



# Australia's Home Defence *1939–1945*

Australians in the Pacific War

Front cover

*Anti-aircraft gun crew on duty on the Australian coast, June 1942.*

*(AWM 012556, photographer: Earl McNeil)*

Title page

*Members of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) practise semaphore using signalling flags, HMAS Penguin, Balmoral, NSW. (AWM 306153)*

Back cover

*Crew of the Fremantle fixed defences wheel ammunition from the magazine to the No. 1 Gun at Swanbourne, Western Australia, February 1943. (AWM 029011)*

Metric conversions of imperial measurements quoted in this text are approximate.

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Researched and written by Dr Mark Johnston, Head of History, Scotch College, Melbourne

Text and photo editing by Courtney Page-Allen

Commissioning editor Kerry Blackburn

Map by Keith Mitchell

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# **Australia's Home Defence** *1939–1945*

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Australians in the Pacific War



**PHILIPPINES**

**MALAYA**

Singapore

Sumatra

Celebes

Ambon

**NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES**

Java

Timor

BATHURST ISLAND

Darwin

New Guinea

Rabaul

Port Moresby

Torres Strait

CORAL SEA

Cairns

Townsville

Mount Isa

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Alice Springs

QUEENSLAND

Brisbane

**NEW CALEDONIA**

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Fremantle

Perth

Adelaide

NEW SOUTH WALES

Sydney

Newcastle

Port Kembla

Canberra

VICTORIA

Melbourne

TASMANIA

Hobart

**NEW ZEALAND**

# Australia's Home Defence 1939–1945

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## *Preparing for war in the Pacific*

No history of the war in the Pacific is complete without the story of the defence of Australia against Japan, especially in the period when Japanese invasion seemed a distinct or even imminent prospect. Australians had feared Japan as a potential invader from the time of the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–5, and in 1942 that fear seemed to be about to come to fruition.

Although Britain was an ally of Japan between 1902 and 1923, its government was suspicious of Japan's intentions in the Pacific. In 1922 it sought to limit Japanese naval building through the provisions of the Washington Naval Conference, and in the same period it committed itself to protecting its empire in the east by developing a great naval base at Singapore. Successive Australian governments supported this Singapore strategy, although perceptive analysts realised that if Japan waited until Britain became embroiled in a European war before launching a campaign of conquest in South-East Asia, Britain's fleet may not arrive in time to prevent disaster. As early as 1920 a group of eminent Australian military commanders described Japan as Australia's 'only potential and probable enemy'.<sup>1</sup>

Australian governments recognised that threat, but lack of will and resources, as well as an excessive reliance on Britain, led to a long period of neglect of Australia's armed forces. Only from 1937, with a European war imminent, did the government significantly increase its expenditure on defence and its recruiting for the home-based militia. In November 1938 the British High Commissioner reported that the Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, exhibited 'a kind of desperate anxiety about the defence of Australia against Japan'.<sup>2</sup> The recruiting drive achieved spectacular success, with 80,000 volunteers available by September 1939. Nevertheless, when war broke out that month there was no prospect of fully equipping this force or the 'special force' of volunteers raised for overseas service, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). There was little prospect of receiving the equipment needed from hard-pressed Britain, and the Australian navy and air force were too small to protect Australia.

In September 1939 Japan was embroiled in its invasion of China, and Australia committed itself to helping Britain. By early 1941 Australia had sent three infantry divisions and substantial air and naval resources to the Mediterranean and European theatres. Thus when, in December 1941, Japan entered the war on the side of the Axis, much of Australia's armed forces was heavily involved in the Middle East and Europe. The government and military chiefs had never lost sight of the Japanese, and had sent the 8th Division, several Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) squadrons and warships of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) to Malaya, with others in the Australian territories of Papua and New Guinea and more ready to follow to the Netherlands East Indies (modern Indonesia). Yet these moves would remain token gestures without huge commitments to those areas from Britain or the United States.

Some of Australia's most experienced commanders had already been brought home from the Middle East and more were recalled from December 1941. The War Cabinet had in August recalled Major-General Sir Iven Mackay, who had commanded the 6th Division with distinction in Libya earlier that year. In September he became General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Home Forces.

Mackay's new task has been described as 'trying to right 20 years of defence mismanagement in the face of the impending Japanese threat'.<sup>3</sup> He was subject to the direction of the Chief of the General Staff, General Vernon Sturdee, who was responsible for the overall 'defence of Australia'. Fortunately the two generals were able to cooperate.

The militia or Citizen Military Force (CMF), expanded since 1940 by a call-up of 18- to 35-year-old unmarried men and widowers without children, was 173,000 strong by the end of August 1941. They were organised into four infantry divisions (with the nucleus of a fifth) and two cavalry divisions. However, only 45,000 of these were serving full time, while the remainder trained for up to three months before being released. Nearly 30 per cent of men liable for service were exempted because they worked in 'essential services' and nearly 14 per cent more were graded medically unfit to serve. Lack of appropriate training facilities and of instructors exacerbated the fragmentary nature of training in the CMF.

In addition to the CMF, the home army included some 5000 members of the Permanent Military Force. There were also nearly 13,000 men in garrison battalions, mostly Great War veterans, whose task was to protect vulnerable coastal defences against sabotage or

attack. In July 1940, on the initiative of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA, now RSL), there arose a Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) of volunteers exempted from the militia but willing to train for roles in guerrilla warfare, local defence and reconnaissance. In May 1941 the Army took over this force, which by August comprised nearly 44,000 men. In March the government approved the formation of a Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF), and then in August an Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), which could release men from certain military duties to enable them to enter fighting units. Recruitment began some months later. A Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) was also formed.

The establishment of the women's services and the VDC signalled the sense of urgency in 1941, but expanding armed forces would be useless without equipment. This was chronically short on the eve of the Pacific war. Rifles were at 73 per cent and grenades 31 per cent of demand. Anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft guns were at about 50 per cent of requirements, while fewer than half the required trucks were available and there were almost no tanks for the 1st Armoured Division of the Australian Imperial Force. One analyst has estimated the home army's state of readiness in December 1941 as only 40 per cent. No move was made to return Australian formations from the Middle East until 5 January 1942, when the scale of the disaster in the Far East was becoming apparent and when the Australian government accepted the British proposal to send the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions to the Netherlands East Indies.

On the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Australia's air force comprised just thirteen combat units under RAAF headquarters. These included no modern fighter aircraft. Most of Australia's sixty-eight naval vessels were at Singapore or in Australian waters at this time, but included no capital ships larger than a cruiser.

How Australia was to be defended from any invasion does not seem to have been discussed by the government until early 1941, although military commanders had been considering plans since 1931. In early 1941 the Australian Chiefs of Staff made an analysis of the Japanese threat and concluded that Japan would probably not invade Australia until it had conquered Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies and neutralised the threat of American intervention from Hawaii.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence the chiefs had sought to strengthen Malaya. They believed that if there was an invasion, the Japanese would seek a quick victory by seizing the area around Newcastle, Sydney and Port Kembla. Consequently

three divisions were located close to Sydney and three close to Melbourne, while most of the other troops were in Queensland. Although the militia had been fully mobilised in December, it would take months to ready them for operations. The defence chiefs had long realised this, but could not have envisaged the rapidity of the Japanese successes between December 1941 and March 1942.

The government that was to direct the defence of Australia from December 1941 onwards was only two months old. On 7 October, the Labor Party leader, John Curtin, had formed a new government, and most of his ministers had little experience in military matters or foreign policy and little sympathy for the military. As late as December they clung to hopes that war with Japan could be averted.

Curtin was heavily dependent for advice on the secretary of the Department of Defence, Frederick Shedden. On 8 December, Curtin declared that Australia was experiencing 'the gravest hour of our history'. He called on 'every Australian, man and woman, to go about their allotted task with full vigour and courage'.<sup>5</sup>

Paul Hasluck argues in the official history that Australia was not under-prepared for this Pacific war, but instead that the previous two years of war had been 'precious', allowing 'many of the initial difficulties and most of the routine tasks of organising a nation for war' to be mastered.<sup>6</sup> Military spending had quadrupled since 1939, and 50,000 workers were directly employed in munitions industries alone. Three excellent infantry divisions had gained valuable experience overseas, more than 200,000 men had been trained for home defence, and a combined total of 80,000 men was serving in the navy and air force. These included 11,000 airmen overseas and 13,000 seamen afloat. Yet the population had been far from fully mobilised. Moreover, making the benefits of the recent hard-won military experience in the Middle East available in Australia would be difficult.

## *Looking to America*

On 27 December 1941 a New Year's Day message by Curtin appeared in the Melbourne *Herald* newspaper. He and other Australians were realising that Britain could not or would not provide sufficient forces to stem the Japanese advance. He said:



*Without any inhibitions of any kind I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom. We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces ... But we know, too, that Australia can go and Britain can still hold on. We are, therefore, determined that Australia shall not go, and shall exert all our energies towards the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy.*

The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, found these remarks offensive, and spoke of 'a mood of panic' in Australia. Curtin's message also shocked many Australians. Curtin soon reiterated his loyalty to the Empire, but bitter recriminations passed between the respective prime ministers, culminating in Curtin telling Churchill on 23 January that evacuating Singapore would be an 'inexcusable betrayal'. President Roosevelt was unimpressed by Curtin's words. However, American forces were being sent in increasing numbers to Australia, initially as a staging post on the way to the beleaguered Philippines and later as a base for a future offensive.

## *Defensive priorities: a Brisbane line?*

As the Japanese swept through Malaya and the East Indies, crushing Australian and other Allied defences, Australia's vulnerability became increasingly apparent. The government concurred with military advice to expand the Australian force in Port Moresby to a brigade group, but lack of naval and air resources prevented worthwhile reinforcement of the one battalion at Rabaul. The subsequent fall of Rabaul, on 23 January, alarmed Australia to an unprecedented degree. Ambon, from which Japanese bombers could reach Australia, fell on 3 February.

On 4 February, General Mackay submitted a memorandum to the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, seeking government direction and concurrence about the area that must be held in the event of an invasion. As he noted, the government had agreed with the Chiefs of Staff that the Port Kembla–Sydney–Newcastle–Lithgow area was of paramount importance. The economic and military significance of Melbourne and a decision to develop an American base in Brisbane meant that those two cities were also crucial. Yet

to defend the 1600 kilometres between Brisbane and Melbourne there were just five divisions. Mackay concluded that all other areas should be regarded as isolated localities, and that Tasmania and Townsville should not be reinforced, though for reasons of morale troops currently there should not be withdrawn. He emphasised that this plan was based on the assumption that he would have available only the troops then in Australia.

Forde, whose own electorate was in north Queensland, was unhappy with this analysis and asked Sturdee to support his argument that Queensland should receive more arms and another division. Sturdee agreed with Mackay, qualifying his views only by saying that should the Japanese direct their main attack to the flanks, the main field army would be repositioned accordingly.<sup>7</sup> The issue had not been resolved when in late February it was rendered irrelevant by news that the 6th and 7th Divisions were returning to Australia and that an American division was also on its way. The debate, which lasted a few weeks, was later termed the 'Brisbane Line' controversy. Drawing a line at Brisbane and abandoning all that was north of it was never government policy, nor General Mackay's plan. However, in October 1942 the Hon Eddie Ward MP referred to the Brisbane Line in speeches in Hobart and Melbourne and aroused a controversy that continues in some quarters to this day.

## *Singapore and I Australian Corps*

Within two weeks of Mackay's memorandum, catastrophe struck further north. Singapore, the key to British and Australian hopes for the protection of Australia and the Empire's other interests in the Far East, fell on 15 February 1942. Not only was the Singapore strategy destroyed, but more than 15,000 Australian troops were lost. The thousands of Australian servicemen on Timor, Sumatra and Java, and in the waters around them were clearly next in line. Curtin stated on 16 February that 'the fall of Singapore opens the Battle for Australia'.<sup>8</sup> He argued that the fate of the English-speaking world depended on the outcome of this new battle.

A pressing question was whether to use the troops returning from the Middle East—I Australian Corps (mainly 6th and 7th Divisions)—to shore up the defence of the Netherlands East Indies, or to return them to Australia. On 15 February, Sturdee produced

a paper noting that if, as planned, the corps was sent to Java, it would probably be lost there, and that if it were not, then Java was an unsuitable base to build up Allied strength for an offensive to push back Japan. Australia, on the other hand, was so large that it was difficult to overrun, had large areas reasonably immune to continuous enemy air and sea attack, was a good jumping-off point to attack Japanese-held territory and was relatively close to the United States. His argument depended on an American build-up in Australia, which was now becoming a reality; there were already American squadrons in Australia, and on 14 February the US had decided to send over the 41st Infantry Division. Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack and British General Archibald Wavell, who had been Commander in Chief of British Forces in the Middle East and was now the commander in Java, came to similar conclusions about the impracticality of Java as a destination. Sturdee threatened to resign if the government did not press the British government for the return of the AIF to Australia. Churchill, with the support of Wavell and President Roosevelt, was determined to divert one of the Australian divisions to Burma, but Curtin and the War Cabinet held firm, and on 23 February Churchill agreed that the convoy would be sent to Australia. Curtin later allowed two infantry brigades to spend some months in Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), confident there was no immediate threat to Australia.

## *The bombing of Darwin*

When war broke out in the Pacific, the Australian government's concern about the possibility of an attack on Darwin was reflected in the evacuation of more than 2000 civilians to the southern states. By 18 February 1942 there were barely 2000 people in the town, including about one hundred women and children. As early as June 1940, concerned Darwin citizens had asked for and received a civil defence organisation. By mid-February, the only AIF combatant units in the Darwin area were the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion and the 2/14th Field Regiment. Darwin had its own garrison, primarily of engineers and artillerymen, as well as a small regular army unit, the 19th Battalion, based on the disbanded Darwin Mobile Force. The 27th and 43rd Battalions and the 19th Machine Gun Regiment, as well as three American units, had arrived by February. Air Force squadrons, including Nos 2 and 13 Squadrons with Hudson bombers and No. 12 Squadron with

Wirraways, were also based in the area. By March there would be some 14,000 Australian troops in the Australian Field Force, comprising the 23rd and 3rd Brigades. There would also be 3000 American troops, but of this Allied force less than half would be front-line infantry.

There was an air raid warning as early as 12 December, but air attack did not become a distinct possibility until February, after the loss of Ambon and the arrival of Japanese aircraft carriers in the area. The carriers were in the Arafura Sea to support the conquest of the Netherlands East Indies. Japanese headquarters knew that Australian ships and aircraft based at Darwin were supporting the defenders of Timor and Java. They also knew that some American aircraft were based at Darwin, so Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, ordered the Carrier Task Force, based on four aircraft carriers, to bomb Darwin on 19 February. One hundred and eighty-eight carrier-borne aircraft would attack, followed by fifty-four bombers based on Ambon. The Japanese air commander, Commander Fuchida, later likened it to using a sledgehammer to crack an egg.

An egg was an appropriate metaphor, as Darwin's air defences were even thinner than its ground ones. There were no Australian fighter planes and just ten United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) Kittyhawk fighters. The defences consisted primarily of anti-aircraft batteries. Three units—the 2nd and 14th Anti-Aircraft (AA) Batteries and 22nd Heavy AA Battery—had between them sixteen 3.7-inch and two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. There were also light machine-gun posts, including one manned by members of the 19th Machine Gun Regiment.

Observers on Bathurst and Melville Islands saw the Japanese aircraft approaching Darwin from the north early on 19 February. Their message reached the RAAF operations room in Darwin at 9.37 am, but for reasons never fully explained the station master did not sound the alarm until about 10 am, just as the attack was beginning.

Guns of the 14 AA Battery were firing at the aircraft as they dropped the first bombs. At 9.55 am, one of the sentries sounded the unit's alarm, and the gunners took post. Lieutenant Graham Robertson was in charge of four of the battery's guns on the Darwin Oval, which was on a cliff overlooking the harbour. On hearing the alarm he looked through his command post telescope. Instead of the expected Allied planes he saw countless aircraft with unmistakably Japanese silhouettes. He called to his men: 'This is no drill! This is fair dinkum!' <sup>9</sup>

Captain Dudley Vose of the same unit recalled the action in which he commanded the first anti-aircraft gunners to fire at enemy aircraft on the Australian mainland:

*I looked up and saw things dropping from the sky, glinting from the sun as they fell. I actually saw the bombs before I saw the planes. My men were at their posts and in action before the air raid sirens sounded ... We fired about 800 rounds from the 3.7-inch guns on the first day, but we were well below the target most of the time. Our equipment really wasn't up to it. We weren't ready for the fact that the Japs were flying very high.<sup>10</sup>*

Army headquarters had forbidden units to fire live ammunition in training, even for calibrating the guns, many of which were thus inaccurate. By aiming along the barrel at one low-flying dive bomber, 14 AA Battery hit it in the nose and saw it crash into the harbour. Gunner Bill Hudson, 2 AA Battery, carried his Lewis gun into open ground for a better field of fire. He saw the pilots of enemy aircraft near the fuel tanks and believed they were laughing at the Australians. He shot one down, and for his 'gallant and distinguished service' that day received a Military Medal, one of just two awarded within Australia during the war. The other was gained that day by another gunner, Lance-Bombardier Fred Wombey.

The first raid lasted about half an hour and was delivered initially by high-level bombers, whose pattern bombing then gave way to strafing and bombing from dive-bombers and fighters. Before noon, the Ambon bombers spent another twenty minutes striking the RAAF base.

The Japanese lost between five and ten aircraft, and although Lewis gunners were credited with saving oil storage tanks, the raids were a great Japanese success, inflicting immense damage. Ten ships were sunk in the harbour and near Bathurst Island. Another fourteen were damaged and twenty-four aircraft destroyed, including all but one of the US Kittyhawks.

One of the damaged vessels was the hospital ship *Manunda*, the second largest ship in harbour and clearly marked with the Red Cross. She suffered twelve killed, fifty-four wounded and damage described later by her captain:

*The after end of the ship still functioned as a hospital unit and our boats and naval launches brought the wounded alongside. By nightfall we had seventy-six patients ...*

*Water was pouring over the gangway and approaches ... What had been a well-appointed lounge on B deck was stripped bare and only debris remained ... Steel bulkheads were blown out and pierced in dozens of places ... On C deck the purser's office could only be identified by the safe and some papers. Bathrooms were reduced to porcelain chips and blocks of cabins where the nurses lived were levelled.<sup>11</sup>*

The Darwin administrator's office, police station and post office were destroyed, and at least 243 people killed. Survivors believed that the raid was a prelude to a Japanese invasion. That afternoon and in the fortnight after it, at least half the civilians in the town fled in what became known as 'The Adelaide River Stakes'. Some servicemen fled too, especially after RAAF men were ordered to retreat into the bush to be fed. On the other hand, the experienced RAAF Hudson squadrons stayed put, as did the RAAF transport section. Individual airmen had shown great bravery, including Wing Commander Archie Tindal, who was killed while firing a light machine-gun from a slit trench.

Some servicemen participated in looting the deserted town. The Australian government, understandably concerned about the effect on Australian morale of this blow just days after the fall of Singapore, announced the death toll as only seventeen, and initiated an inquiry under Mr Justice Lowe. He was critical of Darwin's civil administration, which was replaced by a military one, and of the RAAF preparation for and performance in the raids. Nearly all the senior RAAF officers were subsequently replaced, but the newly arrived Air Commodore Francis Bladin would prove outstanding as air commander of the North-Western Area.

In the whirlwind of events in early 1942, other events and issues soon pressed into Australians' consciousness. One such event was another raid, in which nine 'Zeroes' hit Broome on 3 March. They were unopposed in destroying sixteen flying boats that had been evacuating civilians and servicemen from the Netherlands East Indies. They also attacked the airfield, destroying all six aircraft on it as well as one US bomber that took off; only one of the thirty-three men aboard survived. On the same day as this raid, which cost about seventy lives, other Japanese aircraft struck Wyndham. For a fortnight after these raids, those who stayed in Broome were reportedly convinced that invasion was imminent.

## Japanese intentions

On 27 February, the day before the Japanese landing on Java and four days after the loss of Timor, the Australian Chiefs of Staff noted that Japan's successes in the Netherlands East Indies left her 'at liberty to attempt an invasion of Australia should she so desire'.<sup>12</sup>

They calculated three possible lines of advance: south through New Guinea, after the capture of Port Moresby and New Caledonia; south-east from the Netherlands East Indies into northern Australia; or south-west from the Indies into south-western Australia. General Sydney Fairbairn Rowell, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, forecast soon afterwards these possible attacks:

- a. upon Port Moresby in April;
- b. upon Darwin in early April;
- c. upon New Caledonia in mid-April; and
- d. upon the east coast of Australia in May.

Rowell believed that an attack from the north-east was the main threat to Australia.

At the beginning of February the Japanese Imperial Headquarters ordered the capture of New Guinea, and on 15 March debated whether to invade Australia. The navy wished to make an invasion, but the army believed that conquering this vast country, which would be defended bitterly, would reduce too drastically the forces available in China and for resisting any Russian attack. As a compromise they agreed to sever communications between Australia and the United States by seizing Fiji, New Caledonia and Samoa.

These plans were of course not known in Australia, where by mid-March there was in some quarters an air of panic. 'Ek Dum' of *The Bulletin* wrote on 11 March 'War has ceased merely to be on Australia's doorstep. It is on the mat reaching for the knocker'.<sup>13</sup> When Japanese troops landed in northern New Guinea on 8 March, north Queensland schools were closed. A government report estimated that Townsville and Cairns each had an exodus of 5000 to 7000 residents. However, the defence of Australia was about to be boosted.

## *MacArthur arrives*

The Australian government proposed on 2 March that an American be appointed Commander-in-Chief in the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA). On 17 March Curtin told his cabinet that President Roosevelt was willing for General Douglas MacArthur to become such a commander. The Australian government accepted with alacrity and the appointment became official in April, when General Thomas Blamey, recently returned from the Middle East, was made Commander of the Allied Land Forces. American officers were given command of the Allied air and naval forces. MacArthur had until recently commanded the American army in the Far East. After being ordered out of the Philippines, where defeat was looming, he arrived in Melbourne on 21 March.

MacArthur's appointment involved a considerable loss of sovereignty for Australia. He ignored suggestions from his superior, General George Marshall, to appoint some Australians to his staff. Thus, although Australia had been designated as the base for South-West Pacific Area forces and Australians would constitute most of its land, sea and air forces in the immediate future, and although Australian territory would be the scene of land battles in the foreseeable future, the Commander-in-Chief was an American responsible to and under the direction of the American Chiefs of Staff. Nevertheless, on the issue of defending Australia, his arrival was important. Unable to return immediately and relieve his forces besieged in the Philippines, on 26 March he told Australian politicians in the Advisory War Council that his first aim was now 'to make Australia secure'.<sup>14</sup>

The arrival of the I Australian Corps, less two brigades garrisoning Ceylon, was an immense boost to this goal in the second half of March. As well as these 46,000 fully armed veterans, there were in April a further 63,000 AIF men who had not left Australia, as well as 280,000 militiamen and 33,000 American servicemen. At the end of March, even before MacArthur's appointment, Blamey reorganised the army in Australia, so that its five field formations were:

1. First Army, under Lieutenant-General Sir John Lavarack, with its headquarters in Queensland and including seven divisions in two corps;
2. Second Army, under Lieutenant-General Sir Iven Mackay, with its headquarters in New South Wales and including three divisions;



3. III Corps, under Lieutenant-General H Gordon Bennett, in Western Australia, based on one division;
4. New Guinea Force, under Major-General Basil Morris, of two brigades; and
5. Northern Territory Force, under Major-General Edmund Herring.

An important stage in MacArthur's plan to make Australia secure was bolstering the defences of the Northern Territory. On 24 March, Major-General Herring of the 6th Division was appointed to command the Darwin area. Nine Japanese air attacks hit that area between 28 March and 5 April, and the garrison expected a Japanese landing any day. Herring's appointment was the culmination of the ruthless, sometimes unfair, culling of serving officers in the area and their replacement by experienced officers from the AIF. Brigadier Roy King and Colonel Ivan Dougherty, who had commanded battalions in the Middle East, became commanders of the 3rd and 23rd Brigades respectively. Their forces were deployed in positions along the main road south of Darwin, whence they could counter-attack against enemy landings. These brigades were inexperienced, for they were mainly composed of partially trained militia battalions.

Herring set the expected tone when, during a talk to officers of the 23 Brigade, enemy aircraft approached from Darwin. Officers stood up to head for shelter, but sat down again when they saw that Herring was completely unruffled. By the beginning of May, relentless training and improvements in the supply system had achieved marked improvement. There was a fast-flowing convoy system from Mt Isa and Alice Springs, running through eight intermediate depots that supported the troops as they travelled to a string of camps set up near the north-south road from Darwin to Adelaide River. On 17 May the 19th Brigade of the 6th Division began moving to Darwin. By then, the Battle of the Coral Sea had made it apparent that the north-east approach to Australia was the most critical.

## *Fixing the defences*

The air raids on northern Australia demonstrated the urgent need for expanded anti-aircraft defences. By January 1942 seventeen new anti-aircraft batteries had been authorised and by April 156 powerful 3.7-inch guns had been installed. As many more were on the way, as were 120 Bofors guns from Britain. By April there were six American anti-aircraft battalions distributed among Fremantle, Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane. Large Australian anti-aircraft groups, each with about six anti-aircraft batteries of twelve guns, were at Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane, Newcastle, Port Kembla, Melbourne and Fremantle. By the end of 1942 the hugely expanded anti-aircraft force comprised 32,000 men in two heavy anti-aircraft regiments, thirty-two static heavy anti-aircraft batteries, eleven light anti-aircraft regiments, sixteen independent light anti-aircraft batteries and various training units. All but nine of these batteries were in continental Australia.

Coastal artillery was already established and manned at the outset of the war, although new guns were on order that would be operational from late 1942. By May 1942 there were some 6000 men in the Sydney – Port Kembla fixed defences, and more than 1800 in those at Newcastle. The Allied high command wanted more, so American mobile 155-mm guns, searchlights and fire control equipment were ordered. The sixty guns that had arrived by the end of 1943 allowed the formation of mobile batteries for coastal and other operations. Eight new 155-mm coastal batteries, to be known as ‘A’ to ‘H’ batteries, were authorised in July 1942.

Each of these so-called ‘letter’ batteries had two guns, two searchlights, and about 116 men. By the end of November 1942 there were letter batteries at Cairns and Lytton (near Brisbane), and two batteries at each of Townsville, Bribie Island and Fremantle.

## *Coral Sea Battle*

While Australian and American land forces grew in Australia, MacArthur was frustrated by the lack of naval and air forces to support an aggressive deployment of those troops. Had aircraft arrived quickly there were few airfields for them, although they were

being constructed north to Cape York. Moreover, the American navy, which would be indispensable to any offensive, was still on the defensive.

The defences were tested in the first week of May 1942, when a major Japanese striking force was sent with an invasion fleet directed at Port Moresby. Thanks to American code-breaking, an Allied fleet including the Australian cruisers HMA Ships *Australia* and *Hobart* was on the spot to intercept the attackers. On 7–8 May, in a carrier battle in which losses were about even, the Japanese fleet was turned back and Port Moresby was saved from almost certain capture. Townsville, Cooktown and Thursday Island were saved from bombing planned by the invasion fleet's carriers.

The Coral Sea Battle brought relief and anxiety in Australia. The government and some newspapers urged reversal of the Allied 'Beat Germany First' strategy and called for faster development of Australia as an Allied 'defensive–offensive' base. MacArthur, who predicted a new and dangerous blow in the SWPA, also sought aircraft carriers, 1000 aircraft and an army corps. The Japanese were indeed still making ambitious naval plans, but directed at Midway Island. There its main carrier force was destined to be lost in June, together with the initiative in the Pacific. Japanese surface vessels would never venture so far south again.

## *The midget submarines*

On 31 May – 1 June 1942 one of the defining events in Australia's war occurred when three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour with the intention of damaging Allied warships. Their attack initiated a Japanese submarine campaign in eastern Australian coastal waters.

The first clear evidence that enemy submarines were in the region came on 16 May when, after recent reported sightings in the Coral Sea, Japanese submarine *I-29* fired seven rounds that slightly damaged the Russian steamer *Wellen*, some 50 kilometres east of Newcastle. The submarine was in these waters because it had been sent to reconnoitre Sydney, while another submarine was inspecting Suva, Fiji. This was a prelude to the intended use of four other large submarines of 8th Squadron to launch midget submarines

against naval targets at whichever harbour proved most tempting. An American submarine sank one of the four, *I 28*, in the Carolines on 17 May, but the other three—*I 22*, *I 24* and *I 27*—sailed south from Truk on 20 May, each with a midget submarine strapped to its deck. At about the same time, *I 29* launched an aircraft that flew over Sydney Harbour undetected to confirm the presence of battleships and cruisers.

On 26 and 29 May, reports from New Zealand indicated the probable existence of an enemy unit east of Sydney, first 1100 kilometres distant, then 64 kilometres distant. This vessel was probably *I 21*, which had initially gone to Suva, but had now been diverted to reconnoitre Sydney following the earlier positive report. On the night of 29 May the submarine flotilla was in position 56 kilometres north-east of Sydney.

At about 4.30 the following morning a single float biplane, launched from *I 21*, flew over the harbour with its navigation lights on. It twice circled the cruiser USS *Chicago*, the largest warship in the harbour, and flew out due east. The aircraft was seen and heard at Garden Island, but seems to have been considered insignificant. Fighter aircraft were sent to search for two unidentified aircraft in the Sydney–Newcastle area, but without success. No special measures were taken in the harbour. When the Japanese aircraft, piloted by Lieutenant Sasumo Ito, returned to its submarine, it capsized and sank on landing in rough seas. However, Ito and his observer reached the submarine and reported seeing ‘battleships and cruisers’ in the harbour. The Japanese commander of this section of 8th Squadron, Captain Sasaki, decided to attack on the night of 31 May.

That evening was dark, although there was a full moon and lights on at the graving dock on Garden Island. Anti-submarine defences were being constructed. There were magnetic indicator loops on the sea floor of the outer and inner harbour entrances, though only the inner ones were operative, meaning that any vessel crossing produced a current which registered on a paper chart. At the inner entrance to Sydney Harbour an anti-torpedo boom was under construction. The centre section was completed, but although there were piles on the western end, neither end had nets.

In addition to *Chicago*, the main naval vessels in the harbour were two other American warships, an Indian corvette, a Dutch submarine, HMA Ships *Canberra*, *Kanimbla*, *Westralia*, *Adelaide*, *Whyalla*, *Geelong*, and the depot ship HMAS *Kuttabul*, a converted ferry. For

harbour defence there were three Australian anti-submarine vessels, two Australian minesweepers (*Goonambee* and *Samuel Benbow*), four unarmed naval auxiliary patrol boats and six channel patrol boats.

Harbour traffic was proceeding normally when, between 4 and 4.30 pm, *I 22*, *I 24* and *I 27* released their midget submarines a little over 10 kilometres east of Sydney Heads. At 8 pm an indicator loop showed an inward crossing, but its significance as a submarine was lost in the signatures of other traffic. It was midget *No. 14*, launched by *I 27*. Fifteen minutes later a Maritime Services Board watchman noticed something suspicious caught in the boom net. After he investigated it in a skiff, first one then a second patrol boat approached. James Nelson, coxswain on the second patrol boat, HMAS *Lolita*, later recalled what followed:

*... we got a call there was something suspicious in the net ... so we went across to have a look, and there's this midget sub caught in the net ... the bow was up out of the water through the net and had its stern going trying to pull itself out of the net and we backed back up underneath the stern and dropped the depth charge and then got the hell out, but the depth charge didn't go off because of the shallow water ... So we made three runs like that, we dropped three depth charges ... under it as we came astern to it ... rolled them over the stern. We could see the periscope angling on us as we were coming in. On the third run ... when we were right underneath him, he blew himself up, self-destructed, and we nearly went with him. We were blown over in the water and heeled over and cover with debris and everything and we got out of it.<sup>15</sup>*

The self-destruction Nelson described occurred in midget *No. 14* at about 10.35 pm. In the interval, a second submarine's inward crossing had been recorded on an indicator loop. This was midget *No. 24* from *I 24*. The Naval Officer-in-Charge of Sydney, Rear-Admiral Gerard Muirhead-Gould, gave a general alarm at 10.27 pm, instructing all ships in the harbour to take anti-submarine precautions, and closing the port to outward shipping. He permitted the ferries to keep running, for he believed 'the more boats that were moving about at high speed the better chance of keeping the submarines down till daylight'.

At about 10.50 pm *Chicago* spotted the periscope of midget *No. 24*, illuminated it by searchlight, and opened fire. In the meantime, the third submarine, midget *No. 21*, was entering the Heads. It did not cross the indicator loop, but was spotted by an auxiliary

patrol boat, *Lauriana*, which signalled *Yandra*, an anti-submarine vessel. *Yandra* sought unsuccessfully to ram the submarine, lost contact, then spotted it and attacked with six depth-charges at 11.07 pm.

At 11.14 pm the order was issued to darken all ships, but the graving dock floodlights were still on. Muirhead-Gould ordered Lieutenant Percival Wilson to go to the dock and get them extinguished. The lights were, Wilson later recalled:

*... on tall masts lighting the whole area. I could not raise the dockyard by telephone so the admiral sent me off on foot ... I ran at full speed across a rough and rocky dockyard road into the dock and through the work sheds. As I went through I shouted to all and sundry, 'Get out fast, the port is under attack'. Some delay occurred finding the engineer responsible, and with authority to put the lights out. When I found him, he found it hard to believe, and spoke of the difficulty with hundreds of men in the dock, many below sea level. I left him in no doubt of the admiral's requirements, and he sent word to evacuate the dock, and prepared to turn off the main switches ... I believe that had the lights not been put out, Chicago would have been torpedoed.<sup>16</sup>*

Just before the lights went out, *Chicago* was silhouetted against them as midget No. 24 took up firing position. It had evaded fire from *Chicago* and HMAS *Geelong*. The lights went out at 12.25 am, then five minutes later an explosion wrecked *Kuttabul*, killing nineteen Australian and two British naval ratings on board and wounding ten others. The explosion was caused by one of two torpedoes that midget No. 24 fired at *Chicago*. It passed under the submarine *K9* and hit the harbour bed underneath *Kuttabul* before exploding. The other torpedo ran ashore at Garden Island without exploding.

The ships and other vessels in the harbour now moved. An indicator loop crossing at 1.58 am suggested the arrival of a third submarine, but it was in fact midget No. 24 leaving the harbour after firing both its torpedoes. Its wreck was not located until late 2006. At 3 am *Chicago*, now through the Heads, signalled 'submarine entering harbour' after sighting a periscope almost alongside. The vessel was midget No. 21, finally entering after its depth charge battering from *Yandra*.

Searches and false alarms followed, but eventually at about 5 am in Taylor Bay the channel patrol boats *Sea Mist*, *Steady Hour* and *Yarroma* found and repeatedly depth charged what they believed were three submarines. By 8.30 am it was apparent that they

had wrecked one submarine, now known to have been midget *No. 21*. That day a diver found the submarine on the harbour floor, its engines still running. After much effort it was brought ashore on 4 June. Its occupants were found to have committed suicide. From its remnants and those of midget *No. 14*, a complete submarine was reconstructed and sent on an overland 'voyage' across south-eastern Australia, allowing Australians to see it and helping to raise money for the Naval Relief Fund.

The raid's failure owed much to Australian good luck, which the official historian says was undeserved in the early stages. The authorities failed to act on the sighting of the enemy reconnaissance aircraft, which was known to be ship-borne. There was a two and a half hour delay between the discovery of midget *No. 14* in the anti-torpedo net and the raising of a general alarm, and six and a quarter hours elapsed between that discovery and the alerting of the channel patrol boats. They did not proceed to patrol until three hours after *Kuttabul* was sunk. Nevertheless, once in action, the defending craft performed well.

In a gesture that was controversial then but generally applauded since, Muirhead-Gould gave a funeral with full military honours to the four Japanese submariners whose bodies were discovered.

## *The east coast war, June 1942*

In the days between the submariners' deaths and their funeral on 9 June, there were more episodes in Japan's submarine campaign off the east coast. Japanese vessels struck Australian merchant shipping for the first time in Australian waters on 3 June. A submarine fired on but did not harm the coastal steamer *Age* east of Sydney, but later that night the coaster *Iron Chieftain* was torpedoed and sunk with the loss of twelve men. The following day off Gabo Island, Victoria, a submarine used gunfire and torpedo against the steamer *Barwon*, but missed. Later that day, a Hudson bomber of No. 7 Squadron was on anti-submarine patrol when it saw a merchant ship, the *Iron Crown*, hit by torpedo. An RAAF report stated:

*Shortly afterward an enemy submarine surfaced some distance from the vessel and the pilot immediately dived to attack, dropping two anti-submarine bombs across the*

*conning tower. This left only two general-purpose bombs with which to complete the kill and as it would have been courting disaster to release the bombs under 500 feet the captain made an ascent as quickly as possible to prepare for a second attack. In the meantime the submarine, which had been trying vainly to crash-dive (apparently it had been damaged by the A/S bombs) succeeded in getting under water and could not be located.<sup>17</sup>*

All but five of *Iron Crown's* forty-two complement died. In response to these attacks, coastal convoys were instituted on 8 June. The first two to sail were convoy CO.1 (Newcastle–Melbourne) of nine ships, escorted by HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Kalgoorlie*, and GP.1 (Sydney–Brisbane) of five ships, escorted by USS *Selfridge* and HMAS *Rockhampton*. Thereafter, on the main coastal routes ships of less than 12 knots and more than 1200 tons sailed in convoy, generally with a minimum of two anti-submarine escorts and anti-submarine air cover. In 1942 a total of 1672 ships travelled in 252 convoys in eastern Australian waters. Faster and smaller ships travelled independently on inshore routes. Convoying made heavy demands on the limited escort and patrol vessels available, even though by June 1942 all RAN ships were on the Australia Station except four destroyers and three corvettes with the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. The 24th Minesweeping Flotilla in Darwin was important, but of the RAN's twenty-four corvettes, sixteen were escorting and patrolling in the east and north-east.

On 8 June Japanese submarines attacked again, briefly bombarding Sydney and Newcastle. Between 12.15 and 12.20 am ten shells fell in the Rose Bay and Belleville areas, though only four exploded. A submarine was soon afterwards spotted heading north, but aircraft failed to find it. At 1 am an unidentified aircraft was reported over Newcastle, where an air alert was sounded. The 'All Clear' came fifteen minutes later, but at 2.15 am the submarine *I 21* began firing shells. Twenty-four landed near the power station and Customs House. Again some were duds. Some property was damaged, but there were no casualties. The attack ceased when Fort Scratchley fired four rounds in reply.

On 12 June, the *Guatemala*, a straggler in a convoy, was torpedoed east of Sydney. It sank, but the whole complement was rescued by HMAS *Doomba*. This attack was the last made by the submarine flotilla, which then departed.



## *Defensive position assured*

In May 1942 it became apparent that in deciding to beat Germany first, the British and American leaders had concluded that a Japanese invasion of Australia was now highly unlikely. Considerations on which this conclusion were based included: the enormous additional commitment such an invasion would require of Japan; the risk of an amphibious invasion on eastern and southern Australia; the lack of communications in northern Australia; the fact that Japan could achieve her war aims without such an invasion; the danger of war with Russia; and the fact that India would be a more profitable target.

In reporting these conclusions from London, Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, declared 'some of them very unconvincing', but Curtin made it apparent in a draft telegram of 4 June to Evatt that the Australian government now concurred with the British opinion that invasion was unlikely. The telegram was not sent because, with news of the American victory at Midway, MacArthur, the Australian Chiefs of Staff and the Australian government decided to emphasise the need for more men and material to make it possible to launch war-winning offensives from the SWPA. Thus, although the midget submarine attacks created great apprehension in Australia, the nation's leaders knew that the threat was diminishing.

## *Air war in the north*

The 49th Fighter Group of the United States Army Air Forces was allocated to the urgently needed air defence of Darwin, where it began arriving in March 1942. On 22 March, when three enemy fighters launched the sixth raid on Darwin, they met not only anti-aircraft fire but also P-40 Kittyhawk fighters, which shot one of them down. The Kittyhawk was outclassed by the Japanese Zero fighter, but the Americans were well led and extremely brave, so by September, when the squadron left, Japanese daylight raids had virtually ended and the Japanese had lost about seventy-five planes to twenty American.

The Kittyhawks received substantial Australian assistance. There had been just one radar set at Darwin on 19 February, and it was then temporarily out of action. By March it could

pick up aircraft 120 kilometres away. In April a second station was established and three more in June. The RAN placed a ship on patrol on the direct route to Koepang to improve early warning. The fighters operated from the Darwin RAAF base (the main Japanese target), Batchelor (90 kilometres south of Darwin), and two new bases, shortly to be named Strauss and Livingstone after downed American pilots. The 49th Fighter Group came under the operational control of Air Commodore Colin Bladin, and inter-Allied cooperation was excellent.

By the time of the fourteenth raid, on 25 April, about fifty P-40 Kittyhawks were there to meet the enemy, who lost eight to ten bombers and three fighters. There were no raids in May, while the Japanese base in Timor was moved to the Celebes, but there were four heavy attacks on Darwin during 13–16 June. The Japanese lost about twelve aircraft, inflicting nine American losses and negligible damage. On 30 July they set fire to the fuel dump at the Darwin RAAF base and shot down one P-40, but suffered heavy losses, as they did again on 23 August. Most of the bombing was now at night, when the bombers were safe from the P-40s and AA fire, but their bombing was blind and caused little damage. In August, General George Kenney, newly appointed commander of the Allied Air Forces in the SWPA, decided to move the 49th Fighter Group to New Guinea and replace it at Darwin with two Australian P-40 squadrons: No. 76 from New Guinea and No. 77 from Western Australia. The 49th had defended Australian airspace brilliantly.

Darwin provided air bases not just for defensive fighters but also aggressive bombers. Until October 1942 the Hudsons of the depleted Australian Nos 2 and 13 Squadrons were the northern strike force and also a means of reconnoitring enemy ports for signs of assembling convoys. After the 19 February raid they were moved well south to Daly Waters, where conditions were poor:

*I don't think I've ever struck anything more primitive than Daly Waters [recalled Bob Dalkin, of 13 Squadron] ... There were some truckle bed arrangements which had been rigged up under bushes. Some of them had mosquito nets, some hadn't. The food was appalling. The flies were out of this world. If you did have a mosquito net you'd wake up ... at dawn and ... [could] hardly see out of the ... net for ... masses of flies waiting for you to get up.<sup>18</sup>*

The facilities gradually improved, and more serviceable aircraft became available than the two or three sent on typical early missions.

Once the 49th Fighter Group was operating, Bladin moved the two squadrons forward again in May: No. 2 Squadron went to Darwin RAAF Station, and No. 13 to Hughes airfield, 40 kilometres south of Darwin. The Hudsons could not reach the Celebes, but if they refuelled at a base on the Kimberley coast, they could reach Koepang in Timor with 400 kgs of bombs, or Ambon with half that load. They also ran supply-dropping sorties to Australian servicemen on Portuguese Timor. They flew without long-range fighter cover, but still forced the aforementioned movement of the Japanese base to the Celebes. President Roosevelt gave well-earned presidential unit citations to the Hudson squadrons.

By July, a new phase was beginning in the North-Western Air Command. On the ground and in the air, Allied strength and efficiency grew so markedly that the accent increasingly turned to offence rather than defence. No. 1 Mobile Works Squadron RAAF began operations in July. Its component sections dealt with surveying, planning, camouflage, engineering and camp construction, repair and maintenance. Comprising more than 1000 men, it was the forerunner of the airfield construction squadrons, and was soon preparing new airfields and extending old ones. Other ancillary units were established along the chain of north–south airfields. RAAF units that arrived included No. 34 Transport Squadron and No. 2 Air Ambulance Unit. The arrival in October of No. 31 Squadron, equipped with the superior Beaufighter, marked a watershed in the Northern Territory's role as a base for attack.

## *The Allied Works Council*

Much of the vital work on airfields in Australia in 1942 was done by American engineers in conjunction with the Allied Works Council (AWC), which had been formed on 26 February 1942 to supervise and coordinate all civilian work involving the construction of military defence projects. Such projects included aerodromes, airstrips, docks, factories, roads, wharves, camps and oil installations. Its Director-General was EG Theodore, a former Federal Treasurer, and it included representatives of the RAAF and Army. In April

the formation of the Civil Constructional Corps (CCC) provided it with labour by enrolling or conscripting men over military age, primarily those 45 to 60 years old. From May the council recruited aliens into a Civil Aliens Corps. By June 1943 the latter had 4000 men, the CCC 53,500. Historian Alan Powell described the AWC men who did much work in the Northern Territory, especially on its much-needed new roads:

*... they overcame long hours, hard toil amid great heat, blinding clouds of talcum-like bulldust or bottomless, glutinous mud, to build their roads and airstrips; hard men for hard conditions, men noted for great thirsts and with the money to pay for booze wherever they could get it.<sup>19</sup>*

## *North Queensland 1942*

If Darwin had seen great development as an air base in the five months after the bombing, by July Townsville was the most important Allied air base in Australia. No longer was there any thought of it being lost. The town had its first air raid warning shortly before midnight on 25 July. Then at 12.40 am three Kawanishi flying-boats flew over and dropped six bombs that fell harmlessly into the sea. A single flying-boat dropped eight bombs outside the town early on 28 July and the following day another flying-boat dropped seven bombs, breaking a few windows. The last raid in the area occurred at Mossman near Cairns on 31 July, when a lone aircraft dropped a single bomb that landed 20 metres from a house and caused the first civilian air-raid casualty on the east coast: an injured child.

Horn Island in the Torres Strait was a valuable air base, and enemy aircraft first raided it in March 1942. On 7 June, sixteen Japanese bombers dropped about 200 bombs on the RAAF station, damaging buildings and equipment and wounding three men. However, neither this raid nor seven others in 1942 rendered the base unusable and it remained a valuable reconnaissance base and staging post to Port Moresby.

## *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders defend their homeland*

Aboriginal people contributed in large numbers and a variety of ways to the defence of Australia. Until war with Japan became a real possibility in 1941, Aborigines were prevented from enlisting in large numbers.

Despite fears in some quarters that Aborigines might help the Japanese, they showed remarkable loyalty. In the Northern Territory, especially, they did invaluable work on airstrips, in rescuing downed airmen, salvaging crashed aircraft and locating unexploded bombs. They also worked on the north–south road. By May 1943, the Army employed 687 Aboriginal men and thirty-seven women as farmhands, drivers, deckhands, stevedores and in other labouring jobs.

In June 1941, the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion was formed. Commanded by white officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), its other ranks were Islanders and Cape York Aborigines. At its peak, in August 1943, the unit numbered 745 Islanders and Aborigines.

In August 1941 an extraordinary unit, the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit, was formed to patrol Arnhem Land, a potential Japanese landing area that was unmapped and devoid of white inhabitants. A pre-war anthropologist, Squadron Leader Donald Thomson, was in command. It comprised fifty tribal Aboriginal warriors, six Solomon Islanders, a Torres Straits Islander and several white NCOs. This fine unit was wound down in 1943.

Work of a similar kind, but on a broader scale, was undertaken by the 2/1<sup>st</sup> North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU), known colloquially as the 'Nackeroos' or 'Curtin's Cowboys'. Formed in May 1942 under another anthropologist, Major WEH Stanner, it consisted of 400, later 550 men, and employed more than fifty Aboriginal guides and labourers. Based at Katherine, its brief was to patrol the northern coast and bush on horseback and in small craft, to man coast-watch stations and operate a signals network for northern Australia.

Other Aboriginal irregular forces were raised, though not formally enlisted, on Bathurst and Melville Islands, on the Cox Peninsula and at Groote Eylandt.

## *Air Raid Precautions*

In the late 1930s, plans for protecting civilians from air attack were the responsibility of state governments. The resulting differences in policy and practice affected later coordination of what was officially called Civil Defence (Air Raid Precautions), usually abbreviated to ARP. Thus, for example, in New South Wales volunteers enrolled under the Department of National Emergency Services, whereas in Queensland they were in the Air Raid Wardens organisation. Most states modelled their arrangements along English lines, with civilian wardens and chief wardens supervising 'posts', often located in schools, railway stations or specially constructed locations.

In July 1941 the Commonwealth Department of Home Security was established to coordinate the states' efforts. Millions of pounds were allocated to this area, and the expense is epitomised in the storing of four million respirators for civilian needs.

After Japan attacked, training in fire-spotting and aircraft-spotting became the key emphasis of ARP work. Some women, children and invalids were evacuated from the coast of north Queensland, and there were plans for wider evacuations, but these proved unnecessary as the war situation improved.

Some public shelters were built, generally of concrete and above ground. Sandbags, anti-blast brick and concrete walls were used to protect buildings. Glass was removed or taped in vulnerable buildings. Slit trenches were dug by many householders and in school grounds, even in the country, and some individuals created elaborate air raid shelters. From March 1942 all states shared the same air-raid signal, a fluctuating note denoting the alarm, a sustained note the 'all clear'. A 'brown-out' was introduced in all cities and towns on the east coast and Western Australia. Houses on the coast had to maintain a complete black-out on windows facing the sea. Lighting restrictions were reduced as the war situation improved, and removed altogether in September 1944.

Huge numbers of Australians volunteered for civil defence. In January 1943 there were 321,000. Many other volunteers spent countless hours looking for aircraft. These included tens of thousands of civilians in the Volunteer Air Observers' Corps, working in capital cities and key industrial locations, as well as men and women of all services: for example, those in anti-aircraft batteries and searchlight units, sailors at shore bases and airmen at radar installations and airfields.

Members of the Air Training Corps and Women's Air Training Corps also assisted, at times, with rudimentary tasks on airfields such as painting roundels on aircraft. They received instruction in aero engines and airframes to prepare them for possible entry later into the WAAAF. Boys were also taught theory of flight as preparation for entry into the RAAF.

## Australian women at war

*They were simple peaceful times, when the roles of men and women were more clearly defined. Generally speaking the men were the breadwinners, the head of the house and the custodians of everything important. Women nurtured their children, saw to domestic duties and obeyed their husbands. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 Robert Gordon Menzies announced to all Australians that we were now at war. This announcement was about to turn our lives upside-down and change our way of life forever ... by the time I was 16 years old two thirds of the male work force had left the farms, many women were having to help out on the land doing jobs once dominated by men ... I felt so empowered, I was inspired, I knew right there and then I wanted to do whatever I could to serve my country while our men folk were away so bravely defending it.<sup>20</sup>*

The war resulted in unprecedented involvement by women in military, industrial, agricultural and voluntary organisations. At the start of the war, the country was recovering from the Depression and there was significant unemployment. As industrial and agricultural output was stepped up, unemployed men were absorbed into the civilian workforce and armed forces. By 1941, however, a serious manpower shortage was developing, and women were needed to take on roles that were traditionally the preserve of men — albeit for a lower rate of pay.

During World War I, women in other countries had been employed in armaments production, and in this war Australia followed the example. So important was the women's contribution that in 1942 they, like men, were subjected to 'manpowering' whereby the Manpower Directorate could assign a job to women capable of working and not responsible for children. Employers such as the Lithgow Small Arms Factory and Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation employed significant numbers of women. They worked alongside men and were overseen by them, building tanks, artillery, aircraft and other machinery of war. They tended not to occupy skilled jobs, such as shipwright, as the intention was to employ them temporarily during wartime and training was limited accordingly.

Many women also served in the armed forces. Prior to World War II, the only servicewomen were in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), with support from Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs). During the war, nurses continued serving with the AANS, Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) and Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service (RANNS), and many members of the VADs transferred into the newly created Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS). Women in these services were posted to hospitals and other medical stations around the country and, with the exception of the RANNS, were also sent overseas.

A significant development was the creation of women's services that were not nursing or medical. During 1941–42, the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF), Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) and Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) were formed. They freed up men from many positions within Australia, enabling them to be sent to other postings in Australia or to proceed overseas. The greater numbers of women in the forces also led to some female doctors being enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) for service within Australia.

Many servicewomen filled traditionally female roles, such as cooks, typists and record-keepers, but others filled roles previously the domain of men, including drivers and mechanics. In the AWAS, some served in searchlight and anti-aircraft batteries, defending southern cities and industrial areas—though none ever got the chance to fire guns in anger. Some also served on attachment to the American forces. Their service impressed even some of the 'old guard' of the armed forces, and women were allowed into more non-combat roles. In the WAAAF, for example, they served in seventy-three musterings (trades) and made up a quarter of the RAAF strength in non-operational units within Australia.



During the course of the war, about 35,000 women served in the army, about 27,000 in the air force and about 3000 in the navy—the majority in the auxiliary services. The nursing and medical women's services were allowed to serve overseas but others were restricted to Australia. In time, they were allowed as far north as Darwin and then, in 1945, having proved themselves, Cabinet relaxed the ban on overseas service and about 350 members of the AWAS were sent to Lae, New Guinea. They were the first Australian non-nursing/medical servicewomen to serve overseas.

Women also contributed in the agricultural sector. There had of course always been women on farms, but now many women and girls from non-farming families went into the agricultural industry. This started with the formation of voluntary organisations such as the CWA Land Girls' Sections in Victoria and Western Australia, the Women's Agricultural Security Production Services and Women's Australian National Service Land Sections.

In July 1942, the Government authorised the formation of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA). Later that year, the Minister for Labour recommended an improved status for the AWLA to make it, in effect, a fourth women's service organisation—though a non-military one. The women were provided with training, a working uniform of shirt, overalls and hat, and were paid employees. Their contribution was summed up by the General Secretary of the Graziers' Association of New South Wales as 'a uniformed service which has given work of high value to the defence of Australia in food production'.<sup>21</sup>

Many women who were unable to contribute full time to the war effort, due to family responsibilities, offered their services to voluntary organisations. As volunteers, women had already contributed during World War I—women and men in organisations such as the Red Cross, the Young Women's and Young Men's Christian Associations (YWCA and YMCA) and the Country Women's Association (CWA) had sent 'comforts' such as knitted socks and food parcels to troops, assisted in canteens serving soldiers, and supported hospital staff treating the sick and wounded. During World War II, these and other organisations responded again to the call for voluntary war work. This included supplying comforts, sewing camouflage netting and manning stalls to provide hospitality to Australian and Allied servicemen and women. Some were even provided with rigorous training and uniforms, such as in the Women's Auxiliary Transport Service (WATS), Women's Fire Auxiliary (WFA) and Women's Australian National Service (WANS).

The contribution of women to Australia's war effort assisted greatly, as did that of men employed or serving on the home front. As individuals, men and women contributed equally. The difference for women was that when the war ended they would lose the government and societal support of their working in traditionally male occupations. Government campaigns encouraged women to think about establishing a family life after the war, though many maintained their involvement in voluntary and charitable organisations, and industries such as agriculture and manufacturing were quick to revert to employing men as they became available upon repatriation.

## *The submarines return*

In January 1943 the Japanese renewed their submarine offensive in Australian waters. By June they had attacked twenty-one ships and sunk eleven between Cairns and Gabo Island. When the hospital ship *Centaur* was sunk on 14 May, the 268 lives lost with it represented the biggest loss from a Japanese torpedo in Australian waters. Though brightly lit and properly marked as a hospital ship in accordance with the Geneva Convention, it was hit at 4 am off Brisbane in clear weather. The American naval commander whose ship helped rescue sixty-four survivors wrote of seeing them thus:

*... gas drum rafts, hatch tops, cabin tops, gratings, large shelf structures, and one wrecked lifeboat (awash) had been used by the survivors, many lightly clothed, some naked, some injured and burned, and about half with life jackets.<sup>22</sup>*

This sinking caused uproar and anxiety in Australia, but the following month the Japanese submarines withdrew. Their offensives had caused some disruption, but never seriously threatened Australia's lifelines. The lack of sustained Japanese effort partly explains this, but so does the effective coordination of the anti-submarine measures of the RAN and RAAF. From December 1943, convoying was discontinued between Australian ports south of Brisbane.

Enemy submarines became a threat in Australian waters for the last time in December 1944, when a Greek ship was attacked off South Australia. On Christmas Day a German submarine torpedoed an American ship off Moruya, New South Wales, and in February 1945 another off the Western Australian coast. A total of nineteen ships had been sunk by submarines on Australia's east coast, with 467 fatal casualties. On the entire Australia Station (which included a vast area outside the continent), thirty ships were lost, causing 654 casualties, including 200 Australian merchant seamen.

## *Air war late 1942–1945*

By October 1942, Japanese raids on the Northern Territory had diminished in frequency and scale. All American squadrons had left, though others arrived in 1943, and the force in the North-Western Area now comprised some 120 aircraft in six RAAF squadrons: three fighter (Nos 31, 76, 77), two bomber (Nos 2 and 13) and one general purpose (No. 12). With occasional help from American bombers, this force continued attacking enemy bases, especially Dili in Timor.

In January 1943, No. 1 Fighter Wing arrived in the North-Western Area with Spitfires. From April it was commanded by Australia's most distinguished fighter pilot, Wing Commander Clive Caldwell. It proved most effective against enemy raids, which tapered off and ended with the sixty-fourth raid on Darwin on 12 November 1943.

Elsewhere in Australia, the RAAF's anti-submarine work and protection against the threat of attack by carrier-borne aircraft employed even more squadrons than were in the North-Western Area and New Guinea in the first half of 1943. For example, in April there were four squadrons in the North-Eastern Area, seven in the Eastern, two in the Southern and four in the Western Area. Nine of the squadrons were equipped with obsolescent Wirraways, Boomerangs or Ansons. The resumption of Japanese submarine attacks in that period called many of these squadrons into heavy patrolling. It was a great tribute to the RAAF and the RAN that no Australian troopships were lost to enemy attack.

## *‘The danger of invasion has passed’*

Prime Minister Curtin announced publicly in June 1943 that the danger of invasion had passed. He had realised that it was unlikely a year earlier. Nevertheless, many of the defensive measures at home continued to operate: there were, for example, still three infantry brigades and 32,000 troops in the Northern Territory at the end of 1943.

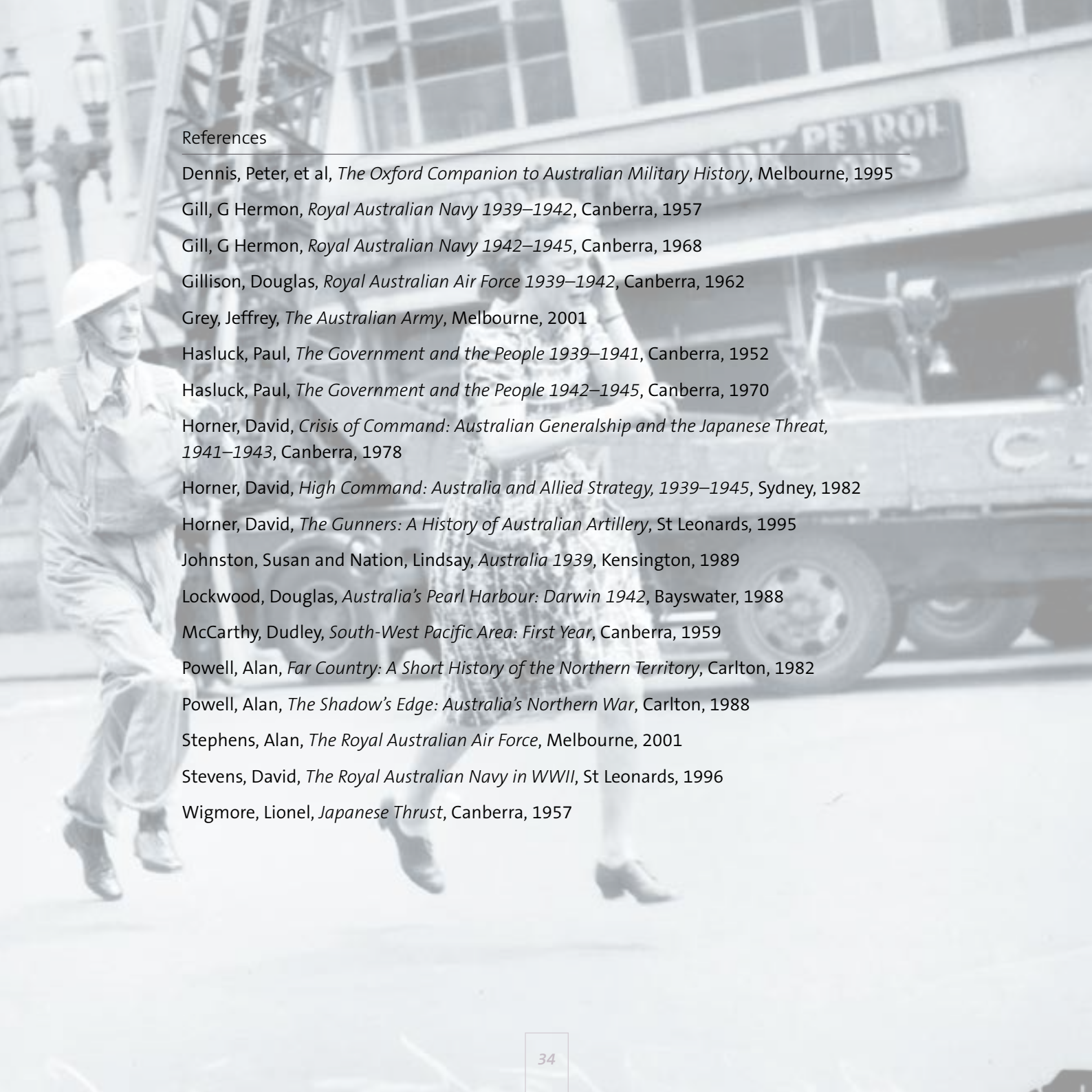
The army’s defences had never been put to the test, and the Battle for Australia that Curtin had referred to in 1942 had never reached the scale or areas that Australians feared. For that, Australia owed its servicemen and civilian volunteers a great debt of thanks. Instead of a great battlefield, Australia had become the great base that Allied leaders had hoped it would be in the war to recapture ground lost in early 1942. The defence of Australia enabled the continent to become a springboard for victory.

End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Johnston and Nation, *Australia 1939*, p. 17
- <sup>2</sup> Horner, *High Command*, p. 13
- <sup>3</sup> Dennis, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 372
- <sup>4</sup> Dennis, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 20
- <sup>5</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942–1945*, pp. 557–8
- <sup>6</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942–1945*, p. 559
- <sup>7</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942–1945*, p. 40
- <sup>8</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942–1945*, p. 71
- <sup>9</sup> Lockwood, *Australia's Pearl Harbor: Darwin, 1942*, p. 86
- <sup>10</sup> Horner, *The Gunners*, p. 303
- <sup>11</sup> Lockwood, *Australia's Pearl Harbor: Darwin, 1942*, pp. 58–9
- <sup>12</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p. 44
- <sup>13</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p. 50
- <sup>14</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p. 74
- <sup>15</sup> The Australians at War Film Archive, James Nelson interview, [www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/index.html](http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/index.html)
- <sup>16</sup> Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1942–1945*, p. 73
- <sup>17</sup> Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1942–1945*, p. 76
- <sup>18</sup> Powell, *The Shadow's Edge 1942–1945*, p. 115
- <sup>19</sup> Powell, *The Shadow's Edge 1942–1945*, p. 232
- <sup>20</sup> Virginia Davidson (nee Martin), Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au)
- <sup>21</sup> JW Allen, General Secretary, Graziers Assoc of NSW, letter to Prime Minister, 19 October 1945, National Archives of Australia, A1608, A27/1/5 Part 2.
- <sup>22</sup> Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1942–1945*, p. 258





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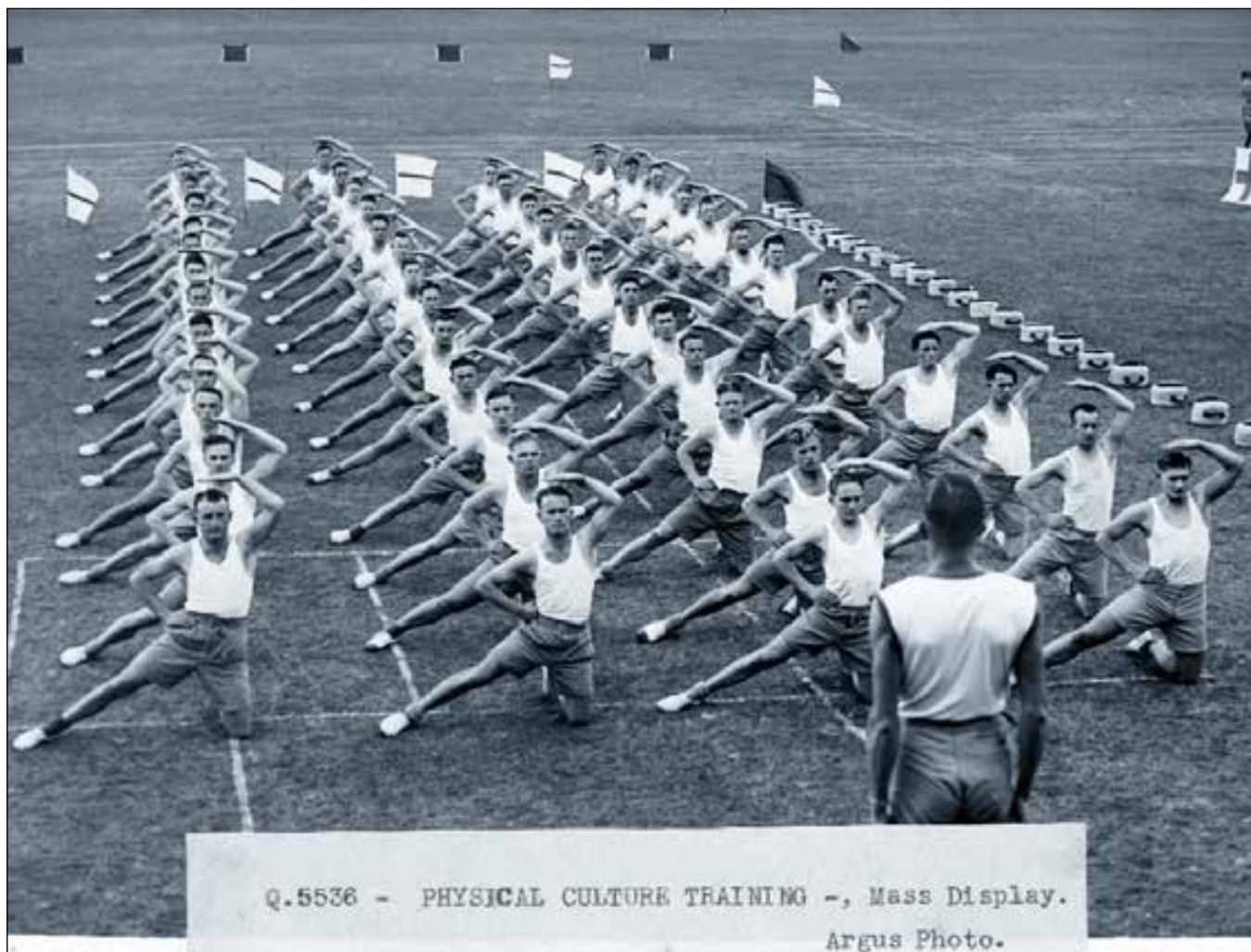


The Sydney University Regiment practises to repel an invasion of the south coast, c1940; some members of this militia unit went on to active service with the AIF. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/2428*)



An Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Suicide Squad trains in bomb disposal, c1941. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/3680*)





Men of the Australian Army qualify as physical training instructors for the AIF and home defence forces, Frankston, Victoria, c1941. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H98.105/4471*)



Women motorcycle messengers of the National Emergency Service, Sydney, April 1941.  
From left: Shirley Winter, Eve Warnaby and Margaret Golder. (AWM 006669)



One of a series of photographs created by the ARP and Metropolitan Fire Brigade for publication in local papers, this image carries a caption giving detailed instructions to householders: ... *Every Australian should know what to do in an air raid ... Keep your head down when in an open trench, upturned faces draw enemy fire. If there is room, lie right down on the floor. To avoid concussion, never lean against the walls of the trench. The open trench in your backyard may be 4 or 5 feet deep, 4½ feet wide at the top, tapering to 3½ feet wide at the bottom. A roof of corrugated iron covered with earth and built to specifications you can obtain from your air-raid warden converts the open trench into a shelter, giving greater protection.*

(AWM 011522)





Householders prepare for compulsory blackouts, Melbourne, c1941. *There were nightly blackouts. All windows wore blackout curtains—wardens patrolled to check that there were no lights to be seen from the outside of buildings, especially during night-time Air Raid Drills, when the eerie sirens would sound. It was believed that if there were no lights showing, then predatory night bombers would pass over our town not knowing it was there!* (Image: State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/4013, quote: Barbara Wolff, *Tell Us Your Story*, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))



Workers prepare public buildings for air raids by removing plate glass windows and constructing brick screens, Brisbane, December 1941. (AWM 042765)



During a training session at Chatswood, Sydney, in January 1942, two volunteers, Mrs JT Robinson and Mr RH Evans, attend to a young 'casualty', Roy Miller, in the first National Emergency Service mobile unit for use in air raids. (AWM 044553)



The original caption for this image, taken during 1942, is indicative of feeling at the time: *Reassuring evidence of Australia's ability to defend herself against invasion by the Japs is rapidly accumulating. The troops who are fighting fit are being well equipped and are undergoing hard training. These photographs from one of the coastal strategic points 'somewhere in Australia', taken during a practice shoot, reflect the spirit of the men and indicate the nature of the defences that are being installed. (AWM 012506)*





Country recruitment day for the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC), c1942. The VDC took men who were unfit for combat in the regular forces, over the age limit or in reserved occupations, and trained them to gather information on enemy movements and to provide a measure of homeland defence. With a motto of 'Deny, Delay and Protect', members were prepared to defend airbases and industrial sites, demolish bridges and piers, construct roadblocks and engage in guerrilla warfare. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/1828*)





Volunteer Defence Corps members conduct an exercise on the use of home-made incendiary bombs, c1942. Originally envisaged as a force of no more than 50,000 members, the VDC proved to be so popular that in 1942 Francis Forde, Minister for the Army, approved funds to outfit and equip up to 100,000 men. *(AWM P02018.091)*



Members of the VDC practise defence and attack at East Kew, Melbourne, c1942. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/2111*)

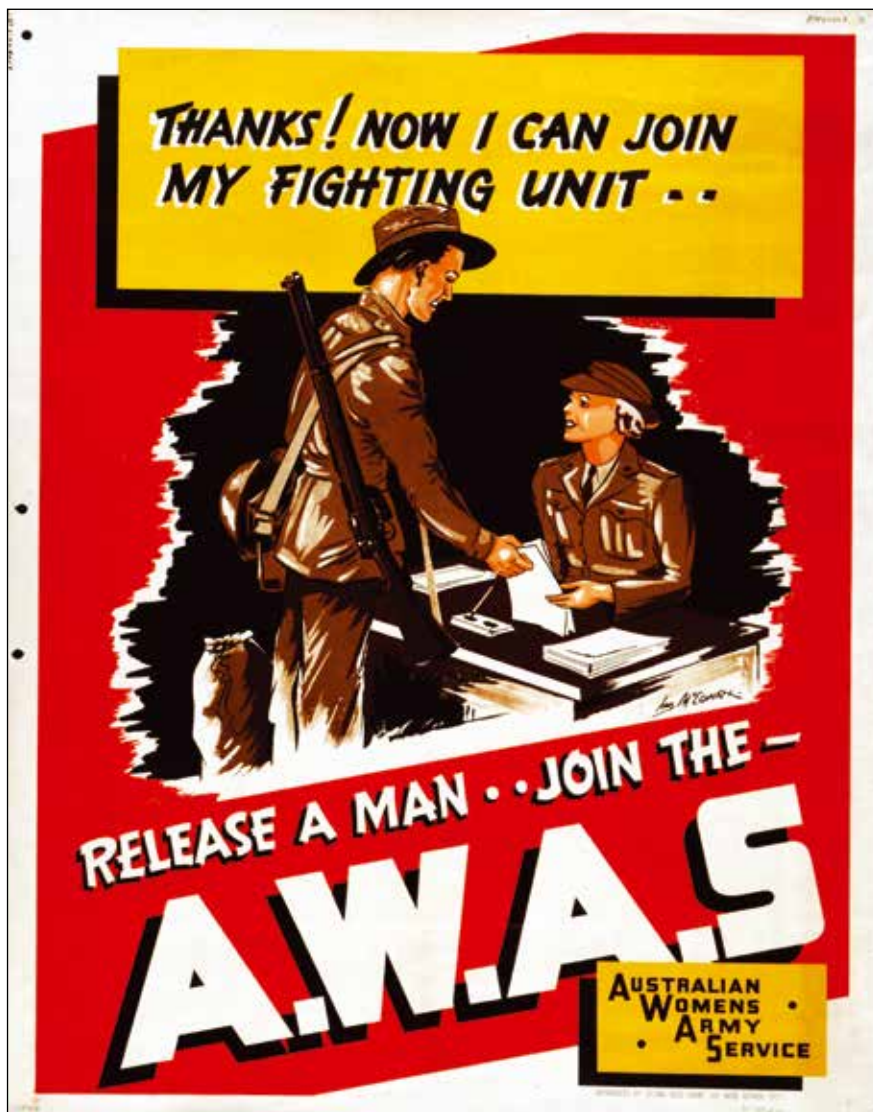


Boys of Sydney Church of England Grammar School ("Shore") perform an air raid drill, c1942. *Air raid shelters of all shapes and sizes became features of most back yards. They varied from sophisticated to simple and were wonderful places for children to play. A friend remembered theirs had humped corrugated iron over it and it was a marvellous obstacle to ride bikes over and over ... Much of the school playground was covered in zigzag slit trenches. There were air raid drills. Children who could ride their bikes home within a certain time were allowed to go there when the siren wailed ... the others had to dive into the slit trenches, mud and all at times, until the 'All Clear' was sounded.* (Image: State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/4024, quote: Barbara Wolff, *Tell Us Your Story*, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))





A floor warden directs staff to the basement during an Air Raid Precautions drill at Myers, Melbourne, c1942. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/3894*)



Recruitment posters such as this one drove home the message that women joining the services or taking on jobs in essential industries freed men to enlist and serve overseas. *Release a man ... Join the AWAS.* Ian McCowan, Second Aust Army Svy Mob Reproduction Section, 1941–1945, lithograph, 61 x 48.3 cm. (AWM ARTV01049)



Members of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) practise semaphore using signalling flags, HMAS *Penguin*, Balmoral, NSW. (AWM 306153)





Two members of the Women's Australian National Service (WANS), Joy Hippisley and Dorothy Mann, with one of the service's mobile canteens, Darlinghurst, NSW, c1942. *Once you'd done the basic training, you could choose which branch you wanted to go into—wireless telegraphy, camp-craft, hospital aid work ... Camp-craft trained us to feed and house large numbers of people in the event of their being bombed out of their homes. We practised by feeding the home guard during their weekend manoeuvres—hundreds of men, often. The canteen truck was beautifully fitted out, but it had a long overhang and no synchromesh, so it could be quite tricky to drive if you were a novice.* (Image: AWM P02619.001, quote: Diana Hodgkinson, WANS)



Women weave camouflage nets at an Australian factory, 1942. (*State Library of Victoria*  
*Argus newspaper collection H2000.200/613*)





The Minister for Aircraft Production, Senator the Hon Donald Cameron, and Minister for Air, the Hon Arthur Drakeford MP, inspect work at a NSW Bristol Beaufort torpedo bomber factory. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H98.105/709*)

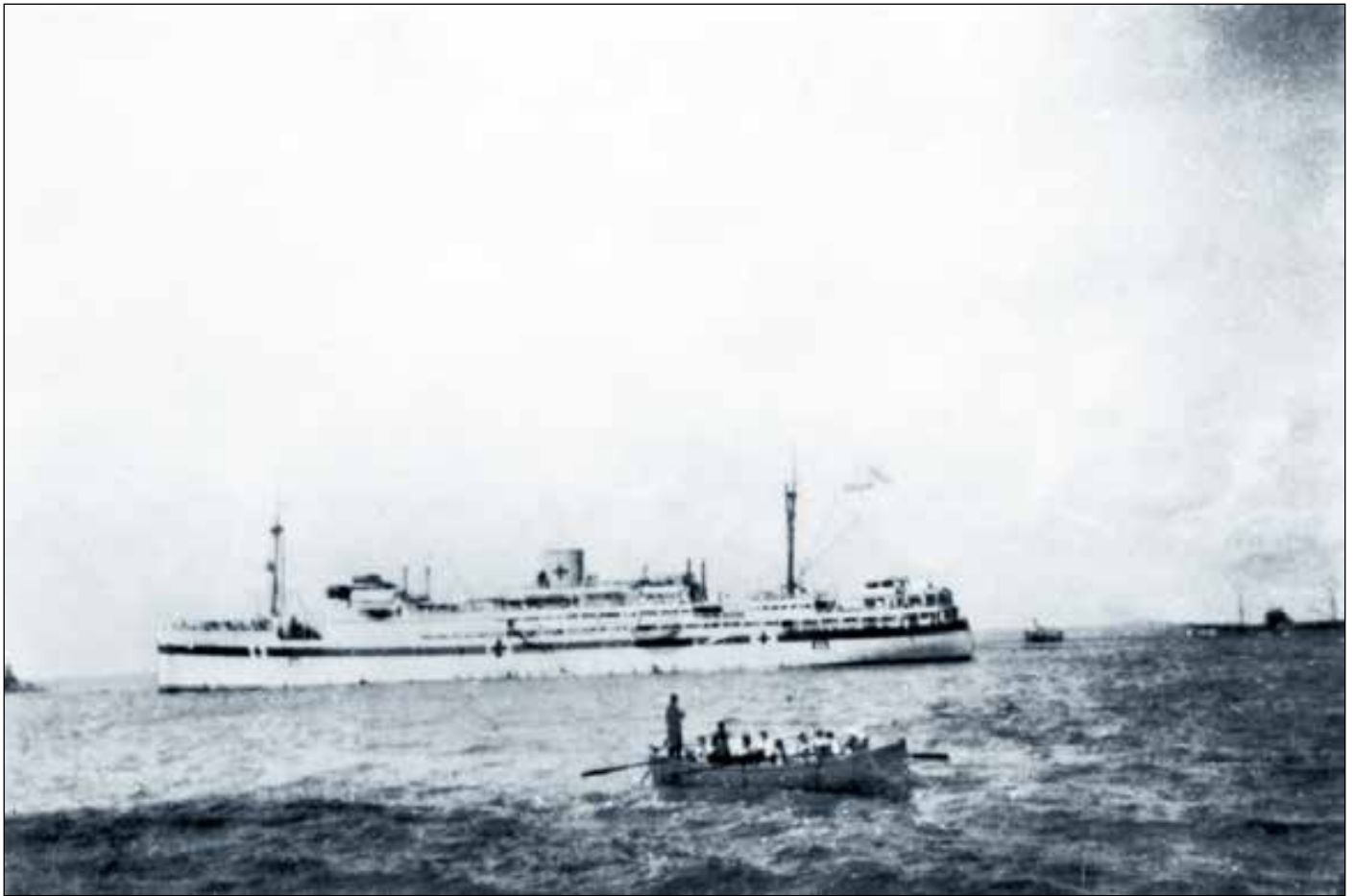


The Australian corvette HMAS *Deloraine* took part in an attack on three Japanese submarines off the coast of Darwin on 21 January 1942. It was initially thought that all three submarines had been destroyed, but *I-124* was subsequently located. It was the first Japanese naval unit to be sunk by the RAN. (AWM 041255)



Dense clouds of smoke rise from oil tanks hit during the first Japanese air raid on Australia's mainland, Darwin, 19 February, 1942. In the foreground is HMAS *Deloraine*, which escaped damage. *Deloraine* was on escort and anti-submarine work from Darwin, and had played a key part in sinking a Japanese submarine off Bathurst Island the previous month.

*(AWM 128108)*



The Australian hospital ship *Manunda* in Darwin harbour shortly after the air raid on 19 February 1942, in which she was badly damaged. Survivors from one of the ten ships sunk in the attack can be seen in the foreground. (AWM 134960)



Australian Army Nursing Service nurses and physiotherapists aboard 2/1st Australian hospital ship *Manunda*, c1941. Sister Margaret de Mestre, third from left, was killed in action when the ship was bombed during the raid on Darwin harbour, 19 February 1942. (AWM P01081.005)





Two radio personnel stand in a large bomb crater in the main street of Darwin, February 1942. The bomb damaged the nearby hospital. (AWM P02759.012)



Nurses and patients at No. 119 Australian General Hospital at Berrimah, Northern Territory, in February 1942. The men being treated are probably casualties of the Darwin air raid of 19 February. *(AWM P02625.004)*



The ruins of the Darwin post office after the first Japanese raid, 19 February 1942. Ten people were killed at the post office, including the postmaster, Hurtle Bald, his wife and daughter, four female telephonists and two postal officers. Nine of those killed were sheltering in a nearby trench. (AWM 044607)





Graves of some of the civilian personnel killed during the first Japanese air raid on Darwin. Their bodies were interred and crosses erected by the 12th Mobile Laundry, Australian Army.

*(AWM 012787)*



Sergeant Fred Wombey, 14th Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. Wombey was awarded a Military Medal for bravery on 19 February 1942 for manning his Lewis gun in defence of the naval oil tanks, continuously firing his gun from an exposed position on planes strafing the wharf area. According to the citation: 'His action was partly responsible for the failure of the enemy to dive bomb the vital area he was defending'.

*(AWM 027800, photographer: W Sanders)*



Gunner Wilbert 'Darky' Hudson, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery, earned a Military Medal for 'gallant and distinguished' service at Darwin during the first raid, in which he used a Lewis gun to defend his position against a Japanese 'Zero' that was strafing the area. He survived the war, but on 16 June 1942 was burned while defending the naval oil storage tanks. Wombey's and Hudson's Military Medals were the only two won within Australia during World War II.

*(AWM P02539.001)*



Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima (left) was the pilot of a 'Zero' fighter damaged during the 19 February 1942 air raid on Darwin. Forced to crash-land on Melville Island, he was disarmed and captured by Aborigines who took him to Bathurst Island to hand over to Sergeant Leslie Powell (right) of 23rd Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers. Powell, who had been sent to maintain demolition installations on the island and was unarmed, used Toyoshima's service pistol to escort him into captivity. Toyoshima was the first Japanese captured on Australian soil, and his was the first Zero captured intact by the Allies. He died in the breakout of Japanese prisoners from the Cowra Prisoner of War camp in NSW on the night of 4 August 1944. (AWM P00022.001)





An Aboriginal, 'Johnny', explains to a RAAF intelligence officer or war correspondent how he helped in the rescue of an American pilot shot down during a Japanese air raid on Darwin. The pilot landed on a small island off the north coast, and Johnny guided him back to the squadron headquarters on the mainland. Rescuing downed airmen was one of many services carried out by Aboriginals in the Northern Territory. *(AWM 012705)*





Australian Army bomb disposal experts recover an unexploded Japanese aerial bomb, Darwin, February 1942. (AWM 012703)



Riders and trainers of 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU)—the ‘Nackeroos’—practise their parade ground drill before an inspection of the local brumbies and Northern Territory horses purchased by the Army for the 500–650 km patrols carried out by the unit, Katherine, 1942. (*AWM P02499.002*)



On 3 March 1942 Japanese bombers destroyed six aircraft on the aerodrome at Broome, including this Liberator bomber of USAF 435 Bomber Squadron. Most of the aircraft had just arrived from the Netherlands East Indies carrying refugees, who were still aboard. It is estimated that thirty-five to forty people were killed, including women and children, and a similar number were wounded. The raid also claimed fourteen flying boats in the harbour.

*(AWM P02039.004)*



Aerial photograph of Darwin, taken in March 1942 by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft at a height of more than 1000 metres. (AWM P00913.002)





Members of the 7th Division receive a rapturous welcome as they pass by train through the suburbs of Adelaide after disembarking from HMT *Orcades* on their return home from the Middle East, 14 March 1942. The return of the 7th Division was a massive boost to the defence of Australia. (AWM 030127/05, photographer: David L Rintel)





Naval personnel use an asbestos shield to protect them from heat as they direct a hose on to a blazing oil tank, set on fire during a Japanese raid on Darwin in March 1942.

*(AWM 157291, photographer: Harry Turner)*



The Australian Minister for the Army, Mr Frank Forde (left), talks to two American soldiers at a camp somewhere in Australia in March 1942. The arrival of American troops and equipment in this early period boosted Australian morale and hopes of survival. Forde was at the centre of what came to be known as the Brisbane Line controversy. *(AWM 011782)*



General Douglas MacArthur and Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee, Chief of the Australian General Staff, in Melbourne soon after General MacArthur's arrival in March 1942. It was at about this time that the Australian government accepted President Roosevelt's suggestion that MacArthur should become Supreme Commander of the South-West Pacific Area.

*(AWM P02018.078)*



The destroyer HMAS *Arunta*, seen here the day she was commissioned in April 1942, was an escort on the first convoy from Newcastle to Melbourne, in June 1942. (AWM 300202)



HMAS *Australia* under air attack during the Battle of the Coral Sea, May 1942. This great naval battle, in which neither side's ships saw each other, saved Port Moresby and eased fears of an invasion of Australia. (AWM 044238)





Radar station on the coast of North Queensland camouflaged to look like the rocks among which it was installed, c1942. (AWM NEA0741)



Sydney's boom defences, viewed from George's Head, c1942. At the time of the midget submarine raid only the centre section was complete. Construction of the single line steel anti-submarine net was begun in January 1942 at the narrowest point of the inner harbour entrance—between Green Point, on Inner South Head, and George's Head, on Middle Head. One of the midget submarines became tangled in the centre section on the night of 31 May 1942 and was destroyed by the crew. *(AWM P03338.005)*



Midget submarine *No. 21* is raised from the bed of Sydney Harbour, 1 June 1942. The bodies of Lieutenant Kieu Matsuo and Petty Officer First Class Masao Tsuzuku were recovered from the wreckage and cremated with full military honours. An amalgamation of this submarine and Midget *No. 14* was made and sent on tour to raise money for the Royal Australian Navy Relief Fund and the King George Fund for Merchant Sailors, before being sent to the Australian War Memorial for permanent exhibition. (AWM 060696, *photographer: Ronald N Keam*)



The wreck of HMAS *Kuttabul*, torpedoed by Japanese midget submarine No. 24 in Sydney Harbour on the night of 31 May 1942, lies partly submerged at Garden Island the following day. Alongside *Kuttabul* is a naval auxiliary patrol boat of the type that spotted Midget No. 21 during the attack. (AWM 012422)





The burial service for the naval servicemen killed during the submarine attack in Sydney Harbour. Nineteen Australian and two British ratings were killed in the sinking of HMAS *Kuttabul*. (AWM 012580)





Locals inspect damage caused to an eastern suburbs home by a shell fired from Japanese mother submarine *I-24* on 8 June 1942, a week after its midget took part in the attack on Sydney Harbour. *I-24* surfaced off the east coast just after midnight and fired ten shells into the suburbs of Rose Bay, Bellevue Hill and Woollahra. Only one of the shells exploded and no-one was killed, though several buildings were damaged. (AWM 012594)



Two members of the Australian Women's Land Army, Desley George and Kay Sharkey, pick apples at a farm near Doncaster, Victoria, in June 1942. *The Women's Land Army members worked for farmers and orchardists while their sons and daughters were away fighting for Australia. I was sent to work on an orchard down at Bridgetown ... I used to rise at 5am to feed the chickens and then go to the paddock to bring the horse up and put it in the stables to be fed before going to the house for breakfast. We picked red apples and put them in dump cases which held 40 pounds ... I was also shown how to make dump cases and I helped to feed some of the calves. I enjoyed working in the orchard ... my life in the Land Army was great.*

*(Image: AWM 136294, quote: Beatie Alexander, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))*



Residents of the Melbourne suburb of Collingwood wait at a local woodyard for their issue of rationed firewood. *Rationing coupons were required when buying petrol, meat, butter, sugar, tea and clothing, which must have tested the ingenuity of mothers. I remember ration books about the size of an old-style bank pass book, with sheets of postage-stamp size coupons.*

*(Image: AWM 136378, quote: Barbara Wolff, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))*





Members of the Naval Auxiliary Patrol on duty, June 1942. The Patrol was a voluntary organisation attached to the Royal Australian Navy, comprising approximately 400 men and sixty private vessels ranging from dinghies to luxury yachts, which patrolled Sydney Harbour and its approaches. (*AWM 012486*)



Nurses feed babies on a mattress under a table during air raid practice at the Camberwell Babies Home in June 1942. *Some remember children wearing ID tags around their necks, as well as either a cork or peg on a cord ... being instructed at school to get under desks or beds or tables— if caught outside, the drill was to lie as flat as we could in the gutter, and bite on our cork or peg to minimize injury from flying shrapnel and avoid biting through our tongues when bombs exploded near us!* (Image: AWM 136391, quote: Barbara Wolff, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))





A truck and car burn in Darwin after the Japanese air raid of 15 June 1942. This raid involved some fifteen Japanese fighters and twenty-seven bombers. Intercepted by twenty-eight American P-40s, the Japanese lost six fighters and one bomber, while one American aircraft was destroyed and another reported missing. (AWM P02759.010)



Australian troops train at an obstacle course at Townsville in June 1942. An Army Operations Report of July 1942 rated all units in Australian territory on a scale from A ('efficient and experienced for mobile operations') to F ('Unit training is not yet complete'). Only four of the thirty-one brigades rated an A. Three of those brigades belonged to the 7th Division, which was in Queensland by June. (*AWM 012621, photographer: Alan Anderson*)



Four Kittyhawk fighter aircraft of the 49th Fighter Group, United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), at the airfield at Darwin in June 1942. The aircraft closest to the camera—number 51, L Ace—was flown by Lieutenant James Bruce Morehead, USAAF, who shot down seven Japanese aircraft while flying out of Darwin with No. 8 Squadron in the 49th Fighter Group. Captain WJ Hennon, who shot down at least five enemy aircraft, is sitting in the cockpit of Kittyhawk number 36. (*AWM 012636, photographer: Earl McNeil*)



A P-40 Kittyhawk of the newly formed No. 76 Squadron RAAF taxis out from underneath trees at Weir aerodrome, a satellite of Townsville's main aerodrome, Garbutt. In June 1942, when the photo was taken, the unit was completing its training. The unit was scrambled three times to try to intercept the Japanese aircraft that bombed Townsville, but each time failed to intercept. However, they would go on to great success in New Guinea. (AWM 012736)





A Lewis machine-gun crew on duty in the Darwin area in July 1942. The high altitude of Japanese bombers and their increasing dependence on night flying rendered the WWI-vintage Lewis guns increasingly irrelevant, though they played an important role in limiting the damage in the first raids. (*AWM 012741, photographer: Earl McNeil*)





A convoy of trucks from the 108th General Transport Company moves out of its staging area onto the Alice Springs to Darwin road, July 1942. *(AWM 150144)*



Royal Australian Navy personnel work on the boom defence across the entrance heads of a north-western harbour. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H98.105/3118*)



Boyscouts conduct a house-to-house collection for scrap rubber in Perth, July 1942. *Youngsters went to special matinees at the Majestic Theatre. Entry was paid with a scrap of aluminium for the War Effort. Many aluminium saucepans, casseroles, kettles etc. were sacrificed.* (Image: AWM 042773, quote: Barbara Wolff, *Tell Us Your Story*, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))



Members of the Volunteer Defence Corps on manoeuvres at Watsonia camp, Victoria, in July 1942. (AWM 026230)





Members of the Volunteer Defence Corps receive instruction in grenade-throwing at Watsonia camp, Victoria, in July 1942. Photographs suggest that recruits did not receive khaki uniforms until 1943. In 1942, many wore a bottle-green uniform and Pattern 1915 leather cartridge carriers, like the thrower here. (AWM 026227)





Port quarter view of three of the transports of convoy ZK.12 en route from Fremantle to Melbourne, while a RAAF Lockheed Hudson patrol bomber flies low overhead, August 1942. With the exception of HMT *Duntroon* (centre), they were transporting Australian troops from Colombo. (AWM 302820)



In the aftermath of the Japanese air raids at Townsville, Australian sappers of a Bomb Disposal Company search in the shallows of the harbour for evidence of bombs, 6 August 1942. (*AWM 150165, photographer: Allan F Anderson*)



At Townsville, interested civilians look on as two soldiers search for bomb fragments from the July raids, 6 August 1942. (AWM 012998)





In September 1942, members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) don gas masks before entering an air raid shelter at No. 113 Australian General Hospital during an air raid practice in Sydney. Sandbag arrangements like this were to be seen all over Australia that year. *I was going to become a nurse with the VADs ... After doing a rookies course ... learning how to drill, the procedure of gas masks and living with girls my own age and also living on baked beans and apple jelly jam with tinned peaches for sweets every day, I then received my posting ... all the girls at rookies were not going nursing, just eleven of us. The rest were going on to be drivers, signallers, gunners etc, with the Australian Women's Army Corps [while] we were Army Medical.*

*(Image: AWM 026570, quote: LE Humphrys, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))*



Lieutenant-General H Gordon Bennett addresses a group of officers at Rockingham, Western Australia, in September 1942, during exercises carried out by the 5th Infantry Brigade. Bennett was at this time General Officer Commanding 3rd Australian Corps. This represented promotion from his earlier command of the 8th Australian Division, but his reputation had been so tarnished by his performance in Singapore, and particularly his escape from the island, that he was never again to receive an active command. He resigned in May 1944 in what has been called 'a fit of pique'. (AWM 026785)





When invasion threatened in early 1942, the 1st Armoured Division was for a time the only AIF division in Australia. It lacked tanks, but by September, when this photograph was taken during training exercises at Townsville, this had changed. From the first quarter, Matilda tanks began arriving from Britain and M3 Light and M3 Medium tanks from the USA. The tank pictured here is an M3 Medium Grant tank. The men are wearing the khaki beret then characteristic of the armoured division. (AWM 150473, photographer: Clifford Bottomley)



Men dig slit trenches in the lawns of the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, in October 1942. (AWM 026959)



Schoolchildren and service personnel inspect the mid-section of a Japanese midget submarine on display in the Exhibition Gardens in Melbourne in late 1942. The submarine had taken part in the unsuccessful attack on Sydney Harbour earlier in the year, and the wreck was taken on a tour of south-eastern Australia to raise money for the Royal Australian Navy Relief Fund and the King George Fund for Merchant Sailors. (AWM P00455.005)





Crew and ground staff stand in front of one of the Lockheed Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron RAAF at Batchelor, Northern Territory, in October 1942. Nos 2 and 13 squadrons were the main strike force in the Northern Territory in 1942, as well as a key means of reconnaissance of enemy ports. The photographed Hudson was crash-landed the following March and converted to components. *(AWM 027611, photographer: William Sanders)*



A gun crew of 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, loading at Darwin in November 1942. The 3.7-inch gun, of the type used here, was the mainstay of anti-aircraft defence in Australia. In the background is a spotting tower. (AWM 027793)





Two members of the Women's National Emergency Legion (WNEL) on duty as mine-watchers on the bank of the Brisbane River, November 1942. Mine-watchers, under the control of the Royal Australian Navy, were women volunteers who manned posts along the river, many of which were sited in private backyards. *(AWM P01554.002)*



Royal Australian Navy bomb disposal experts inspect a Japanese mine washed up on a northern Australian beach. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection, H99.201/1736*)



On 12 December 1942, nearly 400 tanks, guns and vehicles carrying war material made in Australia, including this group of unusual armoured vehicles, were driven in procession through the streets of Sydney. As this parade suggested, Australia's defences were now immensely strong. *(AWM 027529)*





American servicemen enjoy sundaes, ice cream sodas and cold fruit drinks at a milk bar in Mackay, Queensland, c1943. Known to the Americans as a 'soda fountain', the shop ran a brisk trade. (AWM P00561.023, *photographer: James Fitzpatrick*)



Volunteer Air Observer Corps (VAOC) members scan the sky for aircraft, NSW, c1943.

*(AWM P00024.028)*





Two women members of the Volunteer Air Observer Corps on duty at an observation post, of which there were about 2800 throughout Australia. All aircraft heard or seen were reported to the RAAF to keep a check on their movements and enable them to be aided if in distress.

*(AWM 044863)*



Air Raid Precautions (ARP) personnel use a new stirrup pump attachment for quelling fires during a demonstration staged for interstate civil defence personnel and fire brigades, Melbourne, January 1943. (AWM 137740)

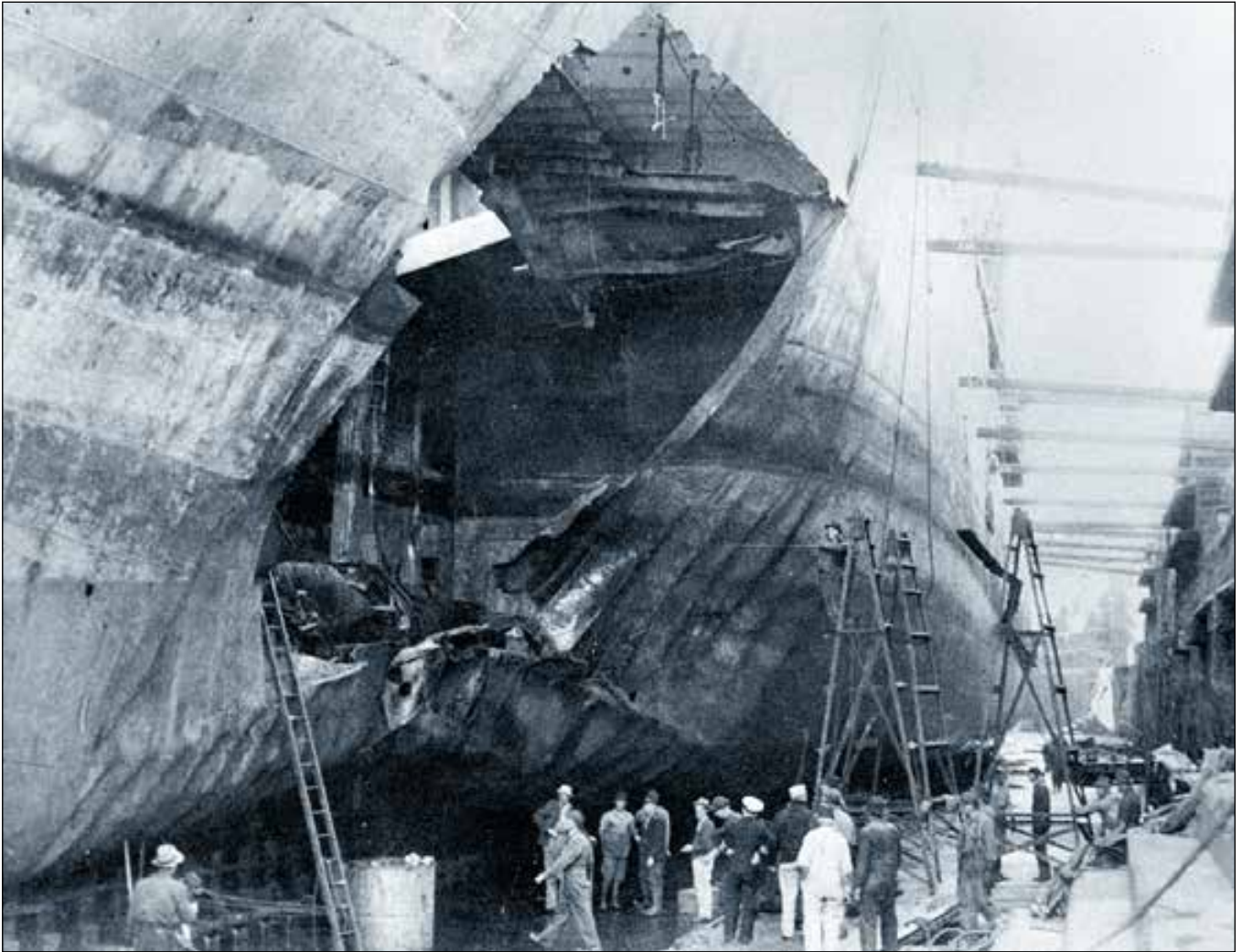


Crew of the Fremantle fixed defences wheel ammunition from the magazine to the No. 1 Gun at Swanbourne, Western Australia, February 1943. (AWM 029011)



United States Liberty Ship *Starr King* sinks off Port Macquarie, NSW, after being torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on 10 February 1943. During the six months after 18 January 1943, the Japanese attacked twenty-one Allied ships, totalling 109,651 tons, off the east coast of Australia, and ships totalling 50,022 tons were sunk. (AWM 128144)





Workers inspect damage to the hull of the United States cargo vessel *Peter H Burnett* at Sutherland Dock, Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney, in February 1943. The ship was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I-21* on 22 January 1943, approximately 675 kilometres east of Sydney; one man was killed. The effects of the torpedo would have been worse had the ship not been carrying a wool cargo. She was initially abandoned, then reoccupied when it was apparent she would not sink. Australian, American and French ships helped her back to Sydney. (AWM 305901)





Family and friends reunite on the wharf at Fremantle, Western Australia, on the return of the 9th Australian Division from the Middle East, February 1943. (AWM 029151)



Members of the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS) check stretcher patients on to a hospital ship at Melbourne, February 1943. (AWM 137992)



A driver from the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS), Joan Gibbons, fills the hopper of a charcoal-burning utility truck at Flinders Naval Base, Victoria, in March 1943. Charcoal was used as an alternative power source during wartime petrol shortages. (AWM 138135)





A searchlight crew of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) stands in front of its searchlight as part of a street display during Army Week in support of the Third Liberty Loan, Perth, March 1943. *I was desperate to enlist in the army, having learnt Morse Code in anticipation of joining up, but my father refused to sign my papers. After much pleading and threats to join when I was twenty-one, he relented, and in August 1942 his fifth child was serving in the Australian Women's Army Service.* (Image: AWM 029770, quote: Sister Julia O'Sullivan, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))



RAAF Flying Officer Frank Fowler, No. 73 Squadron RAAF, pilots an Avro Anson aircraft on a patrol near Nowra, NSW, in March 1943. *(AWM P02393.001)*





In March 1943, in the Darwin area, Flight Lieutenant Robert Foster, No. 54 Squadron RAF, of London, stands beside the Spitfire in which he shot down a Japanese reconnaissance plane the previous month, in the first action involving a Spitfire in the South-West Pacific Area.

*(AWM 014496)*

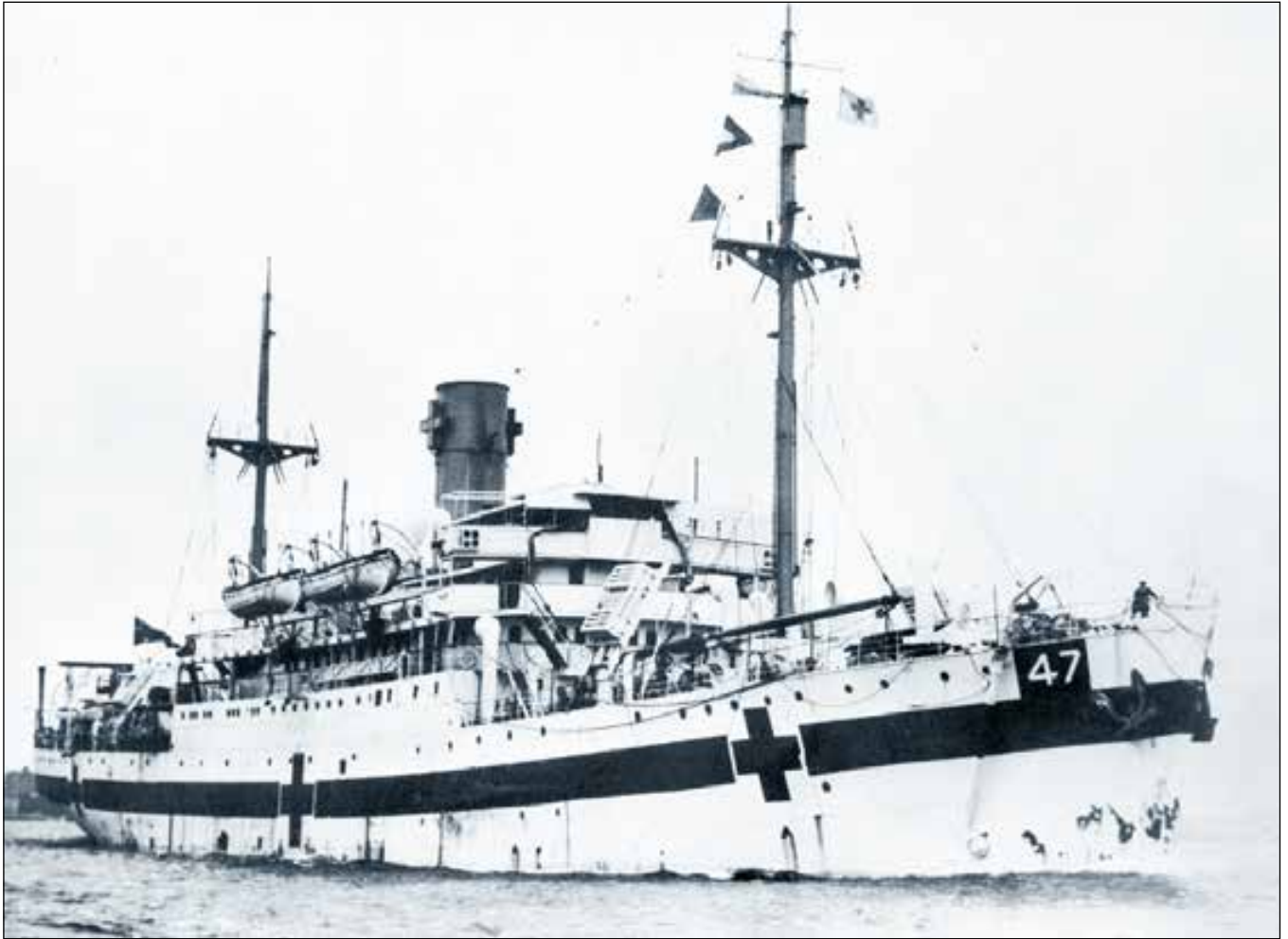


Japanese internees use a crosscut saw to collect firewood at the 14th Australian Prisoner of War and Internment Camp Loveday Group, Barmera, South Australia, March 1943. (AWM 064826, *photographer: Arthur John Faithfull*)



Women munitions workers heat the barrel of a 3.7 anti-aircraft gun in preparation for the straightening process in an ordnance factory at Bendigo, Victoria, in April 1943. *When I arrived in the shell section, I was quickly introduced to a single purpose lathe and taught the intricacies of all its accessories ... in this job, you learn fast, and I was soon turning out an average of 270 shells a shift. But it was jolly hard work as each shell had to be handled twice ... Conditions for female workers were generally very primitive, full length overalls were worn with thick-soled boots and the whole outfit soon became impregnated with the smell of the antiseptic cutting fluid so it was not unusual to see people avoiding us on public transport ...*

*(Image: AWM 138692, quote: Doreen Offord, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))*



The Australian hospital ship *Centaur* in Sydney in May 1943. On 14 May of that year she was sunk by a Japanese submarine off Brisbane, with the loss of 268 lives. This was the biggest loss of life from a Japanese submarine attack in Australian waters. (AWM 043235)



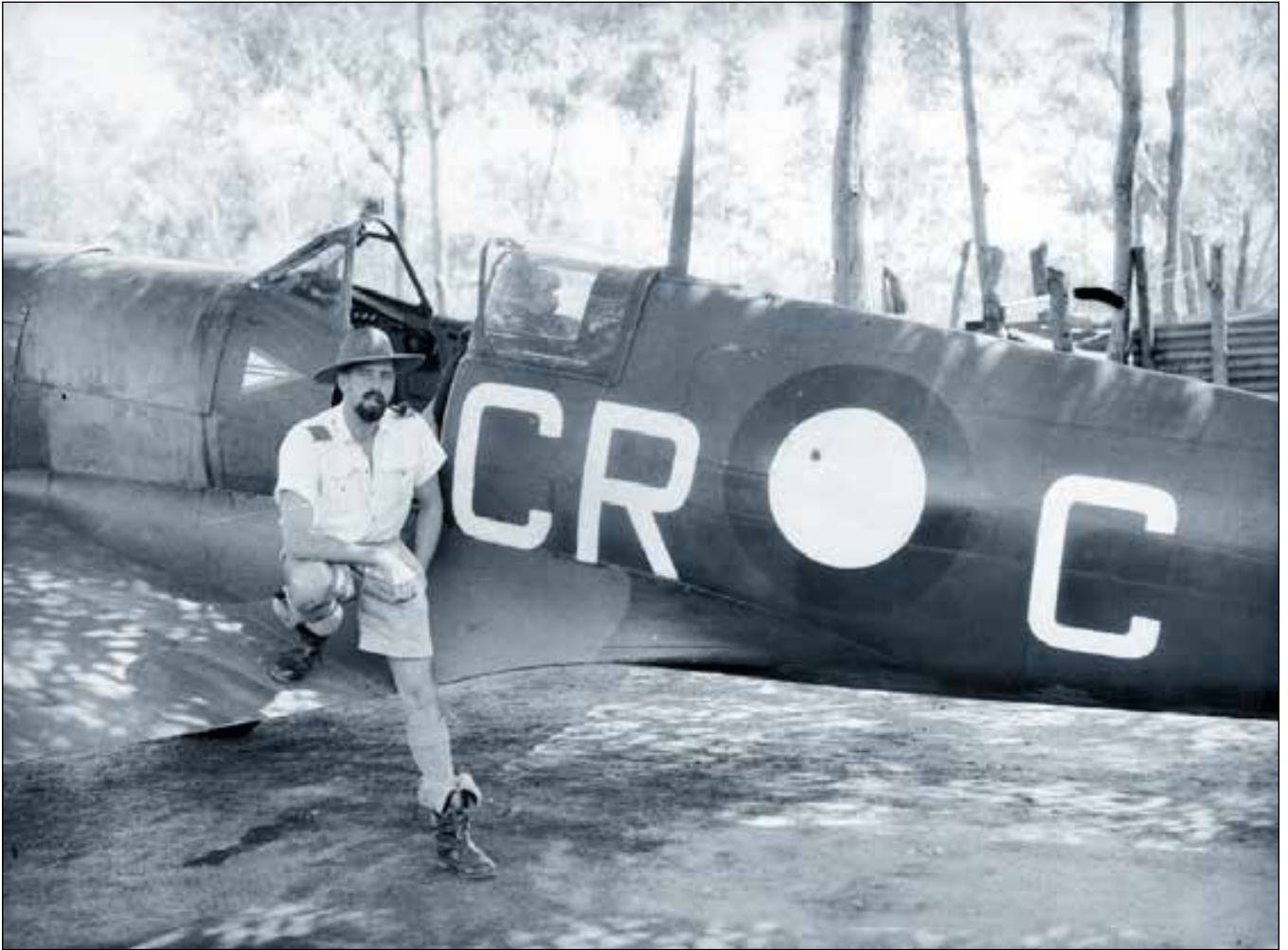


Sister Ellen Savage of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), the only survivor of twelve nurses on the hospital ship *Centaur*, is interviewed at Greenslopes Army Hospital about a week after the sinking. When the ship was sunk she reached a life-raft, and her subsequent behaviour, described in the following citation, earned her the George Medal: *Although suffering from severe injuries received as a result of the explosion, and subsequent immersion in the sea, she displayed great heroism during the period whilst she and some male members of the ship's staff were floating on a raft, to which they clung for some thirty-four hours before being rescued by an American destroyer. She rendered conspicuous service whilst on the raft in attending to wounds and burns sustained by other survivors.*

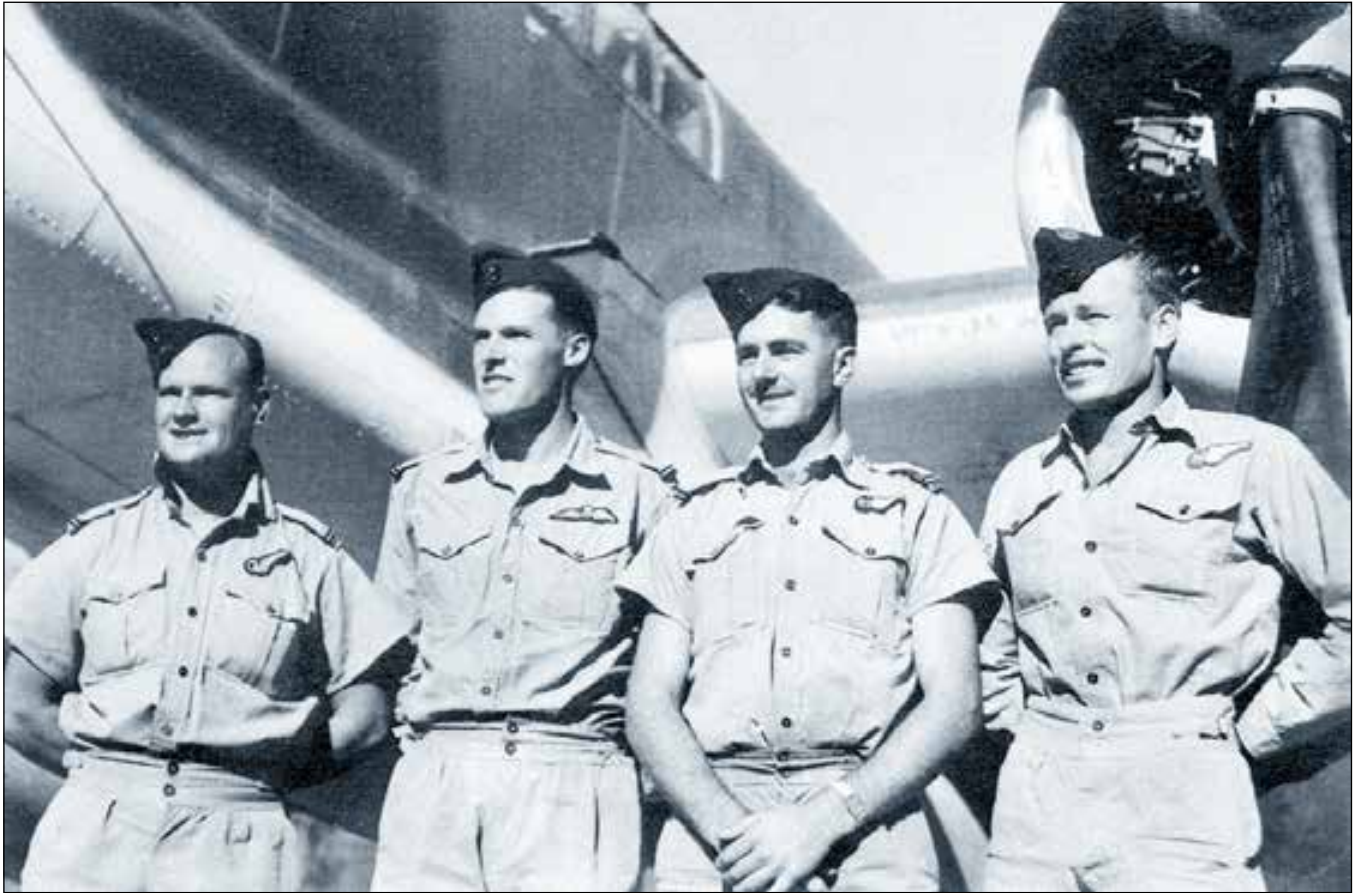
(AWM 044428)



Flying Officer Bruce Beale, in full dress uniform in Sydney, c1941. As a Spitfire pilot with No. 457 Squadron, he would be killed in action over Darwin in May 1943. His only brother, Herbert, would also die in 1943, serving with the RAF in Algeria. (AWM P01631.001)



Wing Commander Clive 'Killer' Caldwell, Wing Leader of No. 1 (Fighter) Wing RAAF, seated on the wing of his Spitfire aircraft at Strauss airstrip, Northern Territory, in about June 1943. Already an ace at this point, Caldwell would finish the war as Australia's top-scoring ace, with 28.5 victories. (AWM NWA0349)



The crew, all South Australian, of a Beaufort bomber of No. 7 Squadron RAAF that shot down a Japanese Jake floatplane over Torres Strait on 26 June 1943. The squadron was based at Horn Island on the tip of Cape York Peninsula, where its primary role was protecting shipping convoys. The Beaufort was captained by Pilot Flying Officer Peter Hopton, second from left, who was credited with this first enemy aircraft credited to his squadron and who was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his courageous flying in the South-West Pacific Area. (AWM P02190.001)





An armourer of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) loads a Wirraway aircraft with 250lb bombs, Hamilton, Victoria, June 1943. (AWM 139164)



Members of an Australian Light Horse regiment swim their horses across a river during a bush patrol in Western Australia, c1943. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/2821*)



Army donkey pack teams use animals that were mustered in the wild to patrol the north-western part of Australia, c1943. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/2942*)





Aboriginal members of the Australian Army at work, c1943. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/291*)





Members of the Civil Construction Corps work on an Allied Works Council project, c1943.

*(State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/2271)*



Volunteer Defence Corps gun crew at practice on a Bofors gun, c1943. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H99.201/1812*)



Survivors of the SS *Wear*, c1943. (*State Library of Victoria Argus newspaper collection H98.105/2662*)



An apparently hysterical woman is chased by an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden so he can calm her down to prevent the spread of panic to other civilians, as part of a demonstration in Russell Street, Melbourne, in October 1943. (AWM 137774)





RAAF Nursing Service (RAAFNS) Senior Sister Joan Kelly carries her tin helmet as she leaves a hospital ward in the Darwin area, December 1943. *When the days work was done, there was always the hazardous trip to the mess for evening meal ... armed with a hurricane lamp not only because it was pitch black outside, but there were also slit trenches half filled with water to be negotiated ... our bedrooms were large tents which housed four to six girls ... they had wooden floors and all clothing hung on a wire down the centre, and were always damp. But what a welcome place it was after a hard day's work in the wards ... the morning call seemed to come so quickly and then another long day was about to begin.* (Image: AWM NWA0517, quote: LE Humphrys, *Tell Us Your Story*, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))



The Prime Minister of Australia, the Right Honourable John Curtin, escorts General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander Allied Forces, South-West Pacific Area, on his arrival at Canberra to attend a dinner honouring the achievements of the forces under his command against the Japanese, March 1944. (AWM 072967)



A squad of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion train in their company lines, Thursday Island, 1945. (AWM 119169)





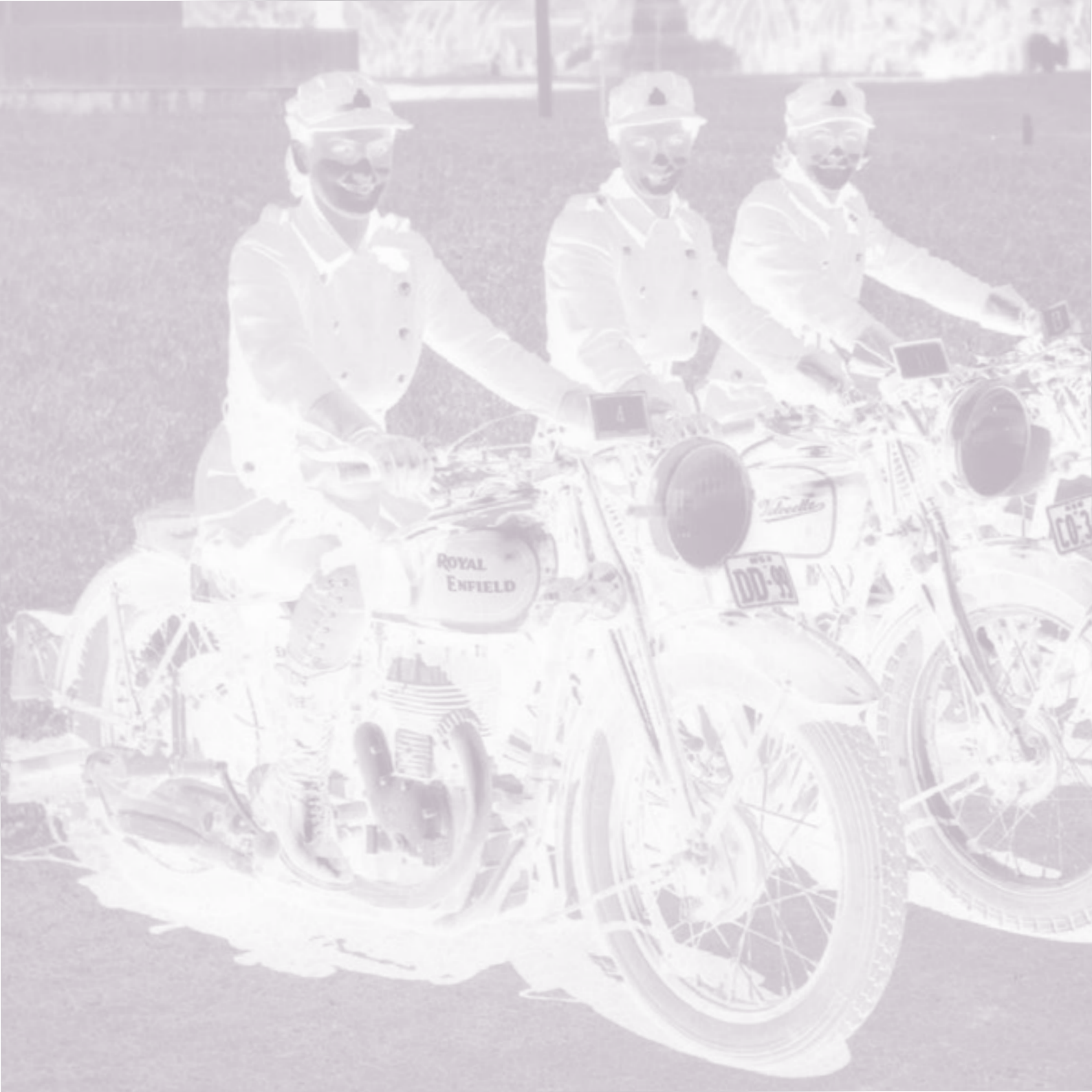
The footwear section of the 'Army at Work' display in King George Square, Brisbane, staged by the Australian Army Ordnance Corps to support the Third Victory Loan, April 1945.

(AWM 088666)





Revellers crowd around a radio stand in Martin Place, Sydney, waiting for an official announcement of the Japanese surrender on Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day, 15 August 1945. *I recall clearly the 15th August 1945. The bells began to ring, the ships in the harbour tooted incessantly, cars and trams joined the racket and Brisbane went mad. People in the streets were singing, dancing and hugging one another with such sheer joy. Peace at last! Life had changed forever. The question was, what now? We were no longer the young women joining the army. We had been trusted to take responsibility. We had grown up. We had survived, made good friends with people from all over Australia, and had observed the rise and fall of humanity! So many men and women would return home. So many would not. We would learn of the atrocities committed in prisoner of war camps, we knew for sure many of our friends did not survive ... Now that life had changed, what would peace bring?* (Image: AWM 113810, quote: Sister Julia O'Sullivan, Tell Us Your Story, [www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.anzac.dpc.wa.gov.au))







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