

APPENDIX 2

TOO MANY GENERALS?

Throughout the series to which this volume belongs there has been intermittent reference to the manpower problem in relation to the army. The discussion of this problem indeed forms a main theme of the story of the relations of the Government and the army during the last four years of the war. Side by side with it for two years ran another theme, a lesser one, although at times it was the subject of equally long communications. In retrospect it can be seen that the discussion of this second problem did not materially affect the war effort one way or the other, and, whatever its outcome, would not have done so. And yet, because of the manner in which character and prejudice—and some important principles—were revealed, it seems worth while to trace the course of this discussion, if only as an appendix to the main story.

A paragraph from a letter from the Minister for the Army, Mr Forde, to the Commander-in-Chief, General Blamey, on 5th August 1943 will serve as a starting point for the chronicle:

From time to time, representations have been made to me by Ministers and Parliamentary representatives that Headquarters services which are being maintained are out of proportion to Army Organisation, with the result that senior officers who are allotted to these organisations are not fully employed, nor are they able to give efficient service in keeping with their qualifications.

The letter was written just a month before the opening on 4th September of the Australian offensive in New Guinea—the largest yet undertaken against the Japanese in this theatre. This may help to excuse the omission which made it possible for Forde on 30th October to complain that he had received no reply. He noted that an organisation diagram submitted some time before showed that the First Army, whose headquarters were in Queensland, comprised formations with a total strength of some 17,000 plus those in “three relatively minor formations”; the Second Army, with headquarters in New South Wales, possessed some 29,000 men and women. The question had arisen of replacing General Mackay as commander of the Second Army. Before the vacancy was filled Forde wished to have a comprehensive statement of the duties of these army headquarters.

This letter crossed one from Blamey recommending the appointment of General Morshead in General Mackay's place. On the 12th November Forde wrote to Blamey that the Prime Minister considered that “as the bulk of the field force is located in New Guinea and is provided with appropriate Commanders and Staffs, it is evident that the maintenance of the present Commands and Staffs established in Australia can only be justified by very strong reasons”. He did not think that any further promotions to General should be made until the future organisation of the army was clear.

On the face of it the maintenance in November 1943 of two army headquarters, a Force headquarters, and three corps headquarters to control eight divisions or their equivalent, several detached forces of moderate size, and the training organisations, all spread over an area about 2,400 miles from east to west and 2,400 from north to south was a modest and economical provision; but, for reasons explored below, Australians in those days were prompt to conclude that in any army organisation there were too many generals.

At this stage Blamey had been disregarding the Minister's letters on this topic for three months. He now changed his policy and on 17th November wrote the first of what eventually became a series of characteristically lucid and emphatic statements on the principles of higher command and their particular application in Australia. He recalled the establishment at the outbreak of war of two higher command headquarters, one in New South Wales and one in Victoria, and of local commands in other States; the later separation of the base organisations from the higher-command organisations; the establishment to meet the needs of the Japanese war of a "Commander, Home Forces", of the First and Second Armies, and necessary corps headquarters; his own appointment to command Allied Land Forces. He recalled the movement forward of General MacArthur's headquarters and the establishment of a small advanced headquarters of L.H.Q. in New Guinea; the forward movement of the corps headquarters in New Guinea, and the establishment of New Guinea Force headquarters.¹ The First and Second Army headquarters would remain, however, "an essential part of the basic organisation either in the form of an Army Headquarters or a Command Headquarters during the whole period of mobilisation in Australia, and also as part of the post-war organisation". A statement of the number of troops under command at a particular time did not necessarily convey a correct appreciation of the two armies' responsibilities. The First Army controlled the units that were round Atherton under a corps headquarters, and the defence of Queensland including the Torres Strait islands, Merauke and the Gulf country. The Second Army commanded the 1st Division, miscellaneous non-divisional units, the defensive organisation of New South Wales and Victoria, and the bulk of the training organisations in Australia; its staff had been reduced to one only slightly greater than that of a corps headquarters.

A secondary consideration was that the retention of the army headquarters enabled the relief of higher commanders and staffs in New Guinea.² Blamey added:

It would in my opinion be quite contrary to the principles of organisation and sound administration to reduce the higher Army organisation. . . . The most important element in the whole Army organisation is probably the headquarters of formations, etc. The failure to recognise this in the latter part of 1941 in the Middle East was

¹ Here Blamey somewhat over-simplified the history of NGF headquarters.

² Mackay of Second Army had twice relieved in New Guinea; on the other hand Lavarack had not been called forward from First Army in this way.

a prime cause of the failure of the operations against Rommel. Headquarters cannot be successfully improvised, as was attempted by the British command on that occasion. They must be trained and organised.

Forde, writing on 18th December, was "still not satisfied", asked for a chart and statistics of the formations, and noted that a report by the United States Chief of Staff stated that on 30th June 1943 there was one general to every 6,460 troops in the American Army whereas it had been stated to him that the number of generals in the Australian Army was excessive and would not stand comparison with the British and United States figures.

It must be assumed that the Minister was not unearthing these arguments and facts and figures and suppositions single-handed, but that this correspondence was evidence of a critical attitude towards Blamey within the Army Secretariat. If it was the Secretariat that advised Forde to seek comparisons between the ratio of generals to men of other ranks in the Australian, British and American Armies it advised him ill, because Blamey was able to point out that the ratios were:

	To Males	To Males and Females
British Army	1 : 8,333	1 : 9,090
United States Army	1 : 6,460	—
Australian Army	1 : 14,953	1 : 15,741

Directing his remarks not at the Minister but at his informants, Blamey wrote: "It is obvious from the above figures that your information is supplied from a thoroughly uninformed and unreliable source," which, in the circumstances, was fair comment.

Blamey then grasped the opportunity presented to him by the Minister and his informants of pointing to the relatively low pay of Australian senior officers. He illustrated this with the following table, showing daily rates of pay:

	Australian	British	United States (on duty overseas)
Lieut-General	89/3	174/9	193/6
Major-General	75/9	144/3	184/11

The figures were in Australian currency and were for an officer with one dependant.³

Concerning a general statement by Forde that there were "relatively large headquarters staffs" who "may not all be fully employed", Blamey said that this statement should be discredited or "evidence produced which can be examined in reference to a particular staff".

An accompanying table showed that under New Guinea Force there were 115,604 troops, and that its field formations included II Corps and four divisions. Under First Army were 90,784 men, including I Corps, and three divisions (but a total of only seven brigades). In the Queensland Lines of Communication area within the First Army area were 41,871

³ It was pointed out that four Australian lieut-generals were receiving a special allowance approved by the Government, thus: Lt-Gen Morshead 38/1 a day; Lt-Gen Lavarack 21/2; Lt-Gen Bennett 4/11; Lt-Gen Sturdee (in Washington) 118/5.

men.⁴ The Second Army possessed 102,593 men including the 1st Division (two brigades), and in its two L. of C. areas were 74,115 men. In III Corps area in Western Australia were 57,916 men, and one division and one armoured brigade were under command. Northern Territory Force contained 36,997 men, and included three infantry brigades. There were 17,694 men in the South Australian L. of C. area, 7,275 in the Tasmanian; 3,859 in L.H.Q. reserve; and 17,986 in L.H.Q. units or not elsewhere included.

On 19th January 1944 Forde replied pointing out that part-time members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (85,000 in all) had been included in the above totals, and suggesting that, as brigadier-generals had been included in the American calculation, brigadiers should be included in the Australian. It still appeared to him that the headquarters should be reduced. A few days later Mr Curtin wrote to Mr Forde quoting a statement by Blamey in May 1942 that the rank of a commander of an L. of C. should be major-general where the troops under command exceeded 20,000.

Blamey's replies (on 7th and 12th February) pointed out that a brigadier in the Australian Army did not have rank or status equivalent to those of a brigadier-general in the American Army. In the latter a brigadier-general held a permanent rank and his primary role was to be second-in-command of a division (an appointment that did not exist in a British army). He added that in the calculations about the ratios of generals British and American forces equivalent to the V.D.C. had been included; and that six of the Australian generals were in fact in employment outside the Australian Army. He also pointed out that the three major-generals commanding L. of C. areas commanded 41,800, 41,800 and 32,000 troops respectively. As in an earlier letter, Blamey offered to discuss the whole question with the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Army.⁵

There the matter seems to have rested until December 1944 when it cropped up again during discussion of the proposed transfer of Second Army headquarters from the Burnside Homes near Parramatta to temporary quarters on a near-by golf links. The acting Minister, Senator Fraser, in a letter to the acting Prime Minister, now Mr Forde, on 13th December gave his "considered view" that the present war establishment of Second Army headquarters—494—was excessive; and said that he was not satisfied that there would be a need for Second Army headquarters in the post-war army. Fraser sent a copy to Blamey on 28th December.

On 4th January 1945 Blamey wrote a second long statement (of six foolscap pages) on the general organisation of command in Australia. On this occasion he went back to 1920 when a conference of senior

⁴The L. of C. areas within army areas were under the army concerned for operational planning and under LHQ for general administration.

⁵Interest in this question was evidently not confined to the Ministers. In the Senate on 28th September 1944 Senator W. E. Aylett, a Government member, asked how many generals were in the Australian Army. Senator Fraser replied that there were: one general, 10 lieutenant-generals, of whom only 5 were serving with the army in the South-West Pacific; and 28 major-generals, of whom 23 were serving with the army in the South-West Pacific.

commanders was convened to advise as to the most effective organisation for the army.⁶ This conference recommended (i) the formation of two main field forces each of two divisions and a cavalry division to defend the vital centres, Sydney and Melbourne⁷; (ii) the necessary maintenance or base and L. of C. organisation, each State becoming an administrative area under a base commandant; and (iii) an effective system of command for the army as a whole. The components of the two field groups and the base area were provided for but considerations of economy prevented the establishment of an effective system of over-all command. In 1939, however, two principal headquarters, Eastern and Southern Command, were established to ensure command of the main field forces. In 1942, when invasion seemed imminent, the Government had "adopted without question . . . the long-standing advice as to the need for reorganising the land forces"; for Eastern Command was substituted First Army and, for Southern Command, Second Army.

The invasion did not eventuate (Blamey continued) but the principles on which the command system had been thought out were of a nature designed to meet any changing conditions. . . . The First Army Headquarters became the operational headquarters to meet an invasion in Northern Australia. Its headquarters went first to Toowoomba and later further north to Atherton. The Second Army took over progressively the remaining functions of command and training.

After the counter-offensive in New Guinea the First Army Headquarters was again advanced, this time to New Guinea; and the area of the Second Army was extended to include Queensland up to the 20th parallel.

Basic principles of efficient army organisation were: the delegation of appropriate responsibilities to a normal maximum of six subordinate commanders; the assignment to each subordinate of one primary role; the provision for each subordinate commander of an adequate organisation and staff.⁸

There were 23 principal formations in the army, omitting schools and training units. The commanders of First Army and I Corps relieved the Commander-in-Chief of immediate control of six divisions; but the remaining formations were too numerous for efficient direct control from L.H.Q. The South Australian and Tasmanian L. of C. areas were small. The Northern Territory Force and Western Command were in the nature of detachments and must therefore remain under his direct command. But, to reduce the number of his immediate subordinates to a practical limit, it was necessary to maintain a separate principal subordinate formation to supervise the training organisation and control local defence units. It would be unsound for the L. of C. areas to carry out these functions.

⁶ They were Lieut-Generals Chauvel and Monash and Major-Generals Legge, M'Cay, Hobbs and White. Blamey as DCGS was responsible for the preparatory studies and general staff work.

⁷ The "Sydney" force was to include the troops in New South Wales and Queensland, and thus, at this stage, the principle of concentrating troops for the defence of the vital Sydney area was implied.

⁸ Writing in an earlier period (in 1903) Colonel G. F. R. Henderson stated: "It is one of the first rules of organisation that eight units are as many as one commander can manage in war." —*The Science of War*, p. 427. In those days there were eight companies in an infantry battalion.

A higher formation such as the Second Army was essential for these purposes. If it was abolished he would have to institute another and less satisfactory organisation. If the functions of the Second Army were distributed among the L. of C. areas the increment needed by the area headquarters would exceed the present Second Army headquarters.

Senator Fraser's letter of 28th December had not reached Blamey when he wrote this paper. After reading that letter Blamey wrote replies to specific questions it raised, such as the extent of the telephone system of the Second Army. He gave details of the telephone system (it possessed 100 telephones), and pointed out that the war establishment of the headquarters had been decreased from 842 in 1942 to 494; during 1944, by disbanding the staffs of certain training centres, the establishment had been decreased by 138 officers and 470 others. He intended to disband the 1st Division and transfer its functions to Second Army with a further saving of 19 officers and 113 others.

Fraser's reply was to ask on 15th January 1945 for a "chart of organisation" of the Second Army. This chart, delivered on 25th January, showed that the strength on 31st December 1944 was:

Headquarters	494
Army troops	4,128
Coast and anti-aircraft defences	3,793
Training establishments	25,092
Schools	1,015
	<hr/>
	34,522
Full-time V.D.C.	227
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	34,749
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In his covering letter Blamey repeated a request made three weeks before that the Prime Minister should be informed of the advice he had given on 4th January and Forde (now Minister again) did so.

As described earlier, political criticism of Blamey took a different direction about this time, and the Second Army was left alone for about four months.⁹

In May 1945 the Second Army had been without a commander for about ten months, ever since Morshead had been transferred to I Corps. Its senior General Staff Officer was Brigadier Fullarton,¹ the only general

⁹ Meanwhile there had been criticism also of the size of the main headquarters, in Melbourne. Mr Forde discussed with General Blamey a letter in the Melbourne *Age* of 19th January 1945 alleging waste of manpower at "Victoria Barracks" where, the writer said, 7,000 were on the payroll but "business men" employed there asserted that 2,000 or 3,000 young people could be removed without any diminution of efficiency. "Post-war business," said the writer of the letter, "needs office and store space in Melbourne, and such accommodation is quite impossible to obtain, because of the huge areas still locked up by war departments which never decrease."

Blamey wrote to Forde, pointing out that not only army but naval, air and civil staffs were housed at the barracks. The army personnel at the barracks numbered 564 officers and 709 others, of whom 40 and 337 were women and 113 and 281 were men who were medically B-class. Other branches, including the personal records section, were housed at the temporary Albert Park barracks and elsewhere. The total strength of the headquarters was 1,424 officers and 3,272 other ranks, of whom a total of 1,270 were women and 1,776 were B-class.

¹ Brig I. G. Fullarton, MC, NX140112. (1st AIF: 29 Bn.) Comd Lae Base Sub-Area 1943-44; BGS Second Army 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. Orange, NSW, 2 Sep 1895. Died 6 Jun 1952.

within its organisation being Major-General H. W. Lloyd of the dwindling 1st Division. As mentioned, Blamey had decided to disband the 1st Division, and on 8th May Lloyd was appointed to administer command of the Second Army. When Fraser, now again acting Minister, was asked to approve, he said that he had decided that the Second Army should be disbanded and responsibility for administering its units taken over by the commander of the New South Wales L. of C. area (Major-General E. C. P. Plant).

I am prepared to take full responsibility for this decision. . . . Would you please advise me of the action that has been taken to give effect to this direction.

Blamey was then on his way forward to Bougainville. On 15th June, having returned to Lae, he wrote to Fraser briefly covering some of the ground of his earlier papers, stating that the proposal was retrograde and would lead to a decline in efficiency, and that the fact of transfer of command from one particular officer to another did not affect the functions that had to be carried out. He concluded by saying that "a reversion to the ineffective system of divided control of reinforcement training" should be carried out with a minimum of friction and he was asking the Chief of the General Staff to work out a scheme.

The studies were prepared. Blamey replied to the Minister on 28th July outlining the problem and concluding with a recommendation that the title of the Second Army be altered to "Training Command". It was 16th August before Forde replied that, since hostilities had ended, no decision was necessary, *but* if the proposed establishment for the Training Command had been the same as that of the Second Army it would not have been acceptable.

To accept the general principles set out in Blamey's letters about the Second Army is not necessarily to agree that those principles were rightly applied in this instance. Among those who most keenly questioned the need for the continued existence of the Second Army in the last two years of the war were officers of all ranks who had served on that headquarters. The final proposal to alter the title of the headquarters at North Parramatta from the Second Army to Training Command might well have been brought forward about two years earlier when it had become evident that the Second Army headquarters would never go into the field. It is difficult to avoid a suspicion that Blamey was not being entirely frank and that one reason for retaining the title Second Army was that it gave him an appointment to which he could, if he wished, post a very senior officer. (He had given a hint of this in November 1943.) After July 1944, when the Second Army ceased to have a commander, and its staff dwindled until it was considerably smaller than the staff of a corps, there was insufficient justification for retaining a name that had been appropriate enough in 1942 but was now incongruous.

The persistence with which the Ministers and their advisers pursued this matter (which involved only some 500 men out of an army of nearly one thousand times as many) was indicative perhaps of the widely-held

conviction of those days that armies (more than navies or air forces) wasted and misapplied their manpower, and bred senior officers who sought to enlarge the size of their commands in their own interests. Some support is provided for this belief by the fact that in August 1942, when the army in Australia and New Guinea was 443,000 strong, 18,000 were serving on various headquarters, but in August 1945 when the army was 382,000 strong, 26,000 were serving on headquarters.

Manpower is wasted in armies and armies provide scope for "Empire builders", but in Australia during the war other institutions provided similar scope, and other institutions wasted manpower, yet were not subjected to the same degree of criticism as was the army, against which in this respect there was a prejudice that was both ancient and unrelenting.

It is illuminating to compare the general attitude to sport in Australia in the first half of this century with the general attitude to the army. Bright uniforms for the army were decried, but in sport they were demanded. Army ritual was considered by many a waste of time, but in sport similar ritual was considered proper, even essential. Leaders in sport attained a popularity never approached by army leaders. Even a modest degree of idleness among the soldiery was considered scandalous, whereas the success of a game was often gauged by the number of idle spectators whom it attracted.