hats were not issued to the labourers, almost all of them have managed to acquire one. Items of Army uniform were in great demand among the Aboriginal labourers of the Northern Territory.

Courtesy of the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd.

Aboriginal labourers.[35]

In response to the increasing employment of Aborigines by the Army, Abbott negotiated the following pay and conditions on the Aborigines' behalf:[36]

Wages:		5/- per week.
Rations:	flour	7 lbs per head per week
	sugar	14 oz
	tea	3 oz
	tobacco	2 oz
	rice	3 lb
	jam	1 lb
	beef	10 lb
	soap	3 oz
	milk	1 tin
	baking powder	1 lb per 50 lb of flour
	potatoes and onions to be issued in lieu of rice	
Clothing:	trousers	2 pr
	shirts	2
	singlets	2
	towel	1
	blanket	1
	ground sheet	1

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35. Demands for Aboriginal labour may be found in many of the official records cited in this chapter, but see for example, AA Canberra, series A659, item 42/1/4499; Half-caste Homes. Letter, E.W.P. Chinnery, to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 21 May 1942. As early as May 1942, Colonel Loutit, the Commander of Central Australian Lines of Communication Area urgently sought the employment of Aborigines to release 100 or more soldiers for other defence related work. See also MP508, item 275/701/634. Letter, Commander Number 11 Central Australian Lines of Communications Sub Area to LHQ, 25 June 1942, in which Loutit sought the formation of a Labour Company manned by 100 'part-Aborigines' to provide labour to Northern Territory based logistic units.

36. AA Canberra, series AA78/215, item 41; NT Native Compounds, September 1942-43. Letter, Commander Northern Territory Force, to HQ Allied Land Forces, Melbourne, 12 November 1942.

Other items: plate, knife, fork, spoon and mug - 1 each.

Only those Aborigines actually working for the Army were paid wages, but their dependents were housed, rationed and clothed according to the Administrator's suggested scale.

In addition to the work offered by the Army, the war led to greater opportunities for Aborigines in the pastoral industry. While pastoral properties were stripped of white labour as men left to join the Services, they also faced the increased workload of meeting Army meat contracts. Aborigines took over many of the jobs vacated by whites. Avon Downs Station reported typical conditions. In June 1942 the manager remarked:

> The labour problem has come to a head. The camp is hung for want of men. And there is'nt [sic.] an unemployed man in the district. ... There may be some blacks to be had in the Alice district.[37]

Some Aborigines were able to bargain for higher wages. Those employed by the Army however, continued to receive the minimum rate authorised under the regulations - 5/- per week. Some officers in the Native Affairs Branch recognised that this low wage 'savoured of slavery'.[38]

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37. Australian National University, Archives of Business and Labour, Peel River Land and Mineral Co. Ltd., Avon Downs Station, Manager's Monthly Reports and Correspondence; N65/61-2, (1941-5). Manager's Report, 18 June 1942.

38. A431, item 46/915. Report by the Deputy Director of Native Affairs, V.J. White, to the Administrator, undated but about mid-1942.

However, with the threat of invasion paramount, the Army gave little thought to the question of pay for its Aboriginal work force. The more pressing demands were the need to obtain more labour and to organise the existing labour force to best meet the Army's requirements. In focussing on these issues, the Army tended to disregard established practices for the administration of Aboriginal settlements and freely moved groups of Aboriginal labourers and their dependents from site to site depending on the requirement for labour. Scant regard was paid to the tribal associations of the Aborigines. Furthermore, the Native Affairs Branch's manpower was depleted as men left the Administration to join the Services.[39] This contributed to some mismanagement of the Aboriginal labour settlements. To assure the efficient supply of labour, the Army moved to take control. Army NCOs were stationed at each settlement to supervise rationing, pay, hygiene and health care of the Aborigines and to organise the labourers into work teams.

Perhaps because control of the Aboriginal settlements had slipped from his grasp, or because the threat of invasion

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39. AA Darwin, series F1, item 42/406; Native Affairs Branch - Staff and Policy Matters. In September 1942 Native Affairs Branch staff consisted of 13 persons of whom 5 had joined the Services and 1 was permanently in South Australia supervising 'part-Aboriginal' evacuees. Those who had enlisted were T.G.H. Strehlow, T.J. Allen, F.A. Gubbins, J.W. Gribble and F.R. Morris. E.J. Murray had also enlisted in the Volunteer Defence Corps but was still administering the Delissaville Aboriginal settlement.

Salting Hides

Aboriginal labourers salting hides at an Army butchery in the Northern Territory.

AWM 27603

had removed from him the need to maintain the status quo, Abbott abandoned his earlier hostility to the Army employment of Aborigines and by mid-1942 had become an enthusiastic supporter. By November 1942, he was extolling the virtues of the Army's employment of increasing numbers of Aborigines. Writing to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, he said that about 1,500 Aborigines were employed on the war effort, including those on pastoral stations. In fact, this figure underestimated the contribution Aborigines were making. Owing to war time limits on travel and communications, Abbott and his Native Affairs Branch officers were unable to travel widely and were out of touch with the true extent of Aboriginal employment. Although abreast of events in the more developed areas where the Army had most of its logistic units, Abbott remained largely unaware of the use made of Aboriginal labour by the Navy and the Air Force at remote locations along the Northern Territory coast.[40] However, he was impressed with what he had seen:

> It has been shown beyond all criticism that the employment of natives by the Army has been most successful the best possible proof being that more natives are being constantly required. ... The Army has written asking whether hundreds more could not be made available.[41]

Abbott later added:

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40. This is discussed in the next chapter.

41. A431, item 46/915. Letter, Abbott to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, 30 November 1942.

> In my opinion, the best thing which has happened to the semi-civilized native since I have been in the Territory is their steady and constant employment in the Army, where they are in gangs and their hours and food are good.
>
> As practical proof of this, there are no blacks loafing around the town of Alice Springs, there are only seven in the gaol as against over twenty in past years, and the Sheriff, ... advised me today that he considered offences committed by natives in the Alice Springs district had decreased by seventy five percent in 1942.[42]

The ready availability of employment and the recognition that Aborigines were making a valuable contribution to the war effort had an important effect on the Aborigines' view of themselves.

Throughout the remainder of 1942, and into the following years, the number of Aborigines employed by the Army continued to grow, reaching a peak in August 1944. The table on the next page indicates the extent of Army employment of Aborigines throughout the course of the war.[43] For each labourer employed, the Army housed and rationed perhaps two or three dependents. The number of Aborigines brought into close contact with the Army in this way, represented a significant part of the Territory's Aboriginal population.

Unlike the pre-war labour market for Aborigines which

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42. ibid. Letter, Abbott to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 14 December 1942.

43. F.R. Morris, 'The War Effort of The Northern Territory Aborigines', Australian Territories, pp. 9-10.

ABORIGINES EMPLOYED BY THE ARMY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Date	Location	Men	Women
May 1943	Darwin - Larrimah Area	497	33
	Alice Springs - Elliott Area	190	4
	Total	687	37
February 1944	Darwin - Larrimah Area	489	25
	Alice Springs - Elliott Area	176	4
	Total	665	29
August 1944	Darwin - Larrimah Area	459	51
	Alice Springs - Elliott Area	200	9
	Total	659	60
April 1945	Darwin - Larrimah Area	433	64
	Alice Springs - Elliott Area	133	8
	Total	566	72
September 1945	Darwin - Larrimah Area	414	53
	Alice Springs - Banka Area	76	7
	Total	490	60
January 1946	Darwin - Larrimah Area	420	62
	Alice Springs - Banka Area	4	6
	Total	462	68
February 1946	Darwin - Mataranka Area	330	39
	Alice Springs Area	21	6
	Total	351	45

generally offered a limited range of employment opportunities based on the pastoral industry and domestic service, Army employment offered a wider range of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Aborigines were employed at Army butcheries as slaughtermen and in salting hides, on hygiene, sanitation and malarial control. They worked as farm hands on Army farms, dismantled car and truck engines, sorted and reconditioned tools and other stores, were wardsmen in Army hospitals, drivers and stevedores. Others worked in Darwin as deck hands, ship's pilots, ship'wrights' assistants, officers' mess stewards and welders' assistants in the Army's 56 Port Craft Company which operated Army small ships from Darwin. Aborigines proved capable of coping with the hardest physical labour. A gang of 60 man-handling ammunition at Mataranka, shifted 3 tons per man per hour in emergencies. Female Aborigines worked as orderlies in hospitals, did washing and ironing and other household and domestic duties.[44]

By January 1943 with the Army's demand for labour still growing, consideration was given to a 'round up' of all available Aborigines throughout Australia. The Inspector General of Administration of the Defence Division of the

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44. MP742/1, item 164/1/209. Report, 'Participation in the War Effort by Australian Aboriginals' by Captain F.R. Morris, Controller Native Personnel, Northern Territory Force, 8 September 1945. This report was prepared in response to a request for information by A.G. Cameron MHR on behalf of Dr Grenfell-Price.

Department of the Treasury, G.S. McIlroy, impressed by the performance of Aboriginal labourers in the Northern Territory, formed the idea of gathering together all available Aboriginal labour, throughout Australia, to support the war effort. Such was the demand for labour, he argued, that there was an urgent need that 'every available avenue should be exploited for man power'.[45] McIlroy sought the views of W.E.H. Stanner and Donald Thomson on the plan.[46] Stanner was supportive but suggested that the numbers of men available and the usefulness of those living a traditional lifestyle were questionable. Still, he thought, 'some thousands' might be available in an Australia-wide search. But Stanner also insisted that suitable conditions should be provided including a 'walk-about' or leave period, because 'fundamental native values are involved which cannot, without damage to the

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45. AA Canberra, series A705, item 68/1/700; Use of Aboriginal Labour by RAAF. Letter, G.S. McIlroy, to Flight Lieutenant [sic. Thomson was a Squadron Leader.] Thomson, 7 December 1942.

46. Before the war Stanner had been an anthropologist in A.P. Elkin's school of anthropology. Much of his fieldwork had been done in the Northern Territory in the Daly River area. Like Elkin, Stanner took the view that Aborigines would need to come to terms with white Australia. During the war, Stanner was first a personal adviser to the Minister for the Army, and later the Commander of the North Australia Observer Unit, an Army surveillance unit operating across north Australia. Like Thomson, who has been described in Chapter 5, Stanner was recruited by the Army to command this unit.

47. A705, item 68/1/700. Letter, Stanner to McIlroy, 22 December 1942.

natives and the work they are required to do, be ignored ...'.[47]

Stanner argued that once Aborigines had been exposed to the habits and material comforts of white society in the Army's labour settlements, they would be unwilling to return to their traditional lifestyle. 'If Army makes widespread use of aborigines', wrote Stanner, 'it will encourage and accelerate this process of native change, and therefore commits the Government to continuous responsibility for controlling the outcome'.[48]

Thomson on the other hand, opposed the idea. 'Any scheme to employ Aborigines in the manner proposed cannot be justified', he argued, and would lead to the extinction of the Aboriginal race.[49]

As part of his quest to find and exploit pools of otherwise idle Aboriginal labour, McIlroy asked State governments to advise on the availability of Aborigines within their States. The State governments revealed to McIlroy one of the stumbling blocks to his plan; that

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48. ibid.

49. ibid. Message, Thomson to RAAF HQ Melbourne, 23 December 1942. Thomson felt strongly about the proposal. On 4 April 1946 he published an article in the Herald attacking the wartime employment of Aborigines and McIlroy's plan in particular. In his journalistic style, Thomson wrote 'boiled down, if this proposal ... is not slavery - what is it?' See AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/1999; Donald F. Thomson - Articles in Press re Abo [sic.] Affairs.

throughout Australia, the Aboriginal population was already heavily committed to the defence effort. In South Australia and Western Australia for example, Aborigines had established themselves as the backbone of the pastoral industry and could not be removed for other purposes without serious damage to the industry. But the State governments also showed themselves to have a poor estimation of the contribution that partly de-tribalised Aborigines might be able to make. The Protector of Aborigines for South Australia noted that 100 Aborigines at Ooldea who would otherwise be available for labour, were 'still in the "walk about" stage' and were therefore useless.[50] Similarly, F.I. Bray, the Commissioner for Native Affairs in Western Australia, had reported that mission Aborigines would not be suitable for the employment McIlroy had in mind. At Drysdale River Mission for example, Bray claimed that the 300 Aborigines 'would be useless for labour'.[51] But the Services were already employing partly de-tribalised Aborigines in the Northern Territory, including many who were 'still in the "walk about" stage' and Aborigines at Drysdale River Mission were

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50. A705, item 68/1/700. Letter, Major K.R. Wyllie, to the Inspector General of Administration, 11 December 1942.

51. ibid. Letter, Inspector T.J. Corteen, to the Chief Inspector of Administration, 10 December 1942.

52. Bray was unaware of this. The RAAF employment of Aborigines on remote mission stations is discussed in the next chapter.

already working for the RAAF on airfield construction. Regardless of whether the mustering of Aborigines around Australia was possible (or desirable), the Services had already demonstrated that the State governments were undervaluing the contribution that Aborigines were capable of making.

McIlroy's grand plan was never to be. It had been based on the false premise that the Aborigines on northern mission stations were idle and were therefore available for work elsewhere. This perception had come about because of the failure of the State and Territory Aboriginal administrators to keep abreast of developments under the difficult conditions of wartime constraints on travel and communications. Nevertheless, McIlroy's plan focussed attention on the Army employment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. In particular, it drew the attention of anthropologists like Thomson, Elkin and Stanner. Stanner noted the impact of the demand for labour on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory:

> There are indications already apparent in NT that where fairly liberal funds are available for native control, and some sense of urgency exists behind the organization of their labour services, the results may well be almost spectacular when compared with pre-war experience. These conditions have never existed before. Army's urgent needs are creating entirely new native conditions.
>
> The present search for organized native labour is a radical outside intervention in NT native

policy, and may well be all to the good ...[53]

Elkin too was monitoring events in the north through his chain of informants, including Stanner, Harney, Ronald and Catherine Berndt and several other researchers. Through this chain Elkin came to see the Army employment of Aborigines in the same optimistic light as Stanner. Elkin had previously believed that dramatic change to the lives of Aborigines was the root cause of their depopulation in the north, but the Army's employment of Aborigines had brought dramatic change yet, as Harney reported, population was increasing. This observation led Elkin to the revelation that diet had been the cause of depopulation. The Army, in contrast to pastoralists, was providing its labourers with a diet indistinguishable from that of the soldiers. It included fresh vegetables and fruit, almost unheard of in pastoral employment where offal, tea, sugar and flour were the staples. This revelation led Elkin to support changes to working conditions for Aborigines in the pastoral industry and provided him with a sound argument for doing so. He was able to argue that the long established practice of paying Aborigines in kind should be abandoned and that Aborigines should be given a cash wage and control over their own diet.[54] The Army's employment of Aborigines therefore affected industrial relations in

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53. A705, item 68/1/700. Letter, Stanner to McIlroy, 22 December 1942.

54. Wise, The Self-made Anthropologist, pp. 165-167.

the Territory, although this effect was not to manifest itself until much later.

By early 1943 continuing shortages of staff in the Native Affairs Branch forced the Army to take control of Aboriginal administration. Mature aged Army NCOs supervised each Army controlled Aboriginal settlement.[55] By June 1943 the Army had taken over the role of supplying Aboriginal labour to civilian employers.[56] By that time, virtually all the readily available Aboriginal labour in the Northern Territory was under Army control.

As the Army tightened its control over the Aboriginal settlements, so various Army procedures began to be reflected in their day to day operation. The issue of rations to various family groups ceased on 27 July 1943 and was replaced by an Army style mess system where food was prepared centrally and eaten in a communal mess hut. Family groups lacked the means to keep their food free from

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55. AA1978/215, item 41. Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Nunn to various area headquarters, 24 March 1943. Men of mature age were thought to be less vulnerable to the temptations of the lubras.

56. AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 24; NT Employment of Natives by Civilians. Letter, Assistant Adjutant General, Northern Territory Force to Commander Number 14A Lines of Communication Sub Area, 19 June 1943. See also item 41. Letter, Commander Number 14A Lines of Communication Sub Area to subordinate HQs [Pine Creek Area, Katherine Area, Mataranka Area and Larrimah Area], 27 July 1943. Civilians could hire Aboriginal labourers from the Army for 3/6 per day per labourer if the labourer continued to reside in an Army settlement and was rationed and transported to and from work by the Army.

flies and dirt and feeding by family groups tended to result in food scraps and bones being left about the camps. Central feeding eliminated these problems and provided other benefits as well. Economies were achieved in the distribution of food, food was prepared to a higher standard and the opportunity could be taken to train lubras in food preparation and hygiene to fit them for employment after the war.[57]

The introduction of central feeding was contrary to the belief, firmly held by many members of the Native Affairs Branch, that aborigines prefered to remain in their own tribal groups. Instead, an Army officer noted, 'it has been found that they respond well to regimentation and seem to like copying the methods of soldiers'.[58] The mixing of tribal groups, the successful introduction of centralised feeding and the basing of Army NCOs at the Aboriginal settlements posed a challenge to the authority of Native Affairs Branch officers who regarded the Army as unschooled in the ways of Aborigines. The Army through its blundering

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57. AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 21; Native Personnel. Minute, Captain Oborn, Acting Administrative Commandant, Mataranka Area, to HQ 14A Lines of Communication Area, 27 July 1943.

58. ibid. Aboriginal labourers took great delight in acquiring bits and pieces of Army uniform. Although issued with part-worn Army clothing, the labourers were never issued with the slouch hat, yet many had acquired these as well as badges of rank and unit colour patches through trading with soldiers. See Noel Adams, 'Black Men in Khaki', The Advertiser, 26 July 1943. Note also the photographs on pages 298 and 337.

intervention was likely to lead to the undoing of years of patient work with the Aborigines. Army intervention was bitterly resented by some.

Hostility between the Army and some members of the Native Affairs Branch developed further when Brigadier Dollery, the Commander of the Northern Territory Lines of Communication Area, suggested in August 1943 that in order to meet the 'serious shortage of manpower ... for works of a military character', a special labour force of Aborigines be organised.[59] Dollery proposed that 50 men from compounds at Mataranka, Katherine, Pine Creek and Koolpinyah be initially transferred to Adelaide River, later to be joined by a further 50 men recruited from Oenpelli, Coburg Peninsula and Melville Island. This group was to become a pseudo military unit and was an intermediate step towards Dollery's real goal of creating an Aboriginal Army Labour Battalion. These labourers, carefully selected by the Army for their fitness and suitability, and unlike other labourers under the close supervision of the Army at all times, moved the Army control of labour into such close association with the military that only a subtle distinction remained between their status as civilian labourers and that of enlisted soldiers. Even the title Dollery gave the labourers - the

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59. AA1978/215, item 41. Letter, Brigadier Dollery to the Administrator of the Northern Territory, 30 August 1943.

'Mobile Native Unit' - reflected this close association with the Army.

The formation of this group of labourers was strongly opposed by officers of the Native Affairs Branch, including Harney, who noted that it did not conform to the requirements of the Aboriginals Ordinance. Dollery had already started to gather the labourers together and Harney pointed out that under the Ordinance, no movement of Aborigines was to take place without the prior permission of the Native Affairs Branch. Harney threatened to resign if the plan went ahead.[60]

Increasing tension between officers of the Native Affairs Branch and the Army erupted into a struggle for control of the labour settlements in September 1943. The Deputy Director of Native Affairs, V.J. White, argued that members of his Branch were responsible for the administration of Aboriginal settlements, the Army having responsibility for its labourers only once they left the settlement. Army officers however, argued that since the Aborigines were Army employees, the Army had a responsibility to provide for the labourer and his or her dependents.

To put an end to the squabble, Dollery issued instructions eliminating any confusion over the

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60. AA1978/215, item 41. Minute, Patrol Officer Harney to Area Commandant Mataranka, 13 August 1943.

responsibility for the control of the camps. When a member of the Native Affairs Branch was installed in permanent residence at a camp, he was responsible for the control of that camp. Army personnel were stationed at the camps to see to the Army's interests, in particular, to see that rations were correctly indented for and properly distributed to those entitled to receive them, to oversee hygiene requirements, to issue clothing, to make up payrolls, to ensure that pay was correctly acquitted and to assist Area Commandants with information as to the number of labourers available for work and their transport requirements.

Dollery spelt out the command situation in unequivocal terms. 'Compounds are a Department of Native Affairs responsibility subject to conditions of military local administration necessary to conform to Army requirements in the Area. Native affairs representatives are controllers, not consultants. Where no representative is available our NCO will be in charge as acting for the Department of Native Affairs'.[61] Dollery reserved the right for Army officers to 'inspect ... compounds at any time and to direct the production of labour as and when required at any point'.[62] Despite his assurances that the Native Affairs

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61. AA1978/215, item 41. Letter, Dollery to Lieutenant Colonel Baldock, Acting Commander of 14A Lines of Communication Sub-Area, 20 September 1943.

62. ibid.

Branch maintained control of the camps, the Branch was never able to place a representative at each camp and remained chronically short of manpower throughout the war. In any case, so long as the Army controlled rations, pay, hygiene and the production and employment of labour, it virtually controlled the settlements. Dollery's instructions permitted the Army to placate the Native Affairs Branch and the Administrator without really conceding control of the detailed administration of the settlements. Guidance in the specialist subjects of the impact of Aboriginal culture on the management of the labourers continued to be provided by the Native Affairs Branch, although even here, the Army had established expertise of its own through ex-Native Affairs Branch officers, and by calling from time to time on the knowledge of Stanner and Thomson.[63]

The Native Affairs Branch did have sufficient officers to put some in control of Aboriginal settlements. But both Dollery and Abbott were concerned that the quality of some of these officers left much to be desired. 'It appears to me', wrote Abbott, 'that a good deal of the trouble and

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63. AA1978/215, item 21. Letter, Abbott to Dollery, 24 November 1943. Unlike officers of the Native Affairs Branch, Abbott remained cooperative with Dollery and other Army officers, seeming anxious to please. Abbott complained to Dollery of his own officer's attitudes and enclosed for Dollery's perusal, letters Abbott had sent to V.J. White, his Deputy Director of Native Affairs, criticising White's performance. .

possible misunderstanding that occurs in connection with the Compounds is that we have not got a very good type of Compound Superintendent'.[64] Dollery agreed. He was appalled at E.J. Murray's 'domestic set-up'. Murray, who had previously been the superintendent at Delissaville,[65] was now superintendent at the Katherine settlement. Murray was married to an Aboriginal woman - which deeply offended Dollery. 'Surely we can not expect the natives to look up to or be guided by men of such poor calibre', he wrote.[66] But Murray's 'domestic set-up' was not Dollery's only complaint. The Katherine settlement had been inspected on 31 October 1943 by Lieutenant Colonel Russell, the Assistant Quartermaster General of Headquarters Northern Territory Force, and had been found in a disgraceful state:

> The ration tent was untidy, wasteful and, I should say overstocked in some commodities. ... The living part of the camp is thick with dogs and dogs' excreta. The humpies are the same. This part of the camp stank of dog and old food. ... There were tins of food in the humpies, additional to the supplies in the ration tent - an incentive to flies to stay around. It took two miles on the return journey to get the flies out of the car.[67]

Russell explained that the reason for this state of affairs

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64. ibid. Letter, Abbott to Dollery, 20 October 1943.

65. Murray and the Delissaville settlement have been discussed in Chapter 5.

66. AA1978/215, item 21. Letter, Dollery to Abbott, 25 October 1943.

67. ibid. Minute, Lieutenant Colonel Russell, to Brigadier Administration, 1 November 1943.

was that Murray forbade the Army supervisor any authority within the domestic part of the compound. The Army NCO

> ... had "put up" with the actions of Patrol Officer Murray in an endeavour to preserve peace. I consider that the price paid for peace in this camp is too high. ... The KATHERINE Camp contrasts most unfavourably with the Natives Families camp at 82 Mile where the sole authority is Military,

wrote Russell.[68]

Native Affairs Branch control of the Katherine compound was to be short lived. On the day following his inspection, Russell had issued orders for the Katherine compound to be disbanded and its native labourers and their dependents moved to other compounds.

The struggle for control of the Aboriginal labour settlements had been won by the Army. The Native Affairs Branch not only lacked the manpower to assert their authority, but also lacked the support of the Administrator. Abbott had all but divorced himself from his own Native Affairs Branch and had allied himself with Dollery. Ultimately, the struggle had been about the issue first identified by Stanner - the extent to which a new order would be permitted to intervene in the formation of Northern Territory Aboriginal policy, including the fundamental issue of the provision of Aboriginal labour and working conditions. Native Affairs Branch officers like

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68. ibid.

An Army Aboriginal Labour Settlement

Army run Aboriginal labour settlements in the Northern Territory established new standards for the accommodation and welfare of Aboriginal labourers and their dependents.

AWM 68025

Murray, Harney and White, represented the old order, steeped in the approach embodied in the Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance. To be fair, the Native Affairs Branch had always lacked both manpower and funds and its administration of Aboriginal affairs had also to face the reality of political acceptability.[69] The Army had been largely free of these constraints and could afford to devote resources to the management of Aboriginal labour with less concern for the financial or political implications.[70]

Another factor however, had been the new attitude exhibited by the Army towards Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Servicemen had arrived in the Territory generally without preconceived notions about Aborigines. After Japan entered the war, the Army had quickly taken the view that Aborigines were a valuable labour resource. As the strategic situation improved and the threat of invasion receded, Headquarters Northern Territory Force broadened its view of the value of Aboriginal labour. The Headquarters began to consider the place of Aborigines in

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69. Although not an elected official, Abbott had always to be concerned with his standing in public opinion. He had suffered public attacks during Justice Lowe's investigation of the panic which had followed the first Japanese air raid on Darwin. Later in the war he was attacked by members of the Northern Territory Development League. See AA Canberra, series A659, item 44/1/2281; Northern Territory Development League.

70. See for example, the Army response to enquiries about Aborigines by A.G. Cameron on page 345.

the Territory's post-war labour force. Here Dollery had stepped into the role of attempting to shape post-war race relations in the Northern Territory. Brigadier Bierwirth, who had preceeded Dollery, had also demonstrated a new approach to Aboriginal involvement in industry in the Northern Territory by his attempt to double the pay of the Army's Aboriginal labourers because 'the present wage is not considered commensurate with the value of the labour obtained'.[71] Because it had been set by regulation passed under the Aboriginals Ordinance, the minimum wage for Aborigines in the Northern Territory had not changed since the Navy had employed Aborigines on HMAS 'Geranium' at 5/- per week in 1923. Twenty years later, the minimum wage was still 5/- per week, and as Abbott admitted, most employers regarded the minimum wage as the maximum, although some Aborigines were able to get higher wages in the manpower shortage during the war.[72]

Having achieved control of Aboriginal labour settlements, Dollery set about organising them more efficiently. Lieutenant F.R. Morris was appointed Director of Native Personnel, answerable directly to Dollery. Morris was responsible for hygiene, sanitation, medical attention, quartering, pay, rations, clothing and equipment at each of

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71. AA1978/215, item 41. Letter, Brigadier Bierwirth to HQ Allied Land Forces, Melbourne, 11 March 1943.

72. AA1978/215, item 21. Letter, Abbott to Dollery, 7 October 1943.

the Army controlled labour settlements. Morris was also to provide reports at regular intervals to the Administrator and he remained responsible to the Administrator as a representative of the Department of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory.[73] Dollery also appointed Sergeant Duffy Inspector of Native Personnel. He was responsible for making regular visits of inspection to the Army's Aboriginal settlements and was to standardise control, housing, quartering and general welfare of the Aborigines.

Both Duffy and Morris proved to be well chosen for their roles. Both men displayed a sympathy for the Aborigines and performed their duties with energy. By 18 December 1943 Duffy had prepared instructions for issue to the NCOs based at each of the Army controlled settlements. These reflected the extent to which the Army was making its mark upon the running of the settlements and the lives of the Aborigines. The NCOs were to maintain a roll of all labourers showing their 'European' and Aboriginal names, clan, the names of their dependents, the number of their blood slide[74] and any general remarks. For identification purposes, each Aborigine was also issed with a number and these were recorded also. A roll of the aged, infirm,

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73. AA1978/215, item 21. Administrative Directive to 11 and 14 Lines of Communication Areas, 10 December 1943.

74. A blood slide was kept for each Aborigine. These were used to monitor malarial infection among the labourers.

widows and children was also kept. Roll books were marked daily.[75] Records were kept of issues of clothing showing the thumb print of the recipient. Periodic kit inspections were held to ensure that these issues were not traded or gambled away.

Each morning a roll call parade was held before the men were despatched to their work. Tents used for housing the natives were set out in line and unsightly structures demolished or re-erected on 'approved lines'. Army NCOs carried out daily inspections paying attention to camp hygiene and sanitation. Duffy reminded his NCOs that Aborigines often failed to present themselves for medical treatment and daily inspections were to include a check for any Aborigines who were in need of attention. Eye trouble was particularly prevalent.

Women not on the Army payroll were required to perform domestic duties and to assist in the mess during the labourers meals. In the common mess rooms in each settlement, the labourers had the first sitting at meals and the other compound occupants followed later. No food was permitted in the Aborigines' accommodation. The meals were varied and healthful. Duffy's instructions suggested that meat could be 'roasted, boiled or braised and prepared

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75. Though these roll books would have formed a valuable source of information on a sizable group of Northern Territory Aborigines, they seem not to have survived.

as cottage or potato pies' for variety. Ant bed ovens were to be used to prepare camp bread. To provide extra fresh fruit and vegetables, gardens were established and cared for by the settlement women after the necessary tilling had been carried out.

Duffy also insisted that the NCO supervisors conduct themselves in a proper military manner. He admonished his settlement supervisors to

> ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THE FACT THAT THEIR POSITION IS ONE OF TRUST AND GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. THE GENERAL STANDARD OF THE COMPOUND IS INVARIABLY A TRUE REFLECTION OF THE BEARING OF NCO's.[76]

Writing in April 1945 about Army control of the settlements, Duffy said he was particularly pleased with the evidence he saw of the 'survival of the race'. Among the Aborigines under the Army's care there had been an increase in the number of births, the birth rate exceeding the death rate. 'As explained by some Tribal Elders', wrote Duffy, 'this is accounted for by a certain sense of security that these natives feel'.[77]

Entertainments including picture shows were available to the Aborigines and sporting competitions between the

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76. ibid. Administrative Instruction Number 103, 20 December 1943.

77. Jay and Peter Read, 'Army Days: The Northern Territory - An Aboriginal View of the Past', unpublished manuscript, Appendix 2.

various settlements were conducted. The Aborigines also received Christmas parcels from the Australian Comforts Fund.

There were also some adverse effects of the Army management of the Aboriginal labour settlements. In central Australia, missionaries bemoaned some of the consequences of increased contact between the Aborigines and white Australian servicemen:

> We have experienced with sorrow how the vice of gambling swept through the camp and affected even those who never before had anything to do with it. Others had ideas put into their heads which brought about doubts and unrest. Matters they considered sacred they heard dragged into dust by those whom they would look up to as superior to themselves.[78]

These were the inevitable results of the Aborigines being exposed to the real world beyond the confines of the mission. The religious training provided by the missions had failed to prepare Aborigines for sustained contact with white society as had their traditional culture. Many Aborigines were also dissatisfied with their 5/- per week. They were 'expected to work alongside the white soldier, do the same amount of work, and then still only receive "womans pay" for it'.[79] Some were so disgruntled that on

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78. AA1978/215, item 21. Letter, Resident Government Protector of Aborigines and Superintendent of Finke River Mission, to the Acting Director of Native Affairs, 21 January 1944.

79. ibid.

return to the mission station on leave they 'went bush' to prevent themselves from being required to return to work. Other Aborigines working for local civilians were earning as much as 30/- per week and were in frequent contact with the Army labourers. Army employment also had a social impact. Fighting had broken out among the Aborigines of Hermannsburg Mission when Army labourers had returned on leave. Rex Battarbee, the resident Native Affairs Branch officer noted:

> This may only be a taste of what can be expected when the war is over and these boys are discharged. They think they are in the Army and therefore are a cut above the other natives, so the old men lose some of their power.[80]

The Army employment of Aborigines also had adverse effects elsewhere. Butchery workers at Adelaide River settlement complained that although they worked longer hours than the other labourers they received no more pay.[81] Tiwi Aborigines from Bathurst and Melville Islands employed on Army small ships operating in Darwin initially refused to return to work when they had been returned to their islands for a holiday. Promised regular leave when they had been recruited, the workload imposed on the small ships prevented the Army from releasing them. They had

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80. AA Darwin, series F1, item 42/286 Part 2; Finke River Mission - Hermannsburg - Mr Battarbee's Fortnightly Reports to December 1943. Report, 8 September 1943.

81. ibid. Inspector's General Report on Native Compounds - Month of Jan 1944, no. 1, 27 January 1944.

served for 18 months in Darwin without break.[82]

Aborigines in the settlements were also vulnerable to visits from servicemen and others seeking sexual contact. After the evacuation of civilians, male Service personnel outnumbered white females - mainly servicewomen - in the Northern Territory by approximately 700 to 1 and many servicemen had not had contact with white women for up to two years.[83] Aboriginal women were therefore a temptation. The Adelaide River Aboriginal settlement was sufficiently close to major troop concentrations near Darwin to attract the attention of the soldiers. The NCO supervisor there had difficulty in keeping out unauthorised visitors, in particular, American Negroes and Civil Construction Corps workers. Settlements were out of bounds to troops and the NCOs in charge patrolled their settlements to prevent these visits but with questionable success.[84] Soldiers were also making contact with Aboriginal women at other centres such as Marrakai, where 'Australian soldiers were in the habit of visiting the

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82. MP742/1, item 164/1/209. Report, 'Participation in War Effort by Australian Aboriginals' by Captain F.R. Morris, Controller Native Personnel, Northern Territory Force, 8 September 1945.

83. AWM Canberra, series 54, item 88/1/1; History of Australian Women's Army Service - NT Force - Appendix B to Australian Women's Army Service.

84. AA1978/215, item 21. Inspector's General Report on Native Compounds, Month of January, 1944, no. 1, by Sergeant W. Charles Duffy, Inspector of Native Personnel, Northern Territory Force.

aboriginal camp ... and having intercourse with the lubras that are camped there. Already there have been reports of syphilis ...'[85] The Army Aboriginal settlements were under supervision and although sexual contacts took place, the evidence suggests that sexual contact was not as unrestrained in the settlements as it was in areas further from effective supervision.[86]

Despite these problems, the Army settlements represented a significant improvement over the types of conditions generally offered to Aborigines on the Northern Territory's pastoral properties. Harney, patrolling the Northern Territory in November 1944 and June 1945, noted that Aboriginal employees on pastoral properties were expected to work from dawn till dark every day of the week, without holiday. Housing was deplorable. He noticed at Wave Hill station that the Aborigines had to build their homes themselves from flattened petrol drums and scraps of timber while stacks of new galvanised iron lay idle in a shed.[87] At other stations, Harney found evidence of denial of rations to Aboriginal workers. Harney described conditions

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85. AA Darwin, series F1, item 42/415; Aboriginals - Removal From Vicinity of Military Camps North of Mataranka. Minute, OC Provost Detachment, Adelaide River to OC Northern Territory Force Provost Company, undated.

86. Sexual contact in remote areas is discussed in the next chapter.

87. AA Darwin, series F1, item 44/275; Patrol Officer W.E. Harney - Patrols and Reports. Report on Patrol of Western Stations, Patrol Officer Harney, 29 June 1945.

for Aborigines on the stations this way:

> The natives working all day, every day, no wages, just bread and beef with tea and sugar, his wife if young is worked too, children also work if old enough. He is not asked to leave his wife and family just told to do things and too frightened to disobey because he has nowhere to go to.
>
> Often old natives told me of their treatment and their desires but it was with lowered voice as though the trees had ears and the arm of the boss was long.[88]

At Alexandria Station, Harney was appalled at the accommodation for the Aboriginal station hands. 'Only one word describes the homes of [the Aboriginal workers] who have carried these stations for years - "damn terrible"', he wrote. Similarly, at Avon Downs Station, he recorded that the Aborigines' camp 'beggars description'.[89] Some stations provided better conditions, but these tended to be the minority. Harney noticed that Rosewood station provided its permanent Aboriginal staff with 'nice huts' and a bathroom with a concrete floor, but seasonal labourers although paid wages, had to fend for themselves for food and accommodation. They lived in squalid humpies away from the station. Only at Lake Nash Station, 100 miles west of Mt Isa, were conditions for Aborigines the same as those for white employees proving, claimed Harney, that there was no economic obstacle to the provision of

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88. ibid.

89. ibid. Report, Patrol Officer W.E. Harney, 6 November 1944.

good conditions for Aboriginal labourers. For most of the Northern Territory cattle stations, Harney drew sharp contrast between the conditions they offered and those provided by the Army.[90]

Armed with the Army model of administration of Aboriginal labour, the Native Affairs Branch began to exert pressure on pastoralists to provide similar conditions. Aware of Harney's adverse report, the manager of Avon Downs station had reported to the superintendent of the Peel River Land and Mining Company which owned the property:

> ... trouble is looming for us from the Native Affairs people. They are making suggestions about accommodation for the blacks which border on the ridiculous.[91]

Appealing to the overworked theory that Aborigines were 'a dying race', the General Superintendent of the Peel River Land and Mining Company regarded the provision of improved housing, messes and chinaware as unacceptable on economic grounds. 'The standard of the native is deteriorating so rapidly, ... that it would be a most uneconomic venture to erect a lot of buildings that in a year or two may become

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90. ibid.

91. ANU Archives of Business and Labour, Peel River Land and Mineral Co. Ltd. Avon Downs Station. Manager's Monthly Reports and Correspondence; N65/61-2, (1941-5). Station Manager's Report, 12 January 1944 [sic. The report should be dated 1945]. The ANU Archives of Business and Labour hold few records for Northern Territory cattle stations in this period but Harney's remarks suggest that Avon Downs station was typical in the conditions it offered for Aboriginal labourers.

useless', he argued.[92] He urged the manager to encourage other station managers in the district to take a united stand against the Native Affairs Branch on the matter.

Harney's view of the deplorable conditions on many stations was supported by Ronald and Catherine Berndt, anthropologists of Elkin's school who conducted a survey of pastoral properties on behalf of Vestey Brothers, a British company owning a chain of pastoral properties across north Australia. Vesteys was concerned at the waning Aboriginal population and hence, labour force, on their stations. The Berndts drew unfavourable comparison between Vesteys' treatment of their Aboriginal work force and the Army's provision for its labourers. They noted that

> while the aborigine is satisfied with very little in return for his labour, there is a certain standard below which it is not wise to fall. This is particularly true at present, when the Army compounds have set a precedent in the distribution of food to workers, dependents and old people; in the establishment of regular working hours; and in the setting-up of showers, with washing and sanitation facilities.[93]

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92. ibid. Letter, General Superintendent, Peel River Land and Mining Co. Ltd. to the manager, Avon Downs station, 2 February 1945.

93. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Some Aspects of Native Labour on Northern Territory Cattle Stations, Aboriginal Protector, vol. 2, no. 2, October 1946, p. 11. Later the Berndts noted that staff shortages in the Native Affairs Branch and the fact that Vestey Brothers held the Army meat contract during the war may have prevented action being taken to improve conditions on Vesteys' properties. See Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Pastoral Stations in the Northern Territory and Native Welfare, Aboriginal Protector, vol. 2, no. 4, June 1948, p. 14.

Like Harney, they claimed that pastoral properties failed to match the the conditions provided by the Army. The Berndts were particularly critical of the diet of meat, flour, tea and sugar provided on many stations. They believed that the absence of fruit or vegetables in the diet had contributed to poor health and infertility and was a major cause of the declining Aboriginal population on Vesteys' properties. Despite the belief by some pastoralists that Aborigines disliked vegetables, the Berndts recorded that Army settlements always provided vegetables and the Aborigines ate them with enthusiasm.[94]

In addition to poor or often non-existent wages, poor accommodation and an unbalanced diet, Aborigines on pastoral properties often endured brutal treatment at the hands of the white station staff. In 1940 an Aborigine at Mount Cavanagh Station in central Australia died after being towed behind a motor vehicle by a length of fencing wire fastened around his neck. Two whites were charged with his murder. Although this brutal act may not have been typical of the behaviour of most white station hands towards Aborigines, the arguments raised in the defence of the whites were remarkable for the insight they give into the attitudes of white pastoralists to Aborigines. The accused made no attempt to conceal that they had indeed towed the man behind the vehicle, even freely admitting

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94. ibid, p. 16.

that before they did so they had struck him several times with a rifle and pistol. They argued that their actions had been entirely necessary because they needed to be firm with the Aborigines on their station and that the incident was common in disciplining Aborigines. A clergyman giving evidence in court said of the accused that their 'treatment of the natives was very good indeed. In fact better than many other station owners'.[95] The accused were acquitted.

The Army settlements were relative havens from such violence, including inter-tribal violence. Even the intermingling of as many as 20 different language groups in a single settlement had not produced the expected trouble. In fact, Harney reported that the mixed groups seemed to be more contented than people from a single tribe.[96] Later, the Army provided boxing gloves for the settlement of minor

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95. AA Canberra, series A659, item 41/1/101; Death of Native Lallilicki at Mount Cavanagh Station. Letter, Judge D.G. Bathgate, to Abbott, 23 May 1941. This incident is also mentioned though in less detail in AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/450; Ill-treatment of Aborigines. Letter, Aborigines' Protection League to Senator Collings, 19 December 1942. Further evidence of violence against Aboriginal workers, including flogging and other mistreatment can be found in AA Canberra, series A659, item 45/1/1369; Native Food Supplies - NT.

96. Jay and Peter Read, 'Army Days', Report, Administration of Native Affairs Section - Care and Guidance of Native Races by Army, HQ Northern Territory Force, 23 April 1945, by Acting Warrant Officer W. Charles Duffy.

squabbles between labourers and others living in the settlements.[97] This discouraged them from resorting to their traditional weapons which were far more lethal.

The final word on any comparison between Army and cattle station conditions belongs to the Aborigines. Some Aborigines deserted cattle stations to work for the Army. One Aboriginal stockman told a Patrol Officer that 'he refused to return to the station stating that his employer had not provided him with clothes and blankets and he was satisfied with Army working conditions'.[98] Patrol Officer Harney noticed that by mid-1943, over 70 per cent of the Aborigines in the Army settlement were from Aboriginal reserves and that a process of 'population drift' had begun. Aborigines in the remote areas were being drawn into the more heavily populated areas as a result of the demand for labour and the attractiveness of working for the Army.[99] To many Aborigines, the most attractive aspect of the Army settlements was their introduction to money. Many received a wage for the first time in their lives while

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97. AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 33; Correspondence with A.G. Cameron. Letter, Major General A.S. Allen, Commander Northern Territory Force to Major A.G. Cameron, MHR, 26 September 1944.

98. AA Darwin, series F1, item 42/461; Native Labour - Request for by Station Managers etc. Minute, Patrol Officer Sweeney to the Director of Native Affairs, 11 January 1944.

99. F1, item 44/275; Patrol Officer W.E. Harney - Patrols and Reports. Report on activities from May 1942 to May 1943 and report, 9 October 1943.

working for the Army. One labourer recalled:

> Oh, get paid. That's the, ... that's the time now we bin look money. Army bin bringem back, money. Now we bin showem the wages then. All the time [before] we bin work for clothes, tobacco, bread, beef. Army time ... bringem money, we bin look money. "That's money!" We lookit, we look that paper. "What's this, that paper?" "No [said the paying officer], that's a note".[100]

Many Aborigines who were employed by the Army still remember that period of their lives with nostalgia. Stephen Watson Narweiia recalled 'it made us sad, and when it's finished, you know, we remember ... we think of it now, after, what the Army did to us. They bin good people'. Tim Japangardi supported that view. 'You know, they never treatem wrong. Some people, soldier people, never treatem Aboriginal the wrong way. They really kind'.[101] The Army settlements with their pay and superior conditions were a major attraction to Northern Territory Aborigines.

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100. Jay and Peter Read, 'Army Days', p. 28. This source needs to be treated with caution as the Reads' do not draw a clear distinction between Aborigines employed as civilian labourers and those formally enlisted.

101. ibid, p. 50. Interestingly, the Reads refer to threats that Aborigines 'escaping' from the Army settlements would be shot. I have found no evidence to support this. Many Aborigines did leave Army employment without these dire consequences and I suspect that the origin of this claim is that Aborigines who had worked for the Army for a period might take pleasure at the expense of newcomers in raising frightening tales. The Reads note that one labourer told newcomers to his settlement 'do not get away, or bullet 'll 'tack you, bullet going to be stuck for you today. We'll put a machine gun on you mob'. See p. 18.

Labourers' Pay Parade

A labourer signs for his pay with his finger print. Army employment introduced many Northern Territory Aborigines to a cash wage.

AWM 57362

By early 1944, with the threat of a Japanese invasion now quite remote, Dollery turned his thoughts away from the Army's requirement for labour to the place of Aborigines in the post-war Northern Territory. Dollery had no doubt that the Army had a legitimate role to play in shaping race relations. His ill fated proposal to form an Aboriginal Employment Company[102] had been an attempt to provide a medium through which Aboriginal leaders could be developed and labour skills acquired. But the proposal had required the approval of Land Headquarters. Out of Dollery's control it foundered. Senior Army officers at Land Headquarters lacked Dollery's vision and commitment to the Northern Territory Aborigines. They viewed his proposal against a background of the ongoing war and it seemed to them a diversion of resources to an unimportant issue. Dollery now shifted his efforts to the Aboriginal settlements which remained within his control. He moved to introduce an education scheme for the Aborigines. Some settlements had already been providing modest education through mission trained Aborigines, but Dollery now envisaged a more formal education programme using members of the Army Education Service.

Major Groves, the Army's Deputy Director of Education, examined the question of providing education for the Aborigines. Groves' report noted the changes to race

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102. Discussed in Chapter 4.

relations in the Northern Territory during the war, seeing them as an opportunity to achieve something of lasting importance for Aborigines. The report noted that

> the natives generally, as in N.G. [New Guinea], appear to have reacted in a most favourable way. They appear to experience a feeling of pride and satisfaction in being allowed to take part in what is obviously a business of urgent national importance to the white man ...
>
> In other words, the natives are appreciative of being given the opportunity of contributing to the white man's war effort and of the value placed on their contribution by the white man. This has had an obvious effect upon the aborigines concerned, quickening [sic.] their native self-esteem which in many cases, one understands, was previously at low ebb.
>
> It is a situation which must be maintained after the war as the basis of the white man's relations with the aboriginal people, if their welfare and development are to be seriously pursued.[103]

Army sponsored education was intended to form a basis for further post-war development of Aborigines, building on the changes to Aboriginal affairs already introduced by the Army. It was planned to fit Aborigines for an improved place in the Territory economy after the war. It was to be conducted by Army educators, including selected women who would be responsible for the education of Aboriginal women and children. Suitably educated Aborigines would work as assistants and would serve as models for the students. The white Australians involved were to be carefully selected. They were to possess a knowledge of the history of race

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103. A431, item 46/915. Report by Major Groves, undated.

relations in the Northern Territory, have a 'sympathetic appreciation' of the problems of Aboriginal development and were to regard themselves as 'missionaries of a "square deal" for the [Aboriginal] people'.[104] There was no hint that such people would be difficult to find among the servicemen and women in Northern Territory Force.

Both Dollery and Groves were struck with the urgency of their task. Dollery in particular must have been aware that the end of the war would bring an end to his plans. Both men worked to develop the Aboriginal settlements to such an extent that the civil administration which would inevitably resume control at the end of the war, would be committed to continuing where the Army had left off. Groves' report noted that

> it is not possible to over-stress the desirability of pursuing every possible means of raising the individual self-esteem of the aborigines as a contribution towards the raising of their racial morale. Nothing of lasting worth can ever be accomplished for these people, however elaborate the plans and however well-disposed the Europeans concerned, unless the aborigines are led to believe in themselves and in our appreciation of them.[105]

Settlements were to build communal halls where training, education and entertainment could take place. Selected adult Aborigines were to be given on-the-job training as medical orderlies, drivers and other semi-skilled jobs,

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104. ibid.

105. ibid.

while others were to be encouraged to teach the young the traditional handicrafts and Aboriginal mythology. 'With such a programme ... carried on by the close co-operation of the natives themselves in their different tribal groups with the European staffs, the Army settlements might provide a pattern for the Native Community settlements of the post-war future',[106] wrote Groves. Just as pastoralists were under pressure to meet the standards set by the Army, so the Northern Territory Administration would be subject to similar pressures to meet the Army's standards of Aboriginal administration. Furthermore, Dollery and Groves were intent on setting that standard as high as possible before the end of the war brought the return of civil administration. But like Dollery's plan to from an Aboriginal Labour Battalion, the plan to provide education for the Aboriginal labourers was quashed by Land Headquarters in Melbourne. For the remainder of the war, Dollery had to be content with providing education from within the resources of the settlements. Those Aborigines better educated than the others led classes.

As well as Dollery's proposals to form an Aboriginal Labour Battalion and to provide education for the labourers, both he and his predecessor, Brigadier Bierwirth attempted to have the labourers' pay increased. Bierwirth had first asked for Treasury approval to increase the pay

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106. ibid.

in March 1943, but Treasury had still not reached a decision by the end of the war, over two years later.

This lack of response stemmed partly from reluctance on the part of Treasury to increase the cost of the Aboriginal labour, and partly on the attitudes of senior Army officers. The proposed pay rise had first to be approved within Land Headquarters in Melbourne. While Bierwirth and Dollery were able to see that the employment of Aboriginal labour was essential to Army operations in the Northern Territory, the officers in Melbourne stuck with determination to their prejudices. Disregarding Dollery's claims concerning the value of Aboriginal labour, officers at Land Headquarters decided that 'the employment of natives by the Army is not economic'.[107] Some senior officers with experience in north Australia disagreed. The Quartermaster General had seen Aborigines at work for the Army and thought their work of 'high standard' and that many 'full-bloods' 'would make good leaders and NCOs'.[108]

Those who deprecated the employment of Aborigines were successful in putting off a decision until the end of the war and the return of the civil administration to the Northern Territory precluded any thought of increasing Army

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107. MP742, item 92/1/302. Report of the Order of Battle Investigation Committee, 6 October 1944.

108. ibid. Minute, Quartermaster General to the Adjutant General, 31 January 1945.

involvement with Aboriginal labour. Dollery and Headquarters Northern Territory Force had been more willing to embrace the role of social experimentation than had Land Headquarters.

Although the employment of Aborigines by the Army had produced some unwanted effects on the Aborigines concerned, such as an increase in their gambling, too rapid exposure to white Australian values, and sexual exploitation, the employment of Aborigines had on the whole, been beneficial for both the Army and Aborigines. The impact of the Army's employment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory can be guaged in several ways. The sustained demand by Headquarters Northern Territory Force for Aboriginal labour indicates that their labour was highly valued. It enabled Northern Territory Force to free soldiers from mundane physical labour to participate in defence activities requiring the skills of trained soldiers. It also enabled many soldiers to take leave in south east Australia, improving morale. The Army had also partially succeeded in establishing standards for the administration of Aboriginal labour which would be used to measure the performance of both civilian employers of Aborigines and the performance of the Native Affairs Branch.

By February 1946 the Northern Territory Administration was already finding it difficult to maintain the standards reached by the Army in control and welfare of Aborigines.

Aborigines who had previously been in Army employment were 'hanging about the main roads, on prohibited areas, and being without work or means were becoming a nuisance by frequenting and in some cases stealing from road camps'.[109] But in addition to the standards set by the Army, the wartime labours of the Aborigines also provided a strong moral incentive to the Department of the Interior to increase funding to Aborigines in the Territory. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior argued for increased funding for Aboriginal affairs because 'the Commonwealth, if only out of gratitude for the help given by these natives towards the war effort, is surely under an obligation to expend whatever funds are necessary to provide for their sustenance, good health and gradual development to take their place in society'.[110]

An important signpost marking the significance of the changes the Army had brought to working conditions for Aborigines in the Territory was the reaction of pastoralists. The improved conditions offered by the Army had thrown out a challenge to pastoralists which many wished to avoid. Pastoralists hoped to preserve the pre-war labour conditions for as long as possible and set

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109. AA Canberra, series A659, item 45/1/5816; Native Affairs Branch Funds for Financial Year 1945-46. Report, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, 21 February 1946.

110. ibid.

out to oppose the Army administration of Aboriginal labour. In January 1944, A.G. Cameron,[111] a member of the House of Representatives and previously leader of the Country Party in South Australia, complained on behalf of Territory pastoralists to Major General Allen, the Commander of Northern Territory Force, about the Army employment of Aborigines. He claimed that the Army was employing mission Aborigines who were forced to leave their lubras unprotected. The women, he said, were likely to be exploited by the many servicemen who were present at most northern mission stations. The pastoralists apparent concern for the moral predicament of Aboriginal women was at odds with the history of sexual exploitation of Aborigines on many northern cattle stations. However, Cameron's most important complaint was that the Army was depriving pastoralists of their Aboriginal labour and 'spoiling' many Aborigines in the process:

> Many [Aborigines] ... have been taken from the stations and have been placed in charge of persons with no experience whatever in the handling of native labour, and [the pastoralists] ... contend that the Army, with the best of intentions, is building up a serious labour problem for the Northern Territory after the war is over. Natives, they believe will not only be discontented when they are forced to return to the only life that they have hitherto known ... but they believe that the soft treatment accorded

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111. A.G. Cameron was the Federal member for Barker, SA. He had served in the First AIF and was leader of the Federal Country Party from September 1939 to October 1940, when he resigned his membership. In addition to being an MHR, Cameron was also enlisted as a Major in the Intelligence Corps throughout the Second World War.

to them by the Army will also make them arrogant, insolent and overbearing.[112]

Allen was unrepentant, attacking the implications contained in Cameron's letter. After a brief description of the conditions faced by Aborigines on many pastoral properties, Allen wrote:

> Army ... is housing, clothing, paying and feeding [Aborigines] ... in decency and comfort, and is raising them as far as possible to assume a sense of citizenship and decent standard of living - principles, I understand, very dear to the heart of the average Australian. ... We are teaching selected natives to be Farmers, Motor Drivers, Motor Mechanics, Carpenters etc., so that after the war, they may form a labour potential of tradesmen for the local inhabitants. ... This, apparently, is the "soft treatment" to which certain Station Owners refer.[113]

Demonstrating the strength of his convictions on the matter, Allen added that if Cameron remained in doubt about the Army's role in relation to its Aboriginal labourers, he would be pleased to recommend that a Commission be appointed to examine the question, including the conditions of labour offered on pastoral properties before the war. Allen's disregard for Cameron's complaints reflected his relative immunity from political pressure. Unlike Allen or Dollery, Abbott had always been vulnerable to political

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112. AA1978/215, item 33. Letter, A.G. Cameron to Major General Allen, GOC Northern Territory Force, 25 January 1944. Cameron also wrote a similar letter to Senator Collings on 26 January 1944. See AA1978/215, item 24.

113. ibid. Letter, Major General Allen to A.G. Cameron, 29 May 1944.

attack from pastoralists who made up an influential bloc in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Development League, formed in June 1944 from among pastoralists and other business interests in the Territory, quickly launched an attack on the style of administration in the Territory and on Abbott personally.

Abbott felt vulnerable to the League. He claimed that the League's formation was 'a preliminary to a move against [him] ... possibly inspired by Brigadier Loutit'.[114] Later he said the League's leaders were 'communists' or had 'communistic tendencies'. The League conducted a poll of white Territorians claiming that the result revealed that 87.4 per cent of white Territorians were unhappy with the Administration and with Abbott as Administrator. The poll results were passed to Cameron.

Persistent in his advocacy of the pastoralists, Cameron wrote again to Allen in September 1944, this time complaining that the Army was teaching Aborigines to box. Violence remained an important weapon in the armoury of

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114. A659, item 44/1/2281. Letter, C.L.A. Abbott to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 8 June 1944. Loutit was the commander of the Central Australian Lines of Communications Area based at Alice Springs and his power in the town challenged that of Abbott. Each came to dislike the other. A squabble over Loutit's refusal to provide an Army band for a ceremony arranged by Abbott prompted the latter to comment 'I think Brigadier Loutit's mental outlook is entirely warped'. See AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 5/1/476; Restoration of Civil Administration in the Northern Territory.

pastoralists in dealing with uncooperative Aborigines as the incident on Mount Cavanagh station had demonstrated. The possibility that Aborigines were being trained to box, with its hint that Aborigines might acquire the means of defence and hence a measure of invulnerability to white violence, could be seen to challenge white economic survival and control of the land. 'I am now informed', wrote Cameron, 'that the Army is conducting boxing lessons for its native labourers. I do not know just what the Army's objective is, unless it be to attempt to place aborigines on a completely equal footing ...'[115] Cameron's complaints were unfounded but were aimed at ensuring that Aborigines did not attain equal footing through their association with the Army. The Army was not teaching its labourers to box, but gloves had been used in some settlements to settle disputes between Aborigines in a harmless way, and several enlisted 'part-Aborigines' serving in Northern Territory Force had participated in the Force boxing competition acquitting themselves well.

In reply, Allen again attacked Cameron. 'The Army's objective', he wrote, 'is to make the Australian aboriginal a happy, healthy and eventually useful member of the community, in his proper sphere', adding the barb, 'I gather that your views would appear to be opposed to ours

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115. AA1978/215, item 33. Letter, Cameron to Allen, 3 September 1944.

Soldiers and Aboriginal Civilian Labourers of an Army Butchery

The egalitarian influences of Service society operated in small groups such as this to foster the formation of relationships relatively free from racism.

AWM 27605

on this objective'.[116] Cameron's complaints betrayed the depth of the pastoralists concern with the Army's experiment with Aboriginal labour. Allen's replies reveal his sense of the importance of the experiment and his determination to press ahead with it.

Through the course of the war the Army in the Northern Territory had undergone a revolution in its attitude to Aboriginal labour. Beginning in 1939 with an approach which endeavoured to conform to the standards set by the white citizens of the Northern Territory, the Army had ended the war having repudiated these standards and replaced them with standards of its own. To achieve this change, Headquarters Northern Territory Force had accepted the role of social experimentation. Unlike the headquarters in the Northern Territory, Land Headquarters in Melbourne had not been willing to accept a role in shaping social conditions in the north and had quashed several of the new directions in Aboriginal administration which had been part of the revolutionary approach. Nevertheless, the changes that Headquarters Northern Territory Force was able to implement represented a significant change in the provisions made for Aboriginal labour and challenged both the civil administration and pastoralists to equal the Army's performance. The impact of the challenge can be measured in the attempts by Cameron

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116. ibid. Letter, Allen to Cameron, 26 September 1944.

to discredit and limit the Army experiment so that it more closely suited the interests of pastoralists.

Headquarters Northern Territory Force had been prepared to enter the uncertain area of social experimentation because several factors provided the opportunity to do so. First, the Army had a pressing need for labour which could be better met by the introduction of improved conditions. Second, after the evacuation of white civilians from the north, the Army became the dominant social force in the Territory, seizing the social initiative and setting its own agenda. Unlike pre-war society in the Northern Territory, servicemen and women knew little of the Territory's history of inter-racial conflict, had no interest in the economic exploitation of Aborigines for personal gain and regarded themselves as temporary visitors to the north. These factors enabled them to approach Aborigines with an open mind, free from the prejudices which had often marred race relations in earlier periods. But the wartime environment also gave the Army in the Northern Territory considerable power to wield in doing its job while at the same time reducing its vulnerability to political pressures aimed at conserving the status quo. Land Headquarters in Melbourne was never as free from the implications of politics and economic power as Headquarters Northern Territory Force and it was mainly the presence of these pressures in Melbourne which caused that Headquarters to adopt a consistently conservative stance on many of the

plans put forward by Headquarters Northern Territory Force. The predispositions of particular individuals also played a part. Bierwirth, Dollery and Allen each saw the role that Aborigines could play in logistic support to forces in the north. They were also familiar with the conditions endured by Aborigines in the Northern Territory and saw their administration of Aboriginal labour as a chance to turn race relations there in a new direction.

Aborigines in Army employment in the Northern Territory made a significant contribution to the war effort through their labour. Others in the more remote parts of the Territory and indeed, across the whole of north Australia were making a similar contribution.

CHAPTER 7

EMPLOYMENT OF MISSION AND OTHER ISOLATED ABORIGINES

The Army's employment of Aboriginal labour described in the previous chapter, was carefully organised and controlled to meet the requirements of both the Army and the Native Affairs Branch. Labour settlements were established where the Army needed them and if necessary, they were moved to new positions as the Army's needs changed. The Army labour settlements remained accessible to officers of the Native Affairs Branch of the Administration throughout the war, and the Administration's policies such as those intended to minimise contact between the labourers' families and servicemen, continued to be exercised without interruption. The Army had been happy to accommodate these controls as they conformed to its own need to protect the health of its troops. The settlements had been ruled out-of-bounds as much to limit the spread of malaria and venereal diseases as to protect the Aborigines from the unwanted advances of the troops. The labour settlements administered by the Army provided a model of centralised, controlled labour camps open to the supervision of the civil authorities.

Beyond the easy reach of State or Commonwealth government patrol officers were the north Australian mission stations and much of the Aboriginal population still living the

traditional nomadic life-style. In contributing their labour to the war effort, these people did not fit the centralised model described in the previous chapter. Unlike the Army model where the Aboriginal labour was moved to the site of the job, in the employment of isolated Aborigines along the north Australian coast, the job - usually RAAF airfields or radar stations - was sited where a pool of labour was available. Often, this resulted in RAAF installations being sited at northern mission stations.

While Aborigines had been employed by the Services in Darwin before the war, little thought had been given to the implications for defence of the large population of Aborigines in isolated northern mission stations, government ration stations or still living a traditional life-style. The residents of these mission stations were to become an integral part of Australia's defence. Aborigines there provided their labour for airfield construction, logistic support and general duties. The strategically important location of many mission stations was the catalyst which brought relatively large numbers of white servicemen to these mission stations, leading to enforced contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. As in other situations in which enforced contact occurred, for example in the enlistment of Aboriginal soldiers, this contact led to improved understanding between the two groups. The pre-war

isolation of the mission stations and the nomadic Aborigines evaporated during the period from 1942 to 1945, and was never to return to pre-war levels. Aborigines at the mission stations were exposed to larger numbers of whites than previously and this loss of isolation brought lasting changes to their lives. In providing labour to the Services, mission Aborigines made a significant contribution to the defence of Australia.

Several of the north Australian Aboriginal missions such as Beagle Bay Mission in Western Australia, and Mapoon, Weipa, Aurukun and Mitchell River Missions in Queensland and Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory, had been established around the turn of the century. Others, particularly Milingimbi, Groote Eylandt and Oenpelli Missions and Munja Aboriginal settlement, a Western Australian government ration depot, were established in a flourish of missionary development in the 1920s. Port Keats Mission established in 1935, was the last to be established before the war. By June 1941, over 13,000 Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' were estimated to be in supervised camps in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland.[1] Although many of the residents of mission

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1. Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, no. 35, 1942-43, p. 315. Aboriginal census of 30 June 1941. Although the official estimates of the Aboriginal population reflected in the Commonwealth Yearbook are open to question, the figure for Aborigines in supervised camps are likely to be more accurate than, say, the figure for 'nomadic' Aborigines.

stations had begun the process of de-tribalisation, some remained relatively untouched by European values. A further 23,000 Aborigines were estimated to live a traditional 'nomadic' life-style.[2]

With few exceptions, the isolated northern missions clung precariously to the north Australian coast. Coastal sites had been favoured because the sea offered a means of communication and because missionaries had been forced to strike a balance between their need to contact the Aborigines in the hinterland, yet be secure from attack. Some missions like those at Milingimbi, Goulburn Island and Croker Island had chosen small islands largely for their defensive value. Although government assistance in the form of grants of land, and later cash subsidies, were given to the missions, they followed a colonial model and attempted to offset the running expenses of the mission by production of various commodities using Aboriginal labour. The extreme isolation of most of the missions meant that economic independence from both government and church support was rarely achieved.

The State and Commonwealth governments, faced with limited financial resources for the administration of Aboriginal affairs and the difficulty of extending control to Aborigines in remote areas, saw the missions as a

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2. ibid.

convenient alternative to their own administration. By the 1930s cooperation between government and missions was particularly marked in Queensland where missionaries were given considerable administrative powers by the State government, empowering them to exercise control over the Aborigines at their mission stations. With or without government sanction, many mission stations across north Australia enforced a strict discipline which sometimes included flogging, chaining and imprisonment of recalcitrant inmates. As far as the inmates were concerned, Queensland's missions, for example, were not dissimilar to prison farms.[3] This brutality often had government support. 'I honestly believe in chastisement and corporal punishment for natives', wrote H.I. Bray, the Commissioner of Native Affairs for Western Australia, 'and even agree that it is often necessary with adult natives, both male and female. ... experience teaches me that it is usually more serviceable in maintaining discipline on

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3. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 248. For an account of life at Mornington Island Mission before and during the war years, including descriptions of disciplinary measures, see Elsie Roughsey (Labumore), An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New, McPhee Gribble and Penguin, Melbourne, 1984.

missions and settlements in preference to Police Court action'.[4]

Although missions were primarily concerned with winning souls, they also saw themselves as providing secular instruction to fit Aborigines to eventually take their place in white society. Aborigines however, generally proved to be resistant to Christianity and tended to remain uninterested in the opportunities to work offered by the missions. They saw the main benefit of the missions in the supply of rations and other sought-after commodities. A cost of acquiring these commodities was the breakdown of much of their traditional culture. Many missions regarded aspects of Aboriginal culture as pagan, worthy only of destruction, while even the most liberal missionaries regarded the breakdown of traditional initiation and marriage customs as desirable to conform to Christian ideals.[5] But these formed the basis for the preservation of much of Aboriginal culture so that the elimination of

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4. WA State Archives, series 993, item 1266/43; Native Matters - Forrest River Mission. Letter, Commissioner of Native Affairs to Superintendent Forrest River Mission, 5 May 1943. This letter was Bray's response to learning that the superintendent of Forrest River Mission had slapped and punched a male Aborigine who was 'neglectful in his work'. The missionary had also 'given a thrashing' to a girl he described as lazy, disobedient and insolent. See series 993, item 409/43; Forrest River Mission - Punishments Administered to Inmates for Breaches of Discipline by Superintendents. Letter, Superintendent, Forrest River Mission, to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 1 April 1943.

5. Broome, Aboriginal Australians, pp. 109-110.

unwanted aspects tended to contribute to more widespread cultural damage. Rowley notes that in practice, the great achievement of the missions was not the introduction of Christian ideals, or even the training and education of the Aborigines, but the anchoring of the isolated Aborigines in these remote areas. This had been achieved by the missions becoming a source of rations and manufactured goods within Aboriginal tribal lands, thus slowing the drift of Aborigines to areas more heavily populated by whites.[6] This gave Aborigines time to adapt to the presence and implications of whites in their world in the relative security of the mission. Despite the erosion of their culture by the missionaries, without this secure base from which to explore white society, the destruction of Aboriginal culture would have been more complete.

In 1939 John McEwen launched the 'Commonwealth Government's Policy with Respect to Aboriginals'. This policy marked a shift away from the paternalistic control of Aborigines who had often been described as a 'dying race', towards the eventual assimilation of Aborigines into the white community and their achievement of full citizenship. To achieve assimilation, 'part-Aborigines' and de-tribalised 'full-bloods' were to be trained and absorbed into the work force, while tribal 'full-bloods' were to be isolated on the reserves and missions where they

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6. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 246.

would be protected from the worst effects of the white community until workable policies could be developed for them.

The process of reaching full citizenship was to be a long one, particularly for Aborigines living their traditional nomadic life-style. 'Myalls' or Aborigines living a traditional life-style were to be 'left alone and protected from the intrusion of whites',[7] on the large reserves and mission stations until the problems associated with those who had already made contact with whites had been resolved. 'Full-blood' tribal Aborigines were to be left 'to their ancient tribal life protected by Ordinances from the intrusion of whites and maintaining the policy of preventing any exploitation of the resources of the reserves'.[8]

The continued isolation of the missions was essential to this policy. Mission stations on the boundaries of the reserves were to form a buffer, as a means of controlling the movement of Aborigines out of the reserves, to contact with whites. By involving the missions in this way, McEwen sought to make the process of contact between Aborigines

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7. AA Canberra, series A571, item 46/484 P I. Commonwealth Government's Policy with Respect to Aboriginals, Issued by the Honourable J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, February 1939. This approach had been advocated by Donald Thomson among others.

8. ibid.

and the white community, a gradual and controlled one. But it was a 'resource of the reserves' which McEwen would least have expected to pose a threat to his policy - their strategic location - which led to the destruction of this policy within three years.

In addition to acting as buffers, McEwen saw a role of the missions as providing a spiritual stability to the Aborigines who, he claimed, had lost the spiritual support of their traditional culture through contact with whites.[9] Generally, the missions were poorly sited to perform both these roles. Those that were sufficiently remote to perform the role of controlling Aborigines' access to contact with whites, were too remote to enable Aborigines to develop a new, workable, spiritual perspective within the framework of the white community. After all, the moral attitudes of the missionaries were not representative of the white community in general and their generally paternalistic attitude to Aborigines prevented Aborigines from acquiring the skills they would need in the white community.[10] The result tended to be that Aborigines were as spiritually ill-prepared for the wider world after

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9. Rowley makes the point that the Aborigines had not 'lost their spiritual support' - very few converted to christianity. Their difficulty was to establish a balance between their traditional spiritual beliefs and the white community which threatened them. See Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 330.

10. Broome, Aboriginal Australians, pp. 106-109.

mission training, as they would have been had they had no spiritual training at all.

Only two months before the launch of the Commonwealth policy on Aborigines, McEwen had made a speech in parliament regarding Commonwealth policy for the Northern Territory. A significant part of this speech had been his acknowledgement that heavy financial commitments to defence preparedness might jeopardise the execution of some aspects of the policy.[11] Although he made no similar acknowledgement in relation to the 'policy with respect to Aboriginals', it is clear that he was aware of the possible impact of rising defence expenditure on the implementation of the Aboriginal policy. Three years earlier, Major General Lavarack, then Chief of the General Staff, had indicated the Army's concern with the defences of Darwin. Lavarack identified the Japanese as the major threat[12] and his assessment of the threat should have alerted the government to the strategic importance of the north Australian coast in a war with Japan. In turn, the Department of the Interior should have realised that a war with Japan would have serious implications for Aborigines. Apart from Lavarack's decision to place an infantry

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11. A571, item 46/484 P I. Speech by Honourable J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, on the Government Policy for the Northern Territory, from Parliamentary Debates, 8 December 1938.

12. A816, item 14/301/14. Report by Major General Lavarack, 16 October 1936.

battalion at Darwin, there seems to have been no serious contemplation of how the effects of a war in or near north Australia might affect Aborigines there.

Defence preparations in north Australia began in earnest with the out-break of war in Europe. Those which particularly affected mission stations, were the organisation of a coastwatching system and the preparation of outlying airfields.

In late 1939 and early 1940, the RAAF began to develop airstrips at remote centres across the north. In his assessment of the defence of Darwin in 1936, Lavarack had identified Darwin as the key to the defence of the whole of north Australia and the focus of military operations. Large forces would be drawn to its defence. The logistic support of these forces, and the viability of the area as a defence base depended upon the maintenance of supply lines to south east Australia. Sea routes via the east coast of Australia through the Torres Strait and via the west coast were therefore of vital importance. The construction of the strategic roads from Alice Springs to Darwin, and from Mt Isa to Tennant Creek, were additional supply routes, but were not completed until 1941 and 1942 respectively. Even then, the roads was supplementary to the sea routes, which remained vital to Darwin's defence. Each of these routes was vulnerable to interdiction by the enemy. In order to protect the sea routes and to extend air surveillance and

reconnaissance as far to the north as possible, a series of forward airstrips was developed along the north coast. These were located at mission stations.

Investigations into the facilities available at some of the mission stations for the construction, improvement and maintenance of airstrips had begun in late 1939. Bathurst Island, of strategic importance because it dominated the approaches to Darwin harbour, was chosen as the site for a RAAF airfield. Other airfields were to be built at Milingimbi Mission, Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, Port Keats Mission and Drysdale River Mission.[13] These airfields would extend air cover over the eastern and western approaches to Darwin.

On 1 December 1939, the RAAF decided to upgrade the landing ground at Bathurst Island Mission. Abbott, the Administrator of the Northern Territory, was keen to maintain the isolation of mission stations in accordance with McEwen's policy, and was therefore reluctant to see large numbers of white construction workers move to the island. Abbott also argued that in addition to avoiding 'intrusive workers', the construction would be much cheaper if left to the mission authorities and their Aboriginal workers. The estimated cost of £2,100 could be reduced by 30 per cent to approximately £1,470 if the 'Mission

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13. Now Kalumburu.

authorities did the work'.[14] Like Abbott, missionaries also hoped to preserve the isolation of their missions and the construction of the airfield would also represent a welcome source of income. Bathurst Island Mission agreed to do the work on 7 March 1940.

Similar airfield construction works were approved for Milingimbi on 6 February 1940. Construction at Milingimbi was to cost £1,240 and was also to be done by the Mission Aborigines.[15] Impressed with the urgency of the strategic situation, the RAAF contracted the Mission to have the job done in fourteen weeks. Other aerodrome construction works were also arranged at Drysdale River Mission in the Kimberley district of Western Australia and at Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt. Work had begun at each site by March 1940.

At Milingimbi, as elsewhere, the missionaries were worried that the construction of the airstrip would lead to the breakdown of their treasured isolation. With the RAAF requiring the airstrip to meet its strategic needs, the missionaries negotiated to retain control over the

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14. AA Canberra, series A705, item 7/1/657; Bathurst Island AOB [Advanced Operational Base] NT - Aerodrome Works. Letter, Director General of Civil Aviation to the Secretary, Department of Air, 2 February 1940.

15. AA Canberra, series A705, item 7/1/694; RAAF Millingimbi [sic.] AOB Aerodrome. Letter, Director General of Works, Department of the Interior to Minister for Civil Aviation, 6 February 1940.

movements of visiting whites. As part of the general agreement to construct the airstrips, the missionaries forced the RAAF to accept that visiting RAAF and other government officials would be subject to 'certain restrictions' on their movements, 'to minimize contact during these visits'.[16] The movements of the Aborigines were to be similarly controlled. The agreement also specified that the airstrip remained part of the Mission, but was to be fenced off from it. As well as keeping stock off the airstrip, the fence served to define the airstrip so that control of contacts between Aborigines and Europeans could be exercised by the missionaries.

The construction of these airfields involved the Aborigines in considerable work. At Milingimbi for example, the construction contract called for the clearing and grubbing of trees over 65 acres, the levelling of 65 acres and the felling of trees over a further 95 acres as well as the erection of boundary markers and other small construction jobs. All the work was to be done using hand tools as the Mission did not possess suitable machinery. At the Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, the Aborigines had the assistance of a tractor and a tree pulling machine, but in the main the work was done by hand.

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16. AA Darwin, series F1, item 40/382; Official Aerodrome Milingimbi Mission. Minute, Secretary Native Affairs Branch to the Director of Native Affairs, 29 February 1940.

Once constructed, the airfields were a continuing source of income for the missions and the Aborigines. On 31 July 1940, Air Force officers visited Milingimbi to inspect the new airfield. It was found that additional work was needed to bring the strips up to standard and the Mission was again contracted to do this. The Aborigines once again took up their tools to widen the two strips and to fell more trees at each end of the strips to improve approach angles. The additional work brought another contract to the Mission for a further £800. The Mission also negotiated for a continuing maintenance contract for the upkeep of the airstrips. This returned the sum of £150 per year. Milingimbi Mission was able to purchase a tractor from the £800 profit it had made after paying the Aboriginal labourers for their labour.[17]

Later, in early 1942, the RAAF recognised the danger that Japanese forces might seize one of the outlying airstrips as a base from which to attack Darwin. The airstrips were therefore prepared for demolition. This work, involving the burying of bombs at 22 yard intervals along the length of each runway, was also done by the Aborigines under RAAF supervision. Other cleared areas near the airfields were

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17. Reverend H.U. Shepherdson, Our Early Years: Elcho News and Views, 23 May 1969, no. 105, p. 3. Shepherdson was one of the Milingimbi missionaries during the early period of the war, later leaving Milingimbi to establish a mission outstation at Elcho Island. The pay of the Aborigines is discussed in detail later.

obstructed with logs or ploughed to prevent their use as landing grounds. To the consternation and amusement of the Aborigines, the runways at Port Keats and Bathurst Island Missions were accidentally demolished when lightning fired the demolition charges. Aborigines repaired the damage and re-planted new demolition charges.[18]

After their construction, the RAAF faced other problems with the new airfields. The airstrips built by Aboriginal labour at Bathurst Island, Milingimbi, Groote Eylandt and Drysdale River initially had the status of 'Emergency Landing Grounds'. This meant that while not used for regular operational sorties, they could be used in emergencies to extend the range of operations or to refuel aircraft running short of fuel on the way to operational bases closer to Darwin. These airstrips therefore carried stocks of aviation fuel. The RAAF faced the problems of defending these new airstrips and of supplying them with aviation fuel, bombs, ammunition and other supplies.

The defence of the airstrips was partly secured through the Navy coastwatching service. By early 1940 every coastal mission station from Cape York to Broome had become

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18. AWM, series 54, item 625/4/2; Notes on Protection of Bathurst Island. Immobilization [sic.] Bathurst Island Aerodrome, January 1942 and AA Canberra, series A705, item 7/1/1237; Aerodromes in North Western Area - General, Part 1. Telegram, Department of Works Office, to the Air Board, 2 October 1942.

part of the coastwatching network.[19] Although the white missionaries were the nominal 'coastwatchers', the Aborigines did the watching. The missionaries merely reported what the Aborigines had seen or heard.[20] At many mission stations, the male Aborigines were rostered to camp by the beach so that a permanent watch over the seaward approaches could be kept. The Methodist missions at Milingimbi, Yirrkala and Goulburn Island, hoping to avoid further intrusion of the war, refused to participate in the Navy coastwatching radio network. Instead, they passed their coastwatching messages over the civil radio network to the Administrator of the Northern Territory. However, their concern with the intrusion of the war did not prevent them from accepting the new radio sets which the Navy installed at each of its coastwatching bases.[21] Gaps in the coastwatching network were filled by the creation of small coastwatching posts manned by Navy or police officers who also relied heavily on reports from local Aborigines.

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19. AWM, series 78, item Naval HQ Darwin War Diary - Part 2: Period 1 June 1940 to 31 December 1940. See entries from 6 November to 1 December 1940, when Lieutenant J.S. Bell visited coastal mission stations to install new radio sets. See also AA Canberra, series A1196, item 29/501/108; Coastwatching Organisation 1941-43.

20. This is widely acknowledged by the missionaries themselves. For example, see Mackenzie, Aurukun Diary, p. 106, and Northern Territory Archives Service, series NTRS, Interview transcript TS64; Reverend Len Harris, wartime missionary at Groote Eylandt, Oenpelli and Roper River Missions.

21. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 29/401/119; Methodist Mission Stations - Intelligence.

One such post was established at Elcho Island after it was brought to the Navy's attention that the Japanese pearling fleet had paid particular attention to the island before the war.[22]

This coastwatching network provided early warning of enemy threats to the airstrips. But without forces at the airstrips, little could be done to defend them even if it was known that the enemy intended to attack. On 3 May 1941, the Secretary of the Department of the Army rejected the idea that the Army should provide conventional field forces for the defence of these airstrips, arguing that insufficient troops were available and that these would be spread too thinly if based at each of the airstrips. Instead, the Army had briefly investigated the defence resources available at the strips and had concluded that at Drysdale River and Milingimbi in particular, missionaries and Aborigines were available to form a local guard.[23] Although the Army appeared to be drawing mission Aborigines into further direct participation in the war, this time as a type of de facto military force, the plan was never implemented.[24] Nevertheless, the pressures imposed on the

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22. AA Canberra, series A816, item 14/301/138; Report on Defence of Elcho Island. Report by J.C. Jennison, - East Arnhem Land: Australia's Open Door, undated but early 1940.

23. A1196, item 15/501/176. Letter, Secretary of the Department of the Army to Secretary of the Department of Air, 3 May 1941.

24. Interview, Reverend Harold Shepherdson, 1 June 1985.

Services by the Japanese threat were clearly drawing the missions out of their isolation and into closer cooperation with the Services. By late 1941, RAAF guards had been placed at each of the airstrips. But this was a token gesture, as each strip was 'guarded' by only two or three men.

The second problem, the logistic support of the isolated airfields, was also to lead to further involvement of mission Aborigines. As war with Japan drew closer, the status of some of the new airstrips was changed from 'Emergency Landing Grounds', which were basically empty airfields, to 'Advanced Operational Bases'. These were bases from which air operations against the enemy would be launched. This change of status required that the airstrips would be stocked with larger supplies of bombs, aviation fuel and other stores. On 16 May 1941, the Military Board with the agreement of the Air Board decided that supply of inaccessible Advanced Operational Bases would be the responsibility of the RAAF. Advanced Operational Bases along the north coast would be supplied by ship and therefore, vessels would need to be secured by the Navy for RAAF use.

The wartime shortage of shipping forced the RAAF to accept that large stocks of ammunition and fuel would be held at each airstrip to reduce the frequency of ship visits and to conserve available shipping resources.

Sufficient fuel was to be stockpiled at each base to allow one month's sustained operations by four Hudson bombers. Ammunition and bombs were being stockpiled on the same basis. The stockpiles were later increased to six week's requirements. Luggers were being investigated as a means of shipping stocks to Milingimbi Mission, Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, Bathurst Island Mission, Drysdale River Mission and Wyndham. Of these, Wyndham was the only airstrip which could be supplied by road, and then only in the dry season.[25] As air operations from the Advanced Operational Bases intensified, so larger quantities of stores had to be delivered. This necessitated the use of larger, deeper draught ships.

The Mission stations at which the Advanced Operational Bases were located were themselves maintained by luggers operating to and from Darwin. The missions rarely possessed jetties or wharves for their own meagre needs, let alone for the transhipment of the tonnages that the Air Force was now contemplating. A large labour force was required to unload the RAAF stores as the missions lacked suitable wharves, barges, cranes or other facilities. Mission Aborigines were called upon to manhandle the stores over the beaches. This was no easy task. The shallow waters of

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25. AA Canberra, series A2653, item 1941, vol. 2, Agenda item 114; Problems of supplying Aviation Fuel and Lubricants, Bombs and Rations to Certain RAAF Advanced Operational Bases. Military Board Agendum 114/1941, 16 May 1941.

the north coast combined with the very large tidal range meant that ships delivering stores had to stand off sometimes as much as three quarters of a mile. The missions generally possessed only very small craft sufficient for their needs, and no more were available because of other wartime requirements. Expedient solutions, such as the building of rafts of petrol drums were tried with some success, but the physical labour involved in unloading was still gruelling.

As the Air Force developed their base at Drysdale River Mission, HMAS 'Koala' visited there to deliver stores in August 1940. The stores, mainly 44 gallon drums of aviation fuel, were unloaded by Mission Aborigines over a two day period. Because the Mission lacked a wharf, the drums of aviation fuel were simply thrown into the sea where they were rounded up by the Aborigines and swum ashore. They worked for long periods in the winter waters and complained of the cold.[26] Once ashore, the drums were manhandled onto a truck for the trip to the airfield. This method of unloading became common practice at these remote bases. The missions benefited from the many stray drums of fuel which would sometimes be washed ashore for weeks after a visit.

Until Japan entered the war, the main impact on mission

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26. AWM, series 78, item; Naval HQ Darwin War Diary - Part 2: Period 1 June 1940 to 31 December 1940.

Aborigines had been the provision of employment. This had relieved the economic pressure upon missions, as they now had a valuable product - the Aborigines' labour. It had also given the Aboriginal labourers and their families access to some of the sought-after products of the white community and introduced some to a cash economy, although most continued to be paid in kind or not at all. Despite these economic effects, the war had little impact on the missions or the Aborigines until 1942. For those missions not located near the strategic flanks of Darwin, such as those on the west coast of Cape York, the war remained far away. At Aurukun Mission, the daily reading of the war news to the assembled Aborigines and saluting the flag were the only changes.[27] After December 1941, however, the isolation of the missions began to dissolve. Large populations of white servicemen began to move to the missions and inevitably, these men interacted with the Aborigines there. As elsewhere throughout north Australia during the war, this enforced meeting of white and black was to cause each to reassess the other, with important social effects.

In early 1942, the 'invasion' of the missions had begun. Those at which the Aborigines had built airfields for RAAF use were soon host to growing numbers of RAAF personnel. At Emerald River Mission, for example, there were only 3

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27. MacKenzie, Aurukun Diary, p. 89.

RAAF 'aerodrome guards' till March 1942. By May, this number had increased to 40. By May the following year there were 13 officers and 130 men at the airfield and RAAF strength there peaked in June 1944 with 16 officers and 251 men.[28] By contrast, the Aboriginal population at the mission remained constant at about 500 men, women and children while the number of missionaries actually fell from the pre-war population of about six, to just one man after January 1942, when non-essential people (such as the missionaries wives and lay assistants) were evacuated. At Milingimbi Mission, RAAF strength peaked at about 350 men[29] and at Truscott Field near Drysdale River Mission in Western Australia, RAAF strength reached about 700.[30] Milingimbi Mission had 600 Aborigines and Drysdale River 300. Each mission had one or two missionaries. Milingimbi Mission was forced to abandon its carefully negotiated right to control the movements of 'visitors'. Other missions which were hosts to RAAF air bases experienced a similar 'invasion'. After June 1942 other missions further

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28. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra; Unit History Sheet, 51 Operational Base Unit, Groote Eylandt. See entries for June 1944. Unit History Sheets are also available from the AWM.

29. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra; Unit History Sheet, 59 Operational Base Unit, Milingimbi. See 59 OBU strength statement as at 31 March 1944.

30. Fr. Eugene Perez O.S.B., Kalumburu War Diary, (R. Pratt and J. Millington, Eds.), Artlook Books, Perth, 1981, p. 161. The missionaries thought RAAF strength might reach 2,000.

out on the flanks of Darwin were host to RAAF Radar Stations with between thirty to fifty men. The Army had also moved men to some of the missions as well. Roper River Mission for example, became the base for the operations of a detachment of first, the 2/4 Independent Company, and later the North Australia Observer Unit.

With the evacuation of non-essential mission staff and the influx of servicemen to the missions, those missionaries who remained were presented with a formidable challenge to their continued authority and influence over the Aborigines. The presence of the RAAF bases provided Aborigines with opportunities to exchange their labour for manufactured goods and rations without the accompanying religious instruction that many missionaries insisted upon.

Some mission stations attempted by various means to counter this threat. Harold Shepherdson, one of the two missionaries at Milingimbi, moved the mission's sawmilling operation and 50 of its Aboriginal flock, to Elcho Island. Although the move served to secure the sawmill from damage which might result from enemy air attacks,[31] this could have been achieved just as easily by relocating the mill to another nearby island. In this way it could have remained

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31. Maisie McKenzie, Mission to Arnhem Land, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, p. 136. See also Shepherdson, Our Early Years, p. 3.

Aborigines Assist with the Unloading of Barges -

Milingimbi

The RAAF policy of basing airfields and radar stations at isolated northern mission stations was partly aimed at exploiting the available Aboriginal labour.

AWM 60522

Bringing Fuel Ashore - Milingimbi

Mission stations lacked wharves and cranes and most stores had to be manhandled across the beach. Aviation fuel formed a major part of the stores delivered to these isolated RAAF airfields.

AWM 60524

Manhandling Drums Onto Trucks - Milingimbi

Although the RAAF paid Aborigines for their labour, this money was often paid direct to the the mission station. Sometimes, the labourers never saw it.

AWM 60525

near the mission it served and near the airfield which was sure to be an important asset in the post-war period. It was possible too, that the RAAF use of the airfield might result in the construction of a wharf or jetty, buildings, bridges or other works at Milingimbi which might have made the production of sawn timber a valuable source of income. It is likely that an important motive was the removal of fifty Aborigines from Milingimbi where the missionaries' authority was increasingly under challenge.

At Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, similar steps were taken to remove the mission from the presence of the RAAF personnel. In October 1943, the mission moved away from Emerald River where it had been established 22 years earlier and where the RAAF had built its airfield, to Angurugu, about twenty miles distant. With the influx of over 100 RAAF personnel at the airfield near the old mission, the missionary felt that the presence of so many '"near-naked whites" ... would have a very adverse affect on the Aborigines'.[32]

The RAAF gradually came to dominate life at the mission stations with nearby airfields. This process is illustrated by the development of RAAF influence at

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32. Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, p. 89. See also Cole, Groote Eylandt Mission, p. 43. Cole refers to 'undisciplined behaviour on the part of some of the personnel at the RAAF air base' as an important factor contributing to the move.

Drysdale River Mission. After constructing the first of three airstrips which would eventually be built near the mission, the Aborigines were involved in the ongoing work of unloading visiting ships bringing RAAF stores. As with other isolated RAAF bases, supplies of aviation fuel were the most common stores delivered. Some ships brought as many as 1,000 drums of fuel, but 300 to 500 was more common.[33] The airstrip at Drysdale River Mission was the closest RAAF base to Timor and Java and aircraft operating from there could extend surveillance and reconnaissance, and later offensive operations, over a large swathe of enemy territory. Hence large quantities of aviation fuel were constantly required. Other stores like bombs and rations were also landed by the Aborigines.

By early 1942, after they had learned that Bathurst Island Mission had been attacked and the coastal steamer 'Koolama' had been bombed nearby, the Aborigines had begun to camp about a mile from the mission. There they were relatively safe from possible Japanese attack but they visited the Mission each day and continued to work at the airstrip. Under the control of Air Force personnel, they maintained the airstrip and regularly moved drums onto the strip to prevent the Japanese from making a landing on it. Later, they assisted the Air Force personnel to prepare the strip for demolition.

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33. Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, p. 25.

Early in 1942, the Air Force had based three 'aerodrome guards' at Drysdale River Mission to discourage the Japanese from landing and to guard the stocks of fuel and bombs there. One of the guards recalled: 'when I first arrived at the Mission the chief Priest asked me not to mix with the Aboriginals more than was absolutely necessary owing to some trouble white men had caused years before'.[34] As allied aircraft began to use the strip more frequently, the number of RAAF personnel stationed there grew. Many became interested in Aboriginal culture and the missionaries were often asked to arrange corroborees. Aboriginal artifacts were sold at these events, the mission fathers acting as middle men.[35] In doing so they prevented the Aborigines from being disadvantaged in deals with the visiting whites who were all too familiar with the sharp practices of the market place. They could also artificially set the price for the Aborigines' handiwork and could limit contact between black and white.

The missionaries' attempts to control contacts between the Aborigines and the servicemen through these measures generally failed. By July 1942, the aerodrome guards were inviting the Aborigines to their quarters and were asking

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34. Letter, E.J. Richardson, ex-RAAF guard, Drysdale River Mission, 19 May 1986.

35. Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, p. 54.

them to stay overnight.[36] This practice was frowned upon by the missionaries and the guards were asked not to allow it. At the same time, the mission diarist recorded in tones reminiscent of the Northern Territory pastoralists of the previous chapter, that the Aborigines were 'becoming very bold and insolent, abusing our kindness', apparently as a result of associating with the RAAF personnel. A police patrol with some Aborigines in neck chains, was expected to arrive at the Mission and the diarist hoped the sight of these prisoners might have a salutary effect on the increasingly fractious Aborigines. 'We will see if they learned a lesson this time', he wrote.[37] The missionaries were clearly concerned to retain their position of paternalistic superiority over their flock.

Missionaries were forced by their vocation, their ethnocentrism and the roles the State or Commonwealth governments had thrust upon them, to maintain a distance between the Aborigines and themselves. They were forced to adopt the roles of teacher, maintainer of white prestige and government disciplinarian each of which barred them,

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36. ibid, p. 66. This hints at sexual activity, but Perez gives no evidence of this.

37. ibid, p. 69.

they thought, from familiarity with the Aborigines.[38] The servicemen were generally free from these roles and although they may have regarded themselves as superior, they were better able to adopt a familiar attitude to the Aborigines. This could create tension between the missionaries and the servicemen. The superintendent of Mornington Island Mission, for example, was offended by soldiers permitting Aborigines to call them by their first names. 'This leads me to consider that the white men [servicemen] ... show very little appreciation for the position of the natives. ... I contend that this party is not suitable to be in charge of native labour',[39] he wrote. Concerned at the developing familiarity between the servicemen and the Aborigines at Drysdale River, the missionaries wrote to Headquarters RAAF North West Area insisting that the Headquarters instruct the guards not to allow the Aborigines near the aerodrome. The Headquarters agreed. But decrees from Darwin were no match for the

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38. Broome, Aboriginal Australians, pp. 104-105. Broome notes that missionaries at Kalumburu [Drysdale River] still regarded the paternalistic 'boys and girls' as an appropriate form of address for adult Aborigines as late as 1977. See also Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, p. 91. Cole describes the reaction of a missionary to Fred Gray's familiarity with an Aborigine. On one occasion, Gray slept under the same blanket as an Aborigine and later invited him to eat at a missionary's dining table. This had deeply offended the missionary who subsequently carried a resentment towards Gray for several years.

39. AA Canberra, series A705, item 182/1/349; Alleged Killing of a Bentinck Island Aboriginal on Sweers Island. Report on Attack by Bentinck Island Natives by J.B. McCarthy, undated.

loneliness and boredom of life at the Mission station for the RAAF guards. Their curiosity again had them contacting Aborigines and by March 1943 the missionaries were again bemoaning the familiarity between white and black. Once again, the Mission fathers felt obliged to

> reprimand the natives who have not stopped going secretly to the aerodrome, where they traffic with the whites who give them a lot of things. This makes them more insolent ... .[40]

The increasing 'boldness' and 'insolence' displayed by the Aborigines were rather signs of increasing independence from the ideals of the Mission. For the Aborigines, association with the RAAF personnel was an educative experience and for some Aborigines, their influence began to displace the influence of the missionaries. A struggle had emerged, albeit unintentional, between the RAAF personnel and the missionaries for influence over the Aborigines.

On 12 March 1943, a party of about 50 RAAF personnel arrived at the mission to start work on the construction of a new airstrip. This was to be constructed at Pago, a Mission outstation about 16 miles from the Mission proper.[41] The Officer Commanding the RAAF party assured

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40. Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, p. 103.

41. AA Canberra, series A705, item 7/1/1241; RAAF Aerodrome Drysdale Mission (WA) - Aerodrome Works. Estimate prepared by RAAF Directorate of Works and Buildings for extension of RAAF AOB Drysdale River Mission, undated.

the missionaries that the men would not cause trouble with Aboriginal women. He had informed his men that the penalty for sexual liaison with Aboriginal women was six months prison with hard labour.[42] Although the men may have been dissuaded from sexual contacts, social contacts increased.

Instead of attempting to channel these meetings into a wholesome and constructive form, the missionaries continued with their doomed attempts to scotch the liaisons completely. Under the pressure of this challenge to their authority, relations between the RAAF personnel and the missionaries began to deteriorate. By early 1943, the Mission diarist was referring to the RAAF with increasing irritation. Particularly irritating had been the Air Force 'invasion' of their outstation at Pago:

> We were nearly pushed out [of Pago] without warning and are passing through serious crisis as are many other missions. May God Bless us during this war.[43]

Perhaps as a reaction to the feeling that they were becoming powerless to control the situation, the missionaries began to react more sternly to the secret visits of the Aborigines to the RAAF personnel. By August

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42. Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, p. 104. Under the Western Australia Native Administration Act, 1905-1936, the penalty for sexual intercourse with any native, not lawfully one's wife or husband, was imprisonment for a period of not more than two years or a fine of not more than £100. Similar penalties existed under Northern Territory and Queensland law.

43. ibid, p. 109.

Purchasing a Dilly Bag - Milingimbi

The war ended the isolation of northern mission stations. Whereas before the war most missions had no more than a dozen visitors per year, many were host to up to two or three hundred servicemen during the war. This provided opportunities for each culture to reassess the other.

AWM 15667

1943, offending Aborigines were being placed in chains for this trivial 'offence'.

Tensions between the RAAF personnel and the Mission fathers erupted in August and September 1943 as they began to squabble over the costs of various services each had provided to the other. The mission had provided the labour of the Aborigines, mission buildings and other facilities to the RAAF who in turn had provided some food, repaired some mission machinery and provided other assistance. While relations were at their worst, the Japanese struck. On 27 September 1943 a Japanese air raid intended for the nearby RAAF base, missed its target and hit the mission instead. Four mission buildings were completely destroyed and Father Thomas and five Aborigines were killed when a bomb scored a direct hit on their trench. Another Aborigine was wounded. The remaining Aborigines were 'beside themselves with fear' and vanished into the bush, returning cautiously after a few days.[44] The RAAF base had sustained no casualties and RAAF personnel rushed to the Mission to offer assistance.

With their Mission in ruins, the numbers and influence of

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44. ibid, p. 132. A good description of the raid is to be found in RAAF Historical Section, North West Area Interviews File. Report of Enemy Air Raid on Drysdale, 27 September 1943. Other missions were also raided during the war. An Aborigine was killed and mission buildings destroyed when Milingimbi Mission was bombed on 9 May 1943 and both Bathurst Island Mission and Goulburn Island Mission were strafed by Japanese aircraft.

the RAAF personnel increasing and the Aborigines growing more insolent and difficult to handle, the period following the air raid marked the nadir of the war years for the missionaries. They gloomily assessed their achievements:

> After so many years of anxiety and labour, the Mission has not obtained the full confidence of any of the men among the natives and I would say only Rufina and Blandina among the women. The supposed civilised are such only by their blundering English, their dress, smoking and swearing. Added to all this is the little or nothing which they have abandoned from their bush life. A native is a native as people would say.[45]

During the period leading up to the bombing raid on the Mission, and to the deterioration in relations between the RAAF personnel and the missionaries, the Aborigines had continued to work on various labouring tasks including gravelling the airstrip, road construction, unloading shipping, and the salvage of a Liberator bomber which had crash-landed on a salt pan 40 miles from the Mission. The Liberator had collapsed onto its nose as it landed and Aborigines from the Mission had righted it. They also carried a replacement part, too big to be shipped by the Mission boat, overland to the crash site. During the salvage operation, light aircraft made frequent flights between the Mission and the salt pan, ferrying fuel, rations for those guarding the plane and spare parts. The Aborigines making the overland trip were to have the

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45. ibid, p. 165.

interesting experience of being ferried back to the Mission aboard this plane. Not to be left out, some others stowed away, including a one-legged man who had managed to get to the salt pan.[46]

In December 1943 the construction of an 8,000 foot strip for heavy bombers and a 5,000 foot strip for transport aircraft, as well as hard standings and revetments for 18 heavy bombers and 12 fighters, was begun at Anjo peninsula, about 60 miles from Drysdale River Mission.[47] The Mission strip was not an all-weather strip and some bombers had become bogged there. The RAAF therefore decided to move. The new all-weather strips would be built at the closest point to Japanese occupied territory in Timor, allowing maximum exploitation of the heavy bombers' range. The Mission was asked to supply as many Aboriginal labourers as possible. Initially 100 men were sent to work, but by mid-1944, 32 Aborigines were in regular employment.[48] Unlike the earlier work performed by the Aborigines, these new works required them to live away from the Mission

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46. ibid, p. 128. See also RAAF Historical Section, Canberra; Unit History Sheet, 58 Operational Base Unit, Drysdale Mission. Entry for 15 August 1943.

47. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra; North West Area Interviews File: Extract from RAAF file 25/70/Works; Works and buildings TRUSCOTT, undated.

48. ibid. See also RAAF Historical Section, Canberra; Unit History Sheet, Number 14 Mobile Works Squadron, Drysdale Mission, entry for 5 June 1944, and Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, pp. 151-186.

station - and the supervision of the missionaries. They were given regular leave during which they were taken back to the Mission station and their families.

To avoid the earlier squabbles, an agreement was negotiated in which the RAAF agreed to supply food to the Mission in return for the labour. The RAAF also agreed to supply the labourers with food and clothing. None of the labourers received a cash wage, but the payment of Aborigines in kind was a well established practice in remote parts of north Australia, particularly in the Kimberleys. Nevertheless, the employment of the Aborigines by the RAAF seems to have been contrary to the Western Australian Native Administration Act, which specified that Aborigines were only to be employed on issue of a government permit, and that the employer had to pay to the Commissioner of Native Affairs a contribution to an Aboriginal medical fund for each Aborigine employed.[49] Neither occurred and the employment of the Aborigines was strictly illegal. Throughout the war, the Western Australian Commissioner for Native Affairs was unable to venture far from Perth, and wartime staff shortages severely reduced his ability to keep in touch with events in the far north of the State. He appears to have been

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49. Western Australian Native Administration Act, 1905-1936, Section 18(1), and Section 36(1)(a).

unaware of RAAF employment of Aborigines at Drysdale River.[50]

As more men and machinery were brought to the area to build the new airstrips, ships began to discharge cargo at the Mission more frequently. The RAAF construction effort involved over 700 RAAF personnel, bulldozers, trucks and other heavy equipment. For the Aborigines who went to work at the site it must have been a great change from their earlier isolation. In addition to this new construction work, the Aborigines continued to maintain the airstrips at the Mission and Pago.

By April 1944, thanks to the labour of the Aborigines, a continuous stream of supplies was flowing into the mission including flour, rice, preserved fruit, vegetables, tinned meat, honey and jam. By May 1944 the mood of the missionaries had brightened. The Mission store at Pago was overflowing with provisions and they felt that 'the natives can now rejoice at the war'.[51] Other goods for the mission

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50. A705, item 68/1/700. Minutes of a conference held on 8 January 1943. Bray had responded to McIlroy's scheme for a national 'round-up' of Aborigines by saying that the 300 Aborigines at Drysdale River were 'useless for labour'. This suggests that he did not know they were already labouring for the RAAF. Furthermore, he was aware of the employment of Aborigines by the RAAF at Lombadina Mission near Broome and insisted upon the RAAF applying for a permit and paying the medical fee in that case. See WA State Archives, series 993, item 1121/43; Cape Levique [sic.] - Employment of Natives by Allied Works Council.

51. Perez, Kalumburu War Diary, p. 176.

were stored at the RAAF base at Anjo peninsula and included 8 1/2 tons of flour and 2 tons of preserves. The missionaries were now in a buoyant mood. 'In general, we are better off than before the bombing. The authorities have been cooperating with the mission and giving us good assistance',[52] they wrote. The Aborigines labouring at Anjo were also well rewarded for their labours. In February 1945, they returned to the mission 'so overloaded with goods and goodies that for them the war has been a great blessing'.[53]

Those Aborigines who worked for the RAAF at Anjo peninsula seemed to enjoy the experience. Though thrust into a group of over 700 whites, they were never far from the support of the Mission station and their wives and relatives. The RAAF provided regular rest periods in which they returned to the Mission. The servicemen involved themselves in the Aborigines' lives in ways that were impossible for the aloof missionaries. The surrender of Japan for example, was marked by a corroboree attended by the RAAF personnel. The Aborigines' corroboree was followed by 'an opposition coroboree [sic.] by the "white boys" of [the RAAF] unit. It is still a debatable point as

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52. ibid, p. 180.

53. ibid, p. 221.

54. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra. Unit History Sheet, No. 58 Operational Base Unit, Drysdale Mission. Entry for 16 August 1945.

to which "tribe" enjoyed themselves most'.[54] Like the soldiers discussed in the previous chapter, the RAAF personnel based at northern mission stations generally came from the cities and towns of south east Australia where they had formed no particular opinion about Aborigines. They saw themselves as temporary visitors to north Australia with no economic or emotional commitment. They were also disciplined, cohesive and possessed the same egalitarian spirit which was present in the Army. Aborigines represented no threat to them. They were therefore able to approach Aborigines with an open mind. This open minded approach could result in the abandonment of long-held prejudices when the servicemen were confronted with the reality of the northern Aborigines. Lindsay Bacon, an airman, wrote of the Aborigines near his base:

> ... at our particular battle station in the far north of Australia, we have the good fortune to be near a tribe of blacks, or "boongs", as they are called ... . Down south one hears of the decadence and lack of intelligence of the Australian aboriginal, but I can assure you that such a conception is entirely false. I've never seen more virile, energetic and well-built specimens than the young men of this tribe... . The natives are very friendly and willing workers.[55]

Bacon went on to assert that 'we so-called civilised people' could learn a great deal from Aborigines. They were

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55. The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 November 1942. This passage with some minor changes is also quoted in Margaret Ann Franklin, Black and White Australians, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1976, p. 129, where Franklin attributes it to an airman's letter quoted by Charles Duguid.

entirely un-selfish, sharing what meagre possessions they had with their friends, and displayed great stoicism in the face of pain and deprivation. In earlier times, the idea that white Australians could learn much from Aborigines would have been dismissed, but qualities of selflessness and stoicism became highly prized in war-time Australia.

An equally important effect of the RAAF presence at many of the mission stations was the economic benefits it brought. Gray's Camp, a privately funded Aboriginal station in the north of Groote Eylandt had been established by Fred Gray in 1938.[56] Unlike the mission stations, Gray's Camp did not receive financial assistance from either the government or any church organisation. Gray held the settlement together by selling produce and artefacts to the Qantas Empire Airways flying boat base, later taken over by the RAAF as a base for Catalina flying boat operations. This meagre income had been supplemented from time to time by bouts of pearling and trepang fishing. Despite these efforts, Gray's Camp was in permanent financial trouble.

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56. Before the war, Gray had fished for trepang along the Arnhem Land coast and had occasionally employed Aborigines at his trepang drying camps. He had been nearby when east Arnhem Land Aborigines killed Japanese lugger crewmen in 1932. Hoping to avoid a police punitive raid, Gray had convinced the killers that they should go with him to Darwin to face the charges against them. Later, with the construction of the Qantas flying boat base on Groote Eylandt, missionaries at Emerald River Mission asked Gray to establish a camp there to watch over the interests of the local Aborigines. Gray agreed to do this, initially on a temporary basis, but was to remain at the camp for the next twenty years, finally leaving in May 1958

The arrival of sixty RAAF personnel at the Catalina base enabled Gray to establish a permanent income for his camp through the employment of some of the Aborigines. Four men were employed permanently by the RAAF and many others were employed casually to meet particular demands for labour, such as the unloading of ships. The impact of this regular employment was as dramatic on Gray's Camp as it was in other missions such as Drysdale River. By 1943 Gray's Camp was free of debt for the first time.[57]

The RAAF airfield at Emerald River had also been an important source of income for the Mission there. The construction of the RAAF airfield alone had taken 31,000 man hours of labour and this had earned the Mission Aborigines nearly £1,000 at the rate of 7 1/2 pence per hour.[58] The Aborigines had also laboured to construct a road linking the Emerald River RAAF base and Mission station to the RAAF Catalina base and Gray's Camp to the

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57. AA Darwin, series F1, item 49/460; Church Missionary Society - Groote Eylandt. Report on trip to Roper Bar and Mission and Groote Eylandt, by Patrol Officer W.E. Harney, 13 June 1943. This change to the finances of Gray's Camp is also supported in my interview with Fred Gray of 17 May 1985. See also Cole, Fred Gray of Umbakumba, for a full account of Gray's association with the Aborigines of East Arnhem Land.

58. Assuming that an eight hour day and a five day week were worked, this results in a weekly wage of £2/5/-. This was vastly better than the 5/- per week which the Army was paying its labourers. The Aborigines employed by the RAAF were being paid at a rate roughly equal to that of the basic serviceman's pay.

north. This work lasted two months and the Aborigines earned another £290 on this task. By May 1942, with the arrival of RAAF personnel on the island in large numbers, Aborigines were being employed directly by the RAAF, rather than as contracted labour through the Mission. Between May 1942 and May 1943, Mission Aborigines worked for 3,700 man days for the RAAF, again at the standard rate of 7 1/2 pence per hour.[59]

Despite this new-found income, and the impressive amount of labour expended, the Aborigines at Emerald River Mission did not see any of their pay. Instead, the RAAF paid the money direct to the Church Missionary Society in Sydney which opened a trust account for the Aborigines. If the labourers wished to purchase goods with their earnings, they were to submit a list of the items they wanted to the missionary who would then forward the list to Sydney. The items would then be shipped to Groote Eylandt.[60] By June 1943, some of the Aborigines were reported to have already 'purchased' goods in this way. For the labourers, this system possessed a number of drawbacks. It lacked the immediacy of money in hand as a reward for labour and it prevented any of the Aborigines with an account from moving away from the Mission, since access to their account was controlled by the Mission. The Aborigines were capable of

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59. ibid.

60. ibid.

handling money, since the labourers at Gray's Camp did so. But they were likely to garner a false impression of the white economy at work through this over paternalistic system.

Of more concern is the possibility that many of the labourers may have been unaware that they actually owned this money. Although some Aborigines may have used this system to purchase goods, Gerald Blitner, a Mission educated 'part-Aborigine' with a good command of English, and one of the Mission foreman for most of the period when the Aborigines were working for the RAAF, was not aware that money had been deposited for him in Sydney, and he never made use of it.[61] If Blitner was unaware of this system, it is likely that the 'full-blood' Aborigines without English were also unaware.

The Church Missionary Society itself, was confused about the money. In January 1943, three years after the airfield and road construction had been completed, the missionary at Emerald River believed there to be 'over £1,000' held for

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61. Monologue, Gerald Blitner, June 1985. In 1984 Gerald Blitner made a claim against the Commonwealth for an unspecified amount he believed was owed to him as a result of his labours in airfield and road construction and other work on Groote Eylandt during the war. In his claim he indicated that other Groote Eylandters also felt themselves to have gone unpaid for their labour.

the Aborigines in Melbourne.[62] Later, the missionary told a patrol officer that the money was held in Sydney.[63] Even the Society's central office in Sydney seemed confused. The Society's Secretary for Aborigines had received a cheque for £619 on 20 January 1942 in payment for the Aborigines' labour but it was not until over a year later that the Society began to enquire after the wages which were still outstanding. The Society was not aware of any money being held for the Aborigines in Melbourne.[64]

It was common practice in mission stations at this time, to view pooled money as a resource available for the common community good. This was the system which operated at Gray's Camp for example. The practice was certainly known at Emerald River Mission. Early in 1943, rations had been stolen from the RAAF base at Emerald River and Aborigines had been blamed. The culprit was unknown. The missionary suggested that the loss be made up by a deduction from the

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62. AA Darwin, series F1, item 42/435; Native Labour Gangs - Control Camps at Mataranka, Tennant Creek, Katherine etc - Employment of Natives by the Army. Letter, the Administrator of the Northern Territory to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 28 January 1943.

63. F1, item 49/460. Report on trip to Roper Bar and Mission and Groote Eylandt, by Patrol Officer W.E. Harney, 13 June 1943.

64. ibid. letter, Secretary for Aborigines, Church Missionary Society, Sydney, to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 12 February 1943.

65. F1, item 42/435. Letter, C.L.A. Abbott, Administrator of the Northern Territory to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, 28 January 1943.

credit held for the Aboriginal labourers, he thought, in Melbourne.[65] Clearly, he saw the credit as a pool of money available to meet community needs, and the fact of private ownership of individual amounts was ignored.

This view was also held by the Church Missionary Society's Secretary for Aborigines. As early as October 1941 he had written to E.W.P. Chinnery, the Director of Native Affairs, pointing out that the Aborigines at Emerald River had now earned a considerable sum of money. He asked for advice. 'Normally we should conserve this money, endeavouring to have it wisely used for the individuals concerned. It has occurred to me', he wrote, 'that it would be good to have your direction regarding the use of this money'.[66] Reflecting the overly paternalistic attitudes adopted by many missionaries towards Aborigines, the Secretary accepted that the money could be used not 'by the individuals concerned', but 'for' them. In paternalistic institutions where power is vested in a few individuals, it is possible for those individuals to believe that what is best for the institution is best for the mass of individuals in it. Spending the Aborigines' money on improvements to the Mission might be seen by the Church Missionary Society as 'wisely using it for the individuals concerned'.

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66. ibid. Letter, Church Missionary Society, Secretary for Aborigines, to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 12 February 1943.

Early in 1943, when the Society was enquiring after the remainder of the Aborigines' pay, the Emerald River Mission station was preparing to move to Angurugu, away from the RAAF base. Perhaps the money earned by the Aborigines who worked for the RAAF ironically financed the move away from what the missionary had come to regard as the detrimental influence of the RAAF personnel.[67] If so, the missionary would have used the income earned by the Aborigines partially to nullify two of the important effects that the war brought to the Mission: the economic effects of putting money into the hands of the Aborigines, and the social effects of placing large numbers of whites in close proximity to the Mission Aborigines. The presence of the RAAF personnel at the missions had offered an opportunity for broad education of the Aborigines. Here was a disciplined, controlled group of whites who offered the opportunity for experimentation with a cash economy, training, additional education, the benefits and responsibilities of employment, and cultural interchange, yet the missionaries generally spurned this to retreat to their isolation.[68]

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67. Cole, Groote Eylandt Mission, p. 44.

68. Goulburn Island Mission had instructed Aborigines in the use of money as early as 1930, but it was an exception. Most preferred to keep Aborigines ignorant of these skills despite their role under McEwen's policy of training Aborigines for assimilation. Broome, Aboriginal Australians, p. 108.

Wartime conditions prevented patrol officers of the Northern Territory Administration visiting remote missions until early 1943. It was not until then that the Native Affairs Branch had become aware of the implications of the RAAF employment of Aborigines. In February 1943 V.J. White, the Acting Director of Native Affairs, saw that the accumulation of money in the hands of Aborigines as a result of the work they were doing for the war, represented a significant change in the position they held in the Territory's economic life:

> The contribution to the war effort by the Northern Territory native is considerable and the demand for manpower has converted him into an economic asset, of real worth to the community ... conditions prevailing at present have enabled the native to emerge from the obscurity in which he hitherto has been destined to work.[69]

White wrote to Northern Territory missions to determine the extent of Aboriginal employment by the RAAF. Arthur Ellemore, the superintendent of Milingimbi Mission replied with a response characteristic of the mission attitude:

> We would only be doing these primitive folk a dis-service if we in any way flooded them with things they do not know how to handle or have any real need of, or if by too generous pay they become able to support an increasing number of idle dependents.[70]

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69. AA Canberra, series AA1978/215, item 34; NT Employment of Mission Natives. Letter V.J. White Acting Director, Native Affairs Branch, to Superintendents of Northern Territory Missions, 10 February 1943.

70. ibid. Letter, Superintendent, Milingimbi Mission to Director Native Affairs Branch, 5 March 1943.

The response from the Catholic Church, which controlled the missions at Bathurst Island, Melville Island and Port Keats, gave even more cause for concern. At these missions the Aborigines were performing considerable work including building and maintaining airfields, piloting vessels, locating sea mines and passing weather reports. They were also becoming involved in work of a de facto military nature such as maintaining patrols and manning observation posts. Despite their involvement, none were formally employed on wages.[71] The Catholic Church asked that food, tobacco and clothing be made available as a form of payment.

White was now anxious to bring the employment of the Aborigines at these Northern Territory missions into line with the Aboriginals Ordinance and regulations passed under it which set standard conditions for Aboriginal labourers. In negotiations with the RAAF he had a standard policy adopted. In June 1943 the RAAF published this policy as a 'Routine Order' controlling the employment of 'native' labour. It asserted that:

> Natives should not be forced to work, but called on; and not kept at work if they desire to "go bush". They should be encouraged however to ask for permission, and kept under control.
>
> Where missions are taking care of the natives,

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71. ibid. Letter, Francis Quinn to Director, Native Affairs Branch, 22 April 1943. The employment of Aboriginal de facto servicemen at Bathurst and Melville Islands has been discussed in Chapter 5.

arrangements are to be made through the mission.

Payment is to be made on terms arranged with the Department of Native Affairs:

> One shilling per day or five shillings per week plus rations, quarters, approx. four sticks of tobacco per week, and an issue of clothing comprising secondhand shirts, shorts and boots. In outback localities, kind is given instead of money.[72]

The labour of the Aborigines was generally under-valued by both Headquarters RAAF North West Area, and the Native Affairs Branch. After the Aborigines had done the hard physical labour of clearing many of the RAAF airstrips using nothing more than axes, picks and shovels, the order's final paragraph stated that 'natives are only useful for light work, and are only to be employed accordingly'.[73] Worse still, the Aborigines who had been earning 7 1/2 pence per hour faced a serious cut in their wages from approximately 5/- per day to 5/- per week. The Native Affairs Branch reasserted the pre-war status quo embodied in the Aboriginals Ordinance, denying the Aborigines the opportunity to benefit from the demand for their labour. Many of the Aborigines would have been unaware of the reduction in their pay because of the way in which it was credited to them. The order remained in force throughout north Australia for the remainder of the war and

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72. MP742, item 92/1/302. Area Routine Order Number 308 Issued on 23 June 1943.

73. ibid.

RAAF units at isolated missions continued to employ Aborigines on the rigorous work of building airstrips and unloading ships.

In June 1942, RAAF radar stations had begun to be deployed to north Australia. The first stations were established in the areas of highest priority: the Torres Strait and Darwin. Throughout 1943 and into early 1944 additional radar stations were deployed to the north Australian coast, eventually to form a chain of stations covering the whole of the approaches to the north. Like the earlier construction of airstrips, these radar stations were sited at missions, extending the RAAF 'invasion' to many which had till then escaped the intrusion of outsiders. Missions like Mapoon, Aurukun, Weipa, Mitchell River, Edward River, Mornington Island, Yirrkala, Goulburn Island, Croker Island and Lombadina each became host to a RAAF radar station. The exploitation of the resources at mission stations had become RAAF policy. The Air Officer Commanding North West Area, said of the RAAF relationship with the mission stations:

> When things were desperate and time was short the obvious place to put an outlying post was near a mission. Water supply was assured, a landing strip was possibly in existence, someone who knew the country and the natives was close at hand, and a regular source of native labour was available ... .
>
> If a plane crashed, if wreckage came ashore, if a mine was washed up, or a belly tank found, the natives had the news, and often the evidence, to the missions in a few hours.

> The benefit of such institutions in aiding the protection of this part of Australia can scarcely be over estimated ... .[74]

Like the airbases established at mission stations, the radar stations provided opportunities for Aborigines to be employed by the RAAF, albeit on a smaller scale. But the main impact of the radar stations was in the form of cultural exchange between the Aborigines and the visiting RAAF personnel. At the major RAAF airbases, such as Truscott near Drysdale River Mission or Melville Bay near Yirrkala Mission, the RAAF personnel could number as many as five or six hundred men. A population of that size was sufficient to provide its own social stimulus, permitting the RAAF personnel to turn inwards to find entertainment and social intercourse during off duty periods. Furthermore, the operations conducted at these major air bases were stimulating in themselves. The conduct of bomber operations from these bases tended to keep the RAAF personnel there in touch with the war and enabled the men to believe that they were continuing to make a contribution to the war effort. To some extent, boredom was held at bay while the men were intimately involved in the struggle.

The radar stations were quite different. Typically, a radar station was manned by a mere forty or fifty men. Those stations which were often the only RAAF unit at an

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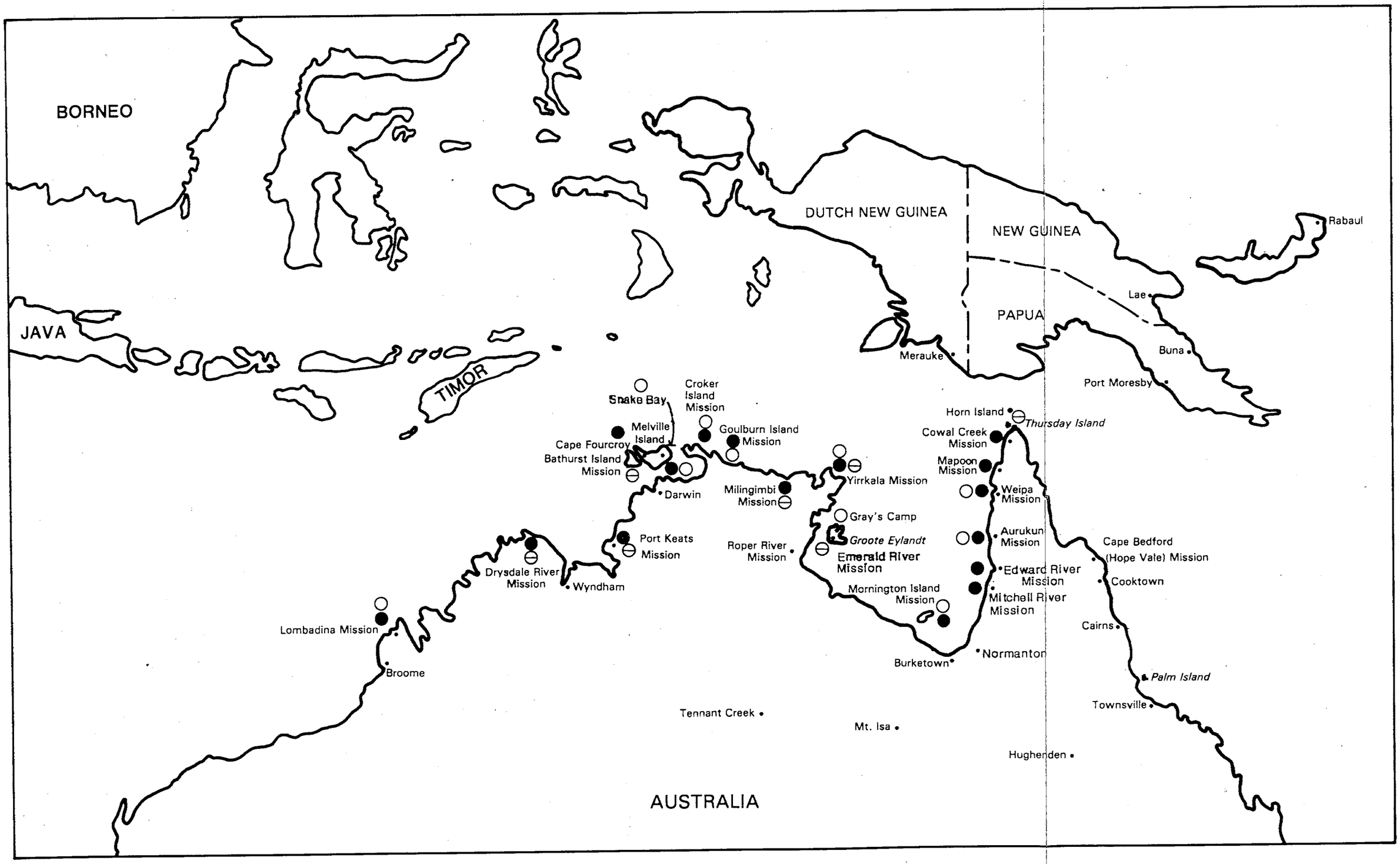
74. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra, Unit History Sheets, Headquarters North West Area: Review of Activities of North West Area, month of January 1945.

NORTH AUSTRALIAN MISSION STATIONS

AND COLLOCATED AIRBASES AND RADAR STATIONS



SCALE 1 : 14 000 000

RADAR STATION ●

MAJOR AIR BASES ⊖

MINOR AIR FIELDS ○

isolated mission station soon found that they had plumbed the limits of social stimulation to be found within their own group. They turned outwards to the mission stations. Overcoming boredom became a major challenge for these units. As the war continued and Japanese air raids over Australia diminished, so the chance of excitement and the feeling of being intimately involved in the war diminished also. Personnel manning radar stations felt that they had been left behind by the war. There were compelling reasons to turn to the mission stations for stimulation, and the war diaries of several of these radar stations record extremely close relations between themselves, the mission stations and the Aborigines.

Number 326 Radar Station which was deployed to Cape Leveque north of Broome on 10 September 1943, provides an example of the development of this relationship. While the unit was still establishing itself, the hard work of setting up camp and the possibility of detecting enemy aircraft meant that there was little time to develop an interest in the nearby mission and its Aborigines. Aborigines were soon employed by the unit but little attention seems to have been shown to them in the unit's diary. Within a few months of arrival however, the unit was engaged in spontaneous social events involving the Aborigines. By late 1944, with the likelihood of the unit detecting enemy aircraft diminishing as Japanese air activity over Australia decreased, the fight against

boredom became a major consideration for the men. Attention was focussed more and more on the Aboriginal workers at the radar station and the mission station. Entertainment began to be planned in advance, and invitations to or from the mission station were regularly extended. Despite these developments, an underlying, relatively benign racism persisted.

Members of the unit displayed a considerable interest in the Aborigines and their culture. The Commanding Officer made an attempt to learn the local Aboriginal language so as to be better able to direct the unit's twenty Aboriginal labourers and visiting RAAF medical and dental staff were directed to the Mission station to dispense aid there. The RAAF personnel also established a 'Native Welfare Fund' for the purchase of items for the Aborigines. These included bottles of lemonade and prizes for the children on sports days organised by the RAAF unit.[75]

As at other RAAF units stationed near missions, some of the Aborigines who worked for the radar station came to be so closely associated with it that they were absorbed into the fabric of the unit's life. The RAAF personnel referred to the Aboriginal labourers as the 'Black RAAF' and to their womenfolk as the 'Black WAAF'. By November 1944, 'one

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75. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra, Unit History Sheet, Number 326 Radar Station, Cape Leveque. See for example entries for 6 September 1944, 10 November 1944 and 27 December 1944.

of the natives ... was deputed head boy and was unofficially appointed to the non-existent rank of Acting Lance Corporal Unpaid'.[76]

On 20 November 1944, Aborigines were invited to attend the unit film nights. This luxury had previously been reserved for the white personnel. The unit's diarist recorded the event:

> Native personnel engaged by the unit requested permission to attend the screening of "Target for Tonight" and educational shorts, so it was decided to hold the show in the open air ... and extend the invitation to the entire native camp. There was feverish activity during the afternoon as native women carried buckets of water from the goat trough to their paper bark huts and one month's ablutionary programme was run through in an hour. There was also a canvas of the camp by the males for hair-oil this item being in great demand by the gins. The show was a great success. The natives were allotted a space on the leeward side of the RAAF and the whole settlement turned up including the dogs and pet goat, Oscar. Corporal Peter (acting, unpaid and entirely unofficial, but nevertheless displaying two faded U/S [unserviceable] stripes) acted as official usher and native master of ceremonies.[77]

Attendance at the unit picture shows became a regular event for the Aborigines for the remainder of the war.

A few days later, two visiting RAAF musicians performed at Lombadina Mission to an audience of the mission staff, Aborigines, the unit personnel and others. 'The entire mission was present and quite a number of native children,

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76. ibid. See entry for 15 November 1944.

77. ibid. See entry for 20 November 1944.

if not all, had never seen a violin before'.[78] Within a month, the Mission station reciprocated and invited the off-duty unit personnel to attend a concert put on by the Mission children.

The Radar unit personnel and the Mission again came together to celebrate Christmas 1944. An airman dressed as Santa Claus distributed gifts to the Aborigines and later, a corroboree was held. The RAAF diarist recorded the spectacle:

> The corroboree was held at night, the only light being that provided by a fire to which shreds of paper bark were continually added by chanting gins. The participants were daubed with clay and pieces of hessian, bark and leaves and twigs. Some of the dances were performed with a savage abandon to the accompaniment of low pitched chanting and the continual clapping of boomerangs. The dances all relate to some phase of hunting or fishing and are appropriate to this part of the North West coast and are known according to the place of origin or the name of the originator. ... The chanting of the gins was quite musical and strict rhythm was maintained. At the conclusion of the corroboree RAAF personnel had had a very eventful and somewhat tiring day ... .[79]

Two days later, the RAAF personnel repaid their hosts of Christmas day with a concert. After a ceremonial parade which included a march-past of RAAF personnel, the 'Black RAAF' and the 'Black WAAF', the concert began. The RAAF men played drums, ukulele, soup spoons, comb, mouth organ

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78. ibid. See entry for 26 November 1944.

79. ibid. See entry for 25 December 1944.

and piano. Again, gifts were distributed to the Aboriginal children by an airman dressed as Santa Claus.[80]

Other radar stations developed similar relations with the nearby mission stations. Number 313 Radar Station, at Mornington Island, employed 52 Aborigines to construct an airstrip and build other facilities. The unit also hired the Mission launch 'Bonny', and the Mission provided two Aborigines, Gully Peters and Jack Oakley, as boat hands. The launch was frequently used by the RAAF to travel between Mornington Island and Burketown, where the unit picked up its mail, rations and other stores. Other work done by the Aborigines included the construction of a dam and the salvage of two Boston bombers which had crashed on the eastern side of the island.[81] The unit made social contact with the Aborigines at the Mission, attending Aboriginal corroborees and entertaining the Aborigines with concerts and other events in return. Airmen from the RAAF base reopened and taught at the Mission school which had been closed due to the evacuation of the civilian teacher earlier in the war.

As elsewhere, the presence of the RAAF personnel and

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80. ibid. See entry for 27 December 1944.

81. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra, Unit History Sheet, 313 Radar Station, Mornington Island. See entries for 24 November 1943 and 2 February 1944. Other work performed by the Aborigines included the construction of an air strip, unloading of shipping, patrolling and the building of a jetty.

particularly the construction of the airstrip, opened Mornington Island to a flood of visiting servicemen. The sudden influx of whites to the area left a lasting impression upon the Aborigines. Elsie Roughsey, then a young woman at Mornington Island Mission, recalled the change that came over the Island. 'We had planes come to land on Mornington, and also many seaplanes landed on the sea. It was so exciting to see planes come and go. Very large seaplanes came ... Catalina, well, she carried about 99 crews, sometimes 231 or 140 crews ... just to come to Mornington Island'.[82] Elsie's exaggeration carries with it the sense of the impact of these visits. Before the war, Mornington Island Mission, like many others, could have expected no more that half a dozen visitors per year.

Elsie saw the war years as exciting yet a lost opportunity for her people. 'One officer was going to teach we few girls how to shoot with Tommy gun. Well, we were so excited to learn, so we could help to look after our own people and country',[83] recalled Elsie, but the idea was scotched by the Mission superintendent. This foregone opportunity to learn to fire the Tommy gun was regarded by Elsie as a metaphor for the lost opportunities of her people.

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82. Roughsey, <u>An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New</u>, p. 42.

83. <u>ibid</u>.

> So our training lesson with Tommy gun was closed. That's why we still in the same way since and before the war.
>
> We are still in the same place, never really move forward. We are still wondering what will be another forward step that will take place, to learn and train, to be what we want to do.[84]

The potential 'forward step' offered to the mission Aborigines by the war and the presence of the servicemen had been turned into an uncertain shuffle by the missionaries.

For some tribal Aborigines, the movement of large numbers of servicemen into their domain was seen as a threat rather than an opportunity of the type Elsie Roughsey remarked upon. The deployment of servicemen to north Australia had brought white Australians into areas where tribal Aborigines had lived almost undisturbed by whites. This could place intolerable pressures upon the Aborigines. On 18 October 1943 a party of RAAF personnel with two Aboriginal boatmen, Gully Peters and Jack Oakley, making their regular launch trip from Mornington Island to Burketown, stopped for the night at Sweers Island. As they gathered drift-wood for the evening fire, six Bentinck Islanders rushed towards them, brandishing spears. The RAAF men fled to the safety of their launch and Gully Peters, standing on the foredeck, shouted to the Bentinck Aborigines that the RAAF men were 'good men' and not to

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84. ibid.

throw their spears. But the attack was pressed home. Soon, Peters had to jump into the sea to avoid the hail of spears. Those in the launch began firing their rifles into the air to frighten the Aborigines. As suddenly as it had started, the attack was over. An Aborigine lay dead, sprawled face down on a sand dune, thirty yards from the launch. The others had withdrawn.[85] Oblivious of the larger struggle being waged around them, the Bentinck Islanders had attacked the RAAF party in defence of their territory.

The investigation which followed this event revealed that the Bentinck Islanders had been provoked by a series of contacts with groups of servicemen. Men from the RAAF base

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85. A705, item 182/1/349. Report Relative to the Shooting of One Bentinck Island Native, Name Unknown, on Sweers Island at about 8 p.m. on Monday the 18 October 1943 by one of the RAAF Men Stationed at Mornington Island, by Police Sergeant H. Nuss, 26 October 1943. Nuss' investigation concluded that the Aborigine was shot as a result of the launch being rocked from side to side as Peters and one of the RAAF men attempted to board it. This caused one of the men firing over the heads of the Aborigines to discharge his rifle at an angle sufficiently low to accidentally hit one of them. This explanation is suspect. Some of the evidence in the report indicates that the dead man was shot twice. This would be unlikely to occur in the manner described by Nuss. Furthermore, three of the four statements of the RAAF men, gathered as evidence by Nuss, include identical final paragraphs supporting the contention that the shooting occurred in the manner described by Nuss. The statements of Gully Peters and Jack Oakley also support this view, but both were illiterate and their statements were written for them and signed with their thumb prints. Regardless of the extent to which the shooting was accidental it is likely that if the RAAF men had not fired their rifles, they themselves may have been killed.

at Mornington Island had regularly visited Bentinck and Sweers Islands but had made little contact with the Aborigines there. But in mid-1943 the Army had begun to map the islands and visiting survey parties had made contact with Aborigines making lewd advances to the women[86] and firing their rifles indiscriminately. These soldiers held the Bentinck Islanders in low regard. A Warrant Officer ranked them as the 'most primitive in the whole Pacific; completely ignorant of even the simplest forms of civilised existence'.[87]

In addition to their undisciplined behaviour, the survey party had erected flags and markers as part of their survey work. These may have been taken by the Bentinck Islanders as signs of intended permanent settlement. On Bentinck Island the flags and markers laboriously erected by the survey party during the day, were mysteriously removed overnight, although the soldiers saw no Aborigines.

The death of the Bentinck Island Aborigine signified the extent to which the war had ended the isolation of Aborigines in north Australia. The 'invasion' of north Australia during the war had stirred a small spark from the smouldering memory of the frontier war which had swept across Australia with the advance of the white man. The

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86. ibid. Statement by Barney, an Aboriginal guide for 2 Australian Army Field Survey Party, 26 October 1943.

87. The Bulletin, 30 August 1944, p. 13.

incident had also raised the question of the continued support of Aborigines in the war effort. On 26 October 1943 the Premier of Queensland wrote to the Prime Minister concerned that the Services had much to lose by such incidents. Aborigines were 'often called upon to render assistance to distressed airmen and seamen and ... actions such as [the killing of the Bentinck Islander were] ... likely to militate against such assistance in future'.[88] The assistance Aborigines had provided, particularly to downed airmen, had been considerable. An investigation was quickly initiated by Curtin, strict controls were imposed on Army and RAAF operations in the vicinity of Bentinck and Sweers Islands and the RAAF commander at Mornington Island made several attempts to re-establish friendly relations with the Bentinck Island Aborigines through gifts of dugong and turtle.[89]

As the air war had developed across north Australia, Aborigines began to find themselves involved in rescue operations and the salvage of downed aircraft. The air war led to the inevitable loss of aircraft by mechanical mishap and by enemy action. Being shot down, or having to crash land in the sparsely populated areas of north Australia was

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88. AWM, series 54, item 506/8/4; Death of Aborigine of Gulf Survey Section. Letter, Land Headquarters Melbourne to Headquarters First Australian Army, 8 November 1943.

89. RAAF Historical Section Canberra, Unit History Sheet, 313 Radar Station, Mornington Island, entry for 7 May 1944.

a daunting prospect to aircrew. Considerable survival skills could be needed and these were not easy to acquire. The difficulties of finding downed airmen in the vastness of north Australia complicated the matter.

Aborigines were ideally suited to the task of finding and rescuing downed airmen. Small groups of Aborigines wandered over the whole of north Australia, but their population was densest around mission stations and government ration depots, some of which were hosts to RAAF air bases. The Aborigines were excellent bushmen with highly developed bush survival skills. They were also extremely observant and their acute hearing and sight proved many times to be the salvation of airmen lost in the bush.

One such rescue was that of Captain Van Auken, shot down by Zeroes over Melville Island as he was attacking Japanese bombers raiding Darwin on 15 June 1942. Van Auken was forced to bail out when his aircraft was hit and burst into flames. He parachuted into the sea and reached the shore at the southernmost point of Melville Island. After walking about five miles, he was found by three Aborigines who brought him by canoe across the Clarence Strait to Shoal Bay on the mainland. One Aborigine stayed with him while the others walked to the Headquarters of RAAF North West Area Command in Darwin and guided a party of RAAF personnel in a truck and ambulance back to Van Auken. The Aborigines

were rewarded for their efforts.[90]

On Cape York, near Flinders Island, four Aborigines in a lugger saw a plane crash on the mainland. The Captain, William Doctor [Bounghi][91] immediately sailed for the crash site. They anchored at dusk and walked inland through rugged country guided by the groaning of the surviving crash victims.

As they neared the crash site, they found twelve men, one of whom was already dead. The others were in shock and several were suffering from injuries. Some were unconscious while others appeared totally unharmed, but in shock. As Doctor approached one of the airmen, the airman asked 'have you come to kill me?'. Doctor replied 'no, we have come to give you assistance'. Doctor and his crewmen made splints for those with broken limbs and moved the airmen down to the beach where they erected a shelter, cooked fish and boiled the billy for those who wanted it. During the night three of the airmen died.

The next morning, Doctor and one of his crew returned to the lugger leaving another two crewmen to look after the airmen. Doctor set off in the lugger to find help. He

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90. RAAF Historical Section Canberra, North West Interviews file. Combat (Fighter) Report of Captain Van Auken, Headquarters SQDN 49th Pursuit Group, 15 June 1942.

91. The other crewmen were Toby Togan [Munderbhy], John Morton [Kookie] and David Marrit [Maria]. Names in parentheses are tribal names.

attracted the attention of a passing sea plane which landed to pick up the survivors. While the seaplane carried the injured airmen to safety, Doctor and his men buried the dead marking each grave with crosses and stones.[92]

Across north Australia, numerous other rescues were carried out by Aborigines. One American airman, Lieutenant J. Martin, was shot down twice near Darwin, and was rescued by Aborigines both times.[93] So common had rescues by Aborigines become, that action was taken to formalise the involvement of Aborigines in rescue work. In November 1943, instructions for rescuing the crews from downed aircraft were sent to missions in Western Australia. Aborigines were to be 'rewarded suitably' if they conveyed prompt information regarding downed planes.[94] The Aboriginal community at Delissaville had been formed into an Army 'unit' for the specific purpose of rescuing airmen shot down over Cox Peninsula to the south-west of Darwin harbour.[95] For those airmen who came down further afield,

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92. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra. File, Aborigines in RAAF (employment) - unregistered. Statement, William Doctor, undated.

93. MP742/1, item 164/1/209. Report by Captain F.R. Morris, 8 September 1945. Martin was first rescued by Gribble's 'patrol' on Melville Island and later by Murray's 'patrol' near Delissaville.

94. State Archives of WA, series 993, item 6/44; Rescue of Crews from Crashed Aircraft - Instructions to Outstations. Instructions, Rescue of Crews from Crashed Aircraft, November 1943.

95. This 'unit' has already been described in Chapter 4.

instructions intended to assist their survival had been prepared for issue to aircrew.

After giving pointers on how to find water and food, the instructions turned to the question of relations with Aborigines:

> The wild abo is rather a lovable bloke, a bit of a communist regarding his own possessions, but otherwise quite normal.
>
> If he offers you portion of a giant warty looking black iguana, or a yard or two of snake, take and eat it gratefully. If he mentions that a fruit or fish is "cheeky feller" then accept the fact that it is poisonous. Treat him with dignity and restraint, and to most of your remaining tobacco, and he will lead you to water and food and probably the nearest Mission or native station.
>
> Your nomad Abo mightn't smell like a garden of roses, he mightn't have an aristocratic profile but don't lose sight of the fact that he means more to you than an Angel with wings.[96]

The reference here to 'angels with wings' indicates that the need to rely upon Aborigines for survival elevated their status in the eyes of those who one day may be in need of their skills. It is also a reminder of those other 'natives' elevated to angelic status through the trauma of the war, the 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels' of Papua and New Guinea.

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96. AWM, series 54, item 85/10/5; Hints to Aircrew - Coastal Area of North West Australia. 'Instructions to Airmen who force-land on the North West Coastal Area of Australia' written by an AIF Guerilla Group Major, undated. Although the Major is not named, the author is probably Major Mitchell who patrolled extensively through the Kimberley district raising guerilla units among the cattle station personnel there. The document is written in Mitchell's style.

"You watchem which way we go Boss, you come back this way fishin' byemby when piurry war him finish." —CPL R. J. HOBSON

Aborigines Rescued Many Downed Airmen

Wings, 3 October 1944

Aborigines were at home in the isolation of north Australia. Their familiarity with the environment, superb survival skills and acute hearing and powers of observation, contributed to the rescue of many downed Allied airmen.

Wings was the magazine of the RAAF.

Courtesy of Wings and the RAAF Historical Section, Canberra.

The same intense emotional forces were at work in both cases.

The 'instructions to aircrew' added a cautionary note about sexual relations with lubras. 'There are Abos with strong views on racial purity. If you have a colour-blind Don Juan in your party, see that he does not wander off in the moonlight',[97] it cautioned.

Sexual relations between servicemen and Aboriginal women remained a potential problem throughout the war. Aborigines under the control of the mission stations tended to be well supervised by missionaries and there is little evidence of sexual relations having occurred at mission stations. Where control was less in evidence, the presence of servicemen could lead to sexual abuse of the Aborigines.

During its brief stay near the mouth of the Roper River, a detachment of 3 Independent Company was reported to have 48 per cent of its men infected with venereal diseases as a result of sexual relations with Aboriginal women there.[98] US Negro units stationed near Cowell Creek Mission on Cape

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97. ibid.

98. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 16/402/111; Transfer of Mission Natives Cape York. Minute, Inspector of Administration to Chief Inspector, Army, undated, concerning transfer of Mission Aborigines from Cape York. This report was greatly exaggerated. It had originated from Lieutenant H.B. Beaman who was not impartial concerning the question of Aborigines. Beaman and his attitude to Aborigines are discussed in the next chapter.

York also attracted the attention of Army medical authorities because of high levels of venereal diseases thought to have been contracted through the Mission station Aborigines.[99] Other evidence also suggests that Aborigines in remote areas were vulnerable to the unwanted attention of servicemen. Soldiers evacuating civilians from the vicinity of Roper River Police station in 1942 had ransacked the station, consuming the Constable's liquor and firing their weapons indiscriminately. Aborigines nearby had taken to the bush. The Constable reported:

> I believe the Provest [sic.] Sergeant in this [Army] party drew his revolver at Elsey Station and fired at natives, he and a civilian in the party tried to grab the female aboriginals in the kitchen at Elsey - such terror did they create there that some ran for miles.[100]

At Nutwood Downs station, about 100 Kilometres south of Roper Bar, Aboriginal women seemed vulnerable to the advances of almost anyone who came along. The manager of the station admitted that soldiers from the North Australia Observer Unit, from Larrimah, sixty kilometres west, and Americans, had come to the station and he had been forced

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99. AA Canberra, series A373, item 3950; Transfer of Natives - Cape York Peninsula. Letter, Major General Burston, Director General of Medical Services, to the Adjutant General, 1 December 1942.

100. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 29/401/686; Looting Roper River. Letter, Constable Edwards, Roper River Police Station, to the Superintendent of Police, Alice Springs, 25 March 1942. The Army rejected the Constable's claims and questioned the reliability of the evidence provided by Aborigines.

to complain of their behaviour. In addition, most of the white employees of the station also cohabited with Aboriginal women. One of them had born two 'part-Aboriginal' children. 'My two kid yellow fellow', she said. 'The father of Bill is an Army man. He is a horse tailer. ... Soldiers chase lubras everywhere when they come up [from Big Hole]', a nearby Army camp.[101]

Service Headquarters had made an attempt to control the men's sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women. Northern Territory Force Order A209 informed all units that infringement of the Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance, Section 53, which forbade sexual relations between whites and Aboriginal women not their legal wives, was both a civil and a military offence.[102] Transgression would attract both civil and military punishment. Similar orders were issued by RAAF and Navy Headquarters. But the chance of being discovered was slim on a remote cattle station on which the white hands regularly cohabited in defiance of the Ordinance. In view of the punishments involved, it can be safely assumed that servicemen sought

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101. A431, item 46/450. Interviews of evidence into the fathering of part Aborigine children at Nutwood Downs station, by Patrol Officers V. J. White and Kyle-Little. The station manager was thought to have fathered two of the 'part-Aborigine' children but in evidence, it appeared that visiting Army personnel may have been responsible for at least one child.

102. AWM, series 52, item 5/45/6; 56 Port Craft Coy. NT Force Order A209 - republished in unit orders.

to avoid disclosure of their sexual relations with Aborigines. Hence, little documented evidence exists. It is possible that sexual exploitation in remote areas was more widespread than the evidence presented here suggests.

Other attempts were also made to modify the attitudes of servicemen by legal process. In January 1944, HQ NT Force circulated orders which forbade the use of the terms 'Boong' and 'Gin', in regard to Aborigines. These, and other terms to denote 'part-Aborigines', such as 'Creamies', had crept into common use among the servicemen. The order instructed that the terms 'Native' and 'Lubra' should be used instead.[103] Coming so late in the war, the publication of the order reflected the growing interest of Headquarters Northern Territory Force in the post-war Aboriginal problem, as its primary concern, the threat to Australia, declined.

The employment of Aborigines by small Army patrols tended to create the strongest bonds between servicemen and Aborigines. This was because these patrols operated in the remotest parts of north Australia and relied upon Aboriginal guides for navigation and survival in the harsh Australian outback. Similarities existed between these patrols and the combat environment described in Chapter 4. In both, the existence of a serious threat to personal

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103. AWM, series 52, item 25/1/2; North Australia Observer Unit. See entry for 11 January 1944.

survival forced individuals to rely upon one another. This cohesive force welded the small group together, overcoming the divisive forces of racism. In combat, the threat to personal survival was posed by the enemy. In patrols across north Australia, the harsh environment of the outback replaced the enemy as the catalyst for the development of these cohesive forces. The soldiers of the North Australia Observer Unit, constantly patrolling the north with the aid of Aboriginal guides, established particularly close relations with these men.

The servicemen were not left to establish this relationship alone. Patrol Officer Harney of the Native Affairs Branch made a point of talking to the servicemen he met about Aborigines. Harney was the ideal man for this job. He had served in the First AIF, and could therefore relate to the servicemen. He also had great sympathy for Aborigines. Harney could also tell a good yarn. He had the ears of the soldiers, was able to represent the Aborigines and had the communication skills to convince. 'He loved the Australian aborigine', recalled a North Australia Observer Unit soldier. 'He made us aware that they were people to be respected rather than otherwise, ... he gave us, well those that wanted to listen, an awareness that stone age people they might be but human beings they

certainly were'.[104]

A constant theme of the recollections of the men of the North Australia Observer Unit is the feeling of security they had when they were accompanied on patrol by an Aborigine. Many of the soldiers were themselves excellent bushmen, having been carefully selected on the basis of their bush experience. Even so, they readily admitted that the Aborigines had far superior bushcraft and survival skills. 'Oh, they were good men. You couldn't ride round up there without an abo [sic.]. You'd get lost', said W. McAdam.[105] McAdam felt that he owed his life to one of the guides who assisted his unit. He had been on patrol for three weeks with Oscar, an Aboriginal guide. They had run out of water. With their tongues swollen in the parched weather, McAdam feared the worst. At last, Oscar found water. 'I'm sure I'd have died if he hadn't', recalled McAdam.[106] Another soldier remembered that 'you were never worried when you had an Aborigine with you or were with one. You always felt that you were safe and you thought, "well, I'll never be lost and I'm able to find my way back", and it would be a terrible place to be lost in

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104. Interview, Tom Honeyman, by Richard Walker. Extracts of this and other interviews of ex-North Australia Observer Unit soldiers were provided by Richard Walker with the permission of the interviewee.

105. Interview, W. McAdam, by Richard Walker.

106. ibid.

because you'd never be found again in some of that country'.[107]

The Northern Australia Observer Unit men also reported a common interest in breaking down some of the social barriers which had been erected between white and black in north Australia. McAdam encouraged Oscar, to sit with the whites at meal time, but Oscar refused. Station life was hard on the Aborigines, said McAdam, 'He'd been flogged over there [at the cattle station], poor devil', but the men of the North Australian Observer Unit 'helped the cause [of Aboriginal advancement] up there [in north Australia] a hell of a lot'.[108] Brian Harris, another Observer Unit soldier, also encouraged his Aboriginal guide Snowball, to share meals with the soldiers. 'When he first came to us, he would sit down away to eat and we wouldn't allow him to do that, we said "you must eat with us because we are all the same". We broke down his reserve'.[109]

This sense of egalitarianism was most uncommon for that time in north Australia, and it earned the resentment of Northern Territory pastoralists. Another soldier recalled that the manager of McArthur River station eighty kilometres south of Borroloola,

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107. Interview, Des Harrison, by Richard Walker.

108. Interview, W. McAdam by Richard Walker.

109. Interview, Brian Harris, by Richard Walker.

> was a bit savage on the Army because he said we used to treat the blacks that well we were spoiling them. "When you move out", he said, "we are stuck with them fellows, you know", and in those days in the Territory, it was nothing to shoot a black if he didn't do the right thing. ... We treated them well because we hadn't had any contact with them previously and they were doing the right thing by us. We tried to treat them as an equal, but they were hard to treat as an equal because they had been ... they had led the life where they were apart from a white man, so if you pulled up to camp, they would take their swags and camp up under a tree somewhere away from us. You'd make a meal and they would just take it back to their swag.
>
> At that time I was trying to treat them as an equal and I thought they should sit down and share with us just like any white man.[110]

Aborigines had seldom experienced such egalitarian treatment. To many Aborigines, the servicemen were 'a new kind of white man'.[111]

Navy and Air Force personnel experienced similar relationships with the Aborigines they came into contact with. Frank Galbally, then a seaman aboard a Navy vessel operating along the north Australian coast formed a very close relationship with an Aborigine he met during his service. Galbally felt that his service training had led him to adopt an attitude to Aborigines different from that which was common among white civilians in the Northern

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110. Interview, Noel Collier, by Richard Walker.

111. M. Brown, The Black Eureka, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1976. p. 31.

112. Letter, Frank Galbally to the author, 11 October 1985. See also Clark, Pastor Doug - The Story of an Aboriginal Leader, pp. 125-126.

Territory at that time.[112]

Despite this widespread emergence of a new attitude towards Aborigines by servicemen who found themselves posted to stations in north Australia, some continued to reflect the attitudes which had prevailed among the pre-war civilian population of the north. Eric Wenban, another North Australia Observer Unit soldier recalled an incident aboard the unit vessel 'Toorbul':

> One day we gave [the Aboriginal deck hand] his rations, which was half a dozen sticks of "Nicky" tobacco, a tin of condensed milk and this weeks pay, and of course, he'd leave the boat and go walkabout and then rejoin the vessel. But this day he threw it on the ground. Just threw it in disgust and said, "Me want white man's tucker, same along as you fellows", which in those days you didn't say ... the black man didn't say that. ... And so we knocked him to the ground. ... I've often thought about that.[113]

But even here there is a self doubt which would not have been present among many white civilian employers of Aborigines in the pre-war period.

By the war's end, Aborigines had built or assisted the construction of airstrips at over seventeen missions. They had regularly unloaded fuel, bombs, ammunition, rations and other stores from ships, searched for and rescued downed airmen and lost seamen, salvaged aircraft, located sea mines and provided general labour. Through their proximity to RAAF bases, some had been bombed. Unlike the bulk of

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113. Interview, Eric Wenban, by Richard Walker.

the white Australian population, Aborigines - men, women and children - were in the front line of the air war.

The war had exposed mission Aborigines as never before to the attractions of white society. Missionaries had lost control and McEwen's scheme to use the missions as refuges in which partly de-tribalised Aborigines could develop at their own pace had dissolved. The consequences of these developments were noticed by W.E. Harney during his patrols of mission stations in late 1943. He noted that a general drift of Aborigines from the missions to populated areas of the Northern Territory was occurring. Of the Aborigines working in Army labour settlements, 70 per cent had originally come from Aboriginal reserves.[114] Harney blamed the missions:

> The destiny of the natives in the Northern Territory rests upon the control of drift and any Mission Station that cannot control this drift, is losing the battle in the salvation of the natives. ... Apparently these immigrant tribes, only use the Missions as stepping stones on their march to civilization and destruction as experience here has proved.[115]

Harney argued that in contrast to those who left the reserves, those who stayed tended to have thriving families with many children.

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114. F1, item 44/275. Report by Patrol Officer W.E. Harney, Native Affairs Branch, to Director of Native Affairs, 9 October 1943.

115. ibid.

'Why cannot the Missions hold the natives?',[116] asked Harney in exasperation. Abbott too, was concerned about the impact of the war on the Missions.[117] While the war lasted, the Services provided employment for large numbers of Aborigines in the centralised Army labour settlements and on the mission stations. But when this employment ended many would be thrown back into dependency upon government or mission rations. For many, the end of the war would mark the end of their access to the manufactured goods they had been able to acquire through their employment. Both Harney and Abbott wondered whether the missions were preparing for this situation. Harney in particular, was critical of the way in which the missions had ignored those Aborigines who had left missions to find work with the Army in the more populated areas of the Territory.

Harney's criticism of the missions was too harsh. They had suffered like every other institution, private or government, during the war. They were chronically undermanned, many of their assets such as their luggers, had been impressed for war service and they had to rely completely upon the Services for all their supplies, medical aid and other services. In some cases they had

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116. ibid.

117. AA Canberra, series A461, item C412/1/2; Northern Territory Industrial Conditions 1937-44. Administrator's Annual Report for the year 1947.

been bombed by the Japanese. But most telling of all, their influence over the Aborigines had been eroded by the servicemen who had 'invaded' their mission sanctuary.

For the Aborigines, the 'invasion' of the mission stations had generally presented opportunities for them to experience relations with white Australians who were not missionaries, to be employed and to have that employment valued. Across north Australia, Aborigines had made a significant contribution to the air war and to the surveillance of large tracts of deserted country. In common with those themes described in earlier chapters, this contribution went largely ignored by the bulk of white Australians because it was rarely publicised. Even the State and Commonwealth administrators of Aborigines remained largely ignorant of it. At an inter-departmental meeting to consider the application of the re-establishment provisions of the Re-establishment and Employment Act, 1945, State representatives were asked to consider the application of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme to 'natives'. Those who had contributed to the war effort were eligible for assistance. The Queensland representative referred only to the evacuation of Cape Bedford Mission near Cooktown, omitting any reference to the work which had been done by Aborigines at Cowal Creek, Weipa, Mapoon, Aurukun, Edward River, Mitchell River and Mornington Island Missions. The Western Australian representative ineffectually said of the Aborigines of his

State 'they must have done a great deal in the Kimberleys. This could only be confirmed by reference to the Air Force'.[118] The failure of the representatives at this meeting to press the case for the inclusion of north Australian Aborigines in post-war reconstruction resulted in their being left out of consideration despite their considerable efforts in the defence of their country.

In the enlisted service of Torres Strait Islanders, the *de facto* military service of groups of Aborigines and the efforts of those who laboured for the Army in the Northern Territory and for the RAAF and Navy across north Australia, Aborigines had made a significant contribution to the national war effort. Yet despite this contribution, some sections of the white Australian community raised doubts regarding the loyalty of Aborigines and the health threat they posed to servicemen. These questions are the subject of the next chapter.

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118. AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/1607; North Australia Development Committee - Welfare of Natives. Minutes of an Inter-departmental Committee Meeting on 4 February 1947.

CHAPTER 8

ABORIGINES AS A SECURITY THREAT.

Despite their extensive support for the war effort through their labour, their enlisted service, their *de facto* service and the multitude of ways in which they helped remote defence outposts, Aborigines, particularly in north Australia, came to be regarded by the Services as a threat to national security. The Services, and particularly the Army which was responsible for internal security, suspected Aborigines of favouring a Japanese victory. This marked perhaps the height of the ambiguity which surrounded the Services' attitude towards Aborigines, since, while they regarded Aborigines as 'potential enemies', they were busily enlisting them, entrusting them with the flank protection of Darwin and employing them as labourers, guides and in a host of other capacities. Unlike Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders generally escaped these accusations of disloyalty.

Apart from their suspected disloyalty, relations between Aborigines and the Services also came to be influenced by the question of health. As the Services moved large forces into north Australia, and servicemen came into increasing contact with Aborigines, concern developed over the spread of venereal diseases and malaria. Both issues - security and health - had an impact on the way in which the Services

saw Aborigines.

From the outbreak of war till the eve of the Japanese involvement, there had been few claims that Aborigines might be disloyal. Those that had occurred came about as the result of the Services' bar to the enlistment of Aboriginal servicemen. Many urban Aborigines found the imposition of this bar extremely frustrating. It contrasted with the developing atmosphere of national unity which gripped the nation after the outbreak of war. Aboriginal political and welfare organisations expressed this frustration by claiming that many Aborigines, feeling that their services were rejected, felt they 'had no King and no country to fight for'. Aborigines, they said, were inclined to remain seated during the playing of the national anthem.[1] But these expressions of Aboriginal alienation from the Australian cause were politically motivated. By explaining this truculence, welfare organisations hoped to convince the government that the exclusion of Aborigines created disunity and that therefore, suitable Aborigines should be admitted to military service. Other Aborigines, who had enlisted in the Army but were later discharged, were even more

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1. MP508, item 275/750/1310. Letter, A.P.A. Burdeu, President Australian Aborigines' League, to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, 30 March 1941. The Australian Aborigines' League, the Aborigines' Uplift Society and the Aborigines' Advancement League each used this phrase to describe Aboriginal discontent.

resentful. The discharge of 18 Lake Tyers Aborigines from the Army in July 1940 (discussed in Chapter 2), had brought serious demoralisation to the Station. Initially, the Aborigines had responded with animosity and threats of violence towards the Station manager - the most readily available representative of white authority. Over a year later, the Aborigines were still resentful, but their hostility had now generalised. In August 1942, the manager reported that 'the generally expressed opinion of the youth of the Station is, that they would get a "better spin" under Japanese rule'.[2] In the space of two years, the Lake Tyers community had turned from eager supporters of the war effort into a disgruntled community inclined to express support for the Japanese.

Lutheran missions had come under suspicion before December 1941 because of the fear that German pastors might influence Aborigines. In 1940 Beagle Bay mission in Western Australia was taken over by Army Intelligence and the missionaries of German descent interned,[3] but Lombadina Lutheran Mission further north, continued to operate

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2. B356, item 54. Managers' report for the period ended 31 August 1942.

3. Biskup, Not Slaves, Not Citizens, p. 197. See also Mary Durack, The Rock and the Sand, Constable, London, 1969, pp. 250-252. The whole of the Lutheran church, not just the missions, was under suspicion. See AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 175/701/871; Lutheran Church in Australia. Notes of Deputation Received by the Acting Prime Minister, Mr Fadden, at Parliament House Canberra, 25 March 1941.

relatively undisturbed. Hermannsburg Mission in central Australia also came under suspicion. Army Intelligence gathered reports from local people about the Mission and those of German descent associated with it. Some used the opportunity to malign the Mission and Patrol Officer Strehlow whose association with the Mission and German name made him a convenient target for anti-German hysteria. Strehlow was the son of a pastor at the Mission and had spent his childhood there, learning Aranda from the Aboriginal children. Later he went to Adelaide University where he studied linguistics. In 1935 he became a Patrol Officer in the Native Affairs Branch of the Northern Territory Administration where his deep sympathy for the central Australian Aborigines often put him at odds with local whites. Giving evidence to the Army, a citizen of Alice Springs said:

> I understand that the natives in and around Linda Vale [Hermannsburg] consider themselves Germans and they are becoming rather obstreperous. There are only two places where they could be primed in this connection, and they are at Hermannsburg or from Strehlow himself.[4]

Others reported that the Aborigines had been taught to sing German songs while the member for the Northern Territory, Mr Blain, alleged in parliament that Strehlow and others connected with the Mission were Nazis and that swastikas

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4. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 175/1/189; Hermannsburg Mission - Use of W/T Equipment. Letter, GSO III 7th Military District to GSO 7th Military District, 4 June 1940.

had been drawn on rocks around Alice Springs.[5] Strehlow himself reported that an Aborigine named Nikutjilpi had told his employer 'I am a German. You cannot touch me'.[6] Despite these statements, further investigation by the Army could unearth no evidence of any disloyalty on the part of the mission staff or the Aborigines. While the Army had earlier toyed with the idea of closing the mission and turning the Aborigines into the desert to fend for themselves, this plan was abandoned and a resident Patrol Officer stationed at the Mission.[7]

As the war progressed, and in the face of the mounting threat from Japan, the Commonwealth government endeavoured

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5. ibid. Strehlow also had his supporters. M.E. Eaton wrote to Horace Nock MHR on 9 June 1940 that 'unfortunately there are folk in Alice Springs and elsewhere who did not like the Patrol Officer interfering with the exploitation of the Aborigines, and are not above using a German name as an excuse for slander'.

6. A659, item 41/1/101. Letter, Patrol Officer Strehlow, to Director of Native Affairs, 17 March 1941. Had he really been attempting to foster Aboriginal support for Germany it is unlikely Strehlow would have revealed this in his report.

7. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 175/1/189. Report on Hermannsburg Mission by GSO 7th Military District, 11 July 1940. The role of the resident Patrol Officer was mainly to reassure Army Intelligence that the Mission radio would not be used to pass messages of military value to Germany. See also AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/450; Illtreatment of Aborigines. This file contains an attack against Strehlow by the Administrator of the Northern Territory. Writing in late 1942, the Administrator claimed that a lubra employed by Strehlow 'frequently amuses herself by drawing swastikas on the walls of buildings'. In the climate of the times, such statements were sufficient to throw a cloud over the loyalty of Strehlow and over the Aborigines at Hermannsburg.

to foster national unity to further the war effort. This, and anti-Nazi propaganda, favoured the development of progressive attitudes towards Aborigines, as white Australians began to see themselves in union with other Australians against the common foe. In addition, the war had led to improved economic conditions for Aborigines. Aboriginal unemployment had dropped as many Aborigines left reserves to take up the jobs vacated by whites who had enlisted. But the effect of these factors on race relations, and particularly the effect of propaganda, should not be overestimated. Its application was erratic, uncoordinated and sometimes even contradictory. Although the press appealed for national unity in the face of the Japanese threat, little attempt was made to cast this appeal in a way which might attract the support of all Australians, including those who were non-Anglo-Saxon. Quite the opposite. Curtin's appeal, published in The Sydney Morning Herald[8] emphasised that Australia had been dominated by Anglo-Saxons since the arrival of the First Fleet and that nothing should be permitted to alter that fact. Four years earlier, Australia's sesqui-centennial had been marked by Aborigines as a Day of Mourning to focus the attention of white Australians on all that Aborigines had lost as a result of this Anglo-Saxon invasion. Although they may have appealed to Australians of British

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8. The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 February 1942.

background, Curtin's remarks were insensitive to the aspirations of Aborigines, failing to enlist their support for the national effort. Other propaganda was also ill-conceived. By March 1942, the Department of Information began its 'hate' campaign against the Japanese. This misguided campaign portrayed the Japanese in explicitly racist terms, referring to them as 'insolent', 'inferior', 'little runts'. But many Australians rejected the campaign, and it was stopped after only two weeks.[9] While it lasted, the campaign suggested that racism was valid.

Regardless of the effect propaganda and improving employment prospects for Aborigines may have had on race relations, after Japan had entered the war, claims that Aborigines were disloyal, began to proliferate. Unlike the earlier warnings offered by Aboriginal welfare organisations, these were invariably made by white Australians who asserted that Aborigines in north Australia would assist the Japanese. Racism was an important element in these claims. In January 1942, Mr Naylor, a pastoralist of 'Mantaka', near Cairns, wrote to the Army commander at Townsville saying that the north Queensland mission

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9. John Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in World War II, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1984, pp. 115-118. Hilvert notes that a Gallup Poll found that of those who had heard the campaign broadcasts, 44 per cent thought them a good idea, 54 per cent thought them a bad idea, and 2 per cent were undecided.

stations were a threat to national security. 'It is possible', he said, 'for these aboriginals to convey information by signalling in native fashion by fire, smoke and other means, to the invader'. Yarrabah Mission near Cairns was of particular concern to him. Aborigines there were 'always frequenting that portion of Cairns known as Malay Town, the headquarters of ...[the] Japanese fishing crews'.[10] There was little to suggest disloyalty here, particularly as Aborigines were discouraged from entering other parts of Cairns. The real reason for Naylor's concern was his own low regard for Aborigines. He saw Aborigines as

> cunning and unreliable; Subject to bribery and just tolerant to his white master. The halfcaste is not much removed from his black brother in this regard.[11]

Despite his low regard for Aborigines, Naylor had been superintendent of Warangesda Aboriginal Station near Narrandera in New South Wales, and of Yarrabah Mission Station. Wisely, the Army disregarded Naylor's warnings, saying that the value of Aboriginal smoke signals to the Japanese, even if they could read them, was nil. But Hope Vale Lutheran Mission, near Cape Bedford, Cooktown, had a superintendent of German descent and Army Intelligence

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10. AWM Canberra, series 60, item 66/1/88; Aboriginal Missions in North Queensland. Letter, A. Naylor to Commandant, Military Forces Townsville, 28 January 1942.

11. ibid.

therefore regarded the mission as a 'potential problem'.[12] When local whites claimed the Aborigines were disloyal, the Army moved. At dawn on the morning of 17 May 1942, a convoy of trucks arrived at the mission to remove the Aborigines and take the missionary into internment. The elderly Aborigines were evacuated to Palm Island near Townsville, but a further 235 were sent to Woorabinda near Brisbane.[13]

After the bombing of Darwin, accusations of Aboriginal disloyalty took on a sharper edge of hysteria. Writing to The Sydney Morning Herald within two weeks of the first raid on Darwin, 'Safety First' wrote of Japanese 'garnishing their faces with burnt cork', and asked 'how many of my fellow Australians could tell them from an abo [sic.]'. Warming to his theme, he described Aborigines as 'the most dangerous race in the north today ... [able to give] good information to a Jap reconnaissance plane 60 to 100 miles off the coast of Broome, Wyndham or Darwin'.[14] 'Safety First' also heralded the supposed connection between Aborigines and Japanese as a result of pre-war contact with Japanese pearlers. The Aborigines' greatest

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12. ibid. Letter, Commander 11 Infantry Brigade, Townsville, to Headquarters Northern Command, undated, but January or early February 1942.

13. Pohlner, Gangurru, pp. 112-117. The Hope Vale people found Woorabinda cold and inhospitable. Of the 235 evacuated there, 60 had died by March 1943.

14. The Sydney Morning Herald, 11 March 1942.

friend, he said, was the 'pearling lugger Jap'. Other concerned citizens claimed that the Aborigines' skill at bushcraft would be beneficial to the Japanese and that therefore, Aborigines should be removed from coastal areas to sites further inland.[15] Other information about the supposed disloyalty of Aborigines came from Army sources. The 2/4 Independent Company operating in the Northern Territory reported that

> several natives on questioning favour the JAPANESE for the gifts of opium, tobacco, calico etc. they have given them in the past. They further state that the white men have not given them anything and on a number of occasions have molested them and their lubras.[16]

The failure of white Australians to recognise some of the foundations of Aboriginal culture such as the observance of obligations to reciprocate, as well as the exploitation of Aboriginal women, were major factors contributing to Aboriginal discontent. Other Army reports merely asserted that Aborigines 'were a big potential menace' and took the line that Aborigines would assist the Japanese if rewarded

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15. See for example, AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 82/712/1773; Removal Aborigines from Coastal Areas to Inland. Letter, Mr McClintock to the Prime Minister, 1 April 1942. Other examples are cited in the remainder of this chapter.

16. AWM, series 52, item 25/3/4; 2/4 Independent Company. Weekly report, undated but about May 1942.

17. AWM, series 54, item 831/3/4; Report on Gulf Reconnaissance - May-July 1942 by Captain A.J. Marshall. Reconnaissance report, Captain A.J. Marshall, undated. Marshall also proposed the evacuation of Aborigines from coastal areas.

with tobacco and rations.[17]

Such letters and reports were remarkable for the fact that although they often cited special skills possessed by Aborigines as indicating their military value to the Japanese, none suggested that these same skills might be used by Australia's forces. This was left to those whose letters attempted to balance the image of the north Australian Aborigine. It was these correspondents, sympathetic to Aborigines, who also had to remind readers that as recently as the 1930s some Aborigines in north Australia had been gaoled for killing Japanese pearlers.[18] Now, through such correspondents as 'Safety First', north Australian Aborigines were accused of cooperating with the Japanese.

By April 1942, the government and the Army began to hear from more authoritative sources that Aborigines might be disloyal. As early as June 1941, Donald Thomson had alerted Land Headquarters in Melbourne to the possibility that Japanese pearlers may have made contact with Aborigines in Arnhem Land, but he had also stressed to the Army that many Aborigines hated the Japanese and would be

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18. See for example responses to 'Safety First' in The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 and 17 March 1942.

19. 54, item 741/5/9. 'The Place of the Natives of Arnhem Land in the Defence of the Coast of Northern Australia with a Proposal for the Organization of a Force for Scouting and Reconnaissance', by Flight Lieutenant Donald F. Thomson, June 1941.

very willing to operate against them as a military unit.[19] A.P. Elkin, Professor of anthropology at Sydney University also warned the Prime Minister that Aborigines might assist the Japanese but 'this danger could be avoided and the aborigines turned into a source of help if we set about it in the right way', by sending men who held the trust of the Aborigines to warn them not to assist the Japanese.[20] Elkin's remarks were supported by E.W.P. Chinnery, and by Lieutenant F.E. Williams.[21]

Another source of accusations had been censored letters. A writer in north Queensland had stated that Aborigines regularly received gifts of tobacco from Japanese pearlers and that Aborigines in the Cooktown district had 'openly stated that the Japs told them that the country belonged to the blacks, had been stolen from them by the whites and that "bye and bye" they (the Japs) would give it back to them (the blacks). So!'[22] Whites also reported 'having trouble with the blacks due to the tobacco shortage'[23] while in the Mount Magnet-Meekatharra area in Western Australia 'it (had) been common talk among the natives that

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20. A659, item 42/1/3043. Letter, A.P. Elkin to the Prime Minister, 2 April 1942.

21. ibid.

22. AA Melbourne, series MP729/6, item 29/401/626; Japanese Activities Amongst Aborigines. Letter, Director-General of Security to the Director of Military Intelligence, Allied Land Force Headquarters, Melbourne, 24 July 1942.

23. ibid.

when the Japs came they (the blacks) would be boss'.[24] These remarks betrayed the motives for many apparently pro-German and pro-Japanese statements uttered by Aborigines: the loss of their land and their powerlessness within white Australian society. The 'obstreperous' Aborigines at Hermannsburg who 'considered themselves Germans' did not support Germany's war aims or Nazism with its heavy emphasis on racism. Aboriginal identification with Germans or Japanese was a plea for power - at least equal to that of white Australians. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Nikutjilpi's statement, 'I am a German. You cannot touch me'.[25] Until the arrival of the white man, Aborigines had enjoyed a monopoly of power in Australia. Identifying with Germans or Japanese was an attempt to restore the power earlier lost to whites. In so doing, Aborigines hoped to regain control over their land and their lives.

Aborigines in north Australia had sensed that whites were vulnerable to political pressure as a result of the war. In his field work in the 1930s A.P. Elkin had noticed that

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24. ibid. Letter, Prime Minister to the Minister for the Army, 24 July 1942.

25. A659, item 41/1/101. Letter, Patrol Officer Strehlow to the Director of Native Affairs, 17 March 1941. Nikutjilpi was evidently a person of rebellious character. Strehlow described him as a 'cunning, treacherous, slinking brute, who is always to be found where dangerous trouble is brewing' - just the sort of person who might chafe against white power and seek ways of overcoming it. See letter, Strehlow to the Director of Native Affairs, 15 March 1941.

non-urban Aborigines had become adept at sensing the attitude of particular whites towards Aborigines. This skill had been wrought from necessity. Aborigines in central and north Australia, tied to particular territories by their cultural links to the land, had been forced into a state of dependence upon the invading white settlers who claimed the land as their own. The ability to understand the changing attitudes of whites enabled these dependent people to gauge how far they could pursue their traditional culture before the limits of white tolerance were reached. This skill was part of what Elkin later described as 'intelligent parasitism' - the Aborigines skill at making the best of an unfavourable situation.[26] The Japanese policy of attacking the prestige of colonial powers in the South West Pacific area and their professed intentions to foster indigenous populations was a threat to the continued power of whites in north Australia and Aborigines were quick to sense this. Pro-Japanese statements by Aborigines were their means of exploring the limits of the new power they had acquired through the realisation that whites were not invincible. Few Aborigines really believed that a

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26. Wise, The Self-Made Anthropologist, p. 214 and Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 208. Elkin's choice of the term 'parasitism' was unfortunate. In addition to its offensive connotations, Stevens argues that this and other terms used by Elkin to describe the stages of Aboriginal adjustment to white occupation interfered with an accurate appraisal of the Aborigines' true place in the north Australian economy. See Stevens, The Politics of Prejudice, p. 142.

Japanese victory would benefit them. The Aborigines from Lake Tyers in Victoria for example, had had no contact with Japanese and their claim that the Japanese might give them 'a better spin', really amounted to criticism of the 'spin' they were getting from whites. Similar pro-German or pro-Japanese statements by other Aborigines were equally motivated by a desire to test the sensitivity of white Australians. Such statements were more about changing race relations in Australia, than a desire for German or Japanese victory.

By May 1942 E.W.P. Chinnery was aware that the Army was concerned about the security of Lutheran missions, particularly Hermannsburg in central Australia. Chinnery was alarmed at the possibility of the Army's perception of Aboriginal loyalty getting out of hand:

> There has always been a strong anti-aboriginal and anti-half-caste opinion throughout the Territory ... and there is grave danger of this attitude infecting members of the military personnel and affecting their judgement in questions of aboriginal welfare. ... Aboriginals are Australian citizens, entitled to the fullest possible consideration. They form the backbone of the great stock-raising interests and other phases of the Territory's economic activities, so that apart altogether from questions of common humanity it is sound policy to prevent anything being done which might cause disruption,

discontent and distress amongst the aboriginal population.[27]

Chinnery's concerns could equally have applied to Aborigines in Western Australia and Queensland. Army Intelligence had already begun to be influenced by racism in north Australia and throughout the crisis years of 1942 and 1943, attributed to north Australian Aborigines a political acumen and awareness of international affairs which most did not have.

Concern about security at Hope Vale Mission caused the Army to question the security at other missions in Cape York. On the east coast were Yarrabah, Lockhart River and Hope Vale Missions while on the west coast were Cowal Creek, Mapoon, Weipa, Aurukun, Mitchell River and Edward River Missions, with Mornington Island Mission in the Gulf. Lieutenant H.B. Beaman, an Army Intelligence officer who had spent most of his life in the Cape, was chosen to investigate the missions. Although Beaman's familiarity with the Cape lent credibility to his report it was no guarantee that he approached the question of Aboriginal loyalty with an open mind. Naylor, for example, had shown

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27. A659, item 42/1/4499. Letter, E.W.P. Chinnery to the Secretary, Department of the Interior, 21 May 1942. Chinnery reported upon his meeting with Colonel Loutit, who had proposed the closure of Hermannsburg Mission because of his concern about its security. Chinnery dissuaded him, arguing instead that a resident Native Affairs Branch inspector be based there. Happily, the resident inspector was Rex Battarbee who assisted the development of Albert Namatjira's career as an artist.

that even those who had lived with Aborigines and who were responsible for their welfare and guidance did not necessarily view them sympathetically. Beaman visited all the Cape missions producing a report which painted an alarming picture. According to Beaman, Lockhart River Mission on the east coast, had 'been used by the Japanese as a recruiting centre', and in the absence of the mission superintendent, the Aborigines were wandering throughout the Cape. At Mapoon, morale was 'exceedingly low, and being mostly half-castes their previous contacts with Japanese, which were most beneficial to them in the way of ample supplies of tobacco and food, makes them a great potential, should invasion take place in this area'. Aurukun and Weipa Missions were similar to Mapoon and the Aborigines there 'would show little reluctance to the changing of masters'. To clinch the matter Beaman reported that 'the opinions of the superintendents who collectively control over 1000 natives, is that not one percent could be relied upon to be loyal', and that the presence of the Aborigines in the Cape would 'doom to permanent failure' military operations in the area.[28] He recommended their evacuation to the south where they could be put to work on defence related industries 'providing always their economic

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28. MP729/6, item 29/401/626. Report, Native Missions Thursday Island and Peninsula, by H.B. Beaman, undated. See also item 16/402/111; Transfer of Mission Natives Cape York. Most Secret minute, Inspector of Administration to Chief Inspector, Army, LHQ, November 1942 (specific date not given). This minute summarises Beaman's report.

conditions remain as they are at present'.[29]

Not content with this damning assessment of their loyalty, Beaman also attacked the presence of the Aborigines in the Cape on the grounds of their threat to the health of servicemen. Large concentrations of US Negro troops were located near Lockhart River, Mapoon and Cowal Creek Missions. At Cowal Creek Mission near the aerodrome at Higgins Field, the majority of the cases treated by the American Camp Hospital were venereal disease cases thought to have been contracted from the lubras at the mission station. Furthermore, Beaman claimed that 3 Independent Company had suffered 48 per cent casualties as a result of venereal diseases contracted through Aborigines at Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory. He believed that 'although many halfcaste gins do not show signs of VD, [Medical Officers] ... affirm that white men cohabitating invariably contract the complaint', so that even those women who were apparently free from the disease could cause casualties among the servicemen they contacted. He argued that the Aborigines should be evacuated to remove this menace.[30]

Beaman's report was accepted within the Army partly

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29. ibid.

30. MP729/6, item 16/402/111. Most Secret minute, Inspector of Administration to the Chief Inspector, Army, LHQ, November 1942 (specific date not given).

because of his experience in the Cape, and attention was turned to the evacuation of the Aborigines. As the Army pondered the problems of evacuation, a storm was brewing with the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, who was responsible for the mission stations at Mapoon, Weipa, Aurukun and Mornington Island. The Moderator had learned of Beaman's report and labelled his accusations 'false and malicious'.[31] The Moderator claimed that there was very little venereal disease among the Aborigines of the peninsula and soldiers were more likely to get the disease when they visited the capital cities. He appears to have been correct. A survey of venereal diseases among the Aborigines of Cape York mission stations had been conducted by the Queensland Department of Health in 1933. It had found very little evidence of venereal disease. Of

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31. A373, item 3950. Letter, Moderator of the Presbyterian church of Queensland to the Minister for National Security, 20 January 1943. The Moderator was under the impression that Donald Thomson was responsible for the accusations. In his field work in Cape York in the 1930s Thomson had earned the hostility of the Presbyterian missions by exposing their brutality towards Aborigines. He had also been accused of undermining the mission's work when his research rekindled an interest among the Aborigines in traditional practices. The Mission alleged that an Aborigine had died as the result of a bone pointing incident after Thomson had aroused old animosities. Furthermore, Thomson had revisited Mapoon in September 1942, aboard 'Aroetta', on his way to east Arnhem Land. He had requested the use of some mission horses to assist a search for a downed bomber, but the missionary had refused and an argument had ensued. The Moderator thought that the allegations against the missions had come from 'such persons as anthropologists who were interested in the "Dying out" race, and their customs'. See minute, Investigation Branch, Brisbane to Section Officer, Investigators, 11 January 1943.

the 235 Aborigines examined at Mapoon for example, only one was found to have venereal disease. Similarly, at Cowal Creek and Weipa, only one case could be found, and Aurukun, with seven cases, had the largest number.[32] As for the question of the Aborigines assisting the Japanese, the Moderator pointed out that no Japanese had visited Mapoon Mission for over a generation. It was the policy of the State government and the missions to exclude all unauthorised visitors. Of the few Aborigines who may have come into contact with Japanese pearlers, the conditions aboard the luggers were so harsh as to make the formation of friendships unlikely. 'The allegation ... that an aboriginal will sell out at any time for a stick of tobacco [as Beaman had suggested], is a libel on an already much maligned race',[33] the Moderator complained.

The Bishop of Carpentaria, responsible for the Church of England missions at Cowal Creek, Lockhart River, Mitchell River, and Edward River also objected to Beaman's claims. Whereas Beaman had suggested that Aborigines would be actively disloyal, the Bishop took the more realistic view that 'the Aboriginal on the Peninsula is not aggressive and

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32. AA Canberra, series A1928, item 4/5: Aboriginals - Survey of. Report, Interim report on Aboriginals - Survey No 2 (Cape York Peninsula), by R.W. Cilento, Senior Medical Officer, Commonwealth Department of Health, 1933.

33. A373, item 3950. Letter, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland to the Minister for National Security, 20 January 1943.

he would consider the Japanese his temporary master and try to get the best terms he could for himself and his family'. Significantly, he added 'I do not think that white men who have exploited Aboriginals will agree with my view in this matter as they fear retaliation'.[34] In the Bishop's view, the Aborigines would react to a Japanese invasion in much the same way they reacted to the white 'invasion' of their territory. Unable to break the cultural ties to their land the Aborigines could not easily withdraw before an invading Army. Instead, they would adopt a truly neutral position sensibly putting their own long term survival before political issues which offered nothing to them. Although some missions, like Aurukun, had made an attempt to inform the Aborigines of the war by daily readings of the war news and saluting the flag, most of the Aborigines on these isolated stations did not fully grasp the concept of the Australian nation, let alone understand the war. The Edward River Mission Aborigines for example, spoke no English, so white culture had made little impact there. Most of the partly de-tribalised Aborigines on remote missions knew only that there was 'trouble' between the whites and the Japanese and that the whites were threatened by it. For the Aborigines, loyalty existed on a

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34. AA Canberra, series A373, item 5903; Japanese Activities Amongst Aborigines. Minute, Assistant Deputy Director to Deputy Director of Security, 24 March 1943. This minute reports the record of an interview of the Bishop of Carpentaria by the Deputy Director of Security.

personal level. Most had a deep personal loyalty to their own missionary despite the harsh discipline practiced on many of the missions. The missionaries shared the isolation of the Aborigines and unlike most whites, stayed with the Aborigines over extended periods. Contrary to Beaman's remarks, many missionaries were able to report great loyalty, albeit personal loyalty, among the Aborigines.

At many of the coastal mission stations, Aborigines maintained a coastwatch, faithfully reporting aircraft and shipping movements to the missionary. At several, Aborigines provided bodyguards for the missionary. For example, Ella Shepherdson, the wife of a missionary at Milingimbi, had refused to be evacuated and went into hiding on a nearby island, guarded by twenty loyal warriors.[35] At Emerald River Mission on Groote Eylandt, when Aborigines reported a suspected Japanese landing on nearby Bickerton Island, the missionary decided to talk to the Aborigines about where their loyalty lay. He told them they might be better off if the Japanese landed on Groote, or even captured the whole of Australia, and asked them to consider the matter. They decided to defend him explaining that the missionaries, unlike the Macassans or the Japanese pearlers, were the only people to have stayed permanently to live with them. As night fell, forty warriors were

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35. McKenzie, Mission to Arnhem Land, p. 134.

organized to stand guard. Later, they helped him establish a hide in the bush, equipped with rations and water, in case the Japanese landed.[36] Even the Aborigines at Hermannsburg, whom Army Intelligence had previously suspected of disloyalty, regarded themselves as contributing to the defence of their mission station. As a group of Aborigines left the mission station to join the Army labour force in Alice Springs 'one man said "we are going to Alice Springs to keep the enemy away from here", while another man expressed the general feeling of the men who remain to carry on the station work by saying that if the enemy reaches our land "we will all go"'.[37] Missionaries at Aurukun too, reported that 'the people have been very good and helpful, there is a solid core of men and women that can be counted on, and they are very loyal ...'.[38] Beaman's view was clearly at odds with reality.

Beaman's report had grossly overstated the security and health risks posed by the Cape York Aborigines. Like many other white observers of the Aborigines at this time, he had made little attempt to see events as the Aborigines saw them. Instead he had tended to attribute to Aborigines his

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36. Northern Territory Archives Service, series NTRS, interview transcript TS64: Reverend Len Harris, wartime missionary at Groote Eylandt, Oenpelli and Roper River Missions.

37. F1, item 42/286 Part 2. Report, 7 October 1942.

38. MacKenzie, Aurukun Diary, p. 104.

own understanding of the Australian nation and of race relations in north Australia. This had led him to a misunderstanding of Aboriginal neutrality, interpreting it as hostility to white Australians and support for the Japanese. Like other commentators on the question of Aboriginal security - including 'Safety First' - his low regard for the loyalty of Aborigines reflected an unstated acknowledgement that they had been exploited in the past and a belief that they would seize the opportunity of a Japanese invasion to retaliate. The churches however, more secure in their relationship with Aborigines, saw the Aboriginal reaction to the war more clearly. As they placed a more balanced view before the Army, plans for the wholesale evacuation of the Aborigines were dropped. By January 1943, with the wet season making movement of any kind difficult, the General Officer Commanding Queensland Lines of Communication argued that evacuation was no longer warranted. The Aborigines would resent the move, the cattle industry would suffer from the disruption to its labour force, and the evacuation would be expensive. Faced with the evidence provided by the churches, the Army repudiated Beaman's report. Acknowledging the neutrality of the Cape Aborigines, the General Officer Commanding wrote 'it does does not appear that there is any definite evidence of pro-Japanese sympathies on the part of these natives but it appears possible that natives might be of assistance to any military force whether Allied or enemy

which was occupying the same area as the natives concerned'.[39]

The removal of individual Aborigines for health reasons was a different matter. The Director General of Medical Services proposed the medical examination of Aboriginal women at mission stations near troop concentrations and the evacuation of those found to be suffering from venereal diseases. Although there was some concern that this might convey to the soldiers a form of official approval of their sexual relations with Aborigines, the Director General of Medical Services was able to convince other senior officers that the Army's chief concern was 'with the health and not the morals of the troops'.[40]

Only one mission station was evacuated for health reasons, and the evacuation failed to have the desired effect. Cowal Creek Mission, near Higgins Field (known as Jacky Jacky earlier in the war), a major RAAF base with a large number of US Negro troops, was moved 60 miles south to Vrilya Point. But the Aborigines did not settle down and wandered the hinterland, 'some of the gins making their way

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39. MP729/6, item 16/402/111. General Officer Commanding, Queensland Lines of Communications Area, secret minute number 0485 to Allied Land Force Headquarters, 12 January 1943.

40. ibid. Minute, Director General of Medical Services to the Adjutant General, 27 February 1943.

back into the area of the negro camp'.[41] Shortly afterwards, the Negro troops were removed to another area and as there had been no evidence of white troops, either Australian or American, having sexual relations with the Aborigines, the Aborigines were permitted to return to Cowal Creek. This one attempt to solve the health problem through evacuation had failed and confirmed the difficulty of evacuation as a general solution.

As the Army examined the possibility that Aborigines in Cape York might assist the Japanese, similar concerns were being felt in Western Australia. As in Queensland, the cause of the concern was the apparently pro-Japanese statements uttered by discontented Aborigines and the claims by many whites that Aborigines were disloyal. In Western Australia, the question of the security of Lutheran missions had been resolved early in the war. The evacuation of Beagle Bay and Lombadina Missions had been proposed by Army Intelligence but was quickly quashed by H.I. Bray.[42] The Army's main concern was with de-tribalised Aborigines not under the control of missions. Although the State government generally opposed the Army's security measures, the de-tribalised Aborigines in Western Australia lacked the support of the churches and the Army had a freer

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41. ibid. Minute, Commander Torres Strait Force, to Headquarters First Australian Army, 8 May 1943.

42. 993, item 365/44. Letter, H.I. Bray to A.P. Elkin, April 1944.

hand in imposing its controls over them.

By June 1942, the Deputy Director of Security for Western Australia had been alerted to the possibility that de-tribalised Aborigines of the south west might be disloyal, and requested that Bray provide him with the names, addresses and types of occupation for all Aborigines south of Geraldton and within 100 miles of the coast![43] The idea was impractical. Bray argued that the Aborigines moved from place to place and from job to job and it would therefore be impossible to keep the information up to date. Some Aborigines were exempt from his control and were entitled to the full rights of white citizens. Furthermore, although his Protectors of Aborigines knew the names of adult male Aborigines in employment, they could not be expected to know the names of all the dependents of these men. Although Bray's arguments quashed the scheme, the Deputy Director of Security, still convinced that controls of this type were necessary, looked for more practical ways of imposing them.

Aborigines in the north west were also thought to be disloyal. Echoing the concerns which had been expressed in north Queensland, an Army Chaplain reporting on his visit to northern mission stations stated that

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43. 993, item 592/43. Letter, Deputy Director of Security Western Australia, to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 20 June 1942.

> missionary and station managers seem to agree that all natives should be taken inland in the event of an invasion. A stick of tobacco would buy any of them ... They have been told for years that the Jap is their friend, and that he will one day save them from the white man who has taken their country.[44]

Like Beaman, the Chaplain's claims reflected guilt at the alienation of the land and the subsequent treatment of Aborigines.

By July 1942, the Army's opinion of Aborigines had hardened. Concerned about the statements being uttered by Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines', Army Intelligence became convinced that Aborigines were sympathetic to the Japanese. An Intelligence Summary stated:

> Investigations disclose that natives and half-castes in the Mullewa, Yalgoo, Mount Magnet, Cue, Bigbell, Reedy, Meekatharra, Wiluna Areas are definitely sympathetic to the enemy. If there was an invasion, it is considered that they would be prepared to help the enemy. It has been common talk among the natives that when the Japs come they would be boss. Strong anti-ally feeling was first aroused when all rifles were impressed.[45]

The apparently arbitrary impressment of rifles or the rationing of tobacco tended to emphasise the Aborigines' powerlessness. Hence, minor wartime constraints were

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44. AWM Canberra, series 54, item 177/2/3; Confidential and Unofficial Report and some general comments resulting from a visit to North West Lines of Communication Area by Chaplain A.L. Bulbeck, 1942. Report by Chaplain Bulbeck, undated.

45. MP729/6, item 29/401/626. Letter, Prime Minister to the Minister for the Army, 24 July 1942.

sufficient to upset the Aboriginal population, triggering pro-Japanese statements. This Intelligence Summary had come to the attention of the Prime Minister, who remained sceptical despite its assured tone. Curtin asked Forde, the Minister for the Army, to have Army authorities in Western Australia discuss the question with State government authorities. He thought they would be able to provide '... the real attitude of the aborigines'.[46]

Army officers had already discussed the question of the security of Aborigines with Bray, but Bray had been unable to curb the Army's belief that Aborigines were '... possible potential enemies'.[47] By June 1942 the Army planned the removal of all nomadic, unemployed and aged and infirm Aborigines between Carnarvon and Derby to points 100 miles inland.

Again, Bray was successful in scotching these plans, pointing out that the Aborigines removed inland would not remain where they were sent, returning to their tribal areas on the coast. He also argued that the cost of creating additional inland Aboriginal settlements would be very high. While mission stations and government ration stations remained where they were, the Aborigines using

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46. ibid.

47. 993, item 592/43. Letter, Secretary Pastoralists' Association of Western Australia to the Commissioner of Native Affairs, 20 June 1942.

them remained under supervision. Evacuation, argued Bray, would lead to loss of control. The Commander of the Western Australian Lines of Communication Area, realising that the control of Aboriginal labour was of more concern to the State government than the security question, attempted to persuade Bray to reconsider the plan arguing that

> if there is an invasion, there is every chance that practically all natives would be liquidated by the enemy before they left these shores. The labour problem, after the war, would then be most difficult.[48]

He did not explain why the enemy would 'liquidate' those who were supposed to be sympathetic. Despite the claim that the plan had support among those whites who lived in the area, Bray refused to accept it.

Finding no support for the evacuation of the Aborigines, the Army moved to impose strict control over their movements. The control of the Aborigines fell to Lieutenant Colonel Garner of the Special Mobile Force based at Moora. Garner set out rules governing the movements and employment of Aborigines, in which Moore River Native Settlement, already an institution hated by Aborigines, was turned into an internment camp for them. Aborigines were

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48. WA State Archives, series 993, item 102/42; Natives - North West Areas - Evacuation of all Nomadic, Unemployed, Aged and Infirm Natives from Coastal Areas Between Derby and Carnarvon to Areas 100 Miles Inland. Letter, Brigadier Commanding Western Australian Lines of Communication Area to Commissioner for Native Affairs, 29 March 1943.

not permitted to leave the settlement except when going to work; all employment of Aborigines was to be approved by the Special Mobile Force; no Aborigine was to enter any town under any circumstances.[49] As far as the Army was concerned it mattered little if Aborigines were holders of Certificates of Exemption, or whether they were 'full-blood' or 'quadroon'. Colour was everything. 'So long as he was considered dark enough to appear a native he had to be under control of an employer with the knowledge of the Police Officer in charge of the district'.[50]

Exasperated at the Army's refusal to listen to his views on the matter, Bray complained to the State Minister for the North West:

> As far as I can gather, the restrictions have come about because of a fear that the natives, in particular the half-castes, are potential aiders and abettors to the enemy should the latter invade us. Possibly this alleged fear is born of a conscious feeling on the part of our whites that the half-caste has been neglected in the past and sweated in regard to wages conditions. ...
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> Officially I am unaware of any substantial reasons for the attitude of the Military Authorities, and can only ascribe it to an inborn fear, unsupported by good ground, that the half-caste is likely to retaliate if the enemy arrives. ... The full-blood native hates the

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49. WA Archives, series 993, item 592/43; Evacuation and Military Control of Natives in Coastal Areas South of Northampton. Rules for Control of Aborigines in Moore River Native Settlement, undated.

50. ibid. Letter, Commissioner for Native Affairs, to Constable G. Meyer, Protector of Natives, Three Springs, 27 June 1942.

> Japanese ... I do not think the half-caste would let us down, but possibly he would be more enthusiastic to our cause if we treated him as a human being. Treat a man as a dog and he might act as a dog.[51]

The Army's instructions were, he thought, 'thoughtless in preparation, ... irksome in character' and would 'harass the natives and ... turn them against us in our efforts as a nation'.[52] Here Bray demonstrated a rare understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and the way this could shape an assessment of Aboriginal 'loyalty'. He clearly saw that the perception of Aboriginal loyalty was based mainly upon pre-war exploitation of Aborigines and the projection onto Aborigines of a desire to retaliate if given an opportunity to do so by the Japanese. This view acknowledged that much of the relationship between white and Aboriginal Australians was marked by repression, though many whites represented their relations with Aborigines as benign and paternal guidance.

Bray argued that the Army's instructions had the effect of separating the Aborigines from the nation's war effort, whereas a more constructive approach would have been to enlist their support. This would allow them to feel that they were contributing. It could be achieved thought Bray,

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51. ibid. Letter, Commissioner for Native Affairs to the Minister for the North West, 16 July 1942.

52. ibid. Letter, Commissioner for Native Affairs to the Commissioner of Police, 5 November 1942.

by enrolling Aborigines in the Army without pay, except for a tobacco issue, and allowing them to continue in private employment. Their movements could be controlled by the issue of Army leave passes. Bray had already imposed his own strict controls on Aborigines to ensure that maximum employment was achieved.

By September 1942, the Army had formalised its control over Western Australian Aborigines by passing a proclamation under National Security Regulations requiring employed Aborigines over the age of 14 to be issued with a 'Military Permit'. Permits were written in either red or black ink. Red signified that the bearer was believed to be 'subversive' and required close attention. Black signified that the bearer was considered trustworthy. Three types of permit existed. Area permits permitted the Aborigine to live and work in a stated area, property permits authorised the Aborigine to live and work on a single property from which he was not to move, and travelling permits were temporary permits allowing Aborigines to travel from place to place. Later, a fourth category of permit, occupational permits, was introduced. These were for those Aborigines employed in seasonal work, and allowed them to follow the flow of work on offer. Unemployed Aborigines were issued with identity cards. Aborigines who became unemployed were to report to 'the nearest duly authorised person', usually local Volunteer Defence Force commanders, where they were to surrender

their work permits and be issued with an indentity card. They were then to proceed direct to Moore River Native Settlement.[53]

The Moore River Settlement functioned as an orphanage, reformatory, penal settlement, vocational training centre and camping place for indigent Aborigines. Even before the war it had received sharp criticism from Aboriginal welfare organisations who claimed it was poorly administered. One staff member wrote of Moore River in July 1943 that there were

> over a hundred children and young women in four dormitories, two for girls and two for boys. They are herded together like cattle. Young women over twenty, babies, toddlers and school-girls. The beds are double-decker, all close together, and two in most beds ... Except for a dance for the older ones held sometimes every three weeks, there are no pleasures. They are locked up like fowls after an early tea every night, winter and summer. No light, no fire, no recreation at all ... no wonder they run away. The police are sent after them, the men are imprisoned and the girls flogged and put in cells

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53. AWM Canberra, series 54, item 39/1/2; Proclamation, Commonwealth of Australia, Protected and Controlled Area (Native and Coastal). Proclamation dated 31 March 1943. See also 52, item 9/5/21. Instruction - 'Australian Military Forces Military Control of Natives', 21 August 1942. This War Diary also includes samples of permits issued to Aborigines. Correspondence relating to the proclamation and control of Aborigines can also be found in AA Melbourne, series MP508, item 4/702/1116; Protected and Controlled Areas Native and Coastal.

for fourteen days.[54]

The Army's controls therefore represented a significant disincentive to the Aborigines. Moore River, already a hated establishment, became even more so.

Army Field Security units in Western Australia began to find that the administration of this complex system consumed most of their time and staff. Patrols scoured the countryside arresting unemployed Aborigines or those thought to be spreading 'pro-Japanese propaganda', where they could be found, and sending them to Moore River.[55] By September 1942, the control of Aborigines had been extended north from Mogumber to Broome, and a Corporal was stationed permanently at Moore River to supervise the Aborigines there. In the north, unemployed Aborigines were to camp in areas designated by local police officers.

By August 1943, the Army was prepared to lift the restrictions it had imposed upon the movements of

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54. AA Canberra, series A571, item 46/484 PI. Pamphlet, The Tragedy of Native Affairs, issued by the Native Welfare Council of Western Australia, undated. See also Anna Haebich, 'On the Inside: Moore River Native Settlement 1930s', in Bill Gammage and Andrew Markus (eds.), 'All That Dirt': Aborigines 1938: An Australian 1938 Monograph, History Project Inc., Canberra, 1982. Even in the 1930s, Aborigines at Moore River Native Settlement were virtual prisoners subject to discipline more appropriate to a gaol.

55. AWM, series 52, item 9/5/21; Field Security Section - North Australia. See entry for 9 August 1942. See also, item 9/5/10; 'P' Field Security Section. Entries for February, March and April 1943 refer to the arrest of several Aborigines for spreading 'pro-Japanese propaganda'.

Aborigines through the permit system. Though many pastoralists had objected to the controls when they had first been imposed, some now sought to extend what they had come to appreciate as the benefits of the system. After the Army lifted its restrictions, a pastoralist from Moora told Bray that the Aborigines had taken a holiday in celebration. He said that farmers and pastoralists were now sorry to see the restrictions lifted because Aborigines had rendered 'good service' under the Army controls. The presence of troops in the area had had beneficial effects upon the Aborigines, he argued. Bray was undecided about the matter. 'Personally I am not favourable to this idea because of its duress aspect. However, in the national interest it is very necessary to keep the natives at work, and ... I propose to bear the whole subject in mind',[56] he wrote. Apart from Bray's brief reference to what he called the 'duress aspect', little thought was given to the oppressive conditions under which Aborigines had been forced to live. Despite the cessation of its control measures, the Army maintained plans for the 'rounding up' of Aborigines if the situation worsened. These plans remained ready to implement till the end of the war.

As in Queensland, sexual contact between Aborigines and soldiers formed an important consideration in the Army's

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56. 993, item 592/43. Letter, Commissioner for Native Affairs to Major Ednie Brown, GS1 Western Australian Lines of Communication Area, 24 August 1943.

plans to impose controls upon Aborigines. As the question of the security of Aborigines began to emerge in Western Australia, the perceived problem of sexual contacts came to the fore, particularly at Port Hedland. The removal of Aborigines from the Port Hedland district was first proposed in response to the arrival of 95 soldiers of 29 Garrison Battalion. Reports came to Bray that 'the female half-castes both married and single are soldier mad'.[57] Army authorities requested that the Aborigines be evacuated from the town area stressing the need to reduce the likelihood of sexual contacts and to maintain security and Bray agreed, declaring Port Hedland a prohibited area for Aborigines. Bray arranged for passes to be issued to those Aborigines in employment so that they could enter the town. This plan met with opposition from the 'Euralian Society', a club for 'part-Aborigines', and from local pastoralists who, fearing loss of control over their labour, encouraged Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' to boycott the issue of passes.[58] But the pastoralists' opposition was eventually overcome. Few Aboriginal women were employed, and the issue of passes excluded them from

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57. WA State Archives, series 993, item 919/42; Port Hedland - (1) Proposed Evacuation of Natives - (2) Suggested Declaration of a Prohibited Area. Letter, J.H. Bisley, Officer in Charge, Native Hospital Port Hedland to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 30 May 1942.

58. ibid. Letter, J.H. Bisley, Officer in Charge Native Hospital Port Hedland to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 9 September 1942.

the town, solving both the sexual contact and security problems.

The resentment welling up within the Aboriginal community in response to the Army's arbitrary control of their movements, left Aborigines susceptible to the influence of the Communist Party. The Communist Party possessed by far the most progressive Aboriginal policies of any political party at that time including complete economic and legal equality with whites and the granting of the voluntary franchise. Donald McLeod, a communist, had developed a great sympathy for the plight of Aborigines in Western Australia and performed a catalytic role in the encouragement of Aboriginal radicalism in the Port Hedland district. He organized strikes and protests in response to the pass system imposed upon the Port Hedland Aborigines. By October 1944, Bray had become concerned at what he saw as communist 'intrusion' into Aboriginal affairs. Surprisingly, Bray supported some of the Communist Party policies but his fundamental disagreement with the Communist Party was with their view of the intelligence of Aborigines. Writing to the Minister for the North West, Bray commented that a recent Communist Party radio broadcast suggested '... that the natives possess an intelligent capacity, but you know as well as I do that this is not so, and their future rests mainly in the hands

of a benevolent and sympathetic white administration ...'[59] Furthermore, Bray thought that Aborigines were 'not of stable mental capacity' and were not 'equipped educationally' to resist the allurements of communism.[60] But the attraction of the communist party was simply that it offered more. Although Bray may have placed great store in the State government's 'benevolence and sympathy', Aborigines came more and more to regard the wartime controls, imposed by the Commonwealth government through the Army with the cooperation of the State government, as imperious and paternalistic. The failure of either the State government or the Army effectively to encourage Aborigines to support the war effort had contributed to the appeal of the communist party. Ironically, the developing Communist Party influence among Aborigines tended to confirm to the Security Service the need for strict control over the Aborigines it continued to regard as 'potentially disloyal'. Elsewhere in north Australia, tribal or partly de-tribalised Aborigines were described as 'communists' simply on the basis of their cultural rejection of materialism.[61]

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59. WA Archives, series 993, item 77/44; Communist Party - Native Policy. Note, Bray to the Minister for the North West, 20 January 1944.

60. ibid. Minute, Bray to the Minister for the North West, 2 October 1944.

61. 54, item 85/10/5. 'Instructions to Airmen who Force-land on the North West Coastal Area of Australia', written by an AIF Guerilla Group Major, undated.

Bray was also concerned about communist influence among Aborigines flowing into the post-war era. His concern stemmed from his view that depressed economic conditions might return with the end of the war and that Aborigines, able to find well paying work during the war, would be forced to return to low wages or even payment in kind after the war. This was likely to stimulate demand for higher wages which pastoralists and others employing Aborigines would oppose. 'Should they ask for wages, particularly if urged by native agitators, trouble is likely to be caused', wrote Bray.[62]

Throughout, the Army and civilian advocates of security controls over Aborigines had been caught in a dilemma. As in Queensland, there had been numerous reports of Aboriginal disloyalty, including some from within the Services. Although some Aborigines had certainly uttered pro-Japanese statements, these reports of disloyalty had not been altogether dispassionate. Often, those who originated them had lived among Aborigines before the war, yet had developed no real understanding of them. Particularly in north Australia where the white population had often been outnumbered by Aborigines, and where the recent history of race relations had been punctuated by inter-racial violence, whites tended to attribute to

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62. 993, item 365/44. Letter, Commissioner for Native Affairs to Professor A.P. Elkin, April 1944.

Aborigines a desire for retaliation. Coupled with the threat to north Australia from the Japanese whose propaganda claimed the support of indigenous populations against their colonial masters, white Australians had come to regard Aborigines as a significant threat. Yet the stern measures they advocated for the control of Aborigines were at odds with their continued desire to exploit Aboriginal labour. Cheap Aboriginal labour was in great demand to meet wartime production in the pastoral and agricultural industries and removal of Aborigines to inland settlements would deprive these industries of this labour force. Yet if Aborigines really were hostile to the national war effort, this drastic action was required. This dilemma was illustrated by T. Quilty, a pastoralist of Coolibah Station, Victoria River Downs, who urged the Prime Minister on one hand to prevent Aborigines leaving stations to improve their conditions while in the next breath stated that Aborigines were 'right with the Jap' and should be rounded up and moved inland.[63] At least part of Quilty's concern for the threat posed by the Aborigines could have stemmed from his own mistreatment of them. 'The Aboriginal does not work for food', he stated with assurance, 'there is plenty in the bush. Tobacco and tea is what they crave.

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63. AA Darwin, series F1, item 43/24; Aboriginal Matters General. Letter, T. Quilty to the Prime Minister, 10 February 1943.

64. ibid.

for and entices them to work'.[64] As described in earlier chapters, poor conditions, including meagre rationing, were common on north Australian pastoral properties.[65]

The Army's initial plan called for the removal of the aged, infirm, the very young and the unemployed - those least able or likely to carry out pro-Japanese actions - while leaving able-bodied adults in employment on pastoral and agricultural properties under the control of the property owner. Although the removal of unproductive Aborigines would not result in great improvements in security, it would be of benefit to graziers and farmers. It was not surprising that the plan received unanimous support from the Volunteer Defence Corps battalion.

Bray's public concern was with the potential for loss of control over the removed Aborigines. This would certainly have been a problem. However, another potential problem was that once institutionalised, the Aborigines would remain a burden on Bray's administration. Property owners might later resist the return of the dependents of their Aboriginal labourers. In any case, when Bray refused to

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65. Another reason for Quilty's concern was that he had met the convicted Aboriginal murderer Tiger, who had been released from Darwin gaol after the first Japanese air raid there on 19 February 1942. Tiger had explained his release by saying 'Japanese been make him [whites] let me go'. This incident was also recorded by 2/4 Independent Company as an indication that the Aborigines of the Bradshaw, Auvergne and Timber Creek areas in the Northern Territory had 'no particular fear of the JAPANESE'. See 52, item 25/3/4. Weekly report number 7, 29 June 1942.

permit removal, the Army resorted to its compromise solution - the complicated and administratively difficult permit system. This gave the Army the control it alleged was necessary (despite Bray's acknowledgement that fear of the Aborigines was 'unsupported by good ground'). Indeed, it is possible to see the controls imposed upon Aborigines in Western Australia in the name of security, as being, in reality, chiefly concerned with maintaining or increasing the control of white interests over Aboriginal labour.

While the Army considered evacuation and other controls of Aborigines in Cape York and in Western Australia, other potentially more sinister developments were taking place in the Gulf Country and in the Kimberleys. As the Japanese threat to north Australia developed, the Army had created Volunteer Defence Corps guerilla bands based on northern pastoral properties from the Kimberleys to the north Queensland coast. Officially, service in these guerilla units was to be strictly limited to white station hands, but a few Aborigines such as the group trained by Longmore and Mitchell in the Kimberleys, managed to serve for short periods. In the Gulf Country, particularly after mid-1943, several Islanders and Aborigines served.

Selected leaders of the guerilla groups were initially sent to the Army's guerilla warfare training school at Forster, New South Wales, but as this removed scarce station personnel from pastoral properties, Army training

teams later visited properties to conduct training courses which lasted a mere ten to fourteen days. Into the hands of these barely trained men were put powerful armouries. Typical of the armouries were those at Victoria River Downs and Manbuloo stations. Victoria River was stocked with 24 rifles, two Lewis machine guns, two Owen sub-machine guns, a large stock of ammunition and explosives for demolitions. At Manbuloo there were twelve rifles with 3,000 rounds of ammunition, thirty hand grenades and 100 pounds of gelignite.[66] But the Army lacked control over this amorphous force. In Queensland, where 23 guerilla groups had been formed, the Army could only provide an estimate of the total number of men involved.[67]

Though Aborigines were excluded from these guerilla groups, they were seen as likely to perform important de facto service in the event of invasion. On reconnaissance patrols across the Northern Territory, the 2/4 Independent Company had visited pastoral properties to identify whites who might serve in these guerilla units and to list the

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66. MP742/1, item 286/1/93. Letter, Major General Stevens, Commander Northern Territory Force to HQ Allied Land Forces, 28 January 1943.

67. MP729/6, item 4/401/177. Minute, Director of Military Training to the Director of Staff Duties, 23 May 1942. The estimated number of men in the Queensland guerilla groups was 297.

68. 52, item 25/3/4. Weekly report of May 1942. In contrast, selected whites were described by the unequivocal phrase 'suitable for enlistment'.

Aborigines who 'would follow'.[68] Though several of the Volunteer Defence Corps commanders realised the importance of employing Aborigines as guides and scouts, it was not long before accusations of disloyalty were being levelled against the Aborigines of the Gulf. Claims that Gulf Aborigines were disloyal conformed so closely to the pattern of Cape York and Western Australia that the phrases sound familiar. 'Aborigines are a big potential menace', wrote the commander of an Army reconnaissance patrol. They were

> semi-sophisticated and have no great respect for their employers or the white man generally. They would readily ... cooperate with the Japs [and] ... may easily bring about the destruction of guerilla bands, as well as seriously embarrass larger units. ... station people [should be organized] ... to evacuate all blacks ...[69]

Captain R. McIntyre, a veteran of the First World War, was the Volunteer Defence Corps guerilla force commander at Burketown. Concerned that Aborigines might be disloyal, he asked his superior headquarters if he could enlist Aborigines under the control of the Queensland Protector of Aborigines and whether he had the power to prevent Aborigines from falling into the hands of the enemy, if the

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69. 54, item 831/3/4. Reconnaissance report, Captain A.J. Marshall, undated.

70. AWM, series 54, item 1008/2/13; The Activities of the Volunteer Defence Corps in the Peninsula, and Gulf Areas of North West Queensland, 1942. Letter, AA&QMG, Corps Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps, Queensland Line of Communication Area, to Headquarters 'D' Group VDC, 26 May 1942.

Japanese landed.[70] His headquarters responded that no Aborigines were to be enlisted in the Volunteer Defence Corps, but more significantly, that

> ... should any person, soldier or civilian be aware of subversive action, intended or actual, it is his duty to report the matter immediately to the nearest Military Commander, and, if urgently necessary to take any justifiable preventive action, which must be reported to senior authority.[71]

Clearly, many Army personnel, including members of the Volunteer Defence Corps already regarded Aborigines as 'a big potential menace' capable of threatening the destruction of guerilla bands. McIntyre may have considered their evacuation but there were few resources with which to achieve this. Mission stations and pastoral properties lacked sufficient stocks of petrol as a result of wartime petrol rationing. There were too few motor vehicles anyway and although horses were available, the Aboriginal population of the Gulf area was too large to move by this means alone. It is also questionable whether Aborigines would have accepted evacuation. Tribal and partly de-tribalised Aborigines may have refused to be moved from their traditional lands.

By February 1943, with Japanese operations expanding into Dutch New Guinea, the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York had

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71. ibid. Author's emphasis. Despite instructions not to enlist Aborigines, McIntyre had enlisted at least two Islanders and was later to enlist an Aborigine named Frank Douglas.

assumed greater strategic significance than before. A RAAF squadron had been based at Karumba, and the Air Officer Commanding North Eastern Area began to be concerned about the sympathies of the Aborigines. Drawing inspiration from local whites, he too took the view that Aborigines might provide guides for the Japanese, might round up cattle to feed them and might assist the Japanese as an 'active Fifth Column whilst apparently passive, indolent and sleepy'.[72] He too argued that the Aborigines should be evacuated.

By April 1943 Army Intelligence accepted that Aborigines in the Gulf were a security threat. An Intelligence Report referred to their valuable local knowledge acquired through their work on pastoral properties throughout the Gulf hinterland:

> ... they would be of inestimable value to the enemy in an overland drive. That the enemy would have little difficulty in soliciting many of these people's services is borne out. These half-educated half-castes and aborigines have been largely influenced by Communist and anti-capitalist propaganda for many years, and can almost invariably be swayed by the agitator. They are extremely class-conscious and consider they have had a raw deal from the white man. These sentiments are not displayed to the white man's face, but are most evident when the coloured people are together in groups. There is little doubt that the Japs would find many of

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72. AA Canberra, series A1196, item 29/501/198 Part 1; Security of Aborigines in the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Areas. Letter, Air Officer Commanding North Eastern Area to the Secretary of the Air Board, 8 February 1943.

73. A373, item 5903. Extract, HQ Queensland Lines of Communication Intelligence Report for the week ending 1200 hours, 16 April 1943.

> them willing helpers.[73]

The author of this report was clearly confused. Why would those influenced by communist propaganda willingly help the Japanese? Prejudice obscured the reality of world politics.

Confronted with the possibility of invasion, assured reports of Aboriginal disloyalty including official Army intelligence reports, and the impossibility of evacuating the Aborigines, Volunteer Defence Corps guerillas discussed the action they might have to take:

> Inevitably, at the VDC camps there was discussion about the possibility of invasion by the Japanese, and what would the aboriginals do in such an eventuality and the consensus was that should the Japanese be able to get hold of them they would be invaluable guides.
>
> Colonel Murray was in charge of the VDC at least up here in ... north [Queensland]. His advice was that should the aboriginals become treacherous they should be shot.[74]

Similar plans were discussed by the pastoralist guerillas in the Kimberleys.[75]

Many pastoralists in north Australia had developed

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74. Letter, Ronald D. Collins, to the author, 30 April 1986. Collins' statement is supported by another correspondent, Alan Atkinson, who wrote that 'the instructions given regarding Aboriginals was [sic.] very detrimental to their well being and I am sure that they would never have been carried out ... '. This issue is a particularly sensitive one and several correspondents were reluctant to discuss it. Even Atkinson refused to be drawn on the question preferring to allude to it in this way.

75. Letter, Wilfred Thun, to the author, 1 June 1986.

associations with Aborigines over lengthy periods, relied on their labour and had developed firm friendships with their Aboriginal employees. They may never have taken this action. But many other pastoralists held Aborigines in low regard. The powerful armouries in the hands of these partially trained guerillas, combined with the tensions created by the threat of invasion and the suspicion that Aborigines were disloyal presented great potential for disaster.

In April 1943 the 'Gulf Scare' came perilously close to providing the trigger. What came to be known as the 'Gulf Scare' was the belief that a Japanese force had landed on the north Queensland coast at Nassau River, north east of Burketown. An Aboriginal stockman reported a Japanese barge discharging men and equipment near Inkerman station. The local guerilla unit and patrols of the North Australia Observer Unit were alerted and in the process, rumours spread through the district that a Japanese force had landed. Soldiers and civilians alike were gripped by fear.[76] The residents of Normanton and the surrounding district began to evacuate themselves to the south. After ten days searching, Volunteer Defence Corps units reported that no sign of a landing could be found, and the considerable tension which had built over the preceding days, began to dissipate. While the 'Scare' lasted, the

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76. Richard and Helen Walker, Curtin's Cowboys, p. 66.

possibility existed that poorly trained Volunteer Defence Corpsmen, over-excited by the 'invasion' might have identified local Aborigines with the enemy and attacked them.

Unlike Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders were rarely accused of disloyalty. After their brief mutiny in December 1943, an Army Field Security Section investigation aimed at identifying the ringleaders unearthed an Islander Lance-Bombadier in the Coast Artillery who, like some Aborigines, had made statements to his Islander subordinates to the effect that '... he would welcome the Japs to the area'.[77] A white Allied Works Council employee and a white soldier were also found to have encouraged the Islanders to agitate.[78] The Army's reaction to these 'subversives' was quite unlike its reaction to Aborigines who had made similar statements. The two whites were removed from the area and the Islander was disciplined, but continued to serve.[79] In mitigation it was conceded that the Islander had not attempted to organize other soldiers

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77. 52, item 9/5/10. See entry for 23 February 1944. The ringleaders of the mutiny were never identified.

78. ibid. See entries for 16 January 1944 and 23 January 1944. See also Peel, Isles of the Torres Strait, p. 117. Peel states that militant trade unionists among the white servicemen on Thursday Island had encouraged Islanders to fight for better conditions in the post war period.

79. The form of discipline is not recorded.

80. MP742/1, item 85/1/445. Report, Major General J.J. Murray to Land Headquarters, 18 February 1944.

but was merely expressing his own opinion.[80] This reaction reflected far greater understanding of the tensions facing Islanders, than was generally acknowledged in the case of Aborigines who uttered similar statements.

Why was the Army's reaction so different? By the overwhelming scale of their contribution to the war effort, Islanders had clearly demonstrated their loyalty. Even before Japan entered the war Islanders working in the pearling industry had passed intelligence to the Navy on Japanese activities,[81] they had enlisted enthusiastically and later they had participated without incident in the internment of Japanese pearlers, many of whom had been their friends and employers. Furthermore, Islanders did not possess the bushcraft skills which made mainland Aborigines so much better guides through north Australia. But perhaps of most importance was the nature of Islander culture. Unlike Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders possessed a culture which was similar in many ways to European culture. Islanders lived in permanent villages, they accumulated personal wealth and power, they maintained gardens and each community had an established heirarchy. In short, Islanders were not as alien as Aborigines. While Islanders possessed cultural traits which were recognisable to white Australians, Aborigines seemed alien. They were

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81. 78, item; Lugger Sightings 1941. Report, Naval Officer Commanding Townsville, 26 December 1941.

outsiders - strangers - on whom it was easier to lavish suspicion.[82]

The security and health issues marked the nadir of relations between the Services and Aborigines and reflected the extent to which Service attitudes to Aborigines were ambiguous. Sometimes, the same Aborigines were regarded as disloyal by Army Intelligence but essential to the war effort by the units which employed them. The Services' perceptions of both the security and health threats posed by Aborigines had been highly coloured by racism, emanating mainly from individuals whose attitudes to Aborigines had obscured their view. The fear of invasion, guilt over past treatment of Aborigines and the projection onto Aborigines of the way they themselves would react under the same circumstances, led many whites including some servicemen to see Aborigines as a threat to security. There had also been a failure to understand Aboriginal culture. Their traditional insistence upon reciprocity had left them dissatisfied with the behaviour of whites and their non-acquisitiveness had been interpreted as evidence of communism.

Aboriginal powerlessness had been the inspiration for

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82. However, in a review of Peel's Isles of the Torres Strait in Oceania, vol. 19, 1948-49, p. 198, Ronald Berndt noted communist interest in Aboriginal and Islander affairs and forecast increasing communist influence unless progressive policies were adopted for the management of Aboriginal and Islander affairs.

apparently pro-German and pro-Japanese statements. Wartime hysteria had left white Australians in no mood to coolly interpret these statements as the pleas for equality and justice that they really were. Of most importance however, was the neutrality of the north Australian tribal Aborigines. These Aborigines, tied to their tribal lands, would be obliged by their culture to remain in areas that might be occupied by the Japanese. To ensure their own survival they would adopt the same techniques they used in their relations with whites. They would attempt to win the best conditions they could by cooperating with their new masters. The Services, and the Army in particular, were too ready to read into this the idea that Aborigines were actively hostile to the Australian war effort and would willingly assist the Japanese by providing their excellent bushcraft skills and detailed local knowledge. In concentrating on Aboriginal 'disloyalty', the Services missed the opportunity to formally encourage them to be fully commited to Australia's defence effort.

Despite the Services' assumption that Aborigines were disloyal, no evidence has been found to suggest that any Aborigine or 'part-Aborigine' took action intended to thwart the national defence effort. They did not lack opportunities. The previous Chapters have described the rescues of airmen, the construction of airfields, the movement of stores, coastwatching, the operation of small ships and many other activities which presented Aborigines

with opportunities for sabotage, the gathering of intelligence and the spreading of disinformation. The war provided a dilemma as much for Aborigines as for the Services. Aborigines were faced with opportunities to either support or frustrate the national defence effort. Overwhelmingly, they chose to give their support. In many cases, Aborigines eagerly assisted the Services for much less reward than was commonly demanded by white Australians.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of formal bars to the service of non-Europeans, by the end of the war, between two and three thousand Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders had enlisted. A further 150 had served as de facto servicemen, patrolling and performing other military duties without formal recognition - and usually, pay - along the north Australian coast. A third group of between two and three thousand had supported the Services' defence effort as civilian labourers. Despite the scale of this contribution, Commonwealth and State governments consistently underestimated the Aboriginal and Islander contribution to the war effort.

The upheaval of the war years resulted in loss of control over Aboriginal affairs by State and Commonwealth bureaucracies. Manpower shortages and restrictions on travel tended to isolate the authorities from the Aboriginal community, particularly in rural areas. In the rapid social change brought by the war, control over the extent to which Aborigines and Islanders were becoming involved in the war effort slipped from the bureaucrats' grasp. By 1947, the Commonwealth and State governments had only the vaguest idea of the numbers of Aborigines involved. In New South Wales, the number of Aborigines

thought to have been enlisted varied from 100 to 500. In Queensland, the State government thought that 700 Islanders had enlisted - the true figure was closer to 830 - and lamely admitted that the number of Aboriginal servicemen was unknown. In Western Australia, estimates of enlisted Aborigines varied from 300 to 400 and little was known of the employment of Aboriginal labour by the RAAF at Drysdale River Mission. In South Australia the Protector of Aborigines thought that 100 men had served, but the Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Board put the figure at 250.[1] In April 1946 the Commonwealth Government claimed that there had been no 'full-blood' Aboriginal servicemen enlisted in the Northern Territory.[2]

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1. A431, item 46/1607. Minutes of an Inter-departmental Committee on 4 February 1947. A roll of 803 Torres Strait Islanders who served in the segregated units of the Torres Strait Force was provided by Central Army Records Office, Melbourne. In addition to these men, at least 27 other Islanders served in the Second AIF, mainland Militia or the Volunteer Defence Corps. For the estimates of the Aborigines' Protection Board of South Australia see SA State Archives, EX AP39 series 3, item 73A/1/3. Letter, Secretary, Aborigines' Protection Board to HQ South Australian lines of Communication Area, 9 January 1946. Also see Public Records Group 387/2; Papers of the Aborigines Protection Board, Aborigines Protection Board Report for 1942. The estimates of the Protection Board were probably the most accurate. By the end of 1942 the Board had noted the enlistment of 30 men from Koonibba Lutheran Mission, 30 from Point McLeay Station and over 30 from Point Pearce. Therefore, over 90 men from missions and government stations alone were already serving by the end of 1942.

2. AA Canberra, series A431, item 46/1357. Letter, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department to the Assistant Secretary, Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, Melbourne Branch, 1 August 1946.

Contrary to the estimates of the Commonwealth and State governments, the contribution by Aborigines and Islanders had been impressive. By June 1944, Australia's Aboriginal, 'part-Aboriginal' and Islander population was estimated to be about 76,000.[3] Therefore, at least one in every 20 Aborigines, 'part-Aborigines' and Islanders (or 5 per cent), had made a direct contribution to the war effort either as a serviceman or woman or as a labourer. With a significant portion of the Aboriginal population living a tribal and nomadic life, and therefore regarded as of no military value for formal enlistment, and official Service policies excluding non-Europeans from service, this level of participation was a remarkable achievement. Taken alone, the contribution of Torres Strait Islanders was even more impressive. Approximately one in every four Islanders had given formally enlisted military service by the end of the war. This rate of participation was higher than that for white Australians, for whom one in every 7.5 had served. Despite these levels of participation, Aborigines and Islanders were excluded from the 'digger myth'. Together with Aboriginal and Islander participation in war

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3. Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, no. 37, 1946-47, p. 741. See also L.R. Smith, The Aboriginal Population, p. 203. Smith puts the 1944 population, as estimated by State census, at 67,886 plus a further 10,000 estimated by the Western Australian government to be 'out of contact'. The 1944 estimate by annual Aboriginal census was 75,795. The Official Year Book figure is therefore reasonably accurate.

industry - a subject only touched upon in this thesis - their contribution to the national war effort possibly represents the single greatest direct contribution to the modern Australian community by these Aboriginal and Islander Australians. Like few other issues, the Second World War had involved Aborigines and Islanders across the country - from the tribal Aborigines of East Arnhem Land, through the spectrum of adaptation to white social values, to the de-tribalised urban Aborigines and 'part-Aborigines' of the cities and towns of south east Australia.

White Australians too, had experienced contact with Aborigines and Islanders on a scale without precedent. The war had caused a major temporary redistribution of the white male population, bringing many to north Australia where they came into contact with Aborigines and Islanders. Other white Australian servicemen had found themselves serving with Aborigines or Islanders in campaigns from Greece and Crete to the Owen Stanleys and Borneo. Combined with the external threat to Australia, this enforced contact with Aborigines and Islanders led to the formation of new attitudes amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal servicemen. Comradeship and the shared experience of work and danger fashioned relationships based upon equality and cooperation rather than the social distance common in pre-war Australia.

Yet despite the contribution made by Aborigines and

Islanders and the generally favourable reaction of the individual serviceman to them, Service policies towards Aborigines and Islanders tended to remain inflexible and intolerant, propping up pre-war social attitudes despite the evidence from within the Services that a new approach was not only possible, but desirable in view of strategic developments. The need for a new approach had been made clear by the McEwen policy of 1939 which, as Commonwealth Government policy, represented an expression of the attitude the Services were expected to adopt. The McEwen policy with its implication that through assimilation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians would live together on equal terms, had been almost revolutionary for its time. Though its weaknesses - in particular, the ethnocentrism it displayed in assuming that Aborigines wished to become white Australians - are apparent with the benefit of hindsight, it did represent a significant change in the direction of Aboriginal policy. It presented conservative social forces, including the Services, with what they saw as unpalatable decisions. In view of the government direction to move towards assimilation, the resistance of the Service policy makers to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders cannot be attributed to direction from the political sphere.

Throughout the Second World War, the Services had faced a dilemma. On one hand there existed strong resistance to the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders, while on the

other there was a need to meet the manpower demands imposed on the Services by the conduct of the war. The resolution of this dilemma expressed itself in the ways which have been described in the preceding chapters, producing a variety of solutions to the problem of easing competing tensions. These solutions varied widely from place to place and throughout the course of the war and were sometimes contradictory. The variety of the solutions and the contradictions contained within some of them reflected in part the pressures upon the Services stemming from attempts to balance the rational requirements of military efficiency and the demand for manpower, with the essentially emotional issues of racism and prevailing social attitudes. The tensions created by these competing interests resulted in such anomalies as the policy of officially excluding non-Europeans, in particular Aborigines and Islanders, from voluntary military service, while simultaneously conducting an aggressive, even exploitative recruiting campaign among Torres Strait Islanders; maintaining the fiction of the policy of excluding non-Europeans through the height of the Japanese threat while at the same time allowing Aborigines and Islanders to enlist in large numbers; while denying the competence and efficacy of Aboriginal labourers, relying upon them to carry an important portion of the labour effort in maintaining Army and RAAF forces across the north of Australia; and while insisting that some Aborigines and

Islanders serve in segregated forces, integrating them elsewhere.

The perception that Aborigines constituted a security threat marked the extremes of these sometimes contradictory attitudes. While the Services regarded some Aborigines as 'potential enemies', the same Aborigines often found themselves assisting the war effort with their labour.

These clumsy, sometimes contradictory responses reflected the Services' inability to deal effectively with the social issues involved. The Services are structured, trained and socialised with the aims of surviving in battle and maintaining national sovereignty. They are necessarily conservative bodies resistant to social change and imbued with the aim of supporting the existing national political structure while at the same time accepting a position of subservience to it. For the most part, the British military tradition - from which the Australian military establishment draws its model - rejects the involvement of the military in politics. The question of the enlistment of Aborigines and Islanders raised the possibility of their sharing Service accommodation with and having command over white Australians thus challenging prevailing social attitudes. The admission of Aborigines and Islanders to military service therefore tended to bring the Services into conflict with their own ethos. Although the enlistment of totally de-tribalised individuals like Reg

Saunders and Charles Mene could be tolerated, the Services resisted opening their doors to Aborigines generally and particularly to partly de-tribalised or tribal Aborigines. Thus the bar to the enlistment of non-Europeans was employed by the Services to allow the admission of those who presented the least challenge to prevailing social attitudes, while excluding others. Tribal Aborigines presented such a challenge to the Service ethos that the exploitation of their military value had to be arranged without enlistment at all. Hence, the Services employed them as de facto servicemen withholding the benefits of formal enlistment.

Against the background of pre-war social attitudes to Aborigines and Islanders, Service policy makers saw the possibility that the free admission of Aborigines and Islanders would be a threat to the stability of the forces at a time when the nation could ill afford it. It was for this reason that the Army's Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation - an officer with prime responsibility for formulating the Army's recruitment policy - stated that white troops would not tolerate living in barracks with Aborigines. 'Certain of their characteristics make their proximity objectionable to white men',[4] he wrote. Ironically, this concern to maintain pre-war social values

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4. MP742/1, item 286/1/96. Minute, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation to Director of the Volunteer Defence Corps, 12 October 1943.

- to reject the opportunity offered by the McEwen policy and the war - led in some cases to the instability policy makers were trying to avoid. The mutinies in the Torres Strait Force, for example, were attributable to discriminatory pay policies which like the segregation of the Islander soldiers, had resulted from the Army's, and the Queensland government's desire to preserve the Islanders' pre-war economic position.

The desire to conform to the prevailing social attitudes tended to blind the Services to the contribution that Aborigines and Islanders were capable of making to the nation's defence. Although the Services were ready to see that the local knowledge, survival skills and involvement in the pastoral industry of north Australian Aborigines was of value to the Japanese, the contribution these skills might make to defence was often dismissed. It was only through the intervention of interested individuals like Thomson, Gribble, Murray, Scott, Dollery and others, that the military value of north Australian Aborigines came to be exploited by the Australian forces. Longmore's attempts to harness the skills of Kimberley Aborigines to the war effort were frustrated by the Western Australian government, which hoped to preserve the place of Aboriginal labour in the Kimberley district, and the Army which hoped to avoid what it regarded as the irksome role of shaping new social relations. Both were interested in preserving their own view of the status quo.

The contribution that Aborigines might make both in terms of their manpower and their specific skills of military value were also obscured by the Services' reluctance to enter into what they saw as social experimentation. Dollery's plan to raise an enlisted labour company from among the Aboriginal civilian labourers working for him in the Northern Territory foundered on this issue. Dollery had openly argued for an Army role in shaping post-war race relations in the Territory but his plan had lost momentum when it reached Land Headquarters in Melbourne for a decision. He was forced to confine himself to what he could achieve within Northern Territory Force. Even so, the reforms to the administration of Aboriginal labour introduced by Northern Territory Force were a remarkable achievement for their time. Had he had the support of Land Headquarters, Dollery could have gone further, cementing in place new standards for Aboriginal housing, rationing, conditions of labour, education and health. However, Land Headquarters was reluctant to become involved in what it saw as a political issue. Even Dollery's attempts to raise the pay of civilian labourers above the meagre 5/- per week - with its implications of placing pressure upon civilian employers to match the pay provided by the Army - failed to achieve political support and was not accepted by the Department of Treasury during the war.

The Services were too timourous in their attitude to

social experimentation. The McEwen assimilation policy of 1939, despite its overtones of cultural arrogance, surely pointed the way to a greater acceptance of Aboriginal and Islander servicemen. It was after all, Commonwealth government policy which the Services were obliged to follow and although it pertained strictly to the Northern Territory - the only place where the Commonwealth had responsibility for Aboriginal policy - it did reflect that Aborigines should be encouraged to 'develop' towards full citizenship embracing both the benefits and responsibilities involved.[5] How were Aborigines to demonstrate their acceptance of the responsibilities of citizenship if they were to be excluded from military service in time of war? Furthermore, the Services were perhaps the ideal Commonwealth Government institutions with which to press for greater Aboriginal and Islander access. They were large employers, had a high public profile - particularly in time of war - and those who served were subject to military discipline which would ensure that assimilation of Aborigines could go ahead even against opposition from within the ranks. By fully opening the Services to Aboriginal and Islander recruits who met the

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5. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 330. See also A659, item 39/1/10859. Report on Conference Proceedings, 21-23 April 1937. This file describes the 1937 Commonwealth and State Government conference regarding Aboriginal welfare. Discussions at this conference as well as contributions from A.P. Elkin and others, led to the formulation of the McEwen policy.

enlistment criteria, the assimilation policy, or at least that part of it which foreshadowed equal opportunity for Aborigines within the white community, could have worked - and been shown to work.[6] It could have presented other institutions, Commonwealth and State government as well as private enterprise, with new models of behaviour.

Events showed that even the limited admission of Aborigines and Islanders to the Services did provide new models of behaviour. The Service employment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory presented a model to civilian employers which, to a certain extent, they were forced to copy in order to continue to attract Aboriginal labour. Military service had also changed the Aborigines' and Islanders' view of themselves. In the Torres Strait, the relationship between the Islanders and the Queensland government underwent fundamental change in the years following the war:

> With the war at an end, returning government officials discovered that the old order could not be restored in its entirety. There was a clamour for 'citizen rights', access to alcohol, control

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6. As well as an increased role for Aborigines within the white community, the assimilation policy envisaged that Aborigines would reject their own culture and take up that of white Australians. This aspect of the policy would never have worked.

of earnings.[7]

But an opportunity for significant Aboriginal development had been missed. Instead of supporting the assimilation of Aborigines and Islanders, the Services were permitted to adopt their policies of excluding non-Europeans and although many Aborigines and Islanders managed to serve, their service received little public acknowledgement. The public face of the Services was set against Aborigines and Islanders and conformed to the perceived social attitudes of the time.

In the Australian community, war time military service has traditionally conferred benefits upon those who have performed it - membership of a powerful political lobby, subsidised housing, preferential treatment for employment and other benefits. Through the lack of publicity given to their contribution to the war, Aborigines and Islanders were denied some of these benefits. In addition to the tangible benefits of pay and repatriation benefits withheld from de facto servicemen for example, other less tangible benefits were also denied. Aboriginal political organisations had hoped to use Aboriginal military service as a moral lever to argue for 'citizens' rights'. The

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7. Boutilier, Hughes and Tiffany, (eds.) Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania, p. 220. Bayton in Cross Over Carpentaria, Brisbane, 1965, p. 167 also argues that Islanders who had served as soldiers expected that their service would qualify them for exemption from the Queensland Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939 and that they were disappointed when this proved not to be the case.

exclusion of many Aborigines from military service and the lack of publicity given to the service of those who had enlisted - and those who had contributed as de facto servicemen, labourers or as workers in defence industries - had robbed these organisations of this powerful argument. The denial of publicity to the service of Chinese as a means of preventing them from making political capital suggests that the denial of publicity to Aboriginal and Islander servicemen may not have been altogether accidental. Greater public acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Islander service, either during the war or shortly afterwards, would have contributed to changes in prevailing attitudes to Aborigines, leading to improvements in their place in the Australian community.

Throughout the war, the Services made no real attempt to test either prevailing social attitudes, or the attitudes of their own servicemen. Unlike the US Army, no studies of the attitude of white servicemen to service with Aborigines or Islanders were ever made. The assumptions which guided the policy making bodies within each of the Services therefore remained untested. Events proved that these assumptions were flawed. White servicemen brought into contact with Aborigines and Islanders either as fellow servicemen, as civilian labourers or as part of the community, generally established relations with Aborigines and Islanders which were free from the influence of the stereotypes upon which senior officers based their

assumptions. White servicemen did not generally find service with Aborigines intolerable, they did not object to their smell as the Director of Army Recruiting had claimed and they generally found them to be conscientious workers. Despite extensive correspondence and numerous conversations with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ex-servicemen, very few have revealed any racial animosity. Most reveal instead, a touching respect.

The Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, primarily representing the interests of white Australian servicemen, reflected the extent to which the acceptance of Aboriginal and Islander comrades-in-arms could be translated into political support. In 1946, the League lobbied the Prime Minister's Department seeking improvements in the standing of Aboriginal and Islander ex-servicemen within the community.

> In view of the high service rendered by Australian Aborigines whilst members of the Defence Forces, the [New South Wales] State Executive considers that their subsequent treatment as civilians is not in keeping with the high regard the general public has for their services in war time,[8]

wrote the League. Other branches of the League also pressed

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8. A431, item 46/1357. Letter, Victorian Branch of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, 17 April 1946. Other State Executives also supported this resolution.

for social change. The League continued to argue for the grant of full citizenship and for the abandonment of restrictions on the consumption of alcohol for Aboriginal ex-servicemen, into the 1950s.[9]

The bonds fashioned between Aboriginal civilians and white servicemen could also be strong. After service in north Australia where they came into contact with Aborigines on mission stations and at other isolated centres, some white Australians returned to the north as lay missionaries. Frank Galbally developed an interest in Aborigines through his war service in the Navy aboard 'Southern Cross', a small steamer which served mainly in north Australian waters delivering stores to isolated outposts. After the war, Galbally began to work with Doug Nicholls, defending Aborigines in the Melbourne courts.[10] Some of the members of the North Australia Observer Unit also formed strong friendships with the Aborigines upon whose bushcraft skills they had depended, fondly remembering them many years after the war.

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9. A518, item RM112/1. See letter, General Secretary of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia, Melbourne Branch, to the Minister for Territories, July 1951, seeking waivure of the requirement for Aboriginal ex-servicemen to obtain exemption from the Aboriginals' Act to attend RSL functions, and letter, General Secretary of the League to the Prime Minister, seeking full citizenship for Aboriginal ex-servicemen, September 1951.

10. Clark, Pastor Doug - The Story of an Aboriginal Leader, p. 125 and letter to the author by Frank Galbally, 11 October 1985.

This apparent inconsistency - policy makers insisting upon 'appropriate' social distances, while individual serviceman abandoned them - can be explained through the operation of small group psychology. While policy makers in senior Service headquarters shied from entering the political field of shaping social relationships and hence clung to their stereotypical views of relations between black and white Australians, inter-personal relations among servicemen were shaped by different forces. Despite social pressures to maintain barriers against Aborigines and Islanders, the serviceman found himself closely bonded to his comrades-in-arms whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, by psychological forces which were more powerful than the civilian attitudes from which he has been largely cut off through the process of enlistment. His attitudes which guided his life as a civilian were rapidly replaced by bonds to his mates, constructed around mutual support and the shared hardships encountered in the struggle to survive in battle. It was simply not possible to maintain a social distance from an Aboriginal or Islander serviceman on whom one might later depend for one's life. These psychological forces produced relationships between black and white servicemen which were relatively free from racism and which in turn, had an important impact upon post-war race relations.

Len Watson notes the impact of these relationships in

this way:

> The war ... made some white Australians say: "Look, these blokes are just as good as us, they fought beside us in the war, they proved themselves". ... This change in outlook is terribly important - revolutionary in a way. It has laid the basis for all the other changes that have occurred in the post war years.[11]

Watson cites the opening up of the Queensland reserves, improvements in Aboriginal education, the winning of award wages and improved levels of funding and of white support, as benefits flowing from the wartime relationships. He argues that the emergence of black radicalism in the late 1950s and into the 1960s had come about as a result of the war years and expressed itself in the form of the 1957 Palm Island strike, the 1968 Yirrkala land claim and the Aboriginal tent embassy established on the lawns of Parliament House in January 1972. Watson notes that after the war, in the absence of the Service milieu, there had been a return of racism and that this had been keenly felt by Aboriginal ex-servicemen, stimulating deep resentment leading eventually to the rise of radicalism.

Although it is not the intention of this thesis to examine the post-war impact of wartime events, some signposts to future research can be constructed. The post-war impact of the Service relations with Aborigines and Islanders, if any, is perhaps the most important of

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11. Watson, '1945: Enter the Black Radical', The National Times Magazine, 1 April 1974, p. 5.

these. Watson's assertions are therefore worthy of brief consideration. At first sight, they may seem difficult to support. Progress towards improved race relations almost came to a complete standstill in the immediate post-war period when the contrast between wartime relations and the return of racism in the post-war period should have been sharpest. But there is also the question of immediate benefits flowing to Aborigines and Islanders from their war time experiences. These may have blurred the contrast between war time and post-war conditions, delaying the impact of Watson's 'revolutionary' changes.

Many Aborigines and Islanders in north Australia had received training in a variety of useful skills which they might otherwise never have received. Some of this training had been conducted with the specific intent of improving Aboriginal and Islander conditions in the post-war period. The Commander of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion for example, had ensured that a nucleus of men had been trained in carpentry because he had become aware of the low standard of Islander housing. Some put their training to good use. Tom Lowah, a Sergeant in the Light Infantry Battalion, recalled how this training had assisted him:

> White personnel ... taught us how to do everything in building. We learnt all right! It's from [them] ... I know a lot of things. I built my own house afterwards ... in St Pauls.[12]

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12. Interview, Tom Lowah, 22 October 1986.

Many Aborigines in the Northern Territory had earned a cash wage for the first time in their lives during the war and were less inclined to return to payment in kind which had always tended to disadvantage them. Despite the inability of Dollery to win improved wages for his civilian labourers during the war, there was a rapid increase in Aboriginal wages in the Northern Territory immediately following the war although this was accompanied by a sharp drop in the number in employment as the Services left the north. By November 1946, the Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory Administration, was insisting that Aborigines employed by the Services should be paid 30/- per week.[13] By May 1949 the RAAF was paying its Aboriginal labourers £1/5/- per week plus a weekly issue of two sticks of tobacco[14] and by July 1950 this wage had risen to £2 per week plus rations and clothing.[15] In the five years following 1945, the wages paid by the RAAF to its Aboriginal employees had risen by 800 per cent. Pastoral properties also began to pay higher wages to their Aboriginal work force after the war, but these increases

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13. AA Canberra, series A1564, item 24/43/ORA; Employment of Native Labour 1946-47. Letter, V.J. White, Chief Clerk, Native Affairs Branch to OC HQ North Western Area, RAAF, 15 November 1946.

14. A705, item 68/1/700. Letter, OC HQ North Western Area, RAAF, to the Secretary of the Air Board, 4 May 1949.

15. AA Canberra, series A1564, item 1229/8/P3; Native Labour Employment 1950. Minute, Staff Officer Works, HQ North Western Area, RAAF, to RAAF Station Darwin, 1 August 1950.

generally returned Aboriginal wages to their pre-war relationship with the wages earned by whites.[16]

There was also a rapid increase in the allocation of funds to the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory. This had been caused partly by concern that white servicemen had established a sympathy for Aborigines during their service in north Australia which would translate into political support for improvements in Aboriginal administration, and partly through the acknowledgement that Aborigines were owed a debt for their service during the war. This had created a situation in which the provision of higher Commonwealth funding for the Native Affairs Branch in the Northern Territory Administration made political sense. The States had been spending more than the Commonwealth on Aboriginal affairs[17] and servicemen and women who had visited the Northern Territory during the war, had returned to their

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16. May, Aboriginal Labour in the north Queensland Cattle Industry: 1897-1968, p. 355. May shows that despite the increased demand for Aboriginal workers throughout the war years, their wages remained static while the wages of European workers rose steadily. Aboriginal wages rose sharply after the war bringing them back into the pre-war relationship to European wages.

17. Comparative figures for 1941 were:

Queensland	£80,283
New South Wales	£76,409
Western Australia	£46,841
Northern Territory	£13,689 plus salaries.

homes with a greater appreciation of the position of Aborigines in the Territory. E.W.P Chinnery warned Abbott that

> during the war great sums of money were spent by the Army on the maintenance, welfare, medical control and supervision of the natives, large numbers of personnel being used in these services.
>
> In addition thousands of ex-service men and women, tax-payers and voters, now dispersed throughout the Commonwealth, became aware of the conditions, requirements and potentialities of the native population during their association with them in Northern Australia.
>
> I paid a good deal of attention to the attitudes of the Service men and women toward native questions, and I have no doubt whatever, that very strong bonds of sympathy developed during that association, an influence which will undoubtedly be brought to bear both in press and politics in future questions connected with aboriginal welfare.
>
> ....
>
> In future, therefore, the Government must anticipate wider and more intelligent publicity and criticism of its financial provisions for, and administration of, native welfare ...[18]

Despite Chinnery's concern, there proved to be little immediate political impact stemming from those servicemen or women who had served in north Australia. Nevertheless, it was fear of this political pressure which encouraged him to advocate increases in the Commonwealth budget for Aboriginal welfare from a mere £13,996 in financial year 1938/39, to almost £70,000 in financial year 1946/47.

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18. A659, item 45/1/5816. Letter, Chinnery to Abbott, 18 February 1946.

Chinnery's figure was slashed to £38,978 by J.A. Carrodus, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and the Treasury objected even to this figure, asking why the Department could not return to its pre-war expenditure.[19] Even though Chinnery's budget estimate had been drastically pruned, the post-war budget for Aboriginal affairs in the Territory remained double the pre-war figure. This increase had been brought about by the accelerated de-tribalisation of Territory Aborigines, the moral debt owed by the Commonwealth to Territory Aborigines and the fear, if not the fact, of a shift in the political balance as a result of white military service in north Australia.

The moral debt owed to Aboriginal and Islander servicemen also found expression in other ways. Many white servicemen had, as Watson notes, decided that Aborigines had 'proved themselves' through their participation in the war effort. Attitudes to colonialism had changed through the course of the war and the utterance of platitudes would not necessarily continue to go unchallenged. The Deputy Prime Minister, F.M. Forde, speaking at a United Nations conference in 1947, had stated that 'the Australian Government urges that the Charter of a World Organisation should recognise that the main purpose of the administration of dependent or undeveloped territories is the welfare and advancement of the peoples of those

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19. ibid. Note, Chinnery to Abbott, 6 November 1945.

territories', which Donald Thomson was quick to point out was at odds with Commonwealth government behaviour in the Northern Territory.[20] Thomson had also attempted to have Raiwalla, a member of the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance unit and a formally enlisted 'full-blood', march in the 1949 Anzac Day parade in a capital city. Raiwalla's presence and the publicity which would surround it, would raise the issue of Aboriginal service in the public mind. The Minister for the Army supported the idea saying that Raiwalla should be present at the march 'as a mark of respect for the work that Australian Aboriginals did for Australia during the difficult period of administration in the Northern Territory during the war'.[21]

Other indications of a new attitude engendered by the war were the amendment of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, to permit Aboriginal ex-servicemen to have the vote and the extension of the vote to Aboriginal ex-servicemen in Western Australia in 1944. At the end of the war, however,

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20. AA Canberra, series A6122/XR, item 156; Communist Party of Australia Activities Amongst Aborigines in Australia. Clipping, The Sun, 7 January 1947.

21. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item R/1/3617; Raiwalla - Darwin Aborigine for Anzac March 1949. Minute, Adjutant General to the Secretary, Department of the Army, 3 March 1949. In the end, Raiwalla did not march. An acrimonious dispute developed between Harney and Thomson over the wisdom of having Raiwalla march in a southern capital city but this remained unresolved as Raiwalla was ill and could not march at all.

the Services briefly reimposed their restrictions on the entry of Aborigines, banning them from enlistment in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.[22] Yet as the Services moved to reimpose the social distance they had reluctantly been forced to modify during the war, some small and lasting concessions had been won by Aborigines and Islanders. The Army's policy by which non-Europeans were excluded from voluntary service, was scrapped in 1949 despite lingering concerns over the possibility that the admission of Aborigines might be detrimental to Service morale and 'contrary to the Australian outlook'.[23] But even after the scrapping of the Military Regulation, Aborigines were not admitted freely. It became policy for senior administrative officers to personally interview Aborigines wishing to join - a practice reserved for Aboriginal candidates only.[24] The return of prevailing social values had been dramatic and reflected the Army's

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22. AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 275/1/222; Ban on Aborigines in BCOF. Letter, Minister for the Army, to Acting General Secretary, Australian Natives' Association, 5 July 1946. Although Aborigines were barred from enlistment into the BCOF, many Aborigines and Islanders already serving in the AIF, like Charles Mene and Donald Waters, were able to transfer into it from their Second AIF units.

23. A816, item 72/301/23. Report by the Principal Administrative Officers Committee (Personnel) at Meetings Held on 7th and 8th August 1950. See also AA Melbourne, series MP742/1, item 275/1/696; Enlistment in ARA - Persons Not of European Origin 1949. Minute, Director of Personnel Administration to Deputy Adjutant General, 20 May 1949.

24. MP742/1, item 275/1/696. Signal, Army Melbourne, to Milcommand Brisbane, 23 May 1949.

desire to return to conservative values. On the eve of the removal of barriers against the service of Aborigines the Army continued to see three 'problems' with their enlistment. First, Aborigines could rise to positions of command over white Australians and 'this may not be desirable'. Second, Aboriginal soldiers would have the same access to alcohol as other soldiers, leading to trouble, and third, segregation of mess and barrack facilities would lead to discontent and adverse criticism. Refusing to learn from the lessons of the war, Army officers worried that while there had been no objection to integration during the war, in peace the situation could be different.[25] Nevertheless, the barriers to voluntary service for non-Europeans were scrapped and by 1951, the Defence Act had also been amended to remove the bar to the compulsory service of Aborigines.

These small changes however, do not appear to add up to the revolution that Watson claims. However, the social upheaval of major wars tends to stimulate a period of consolidation and conservatism during which the wounds of the war years are healed and the lapse of time assists the development of a suitable perspective from which to judge in which direction the next steps are to be taken. A manifestation of this phenomenon is the gap which usually occurs between wars and their representation in

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25. ibid.

literature. The agony of the First World War, for example, did not produce an artistic response of note till the period 1928-32 with the publication of Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, Graves' Goodbye to All That, and others. Perhaps the same gestation period is required for socio-political developments.

Certainly, the 1960s, a little more than a decade after the Second World War, saw the rise of a new confidence among Aborigines and Islanders which may have owed something to the improved self-esteem that many Aborigines felt through their service in the war. Perhaps too, whites who had developed a sympathy for Aborigines during their war service, had by then begun to acquire positions of power where they could express their sympathies or their support in practical ways. In the United States, moves towards integration in the American armed forces begun during the Second World War, had led to full integration in the 1950s which in turn led to raised expectations in the black community triggering the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s.[26] Aboriginal and Islander soldiers also had their expectations raised by their military service.

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26. MacGregor, Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965, pp. 612 and 614. MacGregor argues that 'American servicemen of the 1950s became a positive if indirect cause of racial change. By demonstrating that large numbers of blacks and whites could work and live together, they destroyed a fundamental argument of the opponents of integration and made further reforms possible if not imperative'.

Perhaps the clearest indication of this is the Aboriginal and Islander response to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Voting Rights for Aborigines in the early 1960s. Over fifteen years after their military service, Torres Strait Islander ex-servicemen voiced their expectation of the vote as a result of having served their country.

> I think if I am an ex-serviceman I should have the right to vote, through being a member of the Defence Force in the last war,[27]

said Lui Bon, and others echoed his statement. Almost all the Islanders who gave evidence to the Committee were ex-servicemen indicating the extent to which the war had politicised the Islanders.

Other effects also flowed to Aborigines and Islanders from their war service. The Army labour settlements in the Northern Territory played an important part in accelerating the drift from the outlying missions and the process of de-tribalisation as well as providing valuable training in work skills and the management of money. The Army's practice of mixing tribal groups at its labour settlements may also have assisted Aborigines to develop a pan-Aboriginal identity.

The economic impact of Aboriginal and Islander war

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27. House of Representatives Report from the Select Committee on Voting Rights for Aborigines, Part II - Minutes of Evidence, 19 October 1961. Evidence of Lui Bon.

service is still being felt. As late as October 1983 the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Clyde Holding, released a statement acknowledging the wartime underpayment of Torres Strait Islander soldiers. As a result, over $7 million was paid to the Islander and Aboriginal ex-servicemen of the Torres Strait Defence Force or their surviving dependents.[28] The underpayment of other Aboriginal soldiers is still under review within the Department of Defence. Those being considered include the soldiers of Thomson's Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit and the sailors of Gribble's Melville Island patrol. If a decision is made to pay the Aborigines involved, this belated payment will have an important impact on the isolated communities in which the ex-servicemen or their dependents live.

Although it may be possible to argue that changes in race relations flowed from the relationship between the Services and Aborigines and Islanders, Watson's claim that a revolution in attitudes took place may be going too far. The question of the impact of the Second World War upon post-war race relations is complicated by other issues such as post-war immigration, the end of British colonialism in the Australian region, greatly improved communications and

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28. News Release H46/83, Canberra/Brisbane, 18 October 1983. The wartime underpayment and its illegality was brought to public attention by R.A. Hall, 'Aborigines and the Army: The Second World War Experience', Defence Force Journal, September/October 1980, no. 24, pp. 28-41.

media coverage of national and international events and widespread revulsion at the excesses of Nazi racism. These issues may prove to have had a more significant impact than Aboriginal and Islander service during the war, but the question remains worthy of further examination.

Regardless of the extent to which post-war race relations were influenced by wartime events, the involvement of Aborigines and Islanders in the Second World War was significant on several counts. First, it involved Aborigines and Islanders in cooperation with white Australians in a manner which no single event before or since has done and which despite accusations of disloyalty, represents a signpost to the attainment of race relations based on respect, understanding and cooperation. Second, it represents arguably the single most important contribution made by Aborigines and Islanders to the social fabric of Australia in the twentieth century. Third, Aborigines and Islanders, despite the bars to their service and the large portion of their population living a tribal life-style and therefore of questionable military value, participated in the national effort in significant numbers (relative to their populations). As Watson notes, '...they proved themselves ...'.[29] Indeed, Islanders made a greater contribution than other Australians. In making their

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29. Watson, '1945: Enter the Black Radical', The National Times Magazine, p. 11.

contribution, Aborigines and Islanders put beyond reasonable question their right to a place in the 'digger myth' - and to be considered respected Australian citizens.

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145/1944; Rates of Pay and Conditions of Service - Torres Strait Islanders Enlisted in the Forces.

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156; Communist Party of Australia Activities Amongst Aborigines in Australia.

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24; NT Employment of Natives by Civilians.
33; Correspondence with A.G. Cameron.
34; NT Employment of Mission Natives.
41; NT Native Compounds - September 1942-43.
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58; Location of Native Population in the Northern Territory 1929-39.

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463/208/1142; Australian Native Labour for Luggers - Thursday Island.
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929/19/1162; Liability of Aborigines for Compulsory Military Training Under the Defence Act.

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5/701/47;	Report - Europeans Consorting with Half-castes.
50/703/12;	Refusal to Enlist World War I Veteran and Other Aborigines.
50/703/35;	Protest - Refusal to Serve US Coloured Troops.
61/701/68;	Employment of Aboriginal Labour, Darwin.
82/710/2;	Employment of Full Blood Aborigines at Darwin 1940.
82/712/670;	Letter from Mr Ferguson Aborigines' Progressive Association.
82/712/1773;	Removal Aborigines from Coastal Areas to Inland.
175/701/871;	Lutheran Church in Australia.
240/701/158;	Formation of Chinese Units.
240/701/217;	Role of Aborigines in Defence - Suggestions.
247/704/56;	Employment of Torres Strait Islanders on Military Duty at Thursday Island.
247/704/62;	Torres Strait Infantry.
256/701/90;	Article in 'Woman' re Aborigines.
259/708/143;	Removal of Aboriginal Compound Darwin.
275/701/556;	Enlistment of Aborigines 1942.
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29/401/686;	Looting, Roper River.
37/401/1609;	Formation Torres Strait Pioneer Company.
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5/1/476;	Restoration of Civil Administration in the Northern Territory.
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92/1/302;	Employment of Aboriginal Labour in Army.

128/1/1; Half-caste Aboriginal Personnel with 14 Aust Grn Bn.
164/1/209; Australian Aborigines - Participation in War Effort.
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175/1/189; Hermannsberg Mission - Use of W/T Equipment.
240/1/358; Formation of Native Auxilliay Corps - Kimberleys.
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275/1/696; Enlistment in ARA - Persons Not of European Origin 1949.
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603/201/770; Luggers - Thursday Island.
712/205/621; Employment of Natives by RAN - Darwin.
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Series B356. Lake Tyers correspondence files 1865-1965.

54; Lake Tyers Managers' Reports 1930-1944.

(3). Darwin.

Series F1.

40/382; Official Aerodrome Milingimbi Mission.
42/286; Part 2: Finke River Mission - Hermannsburg - Mr Battarbee's Fortnightly Reports to December 1943.
42/406; Native Affairs Branch - Staff and Policy Matters.
42/415; Aboriginals - Removals From Vicinity of Military Camps North of Mataranka.
42/435; Native Labour Gangs Control Camps at Mataranka, Tennant Creek, Katherine etc. Employment of Natives by Army.
42/461; Native Labour - Request for by Station Managers etc.
43/24; Aboriginal Matters General.
44/275; Patrol Officer W.E. Harney - Patrols and Reports.
44/497; A. Kerr - Delny Station - Complaints re Natives Carrying Firearms.
49/460; Church Missionary Society - Groote Eylandt.

Series NTAC 1980/111. Miscellaneous records maintained by E.J. Murray, Superintendent of Delissaville Settlement, Snake Bay Settlement (Melville Island and Native Affairs Branch, Katherine). The eleven items within this series do not have item numbers.

- File of Papers Containing Reports Written by E.J. Murray Concerning Native Patrols Around Delissaville 1942-43.

- Instructions Fortress Command, HQ NT Force, to Mr Murray, dated 19 June 1942.

c. RAAF Historical Section, Canberra and other Commonwealth Government Sources.

In addition to the material listed above, other Commonwealth government unpublished official records were provided by RAAF Historical Section, Russell Offices Canberra; the Directorate of Sailor's Postings, Navy Office, Canberra; Central Army Records Office, Melbourne; and the Directorate of Personnel Services, Air Force Office, Canberra.

RAAF Historical Section staff provided access to Unit History Sheets and some correspondence files (duplicates of which are available from the Australian War Memorial), and were most helpful in guiding me through these records. Records cited in the thesis from this source are:

Unit History Sheets:

No. 14 Mobile Works Squadron, Drysdale Mission.
No. 51 Operational Base Unit, Groote Eylandt.
No. 58 Operational Base Unit, Drysdale Mission.
No. 59 Operational Base Unit, Milingimbi.
No. 313 Radar Station, Mornington Island.
No. 326 Radar Station, Cape Leveque.
Headquarters North West Area.

RAAF Historical Section unregistered file - Aborigines in RAAF.

The Directorate of Sailor's Postings, Central Army Records Office and the Directorate of Personnel Services, Air Force, each provided brief extracts of the service histories of individual Aboriginal or Islander servicemen.

d. State Government Archives. In addition to visits to regional offices of Australian Archives, visits were made to the State Archives of Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland. The Northern Territory Archives Service which performs the same role as a State Archive for the Northern Territory was also visited. Unlike the others, Queensland State Archives proved dissapointing. Generally, those records relating to Aboriginal Affairs in the Second World War which have been passed to the State Archive, are not available for public examination until 1995. Furthermore, the State Department of Community Services, which inherited responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs, still holds many of the records of the Second

World War period and these too are not available for public examination. A request to be granted access to the records still in the possession of the Department of Community Services, was rejected. Instead, the Queensland government offered to provide answers to specific questions but would not permit access to the records themselves. Access to information through this process was judged unacceptable. In any case, an attempt was made to use this system to confirm information already obtained elsewhere, but the request for the information remains unanswered.

Although access to the Queensland records would be valuable in understanding how the Queensland government reacted to Aboriginal and Islander military service, it was not essential. Much of the response of the Queensland government is available on Commonwealth records.

The following State Archives records were used:

Western Australian State Archives.

a. Series 993.

3/40; Carrolup Native Settlement - Employment of Native Labour - Conditions and rates of Pay.
38/40; Military and Defence - Liability of Natives for Military Service.
529/40; Military and Defence - List of Natives under the Native Administration Act - in the 2nd AIF.
4/42; Unemployed Natives - Utilization of Services During War Period.
102/42; Natives - North West Areas - Evacuation of all Nomadic, Unemployed, Aged and Infirm Natives from Coastal Areas Between Derby and Carnarvon to Areas 100 Miles Inland.
919/42; Port Hedland - (1)Proposed Evacuation of Natives - (2) Suggested Declaration of a Prohibited Area.
1032/42; Native Auxilliary Corps in the Kimberley District - Proposal re Organization of.
409/43; Forrest River Mission - Punishments Administered to Inmates for Breaches of Discipline by Superintendents.
592/43; Evacuation and Military Control of Natives in Coastal Areas South of Northampton.
1121/43; Cape Levique [sic] - Employment of Natives by Allied Works Council.
1266/43; Native Matters - Forrest River Mission.
6/44; Rescue of Crews From Crashed Aircraft - Instructions to Outstations.
77/44; Communist Party - Native Policy.
365/44; Effects of War in Tropical Australia on Future White Development with Particular Reference to Welfare of Natives - Pamphlet by Professor Elkin for Institute of International Affairs.
522/46; 'Western Australian Aboriginal and Citizenship' -

Broadcast talk given by H.D. Moseley.

b. Series 1298A.

40; Cyril Longmore - Dispatches as War Correspondent in North West in 1942.
41; Newspaper Articles on Bombing of Broome and Training of Native Guerillas.
44; Letters Between Longmore and Curtin re Use of Aborigines in War.

South Australian State Archives.

a. Series EX AP39.

73A/1/3; Correspondence - Aborigines Protection Board of South Australia.

b. Series SRG250/4.

Aboriginal Advancement League, Correspondence and Records 1940-65.

Queensland State Archives.

a. Series A/4218.

Employment of Islanders on Military Duties.

Northern Territory Archives Service.

Interview transcript TS64: Reverend Len Harris, wartime missionary at Groote Eylandt.

2 OTHER ARCHIVAL SOURCES.

The Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour provided a select group of records which although few in number, were useful for the insights they provided into the impact of the war years on pastoral properties. Records held by the Archive included:

North Australian Workers Union Correspondence.

Peel River Land and Minerals Co. Ltd., Avon Downs Station, Manager's Monthly Reports and Correspondence; N65/61-2, (1941-5).

3 CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS.

Correspondence and interviews provided an important counter-balance to official records. Correspondence and interviews included the following:

a. Correspondence.

E.J. Richardson, 19 May 1986.
P. O'Driscoll, 24 May 1978.
H.A. Stanton, 7 January 1978.
John Chate, 25 February 1986.
Frank Galbally, 11 October 1985.
Robert Topping (on behalf of Mrs Abednego), various dates.
Jim Hunt, 4 April 1978.
Ronald D. Collins, 30 April 1986.
Alan Atkinson, undated, but received in April 1986.
Wilfred Thun, 1 June 1986.

b. Interviews, telephone conversations and other verbal communications.

Reverend Harold Shepherdson, 1 June 1985.
Tom Honeyman, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Bill McAdam, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Des Harrison, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Brian Harris, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Noel Collier, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Eric Wenban, (interviewed by Richard Walker).
Jerry Anau, (interviewed by Robert Topping).
Vince Egan, 18 August 1986.
Leonard Waters, 1 September 1986.
Reg Saunders, 2 December 1986.
Charles Mene, 19 October 1986.
Kath Walker, 20 October 1986.
Harry One, 16 September 1986.
Holder Adams, 16 September 1986.
Tom Lowah, 22 October 1986.
Elia Ware, 25 October 1986.
Peter Tapau, 24 October 1986.
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Telephone conversation, Jim Brennan, 13 August 1986.
Telephone conversation, Frank Douglas, 12 May 1985.
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Tapes (and transcripts) of interviews, except those conducted by Richard Walker, are available from the Australian War Memorial.

4 COMMONWEALTH AND STATE GOVERNMENT ACTS AND OTHER OFFICIAL REPORTS.

Hon J. Toose, Independent Enquiry Into the Repatriation

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News Release H46/83, Canberra/Brisbane, 18 October 1983, by Mr Clyde Holding, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

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Native Members of the Forces Benefits Act.

Repatriation (Torres Strait Islanders) Act, 1972.

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Letter, Mr Kim Beazley to Senator Gorton, Minister for the Navy, dated 13 September 1961. Obtained from the Department of Defence.

Native Administration Act, 1905-1936, (Western Australia).

Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939, (Queensland)

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Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No. 33, (1940), no. 34, (1941), no. 35, (1942-43), no. 36 (1944-45) and no. 37, (1946-47).

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