

The American Occupation of Australia, 1941-45

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A Marriage of Necessity

By

John McKerrow

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

This book examines the presence of American military personnel in Australia during the Second World War. Around one million US soldiers spent some time in the country. This American occupation resulted in several areas of tension between US military personnel and Australian civilians. Areas of conflict, which have hitherto received little attention from historians, are examined in this work. Jurisdictional and policing disputes between the US military and Queensland officials, American criminal behaviour, and problems between Australian labourers and American authorities are all examined. Other “fault lines,” such as race and gender relations, which have been looked at by other historians, are also examined; this book provides new insights into these areas and challenges some of the existing historiography with regard to relations between black Americans and Australian civilians. How senior authorities on both sides, in particular General Douglas MacArthur and Prime Minister John Curtin, managed crises and coordinated efforts to manage relations between civilians and GIs are also studied. Sexual relations, for example, were directed towards certain associations (prostitution), whilst other associations (marriage) were discouraged. Authorities doubled efforts to manage interracial sexual relations, as both countries had a history of discouraging and even outlawing miscegenation. Ultimately, this study argues that problems between American personnel and Australians during the occupation did not threaten to upset the war effort or the alliance between the United States and Australia; however, there were nevertheless myriad problems between allies that led to friction and ill-will.

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The research of the historian would be vastly more difficult in our age without the help of archival staff. To that end, I wish to thank the staff members of the Queensland State Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, the MacArthur Memorial Archives, the National Archives of Australia, and the Queensland Police Museum. Dozens of people provided me with a professional and friendly assistance during the research process.

This book would have been impossible without the financial assistance of McMaster University. McMaster provided me with several scholarships that paid for travel and living expenses both at home and abroad. In addition, I am grateful to McMaster for employing me for four years as a Teaching Assistant. This steady employ provided financial stability that allowed me to focus on my research and writing.

My parents also provided me with support for which I am grateful. In particular, my mother, Ann McKerrow proofread the original manuscript gratis and offered advice on style. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Kristin. I would not have been able to complete this work without your patience, love, and support. I dedicate this book to you.

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INTRODUCTION

Partly inspired by David Reynolds's seminal work, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-45*, this book examines relations between American servicemen and Australian civilians during the Second World War. How authorities on both sides attempted to manage relations through the prism of national loyalties, esprit de corps, fraught US and Australian racial histories, and the desire to prosecute the war efficiently is another part of this study. This work is not concerned with the wider war (save for how it affected relations in Australia) or, for the most part, associations between American and Australian service personnel. How Diggers and GIs interacted has been covered by historians elsewhere.¹

Relations were good throughout the war, but far from harmonious. Examples of friction between allies over matters unrelated to the conduct of the war reveal general points about allies and armies. Societies that share many common values and the same cause are not free from disputes. Disputes disclose reluctance on the part of both parties to abandon established practices, customs, and values even if that abandonment meant a harmonious war effort. Moreover, because the American forces were overwhelmingly comprised of young men, troubles between even the best of allies often stemmed from male misconduct and posturing. To some extent, the nature of the war in the Southwest Pacific and several related American policies (e.g. the lack of cultural programmes and the swift removal to combat areas of men in trouble) exacerbated points of friction. Before these themes are developed further and the contributions of this study to the existing historiography are laid out, it would be helpful to review the basic trajectory of the war in the Southwest Pacific Area

¹ For an examination of GI-Digger relations see E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under: The American Impact on Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985); John Hammond Moore, *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here: Americans in Australia, 1941-1945* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981); Peter Thompson and Robert Macklin, *The Battle of Brisbane: Australians and Yanks at War* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2000); Darryl McIntyre, "Paragons of Glamour: A Study of U.S. Military Forces in Australia" (PhD dissertation., University of Queensland, 1989).

(SWPA). The wider war dictated the number of American personnel in the country and hence the policies designed to manage relations between Australian civilians and GIs; the very nature of interpersonal relations between American service personnel and Australians was also affected by the wider war.

Events in the Pacific War necessitated the American occupation of Australia. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Japanese attacks elsewhere in the Southwest Pacific, Australia's strategic significance in the Southwest Pacific increased. Even before Pearl Harbor, the Americans were using Australian airbases to ferry aeroplanes to the Philippines; but, it was not until after 7 December 1941 that Washington began to see Australia's potential as a supply base for US forces.² The first major contingent of Americans to reach Australia, the hastily constituted Task Force South Pacific (TFSP), was originally destined to travel directly to the Philippines and was only redirected to Australia after Pearl Harbor. On 22 December 1941, this convoy of 4,600 personnel reached Brisbane with the goal of reinforcing and re-supplying General Douglas MacArthur's forces in the Philippines.³

Throughout December 1941 and January 1942, American forces in Australia continued to have as their chief goal the reinforcement of MacArthur's beleaguered troops. However, as the American position in the Philippines deteriorated, "emphasis shifted increasingly to the defense of Australia and its development as the main U.S. Army base in the area."⁴ Events outside Australia continued to dictate its importance to allied strategy. As the unit history of the United States Army Forces in Australia (USAFIA) states:

By the end of February 1942 the whole strategic pattern in [the Southwest Pacific] had changed. In the Philippines, American troops under General MacArthur were fighting gallantly to hold their position on Bataan and Corregidor but by this time it was clear that their resistance could not last indefinitely and that as a base for operations the Philippines were virtually lost to the Allies. The Netherlands East Indies were almost entirely in

² Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 6.

³ Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services, The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1957), 426; "Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia," [no date], National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA) (College Park), RG 496, Entry 47, Box 326, File: Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia, 1, 10.

⁴ Bykofsky, *United States Army*, 426.

Japanese hands; all U.S. troops that could withdraw had returned to Australia.⁵

With the Japanese advancing virtually everywhere, Australia became the main base of operations and supply for the US Army in the Pacific.⁶ Confirming the country's newfound strategic significance was the establishment of MacArthur's headquarters at Melbourne in March 1942.⁷

The naval battles of Coral Sea and Midway in May and June 1942 ended any chance of a Japanese invasion of Australia (which reflected MacArthur's decision to move his headquarters to Brisbane in July), and allowed the Americans to consolidate and build up their position. From a force of only 25,000 US troops in March 1942, MacArthur had nearly 100,000 GIs under his command in Australia by July.⁸ It was during this period that Australia's chief role in the broader war in the Southwest Pacific Area was to act as a supply base to reinforce Australian and American troops fighting the Japanese in Papua New Guinea. As MacArthur recounted in his *Reminiscences*, the decision to fight the Japanese stationed on the island "involved provision for supply and reinforcement of advanced areas from rear bases in Australia which were in large part merely ports for the reshipping of material from the distant West Coast of the United States."⁹ It was not until the middle of January 1943 that a combined American-Australian force was able to defeat the last Japanese redoubt at Sanananda and secure the south-eastern part of the island.¹⁰ At nearly the same time, American forces won their six-month battle of attrition against the Japanese at Guadalcanal.¹¹

After taking Sanananda, Allied forces enjoyed a period of rest and consolidation. In June 1943, they renewed their assault on Japanese positions and converged on Japanese held Salamaua and Lae. By September, both locations were in Allied hands; a month later, the Japanese

⁵ "Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia," [no date], National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA) (College Park), RG 496, Entry 47, Box 326, File: Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia, 13.

⁶ Bykofsky, *United States Army*, 426.

⁷ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 10.

⁸ Moore, *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here*, 70, 84.

⁹ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964), 154.

¹⁰ Dan van der Vat, *The Pacific Campaign, World War II, The U.S – Japanese War 1941-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 207.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

garrison at Finschhafen fell to Australian troops.¹² In December 1943 and January 1944, Allied troops continued to roll back Japanese forces on the north coast of the island and in the interior.¹³ One should also remember that American forces enjoyed gains elsewhere: Japan's garrison at Bougainville was reduced to inconsequence by the end of 1943, and the major naval and air base at Rabaul was isolated and under constant Allied air attack by April 1944.¹⁴

The purpose of this brief survey is to not only explain why the Americans were in Australia in the first place, but also to provide some context to the American troop numbers in Australia during the war (chart I:1). US troops under MacArthur constantly "flowed through" Australia to New Guinea; yet, 1943 represented the peak presence of American troops stationed in the country. As Allied positions in Papua were secured in January 1943 and the conquest of northeast New Guinea continued during that year, Australia's strategic importance as a supply base for the fighting forces in the SWPA diminished. This diminution is reflected in the number of US Army personnel stationed in Australia from 1943-44. From a high of nearly 120,000 troops in September 1943, the number was cut in half within six months. By the end of 1944, there were fewer than 24,000 US Army personnel stationed in the whole of Australia and that number dwindled to 14,700 by March 1945.

Further buttressing Australia's diminished importance to Allied strategy was Papua New Guinea's increased importance as a supply hub and staging ground by the beginning of 1944. As John Hammond Moore notes in *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here*, Milne Bay became known as "Little Detroit," as soldiers assembled seven hundred vehicles a month "for use in forward areas, which saved shipment to Australia for assembly there."¹⁵ Oro Bay, on the island's north-east coast, saw over 730,000 troops pass through in January 1944 alone.¹⁶ Symbolic of these changes in Australia's importance was the fact that MacArthur, in preparation for the invasion of the Philippines, moved his headquarters from Brisbane to Hollandia (Jayapura) in August 1944. The general moved his headquarters there after a series of amphibious landings on the western half of the island had destroyed the Japanese as a fighting force.¹⁷

¹² Harry A. Gailey, *The War in the Pacific, From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1995), 224-26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 236, 244-246.

¹⁵ Moore, *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here*, 264.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gailey, *The War in the Pacific*, 286.

Chart I:1 presents a reasonable picture of the flow-through of American personnel; however, it is important to note that it only refers to US Army and United States Army Air Force¹⁸ personnel stationed in Australia. The United States Navy (USN) also had a considerable presence in Australia. According to E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts:

USN facilities included two hospitals in Townsville; a naval air station at Great Palm Island; a PT boat installation at Cairns; a naval air station, as well as a submarine maintenance and repair base, at Brisbane; a maintenance and repair base for escort vessels at Sydney; and in Western Australia, besides those in or near Perth, a patrol base for flying-boats and a submarine-refuelling depot at Exmouth Gulf. Naval personnel stationed in Australia, apart from those aboard visiting ships, peaked at 14,300 in December 1943.¹⁹

These numbers do not take into account the hundreds of ships that visited Australia during the war. Over 170 military vessels docked at ports in South Queensland alone.²⁰ Elements of the US Marine Corps, comprising of the 1st Division, also spent some time training and recuperating in Queensland and Victoria after Guadalcanal. The division left Australia in September 1943 to join US forces in New Guinea.²¹ Other American servicemen also visited Australia on furlough or stopped in the country for a few days or weeks before being shipped to the battle zones north of Australia.²² Although not part of this study, it is worth noting that a small number of American women came to Australia serving in the Women's Army Corps, the American Red Cross, and the Army Nurse Corps.²³ All told, around one million US servicemen passed through Australia, a country of only seven million inhabitants, during the war.²⁴

The American presence was not spread uniformly across Australia (Chart I:1). The USAFIA, which later became the United States Army Services of Supply (USASOS) in April 1942, divided Australia into seven base sections for organisational and administrative purposes. The initial four sections were created in January 1942. Base Section One, headquartered at Birdum and later Darwin comprised the Northern

¹⁸ The United States Army Air Force was a part of the US Army until 1947.

¹⁹ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 27.

²⁰ Peter Charlton, *South Queensland WWII, 1941-45* (Bowen Hill, Queensland: Boolarong Publications, 1991), 35-36.

²¹ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 28, 62.

²² *Ibid.*, 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31, 108, 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-30.

Territory; Base Section Two included Queensland north of Rockhampton; Base Section Three was Queensland south of Rockhampton (including the town itself); Base Section Four comprised Victoria, and Melbourne was the location of MacArthur's headquarters until July 1942. The Americans also created base sections in Perth, Western Australia (Base Section Six) and Adelaide, South Australia (Base Section Five) in March 1942. These two bases had a brief existence and ceased operations in January 1943. However, Base Section Five was reconstituted in September 1943 around Cairns. Base Section Seven, created in April 1942, encompassed all of New South Wales, but in practicality all US personnel were stationed in Sydney. The city was used as a supply depot, a furlough location, and the headquarters of the USASOS.²⁵ The majority of US troops stationed in Australia were in Queensland for geographical reasons: proximity to New Guinea and the presence of relatively large ports at Brisbane, Townsville, and Cairns. As Raymond Evans notes in *A History of Queensland*, the state's "global positioning was pivotal. It was to become the staging-zone for the South-west Pacific War."²⁶ In June 1943, sixty-seven percent of all troops stationed in Australia were in the state; those figures climbed to eighty percent in September 1943 and nearly ninety percent in December 1943.²⁷ These numbers help explain why so many of the problems, incidents, and causes of friction during the war occurred in Queensland.

This book dwells on conflicts, but recognizes that relationships were more diverse than unpleasant incidents show. Nevertheless, Australians viewed the American occupation in a number of ways; some certainly resented the conduct of American personnel. Australian social activist and feminist Jessie Street remembered:

After a while, we began to realize that to the average white American, if you were not one of them, whatever your colour, you were regarded as a native and could be treated by them as such. Gradually we accepted it all as part of the horror of war in our country.²⁸

²⁵ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 27-28; "Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia," [no date], National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA) (College Park), RG 496, Entry 47, Box 326, File: Establishment of Headquarters USAFIA at Melbourne, Australia.

²⁶ Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187.

²⁷ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 30.

²⁸ Jessie M.G. Street, *Truth or Repose* (Sydney: Australian Book Society, 1966), 225.

Table I-1 US Personnel in Australia June 1943 to March 1945²⁹

Date	Northern Territory	North Queensland	South Queensland	Victoria	New South Wales	Total Personnel
	Base Section One	Base Section Two	Base Section Three	Base Section Four	Base Section Seven	
Jun-43	2105	26,164	44,833	19,072	13,945	106,119
Sep-43	2392	23,992	71,668	13,790	7589	119,431
Dec-43	2514	20,451	75,358	2133	6741	107,197
Mar-44	3180	15,724	34,797	1372	5963	61,036
Jun-44	8316	12,594	30,025	-	6790	57,725
Sep-44	5023	11,038	20,835	-	3755	40,651
Dec-44	3378	5438	12,839	-	2220	23,875
Mar-45	1427	2895	8706	-	1702	14,730

Hers was an extremely negative appraisal of the American occupation which contrasts with the reminiscences of another Australian woman, Maureen Meadows, who worked for the American forces during the war. Looking back, Meadows declared:

There were so many things about them to love. I loved their looks and their ways and the casual manner in which they gave away so generously of their cigarette ration...But most of all I loved the way they said "Ma'am!"...And whether it was because of the way they looked at you while they did, you felt as if you were the one and only woman in their life who really mattered for the moment anyhow.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Maureen C. Meadows, *I Loved Those Yanks* (Sydney: George M. Dash, 1948), 14.

Were GIs dashing and generous heroes or arrogant allies? Australians saw GIs through both lenses and many more: they were saviours from the Japanese, lovers, husbands, generous employers, and the exotic “other” (especially black Americans). Conversely, Americans were also home-wreckers, demanding and uncompromising employers, criminals, and racists. How the Americans were perceived, as saviours or sinners, really depended on individual Australians.

In his study of the American occupation of Britain, Reynolds notes that many military historians have ignored soldiers as human beings and have instead focused on strategy, tactics, and generals. When speaking of the American occupation of Britain, Reynolds argues that “only by taking seriously high politics and real life can their [soldiers’] experiences be understood.”³¹ This argument applies equally to the Americans in Australia. In a study that is concerned chiefly with relations between Australian civilians, minor civil servants, local labour leaders, magistrates and constables on one hand and junior American officers and GIs on the other, one might ask how does high policy fit in? Simply, those at the top of the pyramid, those who wielded authority over Australians and American servicemen, such as MacArthur, senior military officers, Prime Minister John Curtin, senior civil servants, and labour leaders are not ignored. However, they factor into this examination largely within the context of managing and controlling relations between GIs and Australian civilians. Their place in this story is largely one of crisis management, although their contribution to tense relations is also examined. The policies they laid down and decisions they made to manage relations, reduce friction, temper resentments and sometimes minimize contact between GIs and Australians is a recurring theme of this work. The remarkable fact is that in the midst of war, the “top brass” dealt with an extraordinary array of problems that originated between GIs and civilians. How those at the bottom of the pyramid responded to policy (and in some cases ignored it) is another theme examined in this study.

This book focuses on the problems, crises, and tensions that resulted from the American presence. Here one may simply ask why? Where is the co-operation and goodwill between allies? One should first realise that relations for the most part were good; friendships were made and there was a great deal of co-operation. These features have been examined by

³¹ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-45* (London: Phoenix Press, 1996), xxviii.

other historians.³² One should also realize that there were no major disruptions or conflicts during the occupation. The so-called Battle of Brisbane, where a few thousand GIs and Diggers rioted and fought on 26 November 1942 (leaving one Australian private dead) was the worst incident of the war.³³ Neither does this book eschew co-operation totally; areas where the interests of American and Australian officials overlapped and the generally good relations between black GIs and Australian civilians are examined. The particularly cordial relations between General MacArthur and Prime Minister Curtin are also borne out by this study. Finally, some “problems,” relations between black GIs and Australian women for example, were not problems per se. They were simply aspects of real life. For instance, marriage was a happy occasion for American grooms and Australian brides; the same could not be said for those in authority. Such actions created problems for those in authority and officialdom made efforts and instituted policies to discourage weddings.

There are several reasons for concentrating on areas of conflict. First, certain aspects of the American occupation, such as policing disputes, labour relations, and American crime have not been looked at or have been examined superficially. Another reason why this enquiry focuses on problems and crises is because Australian authorities or the American military sometimes inflated episodes into incidents requiring official management. These incidents are illustrative as they provide insight into the behaviour of GIs. Finally, primary sources tend to focus on the negative rather than the positive; if relations are going along smoothly, there is little reason to file a report. This is particularly true of the files of the Queensland State Police, of which this study makes extensive use. Similarly, material from the US National Archives relating to the General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area and the MacArthur Memorial Archives are skewed towards painting a negative picture of relations. Despite these potential pitfalls, these sources provide new insights into areas of tension and conflict. As long as one realizes that relations were generally sound and that there were countless examples of co-operation, the “imbalance” of these sources can be negated.

This study takes Reynolds’s work as its inspiration, but it is different in many ways. It examines some facets of the American occupation of Australia that were not closely examined in the British context, such as crime, jurisdictional and policing disputes, and problems with labour

³² See Potts, *Yanks Down Under*; Moore, *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here*; Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chap 7.

³³ See Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, chap. 17.

unions and hiring practices. Furthermore, the theatres of operations themselves were extremely different which of course produced different occupations. Whereas the American occupation of Britain was, for the most part, a steady build up of troops (eventually reaching 1.65 million on the eve of D-Day), events in the Pacific had a different trajectory.³⁴ The Japanese and the Allies were constantly engaged after Pearl Harbor, and the latter's position in the Southwest Pacific was precarious for much of 1942. Consequently, in the SWPA, there was a steady flow of troops through Australia to battle zones primarily in Papua New Guinea.³⁵

These dissimilarities in respective occupations produced different policies when it came to managing relations. British and American officials instituted both negative policies (reducing friction by reducing contact) and positive policies (billeting of US troops in British homes, personnel exchanges, and so forth) in order to promote friendship and understanding between GIs and Britons.³⁶ The Americans in Australia did not adopt similar policies. There were some measures taken to separate GIs and Diggers, to segregate black and white American troops, and a few units found civilian billets in the first months of the occupation, but there was little effort to take the positive approach.³⁷ At the beginning of 1943, MacArthur rejected outright requests to institute measures (such as an educational lecture series) that Australian officialdom hoped would counteract "[d]ifferences in outlook which are to be expected in bodies of men drawn from widely separated countries, each with its own national ideals and economy."³⁸ Although he agreed that friendly relations were important, MacArthur believed that "the best results will be obtained by informal means, with each service working through its own channels to control the very small number of unruly individuals who create difficulties."³⁹ When explaining his position, MacArthur told Australian General Thomas Blamey of the GI's natural allergy to lectures and propaganda.⁴⁰ Privately, senior US officers also cited the lack of qualified officers to implement such a policy. The fact that US troops stationed in

³⁴ American troop numbers did drop in Britain from roughly 228,000 to just over 100,000 because of Operation Torch. See Reynolds, *Rich Relation*, esp. chap. 7.

³⁵ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 27-30.

³⁶ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, xxix, chap. 12.

³⁷ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, 43.

³⁸ General T.A. Blamey to General MacArthur, 28 January 1943, MacArthur Archives, RG 4, Reel 586.

³⁹ Douglas MacArthur to General Blamey, 12 February 1943, MacArthur Archives, RG 4, Reel 586.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Australia were “widely scattered and engaged in administrative jobs,” made their assembly “to attend such lectures a hindrance to the work they [were] doing.”⁴¹ Thus, the scattered nature of the American occupation and the unwillingness of American commanders meant that there was no real programme of cultural awareness for US personnel.

This ignorance of Australian culture sometimes led to a lack of respect. Moreover, MacArthur established a policy that, when it came to managing relations in Australia, practiced decentralization and often left discretion to local commanders. This is one reason why problems and efforts to reach agreements were often isolated to individual base sections and were not Australia-wide. Furthermore, this policy of decentralization explains why it was only when crises became serious or threatened to hurt the war effort that senior officials became involved. Because there was no programme to educate GIs about their hosts, US military policy when it came to managing relations was often reactive. In most cases, the Americans made no attempt to eliminate tension before it started; US military authorities muddled along and tried to solve problems and alleviate tensions as they came.

This study is also different from other works that have examined the American occupation of Australia. One should first realize that there are surprisingly few works on the subject. Academic studies have tended to focus narrowly on the experiences of African American troops or sexual relations.⁴² One exception to this rule is Daryl McIntyre’s dissertation “‘Paragons of Glamour’: A study of the United States military forces in

⁴¹ General R.J. Marshall to Assistant Chief of Staff, G.H.Q. Southwest Pacific Area, 14 December 1942, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) (College Park), RG 495, Entry 45, Box 306, File: 336.

⁴² For a discussion of the presence of black Americans see Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon “Jim Crow Down-under? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942-1945,” *Pacific Historical Review* 71 (No. 4 2002): 607-632; Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor “The Reception of Black Servicemen in Australia During World War II: The Resilience of White Australia,” *Journal of Black Studies* 25 (January 1995): 331-348; Kay Saunders, “In a Cloud of Lust: Black GIs and Sex in World War II” in Joy Damousi & Marylin Lake (eds.) *Gender and War: Australia at War in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Rosemary Campbell, *Heroes and Lovers: A Question of National Identity* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989). For a discussion of sexual relations see Michael Sturma, “Loving the Alien: The Underside of Relations between American Servicemen and Australian Women in Queensland, 1942-1945,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 24 (May 1989): 3-17 and Michael Sturma, “Public Health and Sexual Morality: Venereal Disease in World War II Australia,” *Signs* 13:4 (Summer, 1988): 725-40.

Australia, 1942-1945.” Whilst McIntyre provides a comprehensive account of the American presence, he does not focus on relations between Australian civilians and American personnel or efforts by American and Australian authorities to manage relations. His study also deals with the entertainment of GIs, the organization of the USASOS, and relations between GIs and Diggers. McIntyre uses the files of the Queensland State Police but not to a great degree. In contrast, this study makes extensive use of these files as well as the considerable material relating to the General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area found in the US National Archives.⁴³ This book, I believe, is the first to mine this portion of the American archives.

Books on the occupation have been popular histories like John Hammond Moore’s *Over-sexed, Over-paid, and Over Here* and Peter Thompson and Robert Macklin’s *The Battle of Brisbane: Australians and Yanks at War*. Both works are entertaining and informative, but relations between American soldiers and civilians are not their only focus. They are as concerned with the wider war, relations between Diggers and GIs, and events outside of Australia as they are with GI-civilian relations. As one critic notes, Moore “does not tell what it was like to be an ordinary American or ordinary Australian in wartime Australia.”⁴⁴ Moreover, neither work has much to say about efforts to manage relations. A more complete and scholarly, but still popular effort is E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts’s *Yanks Down Under*, which looks at real life within an overarching narrative. Their work offers a flavour of the times, describing what GIs thought of Australia, relations between GIs and women, the experiences of black servicemen, and tensions between GIs and Diggers. Still, *Yanks Down Under* does not examine American crime, labour problems, and jurisdictional and policing disputes in any great depth. When reading this book, one might get the impression that these areas hold little significance within the context of American–Australian relations. Furthermore, much of their book consists of reminiscences, stories of individuals, and some chapters look at post war Australia. *Yanks Down Under* also attempts to measure the impact of American presence on Australian society; a noble effort, however, it is beyond the ambit of this study.

The reader may wonder why the term occupation is used throughout this book; after all, we are not discussing Occupied France under the Wehrmacht. First, some Australians saw the American presence as an

⁴³ RG 495 of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is devoted to the GHQ Southwest Pacific Area.

⁴⁴ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, xviii.

occupation and described it so publicly.⁴⁵ The Americans were similarly criticized as occupiers in the British context, most notably by George Orwell. Furthermore, the term suggests that the Americans had something in common with other armies on foreign soil. Referring to the American presence as an occupation helps us see GIs as not just Americans but also as *soldiers*.⁴⁶ It is also important to keep in mind what kind of GIs were in Australia. These were, after all, largely conscripts who had been drafted into the army unwillingly. Conscripts created their own set of problems. Reynolds states:

[I]nside every soldier is a civilian trying to escape. The schizophrenic duality of army-crowd and soldier-civilian has been a central problem for every military commander throughout history. Yet it is particularly pressing for modern mass-conscript armies, in which soldiers are not professionals but civilians temporarily denied their civilian status and rights. And countries where there is no peacetime conscription find it even harder to habituate the civilian to the shocks of military life.⁴⁷

Seeing the GIs as both Americans and unwilling conscripts goes a long way in understanding their behaviour. Their status as soldiers created a host of problems for Australian and American authorities. Understanding why GIs acted the way they did, what problems their presence created, and how authorities dealt with these problems is another purpose of this inquiry.

Another factor that helps explain relations between US personnel and Australian civilians is the (obvious) fact that the Americans were different from their hosts. This book is also a story of two peoples who were brought suddenly into contact. Both had their own histories, cultures, and national loyalties. Australians and Americans might have been allies and some individuals shared the same Anglo-Celtic cultural and ethnic roots, but they nevertheless saw each other as different, indeed thought, and acted differently. Americans and Australians also suffered from a great ignorance of one other. Potts and Potts are correct to say that:

Americans knew nothing much about Australia: like many still, they might confuse it with Austria and therefore be surprised that the people spoke English...Australians, on the other hand, often had a distorted view, mainly acquired through the cinema, of Americans and their country.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁶ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, xxviii.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁸ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, xvi.

What this meant for relations was that Australians sometimes viewed their guests as the “other,” and Americans found Australians alien. Both sides found it difficult to appreciate the other’s customs, beliefs, and habits, which created tension and resentment. Finally, national loyalties and indeed esprit de corps among GIs sometimes bubbled to the surface and strained relations, especially with regard to jurisdictional and policing disputes and criminal acts on the part of American servicemen. Nevertheless, when both sides shared the same social attitudes, with regard to race and gender relations for example, there was a great deal of co-operation

Taken together, the constant “flow through” of troops, the decentralization of the American command, the lack of any real programme of cultural awareness, national loyalties, the nature of mass conscript armies, and mutual ignorance accentuated tensions along a set of basic fault lines: jurisdiction, gender, labour, race relations, and crime. This study examines these fault lines and how authorities on both sides attempted to alleviate tension, solve problems, and manage relations whilst trying to win the war. Chapter one examines jurisdictional and policing disputes between state police and American MPs and shore patrolmen. Chapter two considers sex relations between GIs and Australian women; authorities on both sides tried to manage these associations. The United States as an employer of Australians is the focus of chapter three; the Americans’ sometimes fractious relations with Australian unions are also examined here. The unique experiences of African American troops is considered in chapter four; here the study digresses slightly with a brief examination of relations between black GIs and white American military authorities. Other historians have examined these relations; however, this study challenges some of the existing historiography. Furthermore, some aspects of these relations have not been looked at closely before in the Australian context, such as the white fear of black mutinies and low morale. This discussion not only provides necessary background, but it helps explain why African Americans had so much interaction with white Australians. Why white Australians treated black GIs surprisingly well, given Australian history, is the main thrust of the chapter; however, areas of friction are also examined. Finally, chapter five explores the crimes that American servicemen committed whilst in Australia, why they occurred, what they meant for relations, and how officials dealt with them.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING BOUNDARIES AND PROTECTING OUR BOYS: JURISDICTIONAL AND POLICING DISPUTES

When the American garrisoning of Australia began in December 1941, the issue of legal jurisdiction did not at first figure prominently. The seemingly inexorable Japanese advance and the threat of invasion eclipsed whatever concerns existed about who would have legal jurisdiction over US personnel in Australia. When it became clear in early 1942 that the US presence in Australia would be prolonged and as more servicemen arrived in the country, the question of who would police the Americans and adjudicate their crimes needed an answer. Historically armies have exercised many functions that are usually within the purview of civil authorities; senior officers have been largely responsible for policing, adjudicating cases, and punishing personnel. However, when the Americans arrived in Australia, jurisdictional boundaries were not clear-cut. Australia, being a friendly host country, could have exercised jurisdiction in cases where American servicemen broke Australian laws or committed crimes against Australian civilians outside military establishments. This did not happen; US military authorities not only enjoyed jurisdiction in cases where their servicemen committed crimes against each other, but they also had jurisdiction when their men broke Australian laws and perpetrated crimes against Australian citizens when off base. American military officials had full extra-territorial legal jurisdiction over their personnel. This is not entirely surprising, given that there were historical precedents to this arrangement. The principle of the host government granting extra-territorial jurisdiction to foreign armies had been recognized in international law by the twentieth century, especially in Europe. Moreover, during the First World War, both American and British forces (of which the Australians were a part) “had been allowed to exercise exclusive

courts-martial jurisdiction over the misconduct of their soldiers” in France.¹

How the American and Australian authorities came to demarcate jurisdictional boundaries and how the former came to enjoy extra-territorial jurisdiction will be dealt with briefly in this chapter. We will see that even after Australian and American authorities formulated a policy that spelled out jurisdictional ambits, problems occurred. At first glance, the episodes themselves may appear to be much ado about nothing; however, they are significant for several reasons. The American military found itself embroiled in jurisdictional disputes with Australian civil authorities in Queensland, which created friction and strained relations in a state where the scale of the American presence meant that goodwill would be useful. The incidents that set off the disputes also offer a glimpse of how individual Americans occasionally perceived themselves being beyond the bounds of Australian law. They saw themselves as *soldiers* fighting a war; Australian law and the concerns of the local population took on a secondary importance if they were considered at all. Some American personnel simply ignored local laws and customs, which suggests there is some truth to Jessie Street’s observation that Americans saw Australians simply as “natives” and as such treated them poorly.² In response to American indifference and even arrogance, Australians pushed back by escalating jurisdictional grievances. Policies negotiated and formulated from above were misunderstood, tested to the limits, or deliberately ignored by local authorities. There might have been a war on, but in the eyes of a number of Queensland officials that did not give GIs carte blanche to flout Australian law. Finally, seemingly small disagreements over jurisdiction advanced up the chain of command, occupying the time of senior officials on both sides. Neither side considered them insignificant.

US military authorities enjoyed full jurisdiction in Australia, but as a practical necessity, the policing of American servicemen was a duty they shared with Australian military authorities and state police. This shared responsibility led to a number of disagreements between the American military police and shore patrol and the Queensland State Police. Violence or the threat of violence was sometimes a feature of these disagreements. At the heart of these disputes was a sense of group loyalty, especially among American forces. As Gwynne Dyer explains in *War*, “the dominant

¹ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 1996), 145.

² Jessie M.G. Street, *Truth or Repose* (Sydney: Australian Book Society, 1966), 225.

trend in the history (and prehistory) of human culture has been the creation of larger and larger groups within which each member is defined as “one of us”: a kinsmen, a fellow tribesman, a fellow citizen.”³ Dyer refers here to one of the root causes of war, that is, the dark side to group mentality, where those who do not share the same collective identity are often warred upon. However, this group mentality can also help explain the friction and conflict between American MPs and shore patrolmen and Queensland Police. For American police authorities, collective identity and national loyalty would often override the duty to police military personnel. Instead of policing American forces, MPs and shore patrolmen often protected them from punishment and occasionally helped them in brawls with state police. Australians were not immune to this mentality either. When the Americans accused police of brutality, Queensland Police authorities instinctively defended their men and dismissed claims of wrongdoing, even though there sometimes was reasonable evidence that police constables exacted informal “justice.”

Finally, it is important to stress that it was not just national loyalty that explains American behaviour but also the fact that they were soldiers. Americans shared group loyalty to their country, but they also identified with themselves as soldiers. Basic training helped create this bond, which some military historians liken to a brotherhood.⁴ David Grossman goes so far as to claim in *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* that bonds within combat units were “stronger than those between husband and wife.”⁵ Although, MPs and shore patrolmen were generally not combat troops, one must not discount the influence of this further group identity. It too helps explain why American military police protected their fellow soldiers.

Establishing Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction

In early March 1942, Lieutenant General George Brett, who briefly commanded the US forces in Australia before MacArthur’s arrival and promotion to supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), wrote Prime Minister John Curtin asking for the surrender of an American soldier arrested by Australian police. This request brought the question of legal jurisdiction to the attention of Curtin’s government and initiated a

³ Gwynne Dyer, *War* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵ David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995), 90.

debate among its members.⁶ Some were willing to accept Brett's request, which amounted to full extra-territorial jurisdiction; however, the Department of the Army wanted to retain serious crimes, such as murder and rape, within Australia's ambit.⁷ Despite the department's objections and a debate in parliament, the Commonwealth adopted the National Security (Allied Forces) Regulations (NSR) in May 1942 to accommodate the Americans' request for full jurisdiction.⁸ The regulations stated:

Where any member of the United States Forces in Australia is arrested or detained on a charge of having committed an offence against the Commonwealth, the appropriate officer of the United States Forces shall be notified and, if he so requests, the member shall be handed over to him and shall thereupon cease to be subject to the jurisdiction of the criminal courts in Australia.⁹

Although the NSR seemingly spelled out clear jurisdictional boundaries and gave state police the right to arrest American personnel, the practical application of the regulations sometimes led to disputes between the US military and Australian civil authorities.

Attentive Australians learned of the NSR and its practical impact almost immediately. Brisbane's *Courier Mail* reported on May 20 that US soldier J.W. Floyd was charged with rape and handed over to American authorities.¹⁰ A few days later, Curtin publicly announced that American military authorities would deal with US personnel who broke the laws of

⁶ E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under: The American Impact on Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ According to Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "[u]nder the National Security Act of September 1939 all Australians theoretically lost many of the civil rights they had been accustomed to exercising. The Act gave the government emergency powers that enabled it to govern without recourse to Parliament and the legislative process. These emergency powers were implemented through the National Security Regulations, by which ministers could make laws by the proclamation of a regulation. The National Security Act (clause 18) enabled these regulations to have supremacy over other laws, so that, for the duration of the Act, there were no protections for individual rights and liberties, and no remedies against arbitrary infringements of individual rights." See Ilma Martinuzzi O'Brien, "Citizenship, Rights and Emergency Powers in Second World War Australia," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 53:2 (June 2007): 207.

⁹ L.S. Ostrander to Commanding General, 23 June 1942, Queensland State Archives (QSA), Police Files, A/12035.

¹⁰ *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 20 May 1942.