

THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE OCCUPATION OF JAPAN, 1945–1952

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Synopsis

On 13 February 1946, Australian troops, the vanguard of a 37,000-strong British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF), disembarked at the war-devastated Japanese port city of Kure, almost four years to the day (15 February 1942) after Singapore, the bastion of the British Empire in the Far East, surrendered to the Japanese Army. At its peak, there were some 12,000 Australians serving in BCOF.

From 1946 to 1952 Australian forces were responsible for the military occupation of Hiroshima Prefecture, site of the first atomic bomb attack in history. During this time the role of the Australian forces changed from that of an “occupying power” to a new role of “protective power”; in 1950 Australian forces in Japan were deployed, under UN command, to operations in Korea.

Achieving Australian participation in the military occupation of Japan

The Australian government of Prime Minister Robert G. Menzies, which committed Australia to war with Germany in September 1939, was replaced in October 1941 by a Labor government led by Prime Minister John Curtin. Two months later this government found itself involved in a closer and more dangerous struggle against Japan. The protective shell of the colonial powers in Asia quickly disintegrated under the Japanese onslaught, and the destruction of the British military forces in Asia destroyed the long-vaunted mainstay of Australia’s defence and foreign policies. Curtin’s appeal on 27 December 1941 to the US for assistance had resulted by April 1942 in the transfer of the control of Australia’s defence policy from a pre-war dependence upon the UK to a wartime dependence upon the US.¹

¹ Curtin’s appeal has to be seen in the light of earlier, non-public exchanges with the US. Barclay, G. St. and Siracusa, J.A. (eds), *Australian–American relations since 1945*, p. 711. Also Millar, T.B., *Australia in peace and war*, pp. 107–8, 116–7.

This fundamental shift was given substance by the Australian government's total support for the US in its direction and conduct of the war in the Pacific.² All Australia's naval ships, field formations, and air force operational elements were placed under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander South-West Pacific Area (SWPA), although the Australian government insisted that an Australian officer, General Thomas Blamey, command the Land Force component of SWPA Command.

The Australian government had little say in either the direction or the conduct of the war,³ the US and the UK having agreed an overall war strategy that gave priority to a "Europe first" war effort. This was reflected in the lower level of importance and military support accorded the SWPA, which divorced the UK and the other colonial powers from the mainstream of the war in Asia and the Pacific.⁴

Australia's land forces initially were the largest component of MacArthur's command and although they inflicted the first major land defeats upon the Japanese at Milne Bay and on the Kokoda Track, their significance quickly waned.⁵ With the build up of US forces in the Pacific, MacArthur's island-hopping campaign seized the initiative from the Japanese and his objective, the liberation of the Philippines, became a prelude to the main assault upon the Japanese homeland.

Curtin, as Prime Minister and Defence Minister, was seriously ill from November 1944 until his death on 7 July 1945. The new Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, sought to re-establish some control by the Australian government over Australian forces and to involve them directly in the offensive against Japan. His aim was that Australia's "military effort should be maintained on a scale which, with the Commonwealth's earlier record in the war, would guarantee Australia an effective

² This wartime dependence upon the US did not necessarily mean that Australia agreed to continue the relationship into the post-war period.

³ See, for example, Reese, T.R., *Australia, New Zealand and the United States*, pp. 19-24 and Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, pp. 145-159.

⁴ Also the Pacific War was essentially a sea and air war and the US was better equipped to fight it. Note also in Millar, p. 152 and p. 535, that the bulk of NZ forces were deployed in areas not directly aligned to Australia's strategic preoccupations.

⁵ For an American assessment of the later Australian contribution in 1943 see Baldwin, H.W., *Foreign affairs*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 220-22.

voice in the peace settlement”.⁶ A RAN squadron and an expeditionary force of land and air forces, all to operate under Australian commanders, were placed at the disposal of MacArthur for operations against the Japanese mainland.

That the MacArthur strategy of using Australian forces for operations in “bypassed areas”⁷ would continue was foreshadowed in moves by the Combined [US/UK]Chiefs of Staff to hand over the command of these forces to the British, to confine Australian forces to operations south of the Philippines, and to limit Australia’s participation in surrender and settlement arrangements. As MacArthur was to inform Chifley:

There are no specific plans so far as I know for employment of Australian troops after the Borneo campaign. The subject of operations in the Pacific is now under intense consideration in Washington and London. I do not know whether Australian troops are contemplated for use to the north.

Consideration is being given by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to a proposal to turn over to Great Britain full responsibility for that part of the South-West Pacific area which lies to the south of the Philippines. In that event undoubtedly all Australian formations would come under British command for ensuing operations to the south. Your manpower problems are appreciated in this.⁸

These intentions were later confirmed when at Potsdam it was agreed in principle that portions of South-West Pacific areas should pass from United States to British Command as soon as possible; and that proposals concerning future operations against Japan had been tabled at Potsdam. The proposals included a plan

⁶ CPD, HR, vol. 184, p. 4687, 27 July 1945.

⁷ See Bell, R.J., *Australian outlook*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 220-22; letter Chifley to MacArthur, 30 April 1945, AA, CA 46, MP 1217, box 570; Thorne, C., *Allies of a kind*, pp. 365-66, 371, 480-81; and on Blamey-MacArthur tension, AA,CA, MP 1217, box 570. See also Ross, L. J., *Curtin, a biography*, p. 369, 378-79 and especially R.S. Ryan’s criticism of the fact that in the Governor-General’s speech of 22 February 1945 there was nothing which indicated a commitment of Australian forces to “a forward and vital part in future strategic operations.” CPD, HR, vol. 181, p. 165, 28 February 1945.

⁸ CA45, MP 1217, box 570, 20 May 1945.

whereby one Australian division would form part of a corps of three Commonwealth divisions (one Australian, one Canadian, one United Kingdom) to be fought as an integral part of the US army with the US having the right to detach divisions in an emergency and with the whole corps to be completely equipped and organised as far as possible on American equipment.⁹

The Australian government had not been informed of fundamental decisions, agreed bilaterally by the US and UK, but when informed sought continuation of the principle then in force, i.e., a direct link between the Australian government and the commander in chief, presumed to be an American, of the Australian forces directed against Japan.¹⁰ The Australian offer of support for the US offensive was repeated in a letter to MacArthur.¹¹ On the same day, 27 July 1945, Chifley also publicly reiterated the basic political objective of the Australian government to secure a place and a voice in the peace settlements.

The Potsdam Proclamation, made public on 27 July 1945, completely invalidated Australia's claims that it was entitled to special status, or that membership of various bodies, and representation in certain quarters, was of any actual significance when the major decisions were made. The unexpected employment of the atom bomb, and the abruptness with which the war with Japan ended, caught most governments, except those of the UK and the US, by surprise; it allowed very little time for consideration and consultation with regard to arrangements for the Japanese surrender. Evatt summarised the Australian reaction thus:¹²

Ever since 1941 it has been the declared and accepted policy of the Australian government that in all matters relating to the peace settlement, both in Europe and in the Pacific, Australia being an active belligerent, possesses the right to the status of a party principal to every armistice and peace arrangement. The

⁹ CA46, MP 1217, box 587, cablegram 125, 10 August 1945, SSSA to Chifley.

¹⁰ CA46, MP 1217, box 587, cablegram 197, 20 July 1945.

¹¹ CA46, MP 1217 box 587, letter, 27 July 1945, Chifley to MacArthur.

¹² CPD, HR, vol. 181, pp. 4687-89, 30 July 1945.

validity of this policy has been accorded widespread recognition and very recent assurances of its general acceptance were received from the UK government. Although that ultimatum declared certain terms or principles of the peace settlement with Japan, it was published without prior reference to, still less the concurrence of, the Australian government. The ultimatum was of fundamental importance to Australia, yet our first knowledge, both of the terms and its publication, came from the press.

Despite these setbacks the Australian government on 2 August 1945 reiterated to the UK government that its first requirement with regard to Japan was “full Australian participation as a principal in decisions on policy and in control arrangements”.¹³ The UK government, also having trouble convincing the US government of the need to consult its allies concerning the conduct of arrangements for Japan, had to admit that, with regard to the draft act of surrender for Japan, “the United States government appears to be going ahead on their own draft”.¹⁴

A major disagreement developed between Australia and its allies concerning arrangements to receive the Japanese surrender. As Evatt described the situation to the Australian press, “on 12 August 1945 the United Kingdom proposed Australian service representatives should attend the surrender, but as attached to the UK service representative.”¹⁵ On 14 August 1945 the Australian government nominated General Blamey as the direct representative of Australia. When the British responded that the US Department of State had rejected Australia’s nomination, the Australian

¹³ AA, CA46, MP 1217, box 453, cablegram 209, 2 August 1945.

¹⁴ AA, CA46, MP 1217, box 453, cablegram 294, 14 August 1945. Also Thorne, *Allies of a kind*, p. 656, and AA CRS, A 5954, box 453, cablegram D1444, 14 August 1945 to Chifley.

¹⁵ *The Age*, 24 August 1945. The original US proposals for the Japanese surrender were accepted by the UK government on behalf of the Australian government which was notified in cablegram D1433, 11 August 1945 (AA, CA46, MP 1217, box 453). A following cablegram, D1435, 12 August 1945, invited a number of Dominion governments to nominate representatives to be attached to the British delegation to the surrender ceremony. In a strongly worded reply the Australian government made clear its determination to attend the surrender ceremony in its own right. Cablegram 236, 14 August 1945, op. cit.

government then took the matter directly to the acting minister at the US embassy in Canberra, and to MacArthur.¹⁶

In his reply, dated 20 August 1945, Blamey indicated that MacArthur was very sympathetic to Australia's claim to sign the instrument of surrender and had recommended that Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Holland, and France should also sign, though Australia objected the inclusion of the latter three.¹⁷ On 21 August 1945 the State Department formally recommended to MacArthur that these representatives separately sign the instrument of surrender.¹⁸

On 18 August 1945, three days after the capitulation of Japan, Chifley announced an Australian offer to provide a composite Australian force to participate in the occupation of Japan. He emphasised his government's desire to act as a separate belligerent and for Australian forces to operate under Australian command, subject only to the control of the Supreme Commander, Allied Forces Japan.¹⁹

The UK agreed that a single British Commonwealth force for Japan would enhance the British Commonwealth's status and position in Japan and that Australia should provide the commander and the bulk of the HQs. However the UK insisted that the commander be jointly responsible to the Australian and the UK governments and that Royal Navy (RN) units in Japanese waters remain under RN control.

This hurdle over, the Australian government was faced with yet another, negotiation with the US government, which was particularly sensitive to any

¹⁶ Evatt informed Blamey: "We received report through Dominions Office that State Department, Washington, objected to your representing Australia separately and independently at general surrender. However this report has been contradicted by the State Department who have informed me that they are taking immediate steps through the War Department Washington, to ask General MacArthur to meet Australia's wishes to the maximum extent possible. In the circumstances, it should be possible for you to sign the surrender document making it clear that you are doing so on behalf of Australia alone."

¹⁷ AA, CA46, MP 1217, box 453, cablegram 21542, 18 August 1945, cablegram 26932, 20 August 1945. According to Bell, *Australian outlook*, Australia protested the inclusion of France, Canada and the Netherlands (then generally known as Holland).

¹⁸ The combination of events lends considerable validity to the Federal Opposition's suspicions that the Australian government, by accepting a secondary role for Australian troops in the latter stages of the war, had also committed itself to a secondary role politically in subsequent negotiations concerning Japan.

¹⁹ CPD, HR, vol. 184, p. 4688. To this end the following forces could be made available without delay for the occupation of Japan: one cruiser and one destroyer, one brigade group, and three fighter squadrons. The size of the force offered by Australia demonstrated the Australian government's determination to act independently and in support of Australia's national interests.

suggestion of a challenge to, or interference with, what it regarded as its sole prerogative to order affairs in Japan. US actions in dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had abruptly resulted in the Japanese surrender with a cessation of hostilities effective from 15 August 1945, and the first US forces deploying at Atsugi on Honshu on 28 August.

The principles of the US occupation policy and implementation were largely entrusted to MacArthur (SCAP);²⁰ separately, the Big Four agreed to establish a Far Eastern Advisory Commission (FEC) for the consideration of political matters connected with the fulfilment by Japan of its obligations under the instruments of surrender. Australian participation in the FEC was accepted on 11 October 1945, and its membership of an Allied Control Council (ACCJ), to be set up in Tokyo, although challenged was also accepted on 1 November 1945.²¹

The formal act of surrender was received on board the US battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945 by MacArthur, who from 15 August 1945, as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) Japan, had been charged by the US President to accept the surrender of Japanese forces. General Blamey signed the surrender document on behalf of the Australian government. Also present in Tokyo Bay were nine Royal Australian Navy (RAN) ships.²²

²⁰ Outlined in the "US initial post-surrender policy towards Japan" (SWNCC 150/41) of 6 September 1945; see Hata Ikuhiko, *Japan interpreter*, Winter 76, pp. 363–6. For full text see AA, MP1217 item, box 1624. By February 1946 numerous reforms had been ordered by SCAP and MacArthur's draft of the new constitution had been issued. On the flight into Japan MacArthur mapped out with his Chief of government section, Major General Whitney, the main objectives of the early occupation. These objectives, listed under eleven headings, were elaborated in SCAP directives issued soon after MacArthur's arrival in Tokyo.

²¹ FRUS, DP 1945, vol. VI, pp. 737–38, pp. 796–97, State Department statement, 1 November 1945: "The United States government is not consulting with any governments other than Russia, China and France on the Far Eastern Advisory Commission. Other interested governments will of course be kept informed of these consultations and in the particular case of the request made by the Australian representative on the commission, it is assumed that the British government will consult with all the dominion governments on the commission." CNIA vol. XVI, no. 7, p. 221 October–November 1945.

²² For a brief summary of the early RAN presence in Japan see "The Royal Australian Navy in Japan", *As you were*, 1948, AWM, p. 158. Prior to the formal surrender, a British landing force, under the command of Captain H.J. Buchanan DSO, RAN, in HMAS *Napier*, had gone ashore on 30 August 1945 at Yokosuka Naval Dockyard. HMAS *Nizam* landed the Royal Marine Guard for the British Consulate at Yokohama on 6 September and HMAS *Nepal* assisted with the landing of senior officers who were attending the re-opening, as a military HQ, of the British Embassy in Tokyo. *Nizam* and *Warramunga* assisted during September 1945 with the recovery of Allied personnel from prisoner of war camps and their transfer to Yokohama for attention and onward movement. Members of the 1st Australian POW Contact and Inquiry Unit landed at Nagasaki in September 1945 and made contact with the 20 to 30

The Australian contribution to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF)

Command and Control of the force

Australia despatched the BCOF proposals, on behalf of the governments of the UK, Australia, New Zealand (NZ) and India, to the US government on 17 October 1945. On 11 December 1945 the recently established Joint Chiefs of Staff, Australia (JCOSA) considered the US response.²³ JCOSA recommended that Australian Lieutenant General John Northcott, BCOF Commander in Chief (designate) be sent to Japan to negotiate the British Commonwealth viewpoint with MacArthur. Meanwhile machinery was set in train for the build up of BCOF.²⁴

Under the MacArthur–Northcott memorandum, operational control of the three service elements was assigned to local US commanders. The Commander in Chief (C-in-C), BCOF, responsible for the administration of the force as a whole, was to have direct access to the SCAP on policy matters; operational control of the force was to be vested in the Commanding General, (CG) US Eighth US Army, who controlled the whole area of Japan.²⁵ On 29 December 1945 the principles put

surviving Australian prisoners located there and set in train the arrangements for their repatriation. All Allied prisoners, and the ashes of known Australian prisoners, had been cleared from the prison camps in the Hiroshima area by 13 September 1945; further investigations were undertaken by an Australian Liaison Team no. 4 which, in company with a similar US team, disembarked Kure on 7 October.

²³ Including authority for General Northcott to make the best arrangements he could in direct negotiation with General MacArthur, as outlined in paragraph 4 of E65 (dated 8 December 1945).

²⁴ AA, CRS, 2700. JCOSA. no. 9/1945, 11 December 1945. According to a message 86835 of 29 November 1945 from the British Cabinet Office to HQ JCOSA Melbourne, Evatt had indicated “Australian forces may be ready to move by about 15 December”. AA, CA46, MP1217, box 1608. MacArthur’s redesignation as SCAP and his relocation to a new HQ, known as GHQ, SCAP, Japan, required changes in Australian accreditation to his HQ. Prior to the arrival of the advance echelon HQ BCOF, there had been an Australian Services mission, located in Tokyo. There was as well the Australian Liaison Section at GHQ tasked to reconnoitre those areas to be occupied by BCOF and the Australian 88 High Speed Wireless Section that established direct communications between Tokyo and Melbourne on 30 January 1946. Commodore JA Collins RAN, Brigadier Anderson AMF, and Air Commodore FRW Scherger RAAF comprised this mission and subsequently B.C. Ballard and J.A. Forsythe from the Department of External Affairs were attached to the mission.

²⁵ AA, CRS 2700, appendix A to JCOSA minute 22/1945. Northcott’s report to JCOSA on 24 December 1945 stressed the whole-hearted welcome and co-operation offered by MacArthur and his staff;

forward by the US government and the memorandum negotiated by MacArthur and Northcott were accepted by the Australian government.²⁶

The Australian government also was heavily involved in activities designed to bolster claims to recognition of its status as a “party principal”²⁷ whereas Australia’s allies became restless. The NZ government, although prepared to persevere, admitted to flagging enthusiasm and questioned the prospects for any improvement in British Commonwealth prestige. The UK government’s reluctance to contribute to BCOF became more noticeable as time went by.

The Australian government itself was hamstrung by delays in the formal acceptance by the US government of Australian forces to be drawn from volunteers primarily located at Labuan and Morotai.²⁸ The local frustrations felt by these volunteers boiled over into a major incident at Morotai, referred to colloquially as the “Jack Up” on 11 January. During the incident, the troops were informed by the acting commander that the commencement date for service in the force had been nominated as 1 January 1946, and they then dispersed.

On 31 January 1946 Chifley announced details of the plan accepted by the US government:

- a British Commonwealth force would participate in the occupation;
- the Australian government was to act on behalf of the British Commonwealth governments;
- Australia was to provide the Commander-in-Chief of the BCOF and the bulk of the HQs;
- details of the force structure;

affirmed that the BCOF was urgently needed and that far from opposing it MacArthur had always pressed for its early arrival.

²⁶ JCOSA 26/1945, 29 December 1945. A further meeting on 22 January 1946 considered proposed variations to the “Memorandum of Accord” but decided upon no substantial change to the agreement, JCOSA 60. AA, CRS 2700.

²⁷ AA, CRS, A1066 14/45/1016/5/2. AA, A1066, 11/45/1016/5/2, cablegram 469, 15 December 1945, Evatt to Makin.

²⁸ As early as 12 December 1945, Sydney’s *The Sun* carried an article entitled “Our Forgotten Airmen” who “were thoroughly browned off by official neglect and the general futility of tropical service”. On 22 January 1946 the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, MHR, arrived at Morotai and assured the force members they would be moved to Japan within the next four to six weeks. A total of 71 units were formed.

- General Northcott was to be responsible for the administration of the British Commonwealth force and its maintenance in Japan with direct access to General MacArthur on policy;
- the establishment of the JCOSA, to be located in Melbourne.²⁹

The BCOF was responsible for demilitarisation tasks but not for military government, which remained a responsibility of US agencies. The order of battle of BCOF included an Australian brigade group, a New Zealand brigade group, a British brigade, a British-Indian brigade, three RAF squadrons, three RAAF squadrons, one Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) squadron and one RNZAF squadron. Australia and the UK contributed to Naval Force "T".³⁰

The total BCOF, although small by comparison with the US occupation force, was a meaningful contribution proportionally for Australia. The JCOSA machinery was a practical step forward in the development of Australia's higher defence machinery, not merely for purposes of military consultation, but also in the concept of political consultation on military matters. The BCOF had come into being, and the fact of its presence was a reminder to the US government of the British Commonwealth contribution both to the recent world war and to the ensuing peace.³¹ Australia contributed the force commander and its force HQs; accepted responsibility for the administrative aspects of the force; provided a significant percentage of the personnel; and played the leading role in JCOSA.³²

On 4 February 1946 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Army, Frank Forde announced that the movement of the Australian component, numbering about

²⁹ *The Age*, 31 January 1946 and AA, CRS, A5954, box 1699, 22 November 1946.

³⁰ *The Age*, 31 January 1946 and AA, CRS, A5954, box 1699, 22 November 1946.

³¹ During the Prime Ministers' Conference in London in April 1946 there was an *Age* report which took up this point: "Units of the three services from Australia, New Zealand, Britain and India for the first time are being integrated into a single readily expandable British Commonwealth force in the biggest advance thus far made towards the formation of a world-wide peace preservation force ... empire defence force being given a trial run in Japan ... What may develop into the British Commonwealth contribution towards forming a UN force."

³² The Australian government had not achieved all its objectives. On 28 January 1946 it became clear that the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, had not been listed by the US government as a war criminal. Hirohito had been the subject of earlier Australian representations and it would be difficult to separate Australia's policy objectives from the emotional responses evident in Australia as the full scale of Japan's treatment of Australian POWs became known in the second half of 1945.

12,000, was expected to be completed, with vehicles and equipment, by the end of April 1946.³³ The advance guard of the Australian contribution from Morotai, some 4,000 ground troops in three convoys over 13–22 February 1946, arrived in Kure Harbour to witness a scene of devastation, described by one observer as “this abomination of desolation”. Kure had been the principal Japanese naval shipping port since 1883 and the area included the largest combined dockyard, shipbuilding yard and naval arsenal in the country. Kure had been heavily bombed by the US Air Corps, particularly in the final months of the war. The harbour was littered with hulks, including the aircraft carrier *Akagi*, and the wharf and foreshore areas were a scene of burnt out and flattened buildings, including the shell of the giant Mitsubishi factory. The business centre of the city had been destroyed by bombing.³⁴

The first flight of 12 Mustangs, in what was to be the longest ferry (4,960 kms) of RAAF aircraft, arrived at Iwakuni on 9 March 1946 and 81 Wing RAAF personnel arrived in Kure Harbour on 1 April.³⁵ BCOF, at its maximum strength on 1 February 1947, totalled some 37,000 personnel comprising Australians (about 33%), Indians (about 30%), British (about 20%) and New Zealanders (about 17%).

ORGANISATION, DEPLOYMENT, ROLES AND TASKS OF BCOF

The C-in-C BCOF, Lieutenant General J. Northcott CB MVO accepted responsibility for Hiroshima Prefecture from the US 24th Division on 7 March 1946. On 15 June 1946 Northcott was succeeded by another Australian, Lieutenant General H.C.H. Robertson CBE DSO.³⁶

³³ This figure is referred to by Millar, T.B., op. cit., p. 174, fn. R.N.L. Hopkins, “History of the Occupation of Japan 1946–1950”, *Royal Australian Historical Society proceedings*, vol. XL/2, 1953, quotes a figure of 12,200 on p. 95 and 13,500 on p. 100. Rajendra Singh claims the initial figure for Australia was 11,466 in his *Post war occupation forces: Japan and South East Asia, official history of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939–1945*, General Editor Bisheshwar Prasad, Kanpur, Job Press Private Ltd., 1958, p. 57.

³⁴ Wood, James, *The forgotten force*, p. 47.

³⁵ HMAS *Warramunga* had arrived at Kure, the port destined to service BCOF, on 1 February 1946 following the arrival over 13–18 January 1946 of reconnaissance parties led by Colonel A.G. Wilson, to establish the BritCom base in Kure. An advanced HQ for BCOF and an RAAF team also arrived to liaise with US troops already in the area. A number of RAN ships were also deployed to provide escorts and port assistance in support.

³⁶ Northcott departed on 24 June 1946 to become governor of NSW.

The C-in-C BCOF had direct access to MacArthur on matters of major policy related to the operational commitment of BCOF forces and was responsible to the governments of those forces within BCOF through JCOSA located in Melbourne. JCOSA comprised the Australian Chiefs of Staff and representatives of the Chiefs of Staff in the UK and NZ and the C-in-C India. Instructions to the C-in-C BCOF were issued by the Australian Chiefs of Staff and the C-in-C BCOF, in his role as representative of the other governments involved, raised matters of BCOF policy through JCOSA to the Australian government.

The initial area allocated to BCOF covered the prefectures of Hiroshima and Yamaguchi but was subsequently increased to include nominated prefectures on Honshu and Shikoku. The total area of BCOF responsibility was approximately 49,000 square kilometres in area with a population of some 9 million in 1946, out of a total of some 77 million across Japan.

The BCOF, at its peak, comprised several elements. HQ BCOF opened initially at Kure on 20 February 1946 then relocated in May 1946 to Eta Jima, some eight kms west of Kure. The Naval Shore Base HMS *Commonwealth* was located in Kure.³⁷

The combat elements – comprising the British-Indian Division,³⁸ 34th (Aust) Brigade,³⁹ 9th (NZ) Infantry Brigade,⁴⁰ and HQ British Commonwealth Air⁴¹ – were supported by HQ BritCom Base⁴² and HQ BritCom Area.⁴³

³⁷ Initially, designated Force C, the naval port party comprised a small fleet of RN/RAN vessels.

³⁸ HQ at Okayama with an area of responsibility covering: (a) HQ 5 (UK) Bde at Matsuyama and the prefectures of Kochi, Tokushima, Ehime and Kagawa on the island of Shikoku and (b) HQ 268 (Ind) Bde at Matsue on the north coast of Honshu and the prefectures of Okayama, Tottori and Shirane on Honshu.

³⁹ Commanded by Brigadier R.N.L. Hopkins, who replaced Brigadier R.H. Nimmo on 18 April and took up his appointment on 13 May 1946. The brigade, initially located at Kaitaichi but then at Hiro (8 July), had responsibility for Hiroshima prefecture. The brigade comprised 65 (at Fukayama), 66 (at Hiro), and 67 (at Kaitaichi) (Aust) Infantry Battalions, 1 (Aust) Armoured Car Squadron, "A" Field Battery and 28 Field Squadron and supporting units.

⁴⁰ To become 2 NZ Expeditionary Force. HQ 2 NZEF, located at Shimonoseki, had responsibility for Yamaguchi prefecture.

⁴¹ HQ BCAIR opened at Iwakuni on 1 March 1946 with stations at Miho in Shirane, and 81 Wing (RAAF) from 6 February 1946 at Bofu in Yamaguchi. The group comprised a Station HQ, two RAF Squadrons and one RIAF Squadron, a second Station HQ with one RNZAF Squadron, one Communications Squadron and a Squadron of the RAF Regiment; and 81 Wing (RAAF) of three fighter squadrons (76, 77 and 82), 5ACS and from May 1946, 381 (B) Sqn.

⁴² Located at Kure, it comprised force and base units.

⁴³ Established in Tokyo in May 1946 to coordinate all BCOF activities and personnel in the Tokyo-Yokohama area and to provide administrative support for BritCom missions in that area.

The magnitude and complexity of the task of administering the force, placed upon the Australian Army particularly, arose from the policy decision that it was an Australian responsibility to maintain the whole Force, amounting at its peak in August 1947 to 37,000 personnel from four nations and three services.⁴⁴ The bulk of supplies was to be drawn from Australian and New Zealand sources, given that the Japanese economy was in ruins.⁴⁵

Evatt in a major speech to the Australian Parliament on 13 March 1946 argued that “the constant concern of the Australian government must be to ensure that Japan did not rise as an aggressor a second time” and drew attention to the appointments of General Northcott, William MacMahon Ball and Sir William Webb to important positions within the occupation framework. The fact that an Australian represented the participating British Commonwealth governments, including the UK itself, was seen by Evatt as an entirely new concept in British Commonwealth relations.⁴⁶ Far more important were questions on the significance of the British Commonwealth’s diplomatic representation in Japan; MacArthur’s stated position was: “As the functions of the Council will be advisory and consultative, it will not divide the heavy administrative responsibility of the Supreme Commander as the sole executive authority for the Allied Powers in Japan.”⁴⁷

Despite such reservations, Chifley’s statement of 19 June 1946 emphasised that Australia was actively seeking a bigger role in the Pacific and on behalf of the British Commonwealth.⁴⁸

Although Robertson’s appointment as C-in-C BCOF maintained the Australian dominance of the BCOF command structure, he faced a number of substantial difficulties.⁴⁹ The first obvious crack in BCOF’s integrated command was

⁴⁴ The most complete and perceptive record available is that prepared by Captain, later Colonel, H.M. Pickering, “History of The AAOC and RAAOC” in *BCOF Japan and BCFK, 1945–1956*. 1988.

⁴⁵ For a further summary of the administrative difficulties that beset the force, see Northcott’s valedictory report: AA, MP 313/5, JCOSA 73, Agendum 59, 31 July 1946.

⁴⁶ CPD, HR, vol. 186, p. 187, 13 March 1946.

⁴⁷ Sebald, W.J., *With MacArthur in Japan*, The Cresset Press, London, 1965, p. 127. MacArthur made no secret of his dislike for the ACCJ, which he regarded as an unwarranted intrusion into the occupation and an undesirable vehicle for Soviet propaganda; he regarded the FEC similarly.

⁴⁸ CPD, HR vol. 187, p. 1560, 19 June 1946

⁴⁹ For an account of General Robertson’s service as C-in-C BCOF, see Jeffrey Grey, *Australian brass, the career of Sir Horace Robertson*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

caused by concerns within the New Zealand contingent over the command of their personnel and the integrity of their General Hospital. Both matters were resolved satisfactorily. Next came a disagreement with Eichelberger (CG US 8th Army) over Robertson's freedom of movement within Japan, again resolved.⁵⁰

More deep-seated and long-standing were Robertson's difficult relationships with individual British officers. The first of these was with General Tenant Cowan, who commanded the British-Indian Division.⁵¹ However Robertson's particular difficulties were with the two senior representatives of the British government in Japan - Lieutenant General Gairdner, as Churchill's personal representative at MacArthur's Headquarters, and Sir Alvary Gascoigne, the Head of the UK Liaison Mission. Robertson's early contacts with Gascoigne were friendly but it became obvious that "his policy was quite definitely to be in every way independent of BCOF and to restore a UK embassy in Japan" and "to demand as a right that they should share in everything which BCOF had." Robertson's position was that he was the senior British Commonwealth representative in Japan and as the peace treaty with Japan had yet to be signed "no ambassadors could be accredited to the Japanese government".⁵²

The military role of the BCOF included the safeguarding of all Allied installations, and of all Japanese installations awaiting demilitarisation; as well as the disposal of Japanese armaments. This role was elaborated as:

⁵⁰ Gen. H.C.H. Robertson. Private papers, undated. Period of service in Japan only. As prepared and verified by Miss M. Lay, his confidential secretary, pp. 10-16.

⁵¹ Northcott had advised Robertson that Cowan had expected he was to command an entirely British force in Japan and then found that the Australians were to command it. Moreover, following Northcott's appointment as Governor of NSW, Cowan, as the then next senior officer, expected to become C-in-C.

⁵² Robertson recorded that Gascoigne informed Robertson "that Gairdner regarded it otherwise and that he considered himself senior to both Gascoigne and myself and that my area was only that occupied by the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, that I had no position or status in Tokyo at all, and that he was the official British Commonwealth representative with SCAP." Robertson was quick to dismiss these claims, on the grounds he was the official representative, that there were no national areas under the occupation and that he had direct access to the SCAP. H.C.H. Robertson, Private papers, p. 53.

- (a) progressively assume responsibility for all occupation missions except military government in the area assigned them on dates mutually agreed upon by the General Officers commanding 1 Corps and BCOF;
- (b) provide necessary troops to assist MG [military governments] in performance of their missions;
- (c) provide troops for military operations other than the occupation of its zone; and
- (d) assume responsibility for supervision of operation of repatriation centres located in the zone of occupation.⁵³

Robertson's interpretation of what was called "Military government" in Japan was that:

MacArthur at no time established in Japan what could be correctly described as Military government. He continued to use the Japanese government to control the country, but teams of military personnel, afterward replaced to quite a considerable extent by civilians, were placed throughout the Japanese prefectures as a check on the extent to which the prefectures were carrying out the directives issued by MacArthur's headquarters or the orders from the central government.

The really important duty of the so called Military government teams was, however, the supervision of the issue throughout Japan of the large quantities of food stuffs and medical stores being poured into the country from American sources. The teams also contained so-called experts on health, education, sanitation, agriculture and the like, to help the Japanese in adopting more up to date methods sponsored by SCAP's headquarters.

The normal duties of a military government organisation, the most important of which are law and order and a legal system, were never needed in Japan since the Japanese government's normal legal system still functioned with regard to all Japanese nationals.

⁵³ FO no. 35 published by HQ 8 US Army, 7 March 1946.

All occupation force legal matters were dealt with through their own military command, all foreign nationals were dealt with through allied courts appointed by MacArthur's headquarters, except United States and British Commonwealth nationals, each of which, being subjects of occupying powers, were entitled to be tried by courts of their own nations convened respectively by MacArthur in his United States capacity and myself in my British Commonwealth capacity. For offences against the occupation force or its directives, special provost courts were provided in which the operational commanders, including myself, were given powers to convene and confirm. The so-called military government in Japan was therefore neither military nor government.⁵⁴

This arrangement actually avoided throwing on the British Commonwealth "a tremendous financial burden to restore any portion of the Japanese people" and Robertson was generous in his praise of this contribution by the US.

Showing the flag

Australia was vigorous in its diplomatic efforts to secure an appropriate status, and to claim the military initiative, as a way to support efforts at "showing the flag", of which there were two aspects.

The first aimed to demonstrate the superiority of Allied military strength and therefore way of life; secondly, the presence of foreign troops, responsible for the security of symbolic Japanese institutions, went to the core of Japanese sovereignty. Thus ANZAC Day, commemorated in Japan for the first time in 1946, was the

⁵⁴ Robertson, H.C.H. *Private papers*, pp. 94–95. "All occupation force legal matters were dealt with through their own military command, all foreign nationals were dealt with through allied courts appointed by MacArthur's headquarters, except United States and British Commonwealth nationals, each of which, being subjects of occupying powers, were entitled to be tried by courts of their own nations convened respectively by MacArthur in his United States capacity and myself in my British Commonwealth capacity. For offences against the occupation force or its directives, special provost courts were provided in which the operational commanders, including myself, were given powers to convene and confirm. The so-called military government in Japan was therefore neither military nor government."

occasion of a major parade and fly-past in Kure, as was a ceremony held on 12 April 1946 to break out the flags of the participating contingents from a signal tower overlooking Kure Harbour. The principal Australian (and BCOF) activity in this regard was participation in ceremonial and security tasks in Tokyo, especially the guarding and conduct of parades at the Imperial Palace.⁵⁵ The first such guard, shared with soldiers of the 1 US Cavalry Division, was mounted over the Imperial Palace on 8 May 1946.

Operational tasks

The completely new, numerous, and complex operational tasks of military control and demilitarisation undertaken by units of 34 Brigade included:

1. disarmament and disposals.
2. supervision of the repatriation of Japanese troops.
3. port and dock control.
4. security screening of ex officers and officials.
5. surveillance.
6. patrolling and searching by land and sea.
7. locating hidden military equipment and plant.
8. supervision of elections.
9. supervision of prefectural, police, schools, hospitals and civilian agencies.
10. black market raids and control.
11. locating and arrest of illegal North Korean immigrants.
12. provosts courts for civil offences against the Occupation.
13. confiscation and destruction of narcotics.
14. implementation of disaster plans for typhoons and earthquakes.
15. showing the Australian flag and force of arms at every opportunity.
16. garrison duties.
17. control and employment of Japanese work force.⁵⁶

The CO 66 Battalion noted that for the “first 20 months of their occupational role they [units] were completely involved in operations with very little time spent in garrison

⁵⁵ There were, in addition, a range of commitments for the posting of guards at facilities associated with BCOF activities.

⁵⁶ *Shinbun* 52, January/February 1993.

duties. Training was confined to specialists in disposals and intelligence.”⁵⁷

Typically, a company of the 65th battalion, commanded by a 24-year-old captain, was assigned the task of the military control, but not military government, of Onomichi, a city of 80,000 located on the Inland sea some 32 kms to the south-west of Fukuyama, where the battalion HQ was located. His task was to ensure that security was maintained, law and order upheld, and to destroy any Japanese military stores and equipment located.⁵⁸

The military nature of the Occupation required a heavy emphasis upon the intelligence mechanisms of the Force. Thus “the primary object of Intelligence in this theatre has been to acquire information necessary to ensure the security of the occupation forces and compliance by the Japanese with the orders and instructions of SCAP in the BCOF zone of responsibility.”⁵⁹

This object made it necessary to determine

whether the Japanese civil population will cease to cooperate with the Occupation Forces, and if so to ascertain the extent and nature of the opposition and whether elements of the Japanese population, e.g., secret societies, discharged servicemen, or nationalistic organisations (i.e., those seeking to reassert political, social, economic, and religious beliefs in place before the occupation) will organise subversive groups to resist the occupation forces, and if so to ascertain the nature and extent of the effort.

Second, to secure and safeguard information of value to the Allied Powers.

⁵⁷ AWM 114, 130/1/23. Statistics of Schools and Courses. Units of the BCOF had arrived in country at differing standards of training, although that of the 34 Brigade was assessed as high. For the first six months any attempts to undertake formal training programs were frustrated by the many demands of the operational roles and the variety of administrative demands, as well as the lack of local training facilities. The immediacy of these demands and the scattered nature of units also militated against any attempt to undertake training at unit or formation level until such time as the short-term obligations were met. Early plans for the conduct of an amphibious exercise with US forces were postponed indefinitely.

⁵⁸ C. East, transcript of interview with Film Australia. East worked on a daily basis through the established Japanese authorities, these being the mayor and the chief of police, using them as his deputies. This arrangement worked successfully; both officials were “very courteous, very deferential, very obedient and I had nothing but praise for them. They did exactly what was wanted.” All involved however were also aware that East had 120 fully armed soldiers, plus a detachment of military police and a number of Field Security NCOs at his immediate command.

⁵⁹ AWM 114, 130/1/23, Intelligence

Following the initial intelligence requirements associated with the lodgement, deployment and maintenance of the force, there was an intense period of patrolling and routine surveillance by the force. It was in a totally foreign and chaotic landscape, occupying a defeated nation in social and organisational disarray. Typically, the BCOF's provost units' initial preoccupation with signposting, traffic control and general military policing was replaced with broader obligations of liaison with the US military and Japanese civil police and other military police units of BCOF. In this there was an emphasis on activities of occupier and occupied alike caught up in crime, especially prostitution, assault, theft, and the development of the black market in scarce commodities or in the highly desirable and easily accessible essentials issued to the occupation forces.

The 36th Australian Field Security Section dealt in the main with the political aspects of the occupation, covering such matters as political rallies, riots, and responses to the Land Reform Bill. A detachment of the Provost Special Investigation Branch, usually about 12 men with an attached linguist, was concerned with strictly criminal cases involving occupation personnel – matters such as murder, rape, assault, hit and run, and large-scale black market activities.⁶⁰

A range of provost, military government, and counter-intelligence units was required to monitor the activities of political, industrial, and criminal organisations that mushroomed during this period, particularly activities by foreign nationals, mainly Formosans and Koreans involved in smuggling and black market schemes.

In October 1945, Australian linguists commenced duties at the Yokohama Interrogation Centre under US command; gradually this work extended to support the War Crimes Trials.⁶¹ Suitable volunteers for the Combined Services Detailed

⁶⁰ The most recent and extensive research on this subject is that undertaken by Bertrand Roehner, at LPTHE, University of Paris.

⁶¹ AWM 114, 130/1/19, Outline of CISDIC activities. See also unpublished manuscript: Colin Funch, "Linguists in uniform: the Japanese experience, 1917–1948". Early plans for the Australian contribution to BCOF placed a high premium on the provision of well-trained linguists, the requirement estimated as "one linguist to each 100 troops of the force". Given the interregnum during which members of the occupation force were being assembled in Morotai, the opportunity was used to train interested personnel, and those in specialist units, in basic conversational Japanese. The name

Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) were in constant demand throughout the area of occupation at the many points of daily contact with Japanese nationals, including, for example, the repatriation centres and the Field Security units. Members of the unit were scattered throughout the BCOF area, engaged in interpreting or translating newspaper and documentary articles on a range of matters including underground activities, traffic accidents, illegal entry, political organisations. The interpreter was regarded as the “barometer” by which the occupiers were enabled to read the real feelings of the “nationals”.

Disposal and military control of Japanese installations and armaments

The magnitude and complexity of this task was not appreciated until HQ BCOF raised the Disposal of Enemy Equipment Section (DEES) and a plan prepared for the systematic searching by patrols of the occupied area. By July 1946 HQ BCOF estimated that 100,000 tonnes of explosives and ammunition and 5,000 tonnes of poisonous gas were stored in Hiroshima prefecture alone, concealed in numerous tunnels and caves. One dump, known as the Koyo Akizuki magazine on Eta Jima, where HQ BCOF was established, contained 70,000 tonnes.

The recovery, transportation and destruction of these materials were highly dangerous tasks.⁶² Six members of 10 Australian Bomb Disposal Platoon were trained over a six-week period and deemed “qualified”; they then trained the other members of the unit, based in Kure. The unit was given responsibility for the neutralisation of the principal ordnance facility for the Japanese Navy at Eta Jima. The tunnels on Eta Jima were described as

of the organisation changed to the Translator and Interpreter Service (TIS), which included a number of Australian personnel.

⁶² Items for disposal were classified as ammunition and explosives; chemical warfare equipment and stores; weapons; submarines under 500 tons; precious metals and currency; narcotics and medical stores; signals, engineering and ordnance stores. Items were further classified as being of interest for research or intelligence purpose; for destruction; for use by the Occupation forces; for handing over to the Japanese authorities for civil use and for conversion to scrap.

like huge warehouses dug into the sides of the granite mountains, then completely lined with concrete and over that, timber. The whole construction was undertaken without nails in order to avoid problems with friction; earthed, air conditioned and fitted with railway tracks. At the other end of the scale were tunnels built by Korean labourers or POWs. These tunnels were unlined; they were usually damp and wet, and highly dangerous because of the use of picric acid as the main element in explosive content, as the acid becomes very unstable when exposed to moisture. Sometimes these storage facilities were based in the centre of a local village or town and usually a “principal person”, for example, the mayor or police chief, would be the holder of the keys to the facilities and would on demand reveal the location. Contained in these tunnels were a range of explosives and equipment ranging from the largest guns ever manufactured, to torpedoes, mines, arms, and explosives.⁶³

Under Operation Lewisite some 19,658 tonnes of poisonous gas and other material were destroyed by 30 September 1946 at the site of the Japanese chemical warfare arsenal on Okuna Shima, which had been operational since 1925. The plant was located on three different sites containing nine different storage dumps. Included in the total storage of some 22,000 tonnes were 665 tonnes of mustard gas bombs, 58 tonnes of gas-filled shells and 15,000 tonnes of toxic smoke. Liquid poison gas was pumped into tanks specially constructed on US supplied LSTs which were also loaded with bombs and containers, then towed into deep water and sunk. Where dumping at sea was not possible, large quantities of gas were stored in caves, which were then sealed with concrete. A major example of relocation was the destruction

⁶³ The usual practice was to follow the first principle of bomb disposal: “Can you BTBIS?” (blow the bastard in situ). This practice would raise often the prospect of problems for the local community and on those occasions the disposal personnel involved, who had absolute authority, would enlist the assistance of the local police in crowd control. More complex were those times when the explosives had to be relocated before destruction, for example, 500-lb bombs or the 2000-lb acoustic mines which contained a very sensitive fuse system and, because they were usually delivered by parachute, found in the most unexpected of locations.

undertaken on Okana Shima, known as the “Burning Island” and surrounded by a wide exclusion and safety zone.

Much of the explosives and ammunition was dumped at sea; at other times material was burned or dismantled on the spot. Wherever possible, non-dangerous items were handed over to the Japanese government for civil use.

Unit members were then scattered throughout southern Japan, operating independently and usually attached to local US or NZ units for local administration. The tasks undertaken ranged in magnitude and degree of difficulty; all were dangerous. The labouring work was performed by as many local Japanese as were demanded by the demolitions officer for the particular task at hand. Despite daily safety briefings, this was dangerous work and many Japanese were killed. One Australian recalls that a Japanese assistant dragged him to safety after he fell and sprained his ankle as he walked away from a major destruction task after setting the ignition devices in train.

A number of Australians also were to lose their lives in these operations. Corporal J.R. (Doc) Sewell, 10 Australian Bomb Disposal Platoon, was awarded (posthumously) the George Medal for his courageous action in saving the lives of many Japanese labourers on 22 October 1946.⁶⁴

Democratisation

Although the process of democratisation of Japan was expected to be a long one, its implementation by SCAP, using US forces in some areas, was both rapid and effective. The process included conducting the trials of war criminals, the removal of “pro-fascists” in the Japanese community, the disbandment of the secret police, and the release of political prisoners, the eradication of Shintoism, the drafting of a new constitution, and the granting of freedom of association to the Japanese people.

⁶⁴ Members of the unit and other patrolling Australians were often confronted by a range of unexploded US ordnance. Thousands of these items were found scattered throughout Japan, lying in backyards, main streets and in the countryside. In each case careful attention to detail was required. Sometimes the task was simply a matter of removing a fuse, and at other times a complex task; at all times it was fraught with danger due to uncertainty as to the actual status of the detonator and the condition of the explosive.

The most significant of the early tasks undertaken by BCOF in Japan's transition "from a feudalistic state to a democracy" was to assist in the security of elections held on 10 April 1946, through the deployment of observer teams on polling day and the presence of patrols in the preceding week. The purpose of these patrols was to ensure that elections were conducted democratically and that voters were free from intimidation. Of the 51 observers deployed, the Australians provided 42, including two female personnel, all being identified by the wearing of white brassards containing the Japanese characters for "election observer".

The first unit task for CSDIC was the deployment of 64 teams for the period before and after the election date to report on "the assurance of a free and untrammelled election". The election saw the enfranchisement of Japanese women for the first in Japanese history, and a number of female candidates took their seats in the Japanese Diet.

Initially the responsibility for military government and counter-intelligence activities in occupied Japan was exclusively American, but from June 1947 this policy was relaxed and three Australians were allotted to each of 11 US military government teams operating in the BCOF area.⁶⁵

In the process of democratisation in a society that had been quarantined from the outside world, the Australian contribution was at the level of contact between individual people. Coffman records that there were few accounts of violence against Australians, nor was there the animosity most had expected from a proud yet now subject people.⁶⁶ L. Semken was told to build a hut and was assigned some Japanese to help him. They could not speak a word of English, nor he a word of Japanese.

⁶⁵ *Occupational monograph of Eighth US Army in Japan*, vol. 11, January–August 1946. Reports of General MacArthur. *The campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific*. vol. 1, Washington DC, Department of the Army, 1966. p. 64.

⁶⁶ J. Coffman, transcript of interview with Film Australia. "The locals were in a parlous condition brought about by the impact of the war, especially those who had been subjected to the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima. The appearance therefore of fit young men, in the main very tall by Japanese standards, who to that time had been vilified as the enemy, now were resident and with absolute local authority over the welfare of the local citizens. Surprisingly the accommodation to the new arrangements was almost universal."

It was a pantomime to try and get anything done, and at the same time we were frightened of them and they were terrified of us. After a day or so we started to settle down, and we got an interpreter. We started to find out who people were ... one of them in the crew had been a pilot in the Pacific ... here was a bloke who had been trying to kill us ... I was never threatened. Originally we were armed but we didn't need to be.⁶⁷

Semken, despite his language difficulties, found that the Japanese, although they resented foreigners being in their country, began to realise that their fears of rape and mayhem were misplaced.

Provost courts, repatriation, and ports

One feature of this contact was the establishment, under powers delegated to the C-in-C BCOF on 11 March 1946, of Provost Courts. These courts, which sat in Japanese public buildings and were open to public access, heard cases usually of offences against BCOF personnel and property, and those involving illegal immigrants. The courts had the power to impose prison terms up to five years' hard labour and/or to impose substantial fines. In certain serious cases the matter would be referred to the Military Commission.

A major feature of military government was the utilisation of the existing Japanese political and military organisation in the successful demobilisation of all military forces in Japan by December 1945 – a massive administrative task, which, apart from minor incidents prior to the actual surrender, proceeded without incident thereafter.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ L. Semken, transcript of interview with Film Australia. See also Chida Takeshi, Hiroshima University, "The British Commonwealth military occupation of Japan and interaction with the Japanese".

⁶⁸ US authorities completed the massive task of demobilisation and disarmament of Japan's military forces located in the Japanese home islands, numbering about three and a half million personnel at the time of surrender.

More complicated for US authorities was the repatriation to their homelands of Japanese from overseas territories and of foreign nationals, other than Allied personnel, located in Japan. The numbers of Japanese overseas, approximately six and half million service personnel and civilians, was “probably the largest movement of human beings ever attempted by sea”.⁶⁹

Within the BCOF area three reception centres were established to handle the extraordinary task of repatriating foreign nationals, mainly Koreans, Formosans and Ryukyans, and to process the returning Japanese service and civilian personnel. The reception centres at Ujina and Otake were supervised by 34th Brigade, and that at Senzaki by New Zealand forces.⁷⁰ As Hiroshima had been the Southern Command HQ and Kure the principal port of departure, the effect on those returning was traumatic. The first repatriates were usually confident but as the full extent of the damage visited upon Hiroshima became evident and imagined for other cities, so also attitudes changed.

The usual procedure for reception was that an Australian infantry company would search all disembarking personnel and remove items of a military nature. Each returnee was obliged to undertake a cursory medical and a delousing; each was then given a rail warrant to the station nearest to their home and left to their own resources.

The principal initial task for the naval component of BCOF was to conduct port operations to enable the trans-shipment of personnel and equipment from ships arriving and departing Kure, which was in effect the funnel through which poured the occupation force and the returning Japanese in extraordinary numbers and under the most complex of conditions. In addition to the handling of incoming ships, the naval shore party had to survey and clear wreckage, arrange disposal, re-establish or replace handling facilities and service visiting ships. Between February and May 1946 the shore party handled some 50 visiting merchant and 65 visiting warships.

⁶⁹ AWM 14, 505/10/2. History of NOIC.

⁷⁰ By July 1946 these centres had processed more than 20,000 people leaving Japan and 467,000 returning to Japan. Although generally these centres were closed in October 1946, due to the small numbers of Japanese being repatriated at that time, the centre at Ujina was still processing returnees in March 1947.

One estimate was that in “the first six months of BCOF operations a total of 348,693 tons of cargo was discharged in the Kure docks”.⁷¹ Force “C” completed the bulk of its duties associated with the arrival of BCOF and by 3 June 1946 reductions in the size of the port force were made and the “stone frigate” HMS *Commonwealth* was recommissioned with manning of about 300.⁷² As the pace of the operational commitment eased and became one of routine maintenance to BCOF, so the naval personnel ashore turned their attention to assisting the local Japanese authorities in the establishment of Kure as a major commercial port.

Force “T” was the British Commonwealth Naval naval presence afloat. By December 1947 the last British warship was withdrawn and what became known as the British Support Unit became entirely Australian, comprising HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*.

The principal task for the RAAF was the conduct of surveillance flights in support of maritime programs to reduce the number of Koreans illegally seeking to enter Japan, and to reduce the incidence of smuggling.⁷³ Personnel contributed to “showing the flag” activities in massed flights and parades for visiting dignitaries and on special ceremonial occasions.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The Royal Navy Naval Port Party No 2504, known as Force “C”, the advance party of which, HMS *Glenearn*, arrived at Kure on 1 February, took over port operations from US forces on 18 February. Once stores were ashore there was an immediate requirement to have them either stored or moved forward, a task including some 242,000 tonnes of stores and 456,000 personnel. The third part of this Australian transportation effort was the 21 Australian Ordnance Depot. Utilising the limited facilities immediately available in the Kure docks area, 21 AOD was responsible for the receipt and issue of stores to the main bodies of the various national contingents, which were arriving in ever-increasing numbers.

⁷² Another major task for the navy was to conduct an inventory of Japanese naval vessels, in whatever condition, and put in place arrangements for the disposal of these. This task, primarily the responsibility of the US Naval Commander for Japan, was of extraordinary magnitude and not completed until January 1949, by which time some 415 vessels had been destroyed.

⁷³ John Coffman, at the time a member of the intelligence section of 67th Battalion, recalls that from 1947 to 1949 elements of BCOF were kept busy combating the large-scale smuggling being conducted by mainly Korean crime rings. These rings sought to smuggle into Japan those Koreans seeking to leave the troubled Koreas, as well as items such as sugar, saccharine, footwear, and drugs in short supply in Japan.

⁷⁴ AWM 114, 505/10/2, History of Military Training. As the technical problems of support for operations were overcome, so also this resulted in the resumption of routine fighter tactical training, tactical reconnaissance exercises with BCOF ground forces, and ground defence. With the establishment of an armament practice camp at Miho, each squadron would spend a month there refining its skills. Squadron personnel also were required to participate in dismounted ceremonial activities and from late 1946, the conduct of technical trade training.

Other Australian service and civilian personnel were on duty in Japan with the Scientific and Technical Division, Economic and Scientific Section, GHQ, SCAP; the Australian Scientific Mission; the International Military Tribunal for the Far East; the International Prosecution Section; the Australian Legal Section; the Australian Military History Section; and an Australian Army War Crimes unit.⁷⁵

Responsibility for the arrest, custody, and trial of persons charged with the commission of war crimes

Following the Japanese surrender, the US JCS ordered “the investigation, apprehension and detention of all persons suspected of war crimes; made provision for the handing over of war criminals wanted by other nations; and authorised military commanders of any nation taking part in the occupation of Japan to set up military courts for the trial of war criminals.”

On 19 January 1946, MacArthur, by special proclamation, established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) on which 11 nations, including Australia, were represented. The President of this Tribunal was an Australian, Sir William Flood Webb. War Criminals were divided into three classes. Major War Criminals (Class A) were those charged “with planning, preparation, initiation or waging a war” and Classes B and C were “actual perpetrators of war crimes, and those who abetted or permitted them.”⁷⁶

The Governor-General was empowered, *inter alia*, under the Australian *War Crimes Act* (11 October 1945) to “convene military courts for the trial of persons charged with the commission of war crimes” and to “appoint officers to constitute military courts”. Responsibility for the arrest, custody and trial of those charged with, or suspected of, war crimes was devolved upon AHQ, Melbourne. A number

⁷⁵ Investigations into war crimes committed by the Japanese began in Australia in 1942. In June 1944 the Australian government appointed a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes perpetrated by the Japanese against Australians.

⁷⁶ The trial of Class A war criminals began in Tokyo on 3 May 1946; of the 28 indicted, 25 were found guilty and sentenced on 12 November 1948. Two of the accused died during the course of the trial and a third declared unfit to stand trial.

of military courts were authorised, including the 2nd Australian War Crimes Section, raised in Melbourne on 15 March 1946 to serve in Tokyo.

Along with a British and a Canadian unit, 2 AWCS (SCAP) worked in close collaboration with SCAP's Legal Section, commanded by the (US) Chief Legal Officer. The CO was directly responsible to the Australian Adjutant General at AHQ, Melbourne, and although in the early days of the unit BCOF provided drivers and escorts for Japanese POWs, the C-in-C BCOF had no jurisdiction over the unit. 2 AWCS prepared cases and prosecuted war criminals for crimes against Australians, assisted only by SCAP's Legal Section in search and apprehension. From the time the unit was raised to the time it was disbanded on 4 January 1953, 779 war criminals were brought to trial under the Australian War Crimes Act (1945).⁷⁷ These trials were conducted concurrently with, but apart from, the trial of the Class A war criminals.

Some 22,376 Australians became prisoners of the Japanese, and of these 8,031 (35.9%) died. 296 trials were conducted under the Australian *War Crimes Act* before Australian courts, including those sitting outside Japan. 924 accused were brought to trial; of these 280 were acquitted, 148 were sentenced to death and 496 to periods of imprisonment. However

it should be noted that these do not account for all the trials for war crimes against Australians ... many of the offences against Australian POWs on the Burma-Siam railway were tried by British tribunals, and many of the offences against Australian POWs in camps in Japan were tried by American tribunals ... Conversely, in about one third of the Australian trials the victims had been not Australian, but Indian troops.⁷⁸

The first trial conducted by 2AWCS was of Japanese (Murakami and others) accused of atrocities against Australian and Allied POWs at the Niihama Beshi Copper Mine

⁷⁷ Mrs Beverley Durrant, Private papers used verbatim or paraphrased by permission of the author. Papers deposited with the Australian War Memorial as MSS 1641. Mrs Durrant served as personal assistant to the CO, 2 Australian War Crimes Section, Tokyo, 1948-1949. These figures, provided by Lt Col Goslett to Mrs Durrant, differ from those recorded in the *Australian encyclopaedia*, vol 8.

⁷⁸ *Australian Encyclopaedia*, vol. 8.

at Naoetsu on Shikoku. Subsequently a number of the Japanese accused were found guilty by the military court and sentenced to death or long periods of imprisonment.

As the occupation came to a formal end, so there was a slackening of the earlier pressures to see that justice was done.⁷⁹ Of the 171 Japanese war criminals sentenced by Australian military courts and held in Sugamo Prison, Tokyo, up to 1 January 1954, 67 had been released since the formal conclusion of the occupation on 28 April 1952. Of those remaining, the majority had been sentenced in early 1946 to terms of imprisonment ranging from 15 years to life. The last trials were conducted on Manus Island during May 1951, when 36 Japanese were acquitted and 5 were sentenced to death.

By 28 May 1956 all minor war criminals, except for a number of Koreans and Formosans, had been released on parole. For example, Warrant Officer Keigo Kanamoto was found guilty of the “murder of a number of Australian POW near Laha Airfield on Ambon Island about 14 Feb 42” by the Australian court sitting at Manus Island, and had been sentenced to imprisonment for life on 19 March 1951. His sentence was terminated on 21 June 1957. One co-accused, also found guilty of the same offence, had been executed. A third co-accused had been found not guilty and released. By July 1957 the last five prisoners sentenced by Australian courts had been released.

Representing the British Commonwealth of Nations: social issues

The “Objects and Role of the BCOF” were:

- (a) to represent worthily the British Commonwealth in the Occupation of Japan;
- (b) to maintain and enhance British Commonwealth prestige in the eyes of the Japanese and of our allies; and

⁷⁹ Minute, Adjutant General to Minister, 8 September 1955, AA. MP 927/1, A336/1/60.

(c) to illustrate to, and to impress on, the Japanese people, as far as may be possible, the democratic way and purpose of life.

The non- fraternisation policies

Australian government policies on matters such as fraternisation and immigration contradicted other government policies, such as those mandating the stated objects for the Force; the policies also severely limited the implementation of those objects in the day-to-day conduct of activities by members of the Force. The contradictory policies on fraternisation especially caused confusion and a great deal of distress at the command and at the individual level.

To ameliorate some of the practical difficulties for Australian and other BCOF personnel, the C-in-C BCOF issued a personal instruction concerning fraternisation with Japanese nationals on 20 February 1946. At that time the C-in-C, whose forces were under command of SCAP and the operational control of US commanders, was cognisant that SCAP had not issued any orders or guidance on the subject of fraternisation, other than to place geisha houses out of bounds to US personnel. Upon the arrival of the main body of the force, the C-in-C's personal instruction was put into effect. The central element of the instruction stressed to each BCOF member that:

In dealing with the Japanese he is dealing with a conquered enemy who has by making war against us caused deep suffering and loss to many thousands of homes throughout the British Empire. Your relations with this defeated enemy must be guided largely by your own individual good judgment and your sense of discipline. You must be formal and correct. You must not enter

their homes or take part in their family life. Your unofficial dealings with the Japanese must be kept to a minimum.⁸⁰

However within a month, BCOF's superior HQs, US Eighth Army, issued a directive to US commanders on 23 March 1946 which cautioned about "public displays of affection by men in uniform", such action in public being prejudicial to good order and military discipline and to be treated as "disorderly conduct".⁸¹ In late July 1946 the Commander 2nd NZEF issued a memo because of "a very wide divergence of opinion regarding the interpretation of General Northcott's directive on Fraternisation which was not intended to be a directive on the subject of fraternisation so much as a guide to Unit Commanders on an involved and difficult question."⁸² Thus a very difficult situation was further complicated by the practicalities of interpretation and application in the day-to-day circumstances of the disparate representatives of the occupation forces. Typically, "The whole idea of democracy which we were told had to be conveyed by demonstration and example of our way of life to the Japanese people was simply not possible to practise if we were forbidden to mix with the Japanese people outside - as simple as that."

In effect BCOF troops were breaking the non-fraternisation rules all the time. Quite apart from the absurdity of the situation, US personnel had already set a pattern of local contact and continued to do so; the bulk of the Australians had been out of Australia and separated from their families for at least a year. They had been in Japan for six or more months; there were no European women with whom to mix and there were plenty of Japanese women who were very attractive. Despite all the warnings, and maybe because of them, Australians naturally sought opportunities to meet, talk with, and get involved with the local Japanese.

⁸⁰ MEA (Australia) to MEA (NZ), telegram 88, 20/3/46. Robin Kay, *The surrender and occupation of Japan*, pp. 1366-67.

⁸¹ Kay, pp. 1367-68

⁸² The memo continued, "This uncertainty had serious results and in particular I found an alarming difference between individual units in the scale of punishments meted out for offences relating to this matter." New Zealand personnel were permitted "(a) attendance at official or semi-official Japanese functions; (b) attendance at musical concerts, lectures and functions of a like nature; and (c) attendance at Japanese picture theatres."

A substantial gap existed between policy and practice. Chambers, Minister for the Army, visiting Japan in 1947, noted that the US authorities not only “permitted but encouraged their troops to fraternise with the Japanese”. Following discussions with senior officers of BCOF, who generally agreed with the C-in-C “that the order was not to be policed”, the Minister foreshadowed that “If I find that circumstances warrant it I will arrange for the order to be quietly cancelled before it dies completely.”⁸³

The degree of fraternisation is difficult to assess. During Chambers’ visit, BCOF was employing some 41,000 Japanese, a situation which had given rise to black-marketeering and general exploitation, especially in canteen goods and foods. The dichotomies were further accentuated by the obvious and easy opportunities for individuals, with the best or worst of motives, to alleviate or exploit the pitiful social and economic conditions of those Japanese with whom they came into contact. In this regard much was made by politicians, officials and members of BCOF concerning standards of leadership, discipline, spiritual welfare, and the generally poor quality of facilities available to BCOF personnel.⁸⁴

One matter given sensational publicity was the incidence of VD amongst BCOF personnel. Chambers claimed that the problem was reasonably under control and the statistics indicated a considerable falling off in the number of cases treated. He noted that

the Kure area in which such a large number of our troops are located was formerly the main embarkation and disembarkation port of Japan for Japanese Army and Naval Expeditionary Forces since the Russo-Japanese War. In addition it was a closed area for all persons either entering or leaving Japan which resulted in VD being particularly present, sometimes in virulent form, in this area more than any other locality in Japan prior to the entry of the

⁸³ Appendix K, Report by the Minister for the Army on his visit. AAV, MP 742/1, 217/1/21.

⁸⁴ See for example, Minister’s report, note 83. The Australian government fuelled motives of “revenge” and “reparations” in Australia as the full extent of earlier Japanese atrocities against Australians and others became public. The particular scars of this period were to remain with many Australians and the wounds kept open by some Australian politicians, it would seem, as deliberate policy.

occupation troops. This might explain, to some extent, the rather disturbing statistics of the incidence of this disease among the Australian Component of BCOF.⁸⁵

The initial Australian medical response to matters of sexual disease devolved upon 20 Field Ambulance until such time as the 130 Australian General Hospital (AGH) was set up to take cases other than surgery. A marked increase in the number of VD cases led to the introduction of a major education program through the use of films and lectures concerning the dangers and appropriate measures for conduct. This program proved ineffectual and the rate of exposure increased.⁸⁶

Given that the infection rate among the local Japanese population was about 31.5 per cent, a meeting between the local prefectural, US military government and Australian medical representatives led to the purchase of a hotel and the establishment in July 1946 of a modern VD Hospital. This and an effective system of medical examination and treatment reduced the rate of infection, amongst the Australians at least, from a high of between 67 and 80 per cent down to about 11 per cent and progressively by 1947 to 5 per cent. These figures were distorted by constant re-offenders and those diagnosed with some form of neurotic or psychiatric disorder.⁸⁷

The poor public image of BCOF, sensationally reported in the Australian press, was a constant theme of the occupation period, with publicity given to the

⁸⁵ Minister's report, p. 7. Further pressures were the long-established Japanese practice of Japanese farmers selling surplus daughters into prostitution at a time when the local economic situation was compounded by the effects of a disastrous war and the pressures on the Japanese - especially attractive young women - to resort to prostitution to feed the family.

⁸⁶ Roger Dunlop, transcript of interview with Film Australia. Used with permission. Much was made of the dangers and shame of contracting venereal disease. A soldier apprehended by the military police was charged with an offence and punished by confinement to barracks or a fine, and his record noted.

⁸⁷ Dunlop was later to argue that an examination of the incidence of venereal disease among the Australian servicemen in BCOF should be set against the public health situation applying generally in Japan during the immediate post-war years. The Japanese community was undernourished and had been subjected to considerable hardships for an extended period. A range of dangerous diseases were endemic and widespread and had been compounded by the diseases carried back from overseas by returning Japanese troops and civilians. As well, the closed cycle of Japanese agriculture, which was based on the recycling of local sewage, and the contamination of water and food supplies, produced a high level of worm infestation and personal vulnerability to disease.

incidence of VD, the alleged poor behaviour of Australian troops, and the perceived incidence of illegal activities involving Australians and Japanese, whether criminal or civil. Chambers noted that “Under the conditions which are applicable in Japan at the present time, it would be impossible to eradicate these black-marketing activities, but it should be possible to curtail them considerably.”⁸⁸ Typically, a formal response by the Adjutant General noted that to 31 December 1946, for an Australian component whose average army strength averaged about 8810, there were 131 convictions by court martial of which 11 were for civil offences.⁸⁹

The Minister argued that “something would have to be done quickly or else bring the men back” to Australia. His first priority to correct this situation was the allocation of proper accommodation and “then we want the YMCA and the Salvation Army.” He was mindful “that discouragement of voluntary effort by Church and Philanthropic bodies has been Army policy”:

There are four representatives of recognised Philanthropic Societies with the Army Component of BCOF serving in Japan and the welfare needs of the troops are adequately provided for. Any increases in their numbers would invariably lead to overlapping of work and duplication of effort, and in addition to this the accommodation problem is so acute that resources are strained to the utmost.⁹⁰

He noted that although the plan for BCOF provided for “YMCA, YWCA and Salvation Army representatives to accompany BCOF”, an amending note had been inserted by AHQ as follows: “A conference was held early in 1946 between YMCA and Director of Amenities AHQ at which the YMCA was requested to continue its

⁸⁸ Report by Minister. AAV, MP 742/1,217/1/21.

⁸⁹ Appendix A to AG report, 3 April 1947. AAV, MP 742/1, 217/1/23. BCOF Administrative Instruction AG 108 of 10 February 1948 reiterated that the BCOF Fraternalisation Policy as expressed in FRO 64/46 “will be observed. The tendency to relax the formalness of relationships with Japanese is to be checked.” The Instruction AG 108 stated in paragraph 11 that “Apart from the above statutory deductions [for hospital treatment and for absence from duty due to VD] it is NOT permissible to inflict penalties for an offence of contracting venereal disease”, though other paragraphs outlined the disciplinary measures to be taken.

⁹⁰ Citing an Army file reference, dated 27 June 1946.

work in Japan until June 1946, after which Army Amenities would be in a position to take up all Club and Welfare work for BCOF.”

In regard to the Minister’s concern about the limited number of padres in the force, the Acting Adjutant General replied that the “normal establishment was provided”. Despite his concerns the Minister concluded, “In view of certain newspaper criticisms in which the behaviour of Australian troops in Japan was criticised ... enquiries were made by me and it is apparent that the newspaper allegations were ill-founded.” He had also been reassured by the C-in-C BCOF “that action was consistently being taken to weed out the undesirable elements from the Forces ... and a considerable improvement had taken place in the behaviour of all sections of the Force.”⁹¹

A formal response to the matters raised by the Minister was prepared by the Adjutant General and following consideration by the Military Board submitted to the Minister on 3 April 1947. A visit by the Chaplains General, and separately by the Commissioner of the Salvation Army, was put in train and applications made by the YMCA and Salvation Army for an increased establishment in their representatives accredited to BCOF. The despatch of a further twenty YWCA personnel was expedited, as was the provision of amenities stores.

Australian female participation in the occupation

Objectives set for the force “to demonstrate the democratic way of life to the Japanese” and “to maintain and enhance British Commonwealth prestige” were undermined by the extraordinary imbalances in the male–female composition of the Australian contingent, both initially and subsequently. Of the total strength of some 12,000 personnel, only 92 members were from the Women’s Services, primarily as staff for 130 Australian General Hospital (AGH).⁹² These volunteers were required to

⁹¹ Report by Minister. AAV, MP 742/1,217/1/21.

⁹² AWM 114, 130/1/42.BCOF, Japan. Women’s Services of the AMF. See also a comprehensive study of the contribution made by women to the occupation in Roma Donnelly, “A civilising influence? Women in the British Occupation Force in Japan. 1946-1952”. MA Thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, 1994. In September 1945 the staffing for 130 Australian General Hospital was selected from members of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). By December this establishment had

serve a minimum period of 12 months with relief within 18 months after arrival. The first female personnel disembarked at Kure on 25 March 1946.

Three Australian female members of the Red Cross, as part of initial BCOF Australian contingent of ten, accompanied the first draft of female personnel of 130 AGH on the *Manunda*. Known as “hospital visitors”, their role was to provide basic personal services over and above those generally available through the normal hospital services. In September 1945 the staffing for 130 Australian General Hospital provided for members of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). By December this establishment had been extended to include members of the Australian Army Medical Women’s Service (AAMWS). Membership of the AANS was restricted to qualified Nursing Sisters whereas membership of the AAMWS, formerly the Volunteer Aid Detachment, was based on a lower degree of nursing standard and less experience. However at no time were members of the Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) allowed to volunteer for service in Japan, although special arrangements were made whereby individuals were enabled to transfer from the AWAS to the AAMWS.

130 AGH was located on Eta Jima, where female members were accommodated in dormitories of 22, living under the extraordinarily stringent restrictions placed on the movement and activities of all Australian women personnel serving with BCOF.⁹³ An exceptional initial female appointment was that of Corporal M. Lay, AAMWS, who undertook a number of secretarial appointments to the Chief of Staff, BCOF, and temporarily to C-in-C BCOF, Northcott, prior to her promotion to Lieutenant and appointment as Confidential Secretary to the new C-in-C BCOF, Robertson.

been extended to include members of the Australian Army Medical Women’s Service (AAMWS). Membership of the AANS was restricted to qualified Nursing Sisters whereas membership of the AAMWS, formerly the Volunteer Aid Detachment, was based on a lower degree of nursing standard and less experience. However at no time were members of the Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) allowed to volunteer for service in Japan, although special arrangements were made whereby individuals were enabled to transfer from the AWAS to the AAMWS.

⁹³ Apart from a steel locker and stretcher per person, more substantial furniture was not issued until December 1946, nor much done to improve privacy. Despite the experience of arrival during the harsh winter conditions of March, it was not until the following March that fleecy lined boots were issued to female personnel, although one pair of woollen pyjamas per person was issued in November. Japanese “house girls” were allotted on a generous basis to all members to undertake cleaning and laundry duties.

As the realities of service with BCOF were more fully appreciated, so minor amendments to establishments were approved, with females allocated to interpreting, welfare, ordnance, non-nursing and secretarial-clerical duties. In December 1945, the Defence Committee supported a JCOSA recommendation “that personnel of women’s services should be included in BCOF to carry out certain essential tasks, particularly clerical and signal duties.” JCOSA estimated that, in addition to personnel for the Australian Army Nursing Service and Australian Army Medical Women’s Services, a maximum of 350 AWAS and WAAFs would be essential.⁹⁴ The War Cabinet rejected the recommendation.

The C-in-C then raised the matter on the grounds that the UK-India contingent, proportionately smaller than the Australian, would include some 250 female personnel, and secondly that the Australian policy on females should be amended to allow “the inclusion of Australian Women’s Services within the Australian Entertainment Unit”. The War Cabinet decision remained unchanged.

Another attempt was made by BCOF on 8 April 1946 “in view of the shortage of signals personnel” to seek the raising of certain signals units which would have required some 78 females. This submission noted “that US forces are employing 4,000 women on specialist and clerical duties and both the Commonwealth representative to the Allied Council and representatives to the International Prosecution Section have women staffs.” This submission was not supported by the Defence Committee (Extended) as “it was considered that it would not be appropriate to raise the matter again”, in light of the previous refusals.⁹⁵

The actual situation with regard to female personnel serving with BCOF on 18 June 1946 was: 210 (UK-India); 77 (New Zealand); 102 (Australia).⁹⁶ The last word on the subject went to Prime Minister Chifley on 6 August 1946, following his recent visit to Japan: “Cabinet has decided, however, that its previous decisions on this matter shall not be varied.” On 2 December 1946 the first draft of 14 AAMWS and 6

⁹⁴ Summary. AAV, MP 313/5, JCOSA 44, p. 1.

⁹⁵ However, advice to this effect crossed with yet another request from the C-in-C BCOF, dated 18 May 1946, again seeking the employment of females within the force, including over 200 posts in the signal services and a number of clerical positions (approximately 100 AWAS).

⁹⁶ *Women’s Services for BCOF*, 19 July 1946. AAV, MP 313/5. JCOSA 44.

AANS personnel arrived in Kure as replacements for those staff of 130 AGH due to return to Australia.

Reaffirmation of the non-fraternisation policy

Despite the generally encouraging reports of both the appropriate minister and the Chaplains General on the improvement of conditions of the Australians serving in BCOF, and recognition of the commonsense accommodations being made, the Australian government's strong line on non-fraternisation was reaffirmed in 1949. On 30 July 1949 the C-in-C BCOF reported "a major change in occupation policy of far reaching significance" promulgated by SCAP. This noted, *inter alia*, that

- (a) Japan has been completely demilitarised;
- (b) social and political reformation of Japan has reached a stage permitting assumption by the Japanese government of increasing obligations in its advancement toward economic rehabilitation and stabilisation;
- (c) necessity for extensive surveillance no longer exists;
- (d) character of the occupation has gradually changed from the stern rigidity of a military occupation to the friendly guidance of a protective force.⁹⁷

The Instruction outlined measures to "indoctrinate occupation personnel in an attitude of friendly interest and guidance towards indigenous peoples in the conduct of occupation missions, an attitude that is reflective of the democratic ideal and avoids any arrogance indicative of unnecessary military coercion."

The C-in-C noted that "I cannot see how occupation personnel can be indoctrinated in 'an attitude of friendly interest and guidance' unless a considerable degree of fraternisation is permitted." He therefore sought

⁹⁷ Letter and attachment, C-in-C BCOF, dated 30 July 1946, AAV, MP 313/5, file 51. The C-in-C enclosed a copy of Change No. 7 to Occupation Instruction No. 5, issued by SCAP, and received by HQ BCOF on 26 July 1949. Because of the ongoing withdrawal of forces from BCOF, the original area of BCOF responsibility had been substantially reduced and at the time encompassed Hiroshima prefecture and the Japanese police district of Iwakuni.

authority to grant permission to members of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force to visit approved Japanese homes, and to assist and advise Japanese institutions and organisations as are, within my discretion, worthy of the assistance and guidance of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. This is in accordance with the policy that has been adopted by the United States forces for some considerable time.

Although the C-in-C's views were supported by the Defence Committee and considered by Cabinet,⁹⁸ on 30 September 1949 the C-in-C BCOF was advised "that Australian government has decided that there is to be no change in the existing policy of non-fraternisation between BCOF personnel and the Japanese".⁹⁹

Despite the specific nature of the Cabinet advice to the C-in-C, the Minister for Defence, in response to a question in the House on 4 October 1949, indicated that the matter was one of "military housekeeping" for the C-in-C BCOF to decide. Dr Evatt's public response in the House the next day was even more misleading:

The Australian government by arrangement with the commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan, has adhered to the military rules of non-fraternisation by the Army units in Japan. That is purely a question of military discipline and involves no general question of political policy, in which the government would naturally be guided by military considerations.

Ironically, Australian government ministers, by their actions concerning the handling of the non-fraternisation policy, emulated the puppet manipulators in the Japanese Bunraku theatre. Repeatedly, by specific, official direction to the C-in-C BCOF, using classified channels and confidential classifications, they enunciated a strict non-fraternisation policy, which no doubt reflected public opinion and the political

⁹⁸ Cabinet Agendum, undated, AAV, MP 742/1, 85/1/1059.

⁹⁹ Letter, Minister for Defence, 18 October 1949. *ibid.*

realities of the day. However, in their public statements the ministers construed the matter as one for the “military authorities” to decide.

These contradictions in the Australian policy on non-fraternisation, and the process of political misrepresentation, were further illustrated in the correspondence in 1949 that arose from representations to the Chaplain-General by BCOF chaplains on the question of worship by Japanese Christians in Army chapels. In essence the conundrum was:

Since 1946 BCOF churches were available for use by Japanese clergy and or congregations at any time other than the regular scheduled BCOF services; BCOF encouraged chaplains and YWCA representatives in their work in Japan and practical assistance was routinely available to Australian and US missionaries; for some months there had been a large attendance of Japanese girls at BCOF church services, some arriving with and leaving with soldiers while some find it a suitable meeting place and leave with soldiers. Some may merely attend because they are Christians. The C-in-C knew of this church attendance but had taken no action, hoping that the Australian policy would gradually relax but if fraternisation was brought to his notice he would obey the government’s direction.

The C-in-C was prepared to reopen the subject in mid December when he hoped for some relaxation of the Fraternisation Policy which at present made Australians diverge from fulfilling national endeavours jeopardising and causing other members of the British Commonwealth to state openly the Australian policy in these matters does not repeat not represent British Commonwealth Policy.¹⁰⁰

The response by the Minister for Defence acknowledged that the “presence of Japanese Nationals at B.C.O.F. church services has been permitted in the past in accordance with para 4(c) of your Directive which states that one of the objects of B.C.O.F. is ‘to illustrate to and impress on the Japanese people as far as may be

¹⁰⁰ AAV, MP 313/5, File 51.

possible the Democratic way and purpose of life'." It followed that "the recent decision by the government maintaining without change the existing policy on Fraternisation does not in itself justify your direction forbidding this practice." Moreover, "It is considered that arrangements could be made in consultation with the Deputy Assistant Chaplains General for the continued attendance of Japanese Nationals at B.C.O.F. church services under conditions which do not contravene the Fraternisation policy." Therefore "unless there are other reasons for your decision which are not apparent and of which we wish to be informed the government desires that the practice of permitting Japanese Nationals to attend B.C.O.F. church services be continued."¹⁰¹

Government policies on accompanying Australian families in BCOF

A similar contradictory and often deceptive policy approach was taken by the Australian government to the matter of Australian families accompanying personnel serving in BCOF. In March 1946 HQ SCAP issued a policy allowing families of personnel serving in Japan to join those personnel, and obliged the Japanese government to provide accommodation for the dependants of those serving with the Occupation Forces. On 30 May the C-in-C BCOF forwarded his recommendations for the movement of Australian families to Japan and arrangements were put in hand for the identification and preparation of appropriate accommodation.

These recommendations were supported by JCOSA and the national governments notified. Agreement was forthcoming for British and Indian personnel, although the New Zealand and Australian governments delayed. It was not until November 1946 that the Australian Cabinet approved of "the entry into the BCOF area in Japan of wives and families of members of the Australian forces serving with BCOF".

A condition of eligibility was that the member concerned was expected to remain in Japan for at least one year after the date of arrival of his family. Given the practicalities involved, i.e., of actually getting the families to Japan, acceptance of this

¹⁰¹ Memo and attachment, Minister for Defence, 18 October 1949, AAV, MP 742/1, 85/1/1059.

condition by the majority of Australian personnel from the March–April 1946 deployment would mean that they would be obliged to serve with BCOF for a further period of two years. In the event some families arrived in March 1947 but the majority did not arrive until August 1947.

By that time withdrawals by the British, Indian and New Zealand governments had placed the future viability of BCOF in doubt. This led the Minister for the Army in October 1947 to suspend the departure of Australian families on the grounds that they might be required to return earlier than expected. Then on 31 March 1948 the Minister for Defence announced the immediate cessation of further departures and the limitation on service in Japan to 12 months. There were at that time 196 families waiting to be moved to Japan, and 477 families in Japan.

The public side of this situation was further muddied following a statement by the Minister for Defence on 14 July 1948, extolling the Australian contribution and noting *inter alia*, “In addition many families have been successfully moved to Japan and housed in model settlements ... At present there are some 260 Australian families remaining in Japan.”¹⁰² He did not refer to the fact that this program had been suspended since the previous October and was to remain so until a decision by the respective ministers actually cancelled the program completely on 17 November 1948. This was in the face of the Defence Committee’s opinion that that such a move would have adverse effects on the morale of the present strength of BCOF, and on recruiting generally, especially as all future personnel would be members of the new Regular Army on a normal two-year engagement of service in Japan.¹⁰³ The program had also demonstrated uniquely to the Japanese people the “Objects of the Occupation” by this further and usually positive exposure to the realities of Australian family life, albeit, compared with contemporary Australian domestic situations, under privileged conditions.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² AA, MP 1217, box 98, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Minute, Defence Committee, 25 November 1948. AAV, MP 313/5, JCOSA 70/2.

¹⁰⁴ Donnelly, “A civilising influence?” and Minister for Army’s report on visit 1947. The inclusion of families, formally referred to as “Dependants”, carried with it the acceptance by the Australian government of the obligation to provide the many services accorded or available to families in Australia. Apart from the housing estates such as the Rainbow Village built at Nijimura in Hiro – which included the public facilities of school, cinema, church, sports facilities – there was the need to

Marriages

A particularly complex aspect of the non-fraternisation policy concerned marriages in Japan: not only between Australians, or between Australians and other Europeans, but with marriages between Australians and Japanese. The government's policy was:

The Minister for Immigration [Arthur Calwell] has decided that no Japanese woman, whether wives or fiancées, will be permitted to enter Australia and he has directed that your Department be informed of his decision for dissemination among the Australian members of BCOF.¹⁰⁵

Calwell's decision arose from an enquiry made through the Australian Political Representative, Tokyo, "by a young Australian soldier, relative to the entry into Australia of a Japanese girl either as his wife or as his fiancée for the purpose of being married here."¹⁰⁶

Members of the BCOF could not marry without the written authority of one of the following: C-in-C BCOF; AOC BCAIR; Comd 34th Bde; Comd 2nd NZEF (Japan) or Comd UK Army Component. The only authority for a marriage between a member of BCOF and a Japanese national was the C-in-C BCOF. However the order stated:

2. In the event of an unapproved marriage being carried out by a chaplain, civilian clergyman, consul or official or under Japanese civil law all ranks are informed that:

attend to the many practicalities of household goods, Japanese staff, ongoing maintenance, and the supply of transport, health, welfare, leave and educational services to be attended to. As the families settled in, so also the sophistication and the range of these services improved, as did the morale and well-being of the service members of the force.

¹⁰⁵ Letter, 13 November 1947, from the Department of Immigration to the Secretary, Department of the Army.

¹⁰⁶ Sheriff, W. *Shinbun* 41, December 1990; and AA MP 927/1, A115/1/10. The BCOF policy on this subject, reflecting the policy on non-fraternisation, and clearly determined by the Minister for Immigration's policy decision, was summarised in a Force Routine Order (FRO Serial 2/48 No 7).

- (a) Disciplinary action will be taken.
 - (b) Dependents and marriage allowance may be withheld and logistic support of the wife and family may not be accepted.
 - (c) Australian Ministry of Immigration will not permit the entry of Japanese women into Australia either as wives or as fiancées.
- Japanese registrars have been forbidden to accept a notification or make any entry in a register of marriage in respect of any member of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force unless the registrar first gives thirty days notice to HQ BCOF through Military government channels, and within that period receives in writing, the authority of the C-in-C BCOF.

The further obstacle was that the British Consul was the only person legally empowered to marry Australians in Japan. The Australian Consul was not so empowered because the Australian government, unlike the UK, New Zealand and Canadian governments, had not passed the Foreign Marriages Act. Those Australians who did obtain permission to marry members of the Australian Services had to be married by the British Consul despite, in most cases, having undergone a formal church wedding.¹⁰⁷

Prohibitions on Japanese females were reiterated in March 1948 when the Department of the Army was informed that the Minister for Immigration's "decision is of a permanent nature, and will not terminate at the signing of the Peace Treaty; and no Japanese women or half-caste Japanese women will be admitted to Australia whether they be Japanese nationals or nationals of any other country."¹⁰⁸

On 7 April 1948, the Australian government policy on Australian servicemen marrying Japanese was raised in a question to the Minister for Immigration in the House of Representatives. In his reply, Calwell stated, "The decision that Australians serving in Japan were not to contract marriages with Japanese women was made by the Department of Army." Calwell made no mention of his policy directive to

¹⁰⁷ The first such marriage between two Australian service personnel was celebrated in November 1946, although this marriage and many others carried with it the formal consequence that members of the Australian Women's Services were thereupon discharged from the service.

¹⁰⁸ AAV, PM 742/1, 85/1/1059.

Australian members of BCOF as stated in the letter of 13 November 1947 and reiterated on 17 March 1948.¹⁰⁹

Further advice was provided to the Australian Service Departments in March 1949 whereby the Minister for Immigration “has decided that wives who are not wholly of European descent will not be permitted to enter the Commonwealth. It is desired therefore, that no facilities should be granted to any Australian serviceman to enable him to bring his non-European wife to Australia. The Commander-in-Chief, BCOF has been informed accordingly.”

Prior to the signing of the Peace treaty, the C-in-C BCOF, bound by the Non-Fraternisation Policy, had not authorised any Australian serving member of BCOF to marry a Japanese national. Ratification of the Treaty of Peace with Japan on 28 April 1952 and the end of occupation rendered the non-fraternisation policy technically no longer applicable.¹¹⁰ The first Australian who had served with BCOF to marry a Japanese national in Japan was Mr Gordon Parker (14 Works and Parks). Parker had been the pioneer in his defiance of this tortuous and, it would appear, deliberate official obstruction of his determination to marry, have children and bring his family to Australia. He made repeated official representations, attracted press attention, enlisted the involvement of his local member of Parliament and the support of the Archbishop of Melbourne in his efforts to bring his wife and two children to Australia. Finally permission was granted and favourable publicity given to the arrival in Melbourne on 9 July 1952 of Mrs “Cherry” Parker and her children, she being the first Japanese war bride. However the battle was to continue, as Mrs Parker and her children were granted a “Certificate of Exemption” for only 60 months, which required yet another appeal and, “years later”, finally naturalisation.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, he included in his reply his opinion that, “There is a particular objection to the presence of Japanese in this country.” He also added, “I believe I speak the opinion of 90% of the people of Australia when I say that as long as there continues to live in this country any relative of any person who has suffered at the hand of the Japanese, no Japanese man or women will be welcome here.”

¹¹⁰ It was not until 27 March 1952 that Cabinet approved “admission of Japanese wives of Australian servicemen and ex-servicemen” and on 17 April 1952, HQ BCOF sought official direction in the light of the Parker’s marriage and official approval for the admission of Mrs Parker and her children to Australia.

¹¹¹ Discussions with Mr Parker and used with his permission.

Reviews of the Australian commitment to BCOF

The first review of the value of BCOF, prepared by the Joint Planning Committee (JPC), and staff of JCOSA in early 1947, considered the views of the Department of External Affairs. It had prepared a response to NZ proposals to reduce the size of the New Zealand army component; to Indian proposals to withdraw all Indian forces; and the preparedness of the British government to participate positively in any appreciation of the future role of BCOF.¹¹²

Despite this unanimity of opinion amongst Australia's partners in BCOF to reduce their commitments substantially or completely, the Defence Committee, at its meeting on 17 April 1947, endorsed generally the JPC Appreciation.¹¹³ The "Objects and Role of the BCOF" were re-endorsed, the military role remained unchanged, and recognition was accorded the value of BCOF as a development in British Commonwealth Defence cooperation. In summary, the purposes of BCOF were directed specifically to the subjection of Japan to Allied, and particularly to British Commonwealth, authority. The Committee concluded that:

20(a) The contribution of BCOF assists the US forces in the present necessary occupation of Japan. This military control must continue at least until the signing of the peace treaty has been concluded, satisfactory guarantees for its fulfilment established, and assurances exist that Japan will not become an easy mark for exploitation which Russia might be disposed to initiate. The British Commonwealth should therefore continue to play its part in order to fulfil the obligations incurred when they decided to participate in the occupation of Japan.

The JPC assessment reiterated the long-standing Australian aim to negotiate a peace treaty with Japan which would secure Australia's future against a resurgence of

¹¹² AA, CRS, MP 1049/5, ADCM 68/1948, cablegram 29, 22 February 1947.

¹¹³ AA, JCOSA 588, ADCM 137/1947, Appendix A.

Japanese militarism, and to give an additional guarantee whereby Japan was secured against Soviet exploitation.¹¹⁴ Thus:

Should any combination of reasons cause the US government to withdraw its troops, Japan would be less able to resist propaganda from her powerful neighbour – Russia, and be powerless to prevent any military infiltration or occupation that Russia might be disposed to initiate. In this case, the favourable strategic position referred to in para 5 would be reversed. In fact, strategically any decisions to withdraw BCOF would react against the best interests of the British Commonwealth as a whole, and against Australia and New Zealand in particular.

Coincidentally, in February 1947 MacArthur presented a recommendation to Washington for a peace treaty with Japan which could be signed by July 1947. A succession of drafts, prepared by the State Department from March 1947 to January 1948, prohibited the creation of either a regular Japanese military force or an aircraft industry but provided for a coast guard and a police force, and also included reference “to resurgent Japanese militarism as Asia’s greatest menace”.¹¹⁵ At this same time MacArthur announced “that the most essential requirement – the

¹¹⁴ For example, in paragraph 14 it was agreed that item (b) the military role, i.e., demilitarisation, had been long completed without resistance by the Japanese. Secondly, item (a) safeguarding of Allied resources, was primarily the result of the occupation, rather than the cause of it. Also in paragraph 14 of the appreciation, reference was made to the SCAP view of the necessity for Allied unity as a guarantee against the Japanese “giving trouble”. As the tide of war turned against the Japanese after 1942, and the military power of the United States gradually exerted itself, so the myth of Japanese superiority became discredited. Even though the full significance of the atomic bomb and its effects upon the conduct of war would take some time to be realised, the reality was that the US possessed atomic weapons and used them to end hostilities. Japan would not be a threat to the peace while such a strategic and technological imbalance lasted.

¹¹⁵ Hata Ikuhiko, *Japan under the occupation*, p. 372. There were increasing signs of US concessions to the Japanese viewpoint. Even before Ashida’s initiatives, questions were asked in the Australian Parliament as to whether the Japanese government was seeking to establish an army of 100,000 as well as a small air force. On 26 June 1947 there was speculation in the Australian press of a Japanese request to establish a coast guard. On 2 July 1947 *The Age* reported that members of Japan’s new government had been canvassing high officers at General MacArthur’s headquarters and members of Allied missions in Tokyo for the return of Japanese ex-servicemen to New Guinea, the Netherlands East Indies, British Borneo and Malaya in order to assist the development of these underdeveloped areas. The Japanese foreign office was also reported to be supporting a campaign for the return of Japanese territory and Yoshida drew the attention of the Allies to Japan’s overcrowded conditions.

disarmament and demilitarization of Japan – has already been completed and that, even without external controls, Japan could not rearm for a modern war ‘for a century’.”

A further Committee conclusion was that:

20(b) The withdrawal of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force might embarrass the US government politically and strategically and reduce the degree of cooperation being achieved in the Pacific with adverse effects in the British Commonwealth.

It was in Australia’s interests to do nothing that might reduce the effectiveness of US interests in Japan.¹¹⁶

There was an additional pressure at work. From time to time Robertson ventured to General Mueller, MacArthur’s Chief of Staff, the opinion that BCOF’s seven squadrons of first class aircraft “seemed a little too numerous”. Mueller “viewed with horror any suggestion that any fighter aircraft should be removed from Japan.” Robertson became aware that by mid-1947, US strength in Japan was so low that some US commanders were contemplating, in the event of war with Russia, the Japanese use of US mobilisation stores that were positioned in Japan, sufficient to equip a force of 500,000 men over and above the occupation forces.¹¹⁷

Later Robertson became aware that US plans were based on striking at Russian airfields first and that

they expected to use my seven squadrons of fighters as the protection to their bombers during this phase. One officer informed me that they intended to use the BCOF squadrons to destruction in the first 24 hours, at the end of which

¹¹⁶ Evatt had made a similar claim with regard to withdrawals of Indian and NZ forces as being “detrimental to Australian forces, as it will raise a public demand for their withdrawal”. See also Singh, Rajendra, *Post war occupation forces ...* p. 157, Do192/2, 29 April 1947. Cawthorn to Smith.

¹¹⁷ Robertson, Private papers, pp. 97-98

time they hoped that the known Russian air force on existing aerodromes within reach of Japan would have been rendered non-operative.¹¹⁸

The third and fourth JPC conclusions concerned the prestige of the British Commonwealth in Japan as “principals in the formulation of the Japanese peace treaty”. Had the Australian government overestimated its own significance? The Japanese, cognisant of the absolute power exercised by MacArthur, deliberately minimised the importance of BCOF; and frequent and substantial reductions in the size of BCOF confirmed scepticism amongst US officials as to the seriousness of the British Commonwealth commitment.

Another JPC conclusion noted that the “presence of BCOF in Japan ensures that the British Commonwealth’s value as an economic and social factor in developments in the Far East is not overlooked or underrated.” This prominence accorded to economic matters reflected a growing discontent with SCAP’s conduct of economic policies within Japan, and a belated realisation that the UK’s initial and sustained economic interest in Japan had been in marked contrast to Australia’s primary and obsessive interest in security.¹¹⁹

By mid-1947 the full effects of the withdrawals from BCOF had become obvious and the arrangements for the control and administration of BCOF were reviewed by the Council of Defence on 3 July 1947.¹²⁰ This review led to the dissolution of JCOSA, with effect 31 December 1947. Responsibility was then assigned to the Australian government, exercised through the joint service

¹¹⁸ Wood, James, *The forgotten force*, p. 161.

¹¹⁹ AA, JCOSA 588, ADCM 137/1947, Dominions office telegram 3, 12 February 1947. Thus, for example, the UK interest in the expansion of the area occupied by BCOF referred to the economic importance of Kobe as a major industrial and trading area. The appreciation noted that although the economic aspect of the occupation had not been mentioned in the Directive to the C-in-C BCOF, “since the directive may be read by other nations”, “it is none the less implicit as one of the reasons which induced the British Commonwealth governments to participate in the occupation of Japan”.

¹²⁰ On 5 October 1947 there was a press report in London that the UK had approached Australia about the withdrawal of UK troops from Japan, subject to the concurrence of the other Commonwealth governments, the US government, and General MacArthur. Although the announcement implied that this withdrawal involved only a residual British force, the actual numbers were considerable and totalled about 4,500 personnel. The British withdrawals were not expected to be complete until early 1948.

machinery in the Defence Department, to which the UK and NZ had accredited representatives.¹²¹

In Tokyo on 16 July 1947 a BCOF spokesman announced “almost the entire burden of the British Commonwealth occupation role will fall upon the Australians after the departure of the Indian contingent and part of the New Zealand army component.” Nevertheless, the withdrawal of Australian troops seemed a probability, despite the Minister’s assurance to the contrary.¹²² Chambers linked such a withdrawal to the signing of a peace treaty and, in answer to a supplementary question, admitted that it would be unfair to the families of Australian servicemen to proceed to Japan after December 1947 “because [they] may have to return [to Australia] in six or nine months.”¹²³

During 1948 there were marked changes in US and Australian policies towards Japan.¹²⁴ MacArthur, on 21 March 1948, recognised that the prospects for an early peace treaty had faltered but he pressed for one as early as practicable. He was informed that there was a “general trend in recent War Department thinking towards the early establishment of a small defensive force for Japan, to be ready at such times as US occupation forces leave the country.” He pronounced himself as “unalterably opposed to any such plan” and outlined his concept of a main US defence line, based upon Okinawa, from which the US forces could defend Japan from external aggression without stationing US forces on Japanese soil.

Then, on 25 April 1948, American troops were called out, for the first time in the history of the occupation, to quell riots in Osaka which involved an estimated 15,000 Koreans and led to deaths and injuries. The US response to the riot led to the implementation of American plans to meet further large communist-inspired uprisings, which were expected to begin on 1 May 1948; it also led to the State

¹²¹ AA, CRS, A5954, box 1608, ACDA 3/1948. New arrangements were approved, retrospectively, by the Council of Defence on 28 April 1948.

¹²² CPD, HR, vol. 193, p. 675, 30 September 1947 and vol. 194, p. 1671, 24 October 1947.

¹²³ Nevertheless in January 1948 the Australian government announced a reduction in the size of the RAAF force in BCOF from three to two squadrons because it had been possible to replace the DC3 aircraft on the courier run to Australia with Qantas aircraft. Technically, however, the RAAF was unable to sustain the three squadron commitment.

¹²⁴ Robertson, Private papers, p. 97. In Washington on 10 March 1948 reference was made to the “Strike Report”, prepared under contract for the US Army, which recommended a scrapping of the Allied policy on Japanese reparations and the rebuilding of key Japanese industries.

Department's agreement to the establishment of a Japanese coast guard, on the grounds of its "economic" value, and to the strengthening of the police force to enable it to cope with "communist pressures of disorder".¹²⁵ There were signs also that the prospects for a general peace treaty with Japan were waning, with attention turning towards an interim US-Japan bilateral agreement to give the US the right to station forces in Japan.¹²⁶

Australia's unease about these developments was expressed by Evatt during a debate in the House of Representatives on 8 April 1948, when he said, "It would be wrong for Japan to be converted into an arsenal that would ultimately be turned in the direction of the South Pacific" and that it would be an "evil day for Australia if Japan is given capacity to rearm". The public debate in Australia on Japan stepped up noticeably on 8 May 1948, when General Blamey ranged himself with those Americans who saw Japan as a "buffer against the spread of Soviet imperialism". Equally significant were the divisions revealed within the RSL.¹²⁷

The Defence Committee reviewed the BCOF commitment on 22 April 1948, cognisant of the following figures:

¹²⁵ MacMahon Ball noted the growth of the left in Japan – from 36 seats in the Diet in 1938 to 142 in April 1947 and, by January 1948, a trade union membership of 5 million. W. MacMahon Ball, "Reflections on Japan", *Pacific Affairs*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ FRUS, DP, 1948, vol. VI, pp. 700-02. A useful summary of US policies towards Japan at this time is to be found in a Reuters report published in *The Age* of 8 June 1948. This described US activities in Japan as a new phase in the occupation of Japan, designed not to keep down a defeated enemy, but to man the western bases of the US in the Pacific. In support of this phase the US was actively strengthening air and sea power facilities in Japan to transform Japan into a military base; and while the US government denied any suggestions that Japan should be regarded as a military ally, it was actively encouraging Japanese economic revival.

¹²⁷ Blamey's statement was condemned by the Federal President of the RSL, Millhouse KC, who stated that "the Japanese are entirely unpredictable and might, out of revenge, desire to use their strength against those who defeated them." Blamey's statement was supported by the SA State President of the RSL, Brigadier A.S. Blackburn, who believed that the Soviet Union had designs on Japan, and questioned what would happen if the Allies refused to allow the Japanese a defence force. Blackburn, noting a natural reluctance on the part of Australia, or its allies, to be involved in any plan that would risk Australian lives in the defence of Japan, proposed that the Japanese be allowed some form of defence under strict allied control. In Tokyo on 10 May 1948 there was a report that recent British interest in normalising Japan's international relations had raised hopes in Japan that the peace treaty would be settled in the near future. This was followed by a report which credited Evatt with the view that "while Japan must not be placed in a position to rearm or to re-create a dangerous war potential, restrictions on the Japanese economy should not go beyond what is necessary for military security and that Japan should have a workable economy."

- a. At its maximum strength on 31 December 1946 BCOF comprised 37,021 personnel – a figure which included 11,918 Australians.
- b. At 1 April 1948 the total strength of BCOF was 12,009 and this figure included 8,203 Australians (or 68.31% of the total).
- c. With the expected withdrawal of the Indian and New Zealand contingents and the bulk of the United Kingdom contingent by 30 June 1948, the Australian strength after that date estimated to be 6,250 out of a total 6,850.

The Committee expected further reductions in the Australian figure by the end of 1948, which would mean BCOF “will not be a useful contribution to any military situation which may arise in Japan” and noted the services’ viewpoint that:

no useful contribution can be made to any military situation which may arise in the occupation of Japan by a force of less than a brigade group plus the necessary naval and air supporting forces and administrative personnel ... totalling approximately 7,000.¹²⁸

Despite this advice, on 7 May 1948 the Australian government advised the US of its intention “to reduce the Australian contingent of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan to one army battalion and one air force squadron with the necessary administrative units for their maintenance or an approximate overall strength of 2,750.”¹²⁹

The US government, in contrast to its reply to an earlier proposal to withdraw the NZ component, reacted very strongly to these proposed reductions in the Australian contingent of BCOF. The reply referred to a “token” British Commonwealth force “which would be inadequate for the occupation of the BCOF area” and observed that “the proposed reduction would necessitate a redeployment of United States forces now in Japan”. However as the US

¹²⁸ AA, MP 1049/5, ADCM 68/1948, Appreciation by the Defence Committee regarding the future of Australian participation in BCOF.

¹²⁹ AA. MP 1049, series 5 2026/2,1220, cablegram 6453/4/5, 7 March 1948, DEA to AEW.

was unable to provide additional troops to the SCAP in Japan to take over the occupation of the BCOF area, it is requested that the Australian government give favourable consideration to maintenance in Japan of a British Commonwealth force equivalent to one United States infantry division (less one regimental combat team) plus necessary service troops at least until such time as it may be determined that a substantial reduction may be made in the occupation forces.¹³⁰

From occupier to protector

Under orders issued by SCAP on 17 April 1948, planning commenced “with a view to placing all occupation troops in Japan in a state of readiness to meet any possible eventualities”.¹³¹ The new US policy marked a fundamental shift in the purposes for which US forces were maintained in Japan, although Robertson was reassured by HQ SCAP that these new arrangements would not necessarily apply to the forces under his command. Robertson found himself caught up in the debate being conducted by the Americans over “the duties of the Occupation Force in Japan and whether or not those duties included the defence of Japan against external aggression”. He “insisted that no matter what powers might have been signed away to General MacArthur under the MacArthur-Northcott Agreement which had been ratified by the various governments concerned, that sovereignty of the British governments did not allow them to hand over the unrestricted use of their forces to any allied commander no matter how close the relations might be.”¹³²

On 28 April 1948 the CGS Strudee requested guidance from the Council of Defence as to the attitude to be adopted, in the event that the Australian forces in BCOF received orders from the US Commander, Japan, “the execution of which might be capable of provoking an international incident with, for example, Soviet Russia”. Chifley, by way of reply, reaffirmed that Australian forces in Japan were there for occupation purposes only. During Robertson’s absence for consultations

¹³⁰ FRUS DP, 1948, vol. VI. p. 827.

¹³¹ AA, CRS, A5954, box 1637, Minute, Shedden to Dedman, July 1948 and despatch 103/1948, AMJ.

¹³² Robertson, Private papers, p. 93.

and leave, the Commander US Forces in Japan had ordered that all aircraft were to fly armed and the Acting C-in-C BCOF had agreed to a modified version of this arrangement. Robertson, upon his return, had this decision amended to an arrangement whereby operational procedures required that for BCOF the “weapons and ammunition carried ... should be as ordered by the C-in-C BCOF”. However, it had become obvious that this change had led to some cooling in attitude by US commanders in Japan, and according to a press report, had led to an angry reversal by Robertson of a US directive to arm Australian fighter aircraft.¹³³

In June 1948 Robertson again sought guidance; under a revised directive, issued in July 1948, he was authorised to defend BCOF forces, if attacked, and “to engage in full staff discussions with the Americans in Japan on the basis that they involved no government commitment”.¹³⁴ In the event of US forces being attacked, he was required to seek direction from the Australian government.

Further investigation showed the revised directive to be inadequate and to turn on the question of the “right” to determine what would be “an act of war involving Australia and to commit Australian forces to engage in hostilities”. Under a new directive, issued in November 1948, the C-in-C BCOF was authorised “that for the purpose of planning and consultation with SCAP it may be assumed that in the event of an attack on Japan, BCOF will act in full cooperation with American forces”.¹³⁵ The C-in-C BCOF was still required, in the event of an attack, to seek directions from the Australian government.

In effect the Australian force in Japan had fallen into line with the new status accorded US forces, i.e., that of “protective power”. As the Australian Head of Mission (HOM) in Japan, Patrick Shaw, was to observe

Neither the Allied Council for Japan, nor the Far Eastern Commission, nor for that matter either myself as Head of the Australian Mission and Allied

¹³³ Sydney *Sun*, 20 June 1948.

¹³⁴ AA, CRS, A5954, box 1637, ACDA 1/1949.

¹³⁵ To this end, Robertson arranged with the “American air force for their complete air warning and control system to be extended to include the BCOF air force, and their main signal lines were brought in and connected up to the back of our switchboards. It only needed a matter of a few seconds then to make the additional connection to bring our system in as part of the overall air system for Japan.”

Council member, nor General Robertson as GOC BCOF have been consulted or informed of basic changes in occupation policy. While we may resent being confronted with a “fait accompli” as a result of a unilateral decision by the United States, it may come to be accepted.¹³⁶

Non-operational aspects of the Australian situation in BCOF during 1948

Two reports provide a valuable insight into the reality of other aspects of the Australian situation some two years after the arrival of Australian troops in Kure in 1946.¹³⁷

The Lloyd–Stanley report summarised the initial deployment of Australians in the following terms:

The original Australian components of the British Commonwealth Force Japan were subjected in the beginning to much avoidable hardship. Few troops would have weathered the initial storm as well and perhaps none better. Quite certainly many would not have weathered it at all. The troops landed in Kure area in appalling conditions. The whole area was devastated by bombing, the weather was bitterly cold, and especially after tropical heat, the troops were not suitably clothed or equipped, and there was no heating or amenities of any kind. All this was quite unnecessary. The Australian component should have been taken initially to Australia for leave and quiet unhurried and adequate preparation for their task, and it was no unimportant task. This was Australia’s first essay at the provision of an overseas garrison force in peace time – a project of long range implications.

¹³⁶ AA, CRS, A5954, box 1637, ACDA 1/1949. This new directive was approved by the Prime Minister and the acting Minister for External Affairs, but was not considered by the Council of Defence until 7 June 1949 when it was “noted”. Shaw also referred to his scepticism of the claims made by SCAP of radical changes in Japan and his own reservations about “accepting our former enemies as a bulwark”.

¹³⁷ The first, “A study of some problems affecting the British Commonwealth occupation in Japan in April–May 1948”, had been prepared by Major General C.E.M. Lloyd and Massey Stanley; and the second prepared by the Chaplains General: the Reverends T. McCarthy, A.H. Stewart and A. Brooke.

The authors noted the impact that the delays in the political process had had upon the military preparations of the time. These included particularly the decisions to concentrate the force in Morotai, rather than bringing the participants home for leave and proper pre-embarkation familiarisation, re-equipment and training; the creation of new units without any common tradition or composition; and misleading information as to service conditions. Moreover, the report then noted

that in contrast with the bad conditions of the early months, the Australian component shares with BCOF in general a standard of amenities and general welfare provision unparalleled in our experience. This improvement and recovery has been wrought by the energy and organising ability of the present Commander in Chief [Robertson]. Morale is high ... despite adverse effects of the withdrawal of British, Indian and New Zealand components and the falling strength of our own units.

Uncertainty as to the future of the Force, and the recent press reports of attacks on its morality and discipline, have not depressed the troops. ... The troops are clean, smart and soldierly ... Crime statistics are low and their general conduct is good. Real black marketing is negligible. The incidence of VD is high, but no higher than the Far Eastern Command generally and lower than the current rates in the Occupation in Europe.

Substantiation of these positive observations and rebuttals was contained in the detail of a number of specific appendices to the report.¹³⁸

Lloyd and Stanley found that “the most serious military problem in Japan is the high incidence of venereal disease in the civil population, and their widespread

¹³⁸ On black marketing the review concluded that “no very large scale operation existed”; that “losses by theft of stores and supplies are in no way extraordinary” and “there is no evidence of an organised trade as far as BCOF personnel are concerned”. There was evidence of “organised Japanese gangs specialising in the theft of bulk foodstuffs, clothing etc” and “on a few occasions service personnel have been involved with these gangs in the theft of BCOF stores and supplies”. Attached to the report was a summary of the nine major black market offences, involving the 17 Australians in an 18-month period who were found guilty of theft of public property and subjected to harsh penalties.

abandonment of normal moral standards occasioned by post war economic and social conditions.”

This situation was further compounded by the variation in policy between SCAP and BCOF on this problem of VD. The US policy was a worldwide one which had resulted in marked reduction in VD amongst US forces, including those in Japan. The C-in-C BCOF, however, despite repeated attempts to obtain formal policy advice, had been instructed only to ensure that weekly returns be forwarded to the Australian Military Board. The Board, it was noted by Lloyd and Stanley, had not suggested any course of action and the only reference on the JCOSA Outline Plan was to list VD as a disease endemic to Japan and to require medical officers and unit commanders to give frequent lectures on the control of preventable diseases. The Minister in his comment on the reports noted that he had directed with effect from 11 June 1948 “that troops contracting VD in the future will be automatically returned to Australia after treatment and cure”.

The chaplains also concluded that “the degree of promiscuity in Japan is no higher than would have been the case in Australia. In Japan, however, the risk of infection is much higher.” They questioned the usual emphasis on high rates of infection, in the light of the inaccuracies of classification in the types and degrees of diseases of classification (in today’s parlance, a notifiable disease). Australian government policies on other aspects of the administration of the force did little to alleviate the situation. In some cases these aggravated a difficult situation considerably.

The Lloyd–Stanley report sought also to redress the question of recognition. “Too little credit has been given at home to the positive achievements of the Australians serving in BCOF.” These achievements were summarised in part as: “In addition to their share in the responsible tasks of demilitarising Southern Honshu (including the biggest naval base and dockyard ever built) and of policing the Allied

directives issued to the Japanese, the Australians engaged on guard duty in Tokyo have gained an international reputation.”¹³⁹

Lloyd–Stanley noted that their US counterparts did much to promote “the American way of life” by the positive publicity accorded US visitors, whereas Australian visitors were sent “to probe their [Australian] morals and behaviour” and attracted publicity for Australians serving with BCOF as “representing a country which had no apparent interest in manifestations of post-war Japan except those which placed the Australian soldier in an unfavourable light.”

Lloyd and Stanley considered “the vexed question of fraternisation” in which the “present position is that these matters are left to the discretion of local commanders.” The report outlined at length C-in-C BCOF’s position on this subject, the key aspects of which were:

The original directive was issued by his predecessor on the authority of the JCOSA ... the directive is a mere guide to conduct and NOT an order ... rumours that the directive would be modified or rescinded brought a storm of protest from Australian womenfolk ... subordinate commanders are insistent on the status quo. The matter is therefore left to them; consumption of food of Japanese origin is forbidden by SCAP for good reasons; troops cannot take food with them to Japanese homes; any soldier who wishes to visit a good class Japanese home can do so on the approval of his commanding officer; lifting of the restrictions would facilitate black marketing; risk of infectious disease is high.

They concluded that

- (a) The [non-fraternisation] policy cannot be really enforced and it is regrettable that the directive was ever issued.

¹³⁹ Typically, the voluntary work at that time being undertaken to improve the standard of nursing care in Japanese civilian hospitals would have been seen negatively in Australia as an example of fraternisation.

- (b) Any action either way now would incur criticism.
- (c) The future role of BCOF will automatically solve the problem in that conformity with existing US policy will be unavoidable.

The chaplains' report also noted

the widespread resentment at the unjustifiably bad press afforded the troops in Australia, which has had an adverse effect upon the morale of home folk and troops alike. These lads were aware of the unfavourable Army records of many of the men who have made these allegations, and resent the fact that these unfavourable utterances should have received such widespread publicity.¹⁴⁰

The chaplains were encouraged by the valuable initiative pioneered within BCOF to establish practical Moral Leadership Courses for all ranks and praised the work being done to educate service personnel and their families; they also noted the high level of amenities and the standards of personal accommodation.¹⁴¹ Lloyd and Stanley were convinced that BCOF housing, for some 472 Australian families in a force at that time of 8,200 Australian personnel, was equal to that provided by the US for its families and in the case of the Rainbow Village at Nijimura, superior.¹⁴²

Meeting the communist threat

¹⁴⁰ Report by Chaplains General. AAV, MP 742/1, 217/1/23. See also P. A. Davidson, *Sky pilot: a history of chaplaincy in the RAAF, 1926–1990*. Canberra, 1990.

¹⁴¹ They praised the provision of well-appointed chapels; support to families and religious education in schools; publicity; transport to services; and the efforts being made by the unit chaplains. "The overall standard is very high – in BCOF Canteens, Service installations and unit clubs, and those controlled by the philanthropic organisations – the Red Cross, YMCA; YWCA and the Salvation Army. It is evident that no Australian Force has ever been better served."

¹⁴² Dependant housing included the provision of furniture and equipment, free servants, and medical, dental, and hospital services. Education was provided by BCOF education officers. Generous though these arrangements appeared to be, compared with conditions in Australia, ambiguities in the promulgation of service conditions had led to the build-up of some grievances following a decision in 1947 to implement a scale of rental charges.

The release of a public version of the Lloyd–Stanley report was followed by Chambers’ announcement of a forthcoming Parliamentary visit, and by public endorsement on 28 May 1948 by Robertson, who said that Australia had demonstrated clearly its capacity to assume a major defence role in British Commonwealth affairs in the Pacific. Chambers also claimed “that significant moves had been made in recent months to rebuild Japanese industries as a buffer against communism”.¹⁴³

Sensitive to criticism of BCOF, the Minister for Defence, J.J. Dedman, claimed that Australia had enhanced its status by acting as the principal representative for several Commonwealth governments and that the establishment of JCOSA (by this time dissolved) had represented an advance on any machinery “hitherto devised for the control of a joint commonwealth force”.¹⁴⁴

On 27 August 1948 the returning Parliamentary mission to Japan led by L.C. Haylen, MHR, praised MacArthur’s “democratisation” program but was critical of the way the Australian element of the BCOF had been “let down by the people of Australia”; he singled out the press for its handling of material concerning BCOF.¹⁴⁵ Haylen’s belated criticisms have little substance when it is remembered that Australian troops had been in Japan for over three years and this was the first Parliamentary delegation to visit BCOF.¹⁴⁶ At this time Australia’s diplomatic

¹⁴³ *The Age*, 5 June 1948. However in the account in the CNIA vol. 19, no. 7, July 1948, p. 426, the purposes of the visit are said to be for the delegation to study the conditions of Australian troops and prospects for development of trade between the two countries. No mention is made in this report of Japan as a buffer against communism.

¹⁴⁴ AA, CRS, A5954, box 1628, Shedden report on visit to UK, June 1949. Dedman papers, 987/9/7. Shedden issued a statement on 14 July 1948 entitled, “Review of the organization and accomplishments of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan”. As Shedden was later to write, concerning the JCOSA, “while this was a useful experiment, the Australian government and its advisers did not consider this committee to be a suitable model for the future development of machinery for British Commonwealth co-operation.” Despite Dedman’s substantiation of “Australia’s willingness to carry responsibilities”, he could be challenged on the grounds that Australia had not at any time increased its component of BCOF to compensate for withdrawal by its Commonwealth partners. Similarly, his claim that this was “the first time that forces of the United Kingdom have been placed under the control of a Dominion government” is questionable, given the presence in Japan of General Gairdner – as well as the JCOSA arrangements, the overriding authority of the various governments and General MacArthur, and the separate arrangements applicable for the control of the naval element and the operational control of the army and air force elements.

¹⁴⁵ CPD, HR, vol.198, p. 73, 2 September 1948.

¹⁴⁶ Apart from brief earlier ministerial visits by Chifley, Evatt, and Chambers, the Australian government had done little to encourage a close public interest in BCOF. Haylen’s remarks

standing in Tokyo with SCAP HQ was strained. A record of the conversation between Sir Alvary Gascoigne, Head of the UK mission in Japan, and Sebald, reveals that Patrick Shaw, the Australian diplomatic representative on the ACCJ, was regarded by MacArthur as acting in concert with the Soviet member on the ACCJ in criticisms of MacArthur. However Gascoigne, who agreed with Sebald's assessment of Shaw's attempts to play a constructive role, described Shaw as anything but a "Red", in contrast with MacMahon Ball "who is definitely a pink". Despite local antagonism in Tokyo, US State Department policy towards Australia, as outlined on 18 August 1948, saw "Australian support for our Japan policy" as "highly desirable" and "every effort should be taken to prepare the ground through diplomatic channels before new measures are adopted which might be misunderstood in the Australian government."¹⁴⁷

J. Francis, MHR, a delegation member, argued that if the Australian forces were "withdrawn too soon there is a danger of invasion of communism from Korea",¹⁴⁸ although he was encouraged by information that "fortunately in March next year the United States of America intends to augment the strength of its occupation forces". Senator R.J. Murray believed there was "grave danger that if the occupation is not policed properly the military classes may rise again as in Germany" and he sought "serious consideration to this menace, which is more dangerous than communism at this time". While Murray repeated that the purpose of the Australian military presence in Japan was to secure a place at the peace settlement, he proposed the Australian government should also develop an outpost in Japan and could charge the costs of maintaining and training "substantial fighting forces" against reparations payments which Australia was entitled to demand from Japan.¹⁴⁹

concentrated heavily upon the conditions under which the Australian troops in Japan served rather than upon the purposes of their being there; it was left to Mr McEwan to attack Haylen, as leader of the delegation, for making no mention in his report to Parliament of any matter concerning a possible peace settlement.

¹⁴⁷ FRUS DP vol. VI, p. 842-44.

¹⁴⁸ CPD, HR, vol. 198, p. 123, 7 September 1948.

¹⁴⁹ C.W. Davidson, MHR, regarded Japan as of "greater importance to Australia than to any other nation" and argued for a peace settlement with Japan; he called for the regular relief of the Australian component of BCOF by, say, a brigade at a time, and saw Japan as "a splendid training area for the troops of our regular army".

There were also concerns as to the Australian Army's capacity to maintain the strength of its contingent in BCOF.¹⁵⁰ The government emphasised the role played by the RAN force committed to BCOF, whereas Shedden maintained that "the main consideration in the Defence programme is the strength of the army and the capacity to build up the numbers required".¹⁵¹ On 8 October 1948 Chambers announced that no more Australian families would be sent to Japan because it was proposed to reduce the strength of the Australian contingent to BCOF. The US government response, that it could not "subscribe to this proposed further reduction of the BCOF in Japan", suggested that Australia take steps to overcome its recruiting difficulties or "to modify current plans for redevelopment of the regular forces".¹⁵²

On 24 November 1948 the Australian government formally notified the US government that it was not practicable, after 31 December 1948, to maintain a force in Japan greater than one battalion, one air force squadron, and necessary maintenance personnel, totalling 2,750; and added that this accorded with the formal notice of 7 May 1948. The C-in-C and staff of BCOF would continue with rank commensurate with the responsibility and dignity of a BCOF mission.¹⁵³

In Washington on 22 February 1949 Eichelberger (CG US 8th Army) added more fuel to fears in Australia of a communist threat, when he was reported as saying "if the communists gained domination in Japan, Russian-led Japanese troops might overrun the Pacific in a few years".¹⁵⁴ MacArthur commenting on such issues

¹⁵⁰ CPD, HR, vol.198, p. 832, 8 September 1948.

¹⁵¹ Dedman papers, 987/9/4 and FRUS DP, 1948. vol. VI, pp. 886-87. Minute to the Minister dated 14 September 1948. Although Shedden developed this comment as "the Army authorities consider the recruitment for the regular Army satisfactory and this view is based on a remark by the Chief of the General Staff [Lieutenant General V.A.H. Sturdee] at the last meeting of the Defence Committee when we were discussing the manpower", the Australian government had, in a note on 7 May 1948, and again on 2 September 1948, advised the US government of its intention to reduce the Australian contingent to BCOF and had advanced "recruiting difficulties" in support of its plans to reduce the Australian force.

¹⁵² AA, CRS, A5954, box 1699, Minute to Dedman, 10 November 1948. The US government reply questioned the Australian government's contention that it had already given the required six months' notice to withdraw forces. According to Shedden, the US "appears to have deliberately ignored" the Australian note of 7 May 1948.

¹⁵³ FRUS DP 1948, vol. VI, p. 909. Formal acceptance by the US government of this decision was dated 7 February 1949.

¹⁵⁴ Eichelberger's remarks were followed by a report from Tokyo on 23 February 1949 that documents in the hands of the occupation authorities "show the Communists in Japan expected their projected

stated that “America in its strategy never intended Japan to be an ally. All it wanted Japan to do was to remain neutral.” He saw a complete transformation in American strategy as a result of the war, and envisaged the move of US strategic dispositions from the west coast of America to the “chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia”. He played down the capacity of the Soviet Union to attack Japan but said if Japan was attacked then “America would certainly defend her”. He dismissed suggestions that the Japanese police were to be the nucleus of a future army, claiming that their task was “simply to preserve internal peace” and pointing out that “not more than 20% even had pistols”. He also dismissed as insignificant a communist threat to Japan, pointing out that they could only lay claim to 35 seats in a Diet of 466 seats.¹⁵⁵

Apart from remarks by Calwell,¹⁵⁶ who envisaged Japan as a giant aircraft carrier to be used by the US in the event of a third world war, interest in Japan remained low in Australia until the US government confirmed on 6 May 1949 that it had called on the FEC to relax its control on Japan’s foreign trade and economic and commercial affairs. Then on 24 June 1949 the Japanese Attorney-General, Shunkichi Euda, declared that “only the presence of occupation troops kept Japanese communists from throwing the country into turmoil” and a State Department official on 29 June 1949 claimed “Russia was pushing an active calculated campaign to communise Japan from within”. Japanese concern reached a high point when in Tokyo on 8 July 1949 Premier Yoshida told the Japanese Cabinet he was prepared to proclaim a state of emergency, if necessary, to halt violence and unrest in Japan.¹⁵⁷

In July 1949 MacArthur “issued an instruction requiring a new attitude on the part of the occupation forces in view of the facts” that:

- (a) Japan had been completely demilitarised;

general strike of last August (1948) to turn into an armed revolt by October [1948] and so result in the formation of a communist people’s government by February this year.”

¹⁵⁵ Interview with a *Daily Mail* correspondent on 2 March 1949. In a reference to the UK and Australia, MacArthur expressed the warmest feelings, and while he “regretted” the reduction in the size of BCOF said he understood the reasons which made this necessary.

¹⁵⁶ On the dangers of a re-armed Japan at a luncheon at the Royal Commonwealth Society in Melbourne on 22 April 1949.

¹⁵⁷ *The Age*, 25 June 1949.

(b) the social and political reformation of Japan has reached a stage of permitting assumption by the Japanese government of increasing obligations in its advancement toward economic rehabilitation and stabilisation;

(c) the necessity for extensive surveillance and execution by the occupation of many special missions relating to social, cultural and economic development of Japan no longer exists; and

(d) the character of the occupation has gradually changed from the stern rigidity of a military occupation to the friendly guidance of a protective force.¹⁵⁸

He also announced the withdrawal of 42 military government teams by the end of 1949. Following the change in status of US forces in Japan, the Australian HOM in Japan on 5 August 1949 raised the question of the withdrawal of the Australian force. He was informed that the force would not be withdrawn until a Japanese peace treaty had been signed. On 19 August 1949 the State Department revealed that it had instructed MacArthur to help Japan establish direct relations with other countries. This directive was given effect by HQ SCAP on 25 August 1949.

Peace and war

On 1 September 1949, the US Under-Secretary for the Army, Voorhees, revived hope of a peace treaty with Japan. He announced that there would be no reduction in the size of the US occupation force, the chief function of which was described by MacArthur as “a military garrison”. On 23 September 1949 the US lifted restrictions on fraternisation between US personnel and the Japanese, a prohibition which the Australian government reaffirmed on 30 September 1949 for Australian personnel in Japan.

The Australian Parliament adjourned on 27 October 1949 for general elections in December 1949. Australian policies towards Japan remained stalemated, although the long-standing Australian attitudes of fear and revenge were kept alive by what

¹⁵⁸ *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 September 1949.

was seen as the increasing communist influence, domestic and international, in Japan. The new Liberal–Country Party moved quickly to consider a Cabinet submission on the future of the BCOF in Japan.¹⁵⁹ On 1 March 1950 the Australian contribution “was 2,356, consisting of one Army battalion, one RAAF squadron, and the naval port party plus administrative personnel”. The Defence Committee concluded:

Now that the original occupational role of the British Commonwealth Occupational Force and British Naval Support Unit has been fulfilled, the retention of these forces in Japan rests on political rather than military grounds. Maintenance of these forces is a constant drain on the limited manpower of the three Services and this drain will be sharply accentuated because of the increased personnel required for National Service.¹⁶⁰

The Cabinet bore in mind the recent Colombo Conference Agreement that work be undertaken on the terms of a peace treaty with Japan. It was also cognisant of pressures from the Australian services for resumption of the movement of families of BCOF personnel to Japan, suspended in March 1948; and of developments which meant that “it was vital to our own security and hers that we should render all possible support in assisting the United Kingdom to fulfil her commitments”.

Following US agreement, the Australian Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, announced on 26 May 1950 the decision to withdraw the remaining Australians from BCOF.¹⁶¹ The decision was taken at a time when the military situation on the nearby Korean Peninsula was volatile. The day after two Australian military observers with the UN Commission on Korea (UNCOK) reported that “No reports ... had been received of any unusual activity on the part of the North Korean forces that would

¹⁵⁹ AA, MP 1049/5, 1869/2/53, Minister of Defence, 24 March 1950.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Menzies stressed the government’s intention to proceed with a national service scheme and the demands this would place upon the Australian services. He also foreshadowed that “some time will elapse before actual movement of men and stores commences and the whole operation will extend over a considerable period.”

indicate any imminent change in the general situation on the parallel”, the North Korean Army attacked South Korea on 25 June 1950.¹⁶²

By 27 June the Australian government was caught up in a spiral of events. Two Australian warships in Japanese waters were committed to operations in Korea on 28 June; 77 Fighter Squadron, the RAAF component of BCOF, was allocated to operations in Korea on 30 June; approval was given for Australian army officers in BCOF to be sent to Korea as observers; and the question of the deployment of the BCOF infantry battalion was under consideration.¹⁶³ Following a further spiral of desperate events, the commitment of the BCOF battalion to operations was announced on 26 July 1950 and C-in-C BCOF warned to prepare 3 RAR for active service in Korea.

Effectively, Australia’s military commitment to the occupation of Japan, other than in terms of the Australian interest in the peace treaty, had had no relevance after MacArthur’s statement of July 1949 about the changed “character” of the occupation. The events of June 1950 merely confirmed this situation, and with the redeployment of the principal Australian combat elements to support the war in Korea, the rump of BCOF became in effect merely a convenient forward base from which to support these deployments. The technicalities germane to this new situation were made formal in agreements arising from the establishment of a C-in-C British Commonwealth Forces, Korea; the replacement of Robertson by W. Bridgeford in November 1951; and the disbanding of BCOF on 28 April 1952, when the ratification of the peace treaty with Japan took effect.¹⁶⁴ Australian administrative and support units in BCOF were committed to support Australian and British Commonwealth operations in Korea, and new units were raised and based in Japan for this specific purpose.

¹⁶² Robert O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War*. Volume I, *Strategy and diplomacy*. AWM and AGPS, Canberra, 1981, p. 12. The actual significance of this report is elaborated by O’Neill on pp. 14–15.

¹⁶³ On this last matter, the C-in-C BCOF was “to do whatever was possible to ensure that a request for the employment of the Army component was not made by SCAP and that no publicity was given to this matter by BCOF Headquarters”.

¹⁶⁴ From July 1950 3RAR was raised and equipped to war establishment and commenced its operational training at Haramura prior to embarkation for Korea on 27 September 1950. Arrangements were put in place for the light anti-aircraft protection of Iwakuni, the base from which no. 77 Squadron, RAAF, mounted operations in Korea.

There were in September 1950 some 1,612 AMF, 328 RAAF, and 42 RAN personnel, with 64 Australian civilians and 122 families remaining in Japan. This was in addition to the 1,050 Australians by then in Korea. However the technical distinctions between support for residual BCOF obligations, and support for the pressing UN operations in Korea, were blurred by the urgency of the operational situation in Japan, at least until the formal cessation of the BCOF commitment on 28 April 1952.

The central objective of the Australian Labor government's post-war foreign and defence policies with regard to Japan had been to secure a place and a say in the peace settlement with Japan. Despite the many avowals by the appropriate ministers as to the significance of the Australian military contribution to the occupation of Japan, and its importance as a unique expression of Australia's foreign and defence policy objectives, the same ministers were party to a denial of the usual public recognition of these achievements.

Over the period 1946 to 1948, the C-in-C BCOF, an Australian, submitted recommendations for Honours and Awards for inclusion in the Birthday Honours List. These lists included recommended public recognition for exceptional or outstanding service by personnel from each of the four national contingents serving in BCOF. On each occasion details of the recommendations were forwarded to the appropriate representatives of the governments of New Zealand, India and the United Kingdom. Invariably, these governments subsequently made these recommendations public by including them in the Honours' List issued by that government. However, not one of the 91 specific recommendations, ranging from KBEs to Mentioned in Despatches, for Australians serving with BCOF in that period were ever included in a subsequent Birthday Honours List.

A similar situation applied to repeated appeals to successive governments for recognition of service and granting of those benefits normally available to Australian service personnel. Left in remote and silent tribute at the war cemetery at Yokohama were the graves of 82 Australians who served in BCOF at the policy direction of the Australian government.

It fell to the Liberal–Country Party government of R.G. Menzies, represented by the Australian Minister for External Affairs, P.C. Spender, in company with the other signatories, to sign the long-sought peace treaty with Japan on 8 September 1951 in San Francisco.¹⁶⁵

The date of deposit for Australia’s ratification was 10 April 1952 and the treaty came into force on 28 April 1952, when new arrangements between Australia and Japan concerning the stationing of Australian troops in Japan came into force. Although hostilities between Japan and the Allied powers had ceased on 15 August 1945, the state of war between Australia and Japan was not legally terminated until 28 April 1952.

Bibliography

Apart from those references included with the footnotes, the sources used in the preparation of this text are those recorded in the bibliography of James Wood, *The forgotten force: the Australian military contribution to the occupation of Japan 1945–1952*, Allen and Unwin, 1998.

¹⁶⁵ Under Article 1, “The state of war between Japan and each of the Allied Powers is terminated as from the date on which the present Treaty comes into force between Japan and the Allied Power concerned, as provided for in Article 23.” Article 23 required “instruments of ratification” by Japan and “by a majority” of the Allies, which included Australia, the treaty coming into force in each State which subsequently ratified it on the date of ratification, with certain time limits applicable.