

Australian and American Relations in the Southwest Pacific Theater of World War II

Alisha Hamel

American Military University

ABSTRACT

While both the Australians and Americans fought the Japanese during World War II, leadership and cultural differences became apparent when they fought together in New Guinea. While Australia and the United States were and still are great allies, even the best of allies have different cultures, training, and leadership methods, often resulting in difficulties when they are put into combat roles together.

Keywords: WWII, Australia, Southwest Pacific Theater, MacArthur, Curtin, Blamey

Relaciones australianas y americanas en el teatro del Pacífico sudoccidental de la Segunda Guerra Mundial

RESUMEN

Mientras tanto los australianos como los estadounidenses lucharon contra los japoneses durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el liderazgo y las diferencias culturales se hicieron evidentes cuando lucharon juntos a través de Nueva Guinea. Australia y los Estados Unidos fueron y siguen siendo grandes aliados, pero incluso los mejores aliados tienen diferentes culturas, entrenamiento y métodos de liderazgo que a menudo resultan en dificultades cuando se los pone en roles de combate entrelazados.

Palabras clave: Segunda Guerra Mundial, Australia, Teatro del Pacífico Sudoccidental, MacArthur, Curtin, Blamey

第二次世界大战西南太平洋战场中的澳美关系

摘要

尽管澳洲人与美国人在二战期间共同对抗日本人，但各自的领导与文化差异在新几内亚战区变得明显。澳洲与美国从过去到现在一直是亲密联盟，但即使是最好的联盟也有不同的文化、训练和领导方法，导致他们在投入相互交织的战斗模式时出现困难。

关键词：二战，澳洲，西南太平洋战区，麦克阿瑟，柯廷，布莱梅

Australians and Americans fought together and separately in the Southwest Pacific Theater during World War II. The Australian military effort was vital to maintaining the Allied presence in the Pacific Theater, giving time for the Americans to mobilize their troops and supply chain. From 1942 to 1943, because of their readiness and location, the Australians fought in the Southwest Pacific Theater's primary offensive actions through the Allied victory on the Huon Peninsula, a strategically located peninsula in New Guinea that, along with New Britain, controlled the straits between the Bismarck and Solomon Seas.

In 1944, the Americans took over almost all primary offensive operations, while the Australian role became one of clean up operations, a mild sounding role for a very dangerous mission. This article explores the reasons that the Australians were pulled from offensive operations and relegated to secondary duties after their offensive win on the

Huon Peninsula. With no mention of the Australians or any other ally in the public press, a common misperception was that the Americans had single-handedly won the Pacific War.

Australian and American relations during World War II were built on a common background and a mutual foe, which resulted in them becoming strong allies. Australia saw the advantages of cultivating strong relations with the United States both to create an international voice and to protect themselves from a Japanese attack. The United States needed Australia as a large staging base in the Pacific Theater and saw that Australia also had extensive natural resources, had already built civil and military facilities, and an experienced, though small, military.

The beginning of the war in the Pacific Theater required close cooperation between Australia and the United States, but even close allies have different ideas about how to fight a war and how to use their troops. Differing styles



General Sir Thomas Blamey. March 26, 1945. Bougainville,
Solomon Islands Australian War Memorial 079976

of military leadership and training had to be synchronized, supply issues had to be resolved, and even the national tastes for distinct types of food to be consumed had to be addressed.

Australia, with a population of almost 7 million and an army of close to 730,000 during World War II, was considered a minor Allied partner with a minor voice in Allied politics. The major powers of Russia with a population of over 170 million, Great Britain with a population of almost 48 million, and

the United States with a population of over 131 million were the big three Allies of World War II. Australia went to war in 1939 as a Commonwealth country when Great Britain declared war against Germany, contributing troops to fight under English command in North Africa and the Middle East with very little representation for their use.¹

The looming threat of war with Japan caused Australia to recognize the need for representation in the Allied councils of war in order to safeguard

its own national interests. The need for representation was a difficult concept for a country that had never had to fight to have its voice heard, that had relied on British diplomatic and intelligence services, and that had little trust in its military leaders. In addition to its relatively small population, Australia had a relatively weak industrial capacity, which contributed to the difficulty of pursuing an independent strategic and foreign policy. Australia found that it was only able to influence allied strategy by using its military as a reward for the United States or Great Britain to recognize Australia's concerns.²

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines in December 1941, the people of Australia and Prime Minister John Curtin could clearly see that their homeland was the next target for the Japanese due to its location and the ability to base Allied troops there for counter-offensives. At the Arcadia Conference in Washington, DC, the first in a series of high-level conferences between the United States and Great Britain (December 24, 1941–January 14, 1942), the short-lived Australian-British-Dutch-American (ABDA) Command and a Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) were created. One of the attendees, Australia's Minister to the United States, Richard Casey, sent a cablegram to Curtin stating; "I have reason to believe that the President [Roosevelt] will try very hard to have an American accepted as Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific and the Far East Theatre and that General MacArthur [now in the Philippines] will probably be the individual nominated. I

understand that although not devoid of human frailties, he is a good man." He continued, "It occurs to me as not impossible that the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific and the Far East might be in Australia."³ Curtin asked for clarification of Australia's role with the United States and Britain, and the United States responded on January 8, 1942 with a proposal to create the Australia/New Zealand (ANZAC) area. This assured Australia that the US would help with its security and provided the United States with a staging area for American troops to train before going into battle with the Japanese.⁴

With Australia available as a staging base for US troops, Australia became more important to the Allied strategy. It was imperative to develop a strategy to maintain safe shipping lanes from the United States to Australia. Australia found a stronger voice in the Allied councils of war, which increased even more when MacArthur arrived in Australia. MacArthur had a more direct connection to President Franklin Roosevelt and General George Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, and to the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff. Australia's External Affairs Minister H.V. Evatt noted that MacArthur would be able to attract American troops and supplies to Australia and that this quality was even more important than his generalship.⁵

MacArthur arrived in Australia to a hero's welcome in early 1942. The Australians expected him to bring American assets into Australia to protect Australia from the Japanese, as

Australia was to be used as the staging base to develop a plan of attack to defeat the Japanese. Before MacArthur's arrival in Australia, Curtin 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 with the United Kingdom."⁶ At that time, Australia felt like it needed American military leadership, and MacArthur was happy to provide it. MacArthur almost completely directed the Australian war effort. The Australian public adored him and treated him like a movie star. MacArthur and Curtin developed a very close and mutually beneficial relationship, and MacArthur became the de facto field marshal in charge of all of Australia's defense forces.⁷ Although the Australian public loved MacArthur throughout the war, the Australian troops developed second thoughts as the war progressed.⁸

MacArthur saw the value of Australia as an island bastion from which to mount an offensive against the Japanese, and the resident Australian forces, especially in 1942 and 1943, defended and then led the offensive against the Japanese. He also recognized the importance of Australian public support. Curtin recognized the value of MacArthur, and they worked well together politically to maintain the safety of Australia and to push for an Allied attack in the Southwest Pacific Theater.

As Prime Minister, Curtin led Australia successfully through World War II and after the attack by the Japanese on Darwin in February 1942. He rejected the British strategy for Austra-

lian troops. "Australia's intention was to carry the fight to the Japanese just as soon as forces became available to do it. At this stage, however, only the first troops of the 7th Australian Division had arrived in Australia."⁹ Because the 9th Australian Division continued to be needed by the British Empire to fight in the Middle East, a second US division was offered to be sent to Australia in addition to the already offered US 41st Division, a Northwest National Guard infantry division considered the "best" National Guard infantry division in the United States. The US 32nd Division, a National Guard infantry division from Michigan and Wisconsin, was pulled from training to fight in the European Theater and was sent to Australia, arriving only a month after the 41st Division arrived. Even with these two US infantry divisions and the returning Australian troops from North Africa, MacArthur still was short of fighting men and needed Australia to institute conscription. Australia had a policy against conscription. Although Curtin had been a formidable opponent of conscription, when Australians were needed to protect their homeland, he reversed course and implemented conscription and those conscripted troops helped to lead the fight in New Guinea.

Although MacArthur oversaw all of Australia's defense forces, he also commanded all Allied troops in the Southwest Pacific Theater and as such was directed to create an Allied staff. The Southwest Pacific Theater consisted of a geographical area that included the Philippines, Borneo, the Dutch East Indies, East Timor, Australia, New Guinea

and Papua New Guinea, and the western part of the Solomon Islands. The Allied staff was intended to include officers from Australia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and Great Britain, but MacArthur assigned only long-time US staff officers who had evacuated with him from the Philippines to key staff positions, resulting in a US-centric headquarters. When MacArthur became the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Southwest Pacific Area in April 1942, US Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall directed MacArthur to appoint an Australian as Commander, Allied Land Forces. MacArthur chose General Sir Thomas Blamey. Blamey had a storied background. In 1936 as Victoria's commissioner of police, he had a reputation for being confrontational, violent, and ruthless. He was also well known for his public drinking and womanizing. Despite that reputation, Blamey had a distinguished military career starting with a posting to the 1st Australian Division in Egypt in World War I. He landed at Gallipoli in 1915, returned to Egypt to form the 2nd Australian Division, and ended World War I as the Chief of Staff of the Australian Corps. When World War II started, Blamey took command of the 6th Australian Division and by December 1941, had been promoted to General.¹⁰

Blamey commanded the Australian troops in North Africa and Greece, but when Australia was attacked by the Japanese at Darwin in 1942, he was rushed back to Australia to activate the defense, arriving just five days after MacArthur arrived from the Phil-

ippines. Blamey had major problems he needed to address immediately. He had to establish a coalition relationship with the US armed forces, create a plan for the defense of Australia, and dramatically increase Australia's insufficient armed forces. Blamey proved to be the best possible Australian to be put in that position. He stayed loyal to MacArthur until the end of the war, but politely and firmly held fast to Australian autonomy.¹¹

In addition, Blamey was the only Australian military commander who could offer advice to Curtin because of his extensive combat record. The Prime Minister had very little military expertise and only trusted military leaders with proven records of accomplishment. While MacArthur had the lead in developing Australian war strategy, Blamey influenced that strategy because he also had direct access to Curtin. However, because Blamey wore two hats as the Commander, Allied Land Forces and the Commander in Chief of the Australian Militia Forces, he had limited time to influence the Prime Minister. Luckily, for the first eighteen months of the Pacific war, MacArthur had the same strategy as Australia. With the competent and strategic decisions that MacArthur was making, Australian political leadership did not have to make tough decisions, and Australia did not develop a strategic view outside of MacArthur's strategy.¹²

Blamey was a good counterpoint to MacArthur. He was loyal to MacArthur, but he had strong views on Australian sovereignty and understood the role of politics in war. Blamey fought to

maintain independent use of Australia's troops with a real concern for their welfare. Without his untiring promotion of Australia's sovereignty, MacArthur would have most likely disregarded Australia's concerns.¹³

Because the composition of MacArthur's senior staff was composed of his most trusted advisors, the "Bataan Gang," this all-American staff, with the exception of Blamey, caused continued friction throughout the war with senior-level Australian commanders. There was little the Australians could do about the situation. They needed the Americans to protect Australia and force the Japanese back. The lack of respect for Australian military leadership generated bad blood between MacArthur and senior-level Australian commanders. MacArthur defended the lack of Australian representation on his staff by saying that there were few qualified senior staff officers in Australia. The Australians proved themselves in battle and fought well in the foxholes with the Americans, but there continued to be friction at the higher levels of command.¹⁴

The first real land defeat suffered by the Japanese happened at Milne Bay, showing that the Japanese were no longer invincible. Milne Bay was important to the Allies because of its location for the proposed attack on Rabaul and land-based support for sea movement to the northern side of New Guinea. "The first major battle of WWII in which Japanese ground forces were defeated was not Guadalcanal, but Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea. Laurels for the victory go not to the U.S. forces, but the

7th Brigade of Australian Militia and the 18th Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force."¹⁵ These units, a militia infantry brigade and a veteran Australian Imperial Force (AIF) brigade supported by Kittyhawk fighters, stationed at Milne Bay held off a Japanese attack that lasted from August 25 to September 7, 1942. The next major battle in New Guinea for the Australians was fought over the Owen Stanley Mountains via the Kokoda Trail and into Buna and Gona.

There is no more terrible traverse to battle than over the Owen Stanley Mountains on the Kokoda Trail. "The Diggers marched on, weary, rain-soaked, but eager to get to grips with the enemy. One day was much like another—the sheer physical agony of the track, the changeless jungle scenery broken by the little clearings as village after village was retaken."¹⁶ The Kokoda Trail at times required hand-over-hand traverse; the environment was constantly wet and became very cold as the soldiers went over the top of the Owen Stanley Mountains. Only what could be carried could be brought with them, and they were expected to fight not only along the trail, but also when they reached the other side. The men came off the trail starving, clothes in tatters, but with a fire to defeat the Japanese.

In 1943, at Buna and Gona, the Australians and Americans fought near and with each other for the first time in offensive operations in significant numbers, with the fight consisting of primarily Australians due to their location and ability to mobilize enough troops to start the fight. "Indeed throughout 1942 and 1943, the Australians bore

the brunt of Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) war. Australian troops [which had been mobilized as part of the British Commonwealth in 1939] rushed back home from North Africa or hastily deployed from Down Under, blunted the initial Japanese thrust at Port Moresby in 1942, and in the following year they spearheaded MacArthur's drive through Papua and Huon peninsula."¹⁷

The Americans fought for the first time when the US 32nd Infantry Division fought in September 1942 at Buna and Gona, and quickly found themselves fighting not only against the Japanese but also against the elements. At Buna and Gona, the US 32nd Infantry Division sustained almost 100 percent casualties counting those killed in action, wounded in action, missing in action, and downed by sickness due to the tropical climate. The 32nd lost its commander, Major General Forest Harding, when he was relieved of command. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander Southwest Pacific, felt that Harding had not pushed the 32nd hard enough to defeat the Japanese. The men felt that "Forest Harding was too principled to add ... 'another bloody repulse' to history's long roll of military disasters by sacrificing his soldiers on the altar of Douglas MacArthur's impatience." Harding was replaced by the I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger.¹⁸

When Eichelberger arrived at Buna and Gona to take over the battle command of the 32nd Infantry Division, he pulled all the men back from fighting, fed them a hot meal, and reassessed the situation. They were sent back into

battle fighting alongside the Australian troops. After that respite, both the Americans and Australians proceeded to defeat the Japanese at Buna and Gona. "[MacArthur] had been critical of Australian performance during the Port Moresby battles, claiming that they were not good in the field or the jungle, that they were all recruited from the slums of Australia, and they lacked fighting spirit."¹⁹ At Buna and Gona, MacArthur expected more from the US troops than he got. The US troops reacted as the Australians had reacted when they first went into battle with overconfident commanders and troops that were lax about security and camouflage.

The US 41st Infantry Division sent its first unit into combat, the 163rd Regiment, to finish off the battle at Buna and Gona under the command of the Australians, but "after Buna American combat units came under direct Australian command on only one other occasion."²⁰ The one other occasion was at the landing at Nassau Bay and battle for Salamaua when the 162nd Regiment of the 41st Infantry Division fought under the triple command of the Australian 17th Brigade, the 3rd Australian Division, and the US 41st Infantry Division, creating multiple command issues and giving MacArthur a reason to divide up the missions of the Americans and the Australians to ensure US dominance in offensive operations.²¹

MacArthur was intent on ensuring that the United States received the credit for winning the war in the Pacific. At first he had reluctantly relied on the Australian military, but as more US

forces arrived in Australia and trained to fight in the jungles of New Guinea, MacArthur shifted the burden of the offensive to US troops. The last joint Australian and US battle happened at Salamaua (June to September 1943) when the American 162nd Regiment fought under the command of the 17th Australian Brigade.²²

The Allied Ground Force Commander Blamey, the token Australian on MacArthur's staff, was expected to command of all of the Allied ground forces as his title implied, but MacArthur circumvented that by routinely creating task forces outside of Blamey's command. While MacArthur had publicly approved of the appointment of General Blamey as the Southwest Pacific's ground forces commander, privately he started assigning all US troops to General Walter Krueger's 6th Army, named Alamo Force, which left only Australian troops under General Blamey's authority.²³ On Saturday, February 20, 1943, *The Mercury* announced:

An official spokesman at Gen MacArthur's headquarters, referring today to the appointment of Lt-Gen Walter Krueger to the command of the 6th United States Army in the South-West Pacific area, said it had not special operational or strategic significance and was merely a move to make administration more flexible. The 6th Army was to be made up entirely of the American troops already in the South-West Pacific area. The High Command in the area would remain unchanged, with Gen MacArthur in supreme

command and Gen Sir Thomas Blamey and Lt-Gen Kenney in command of Allied land and air forces respectively.²⁴

Curtin valued MacArthur's political connections and military expertise over his own military commanders, which over time resulted in the Australian Army receiving unpleasant assignments with little to no recognition or US support. Curtin's admiration worked in Australia's interest until MacArthur no longer needed Curtin as more US troops became available in the Southwest Pacific Theater and supplies from the United States increased.

MacArthur soon found that if he underreported the number and quality of Australian troops, he received more US troops. Fredrick Shedden, Australian War Council, wrote, "General MacArthur said it presented a misleading and injurious picture to Washington to talk about the total number of men in the Army in Australia, as only the two A.I.F. divisions could be considered first-class shock troops."²⁵ As the war progressed and more US troops arrived to fight in the Southwest Pacific Theater, MacArthur started to diminish Australian involvement in the war. MacArthur believed that since the Americans had the resources to be able to defeat Japan, the Americans should determine the strategy and claim the victory. MacArthur downgraded the Australian role subtly by referring to the battle forces as Allied Forces when Australians commanded the operations and US Forces when Americans commanded operations.²⁶

MacArthur's first offensive strategic action in the Southwest Pacific Theater was to make Port Moresby the fulcrum of both the defense of Australia and the attack through New Guinea. MacArthur felt that if the Japanese got a foothold in Australia, they might prove to be unstoppable, and it was of utmost importance to protect Australia from New Guinea. MacArthur took credit for the idea that Australia had to be saved in Papua even though the Australians had already held defensive positions there ever since the Japanese had started their offensive moves into New Guinea. The Allied Air Commander for the Southwest Pacific, George Kenney, said, "MacArthur without fear of criticism might have decided to remain on the defensive until sufficient forces could be made available ... a lesser general might even have considered the abandonment of Port Moresby, his only base in New Guinea."²⁷ Partly because of the offensive tactic used by MacArthur and because of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese started pulling back their troops in New Guinea and failed in their attempt to take Port Moresby.

The Australians were placed in an untenable position when MacArthur consistently announced the success of each of his conquests in his drive back to the Philippines at the first sign of capitulation by the defenders even if it were to take months of fighting, primarily by the Australians, to secure the location.²⁸

MacArthur, a master of the use of the press to inform the public, was not one to share the limelight with anyone,

including his staff, troops, or especially the Australians. The Australians who had primarily fought and shed blood in these first offensive encounters with the Japanese were not given credit due to them. After the Battles of Salamaua and Lae and the capture of Madang, the Australians were given low-profile missions of garrison duty and were ordered to clean up the areas in New Guinea already considered conquered. This did not sit well with the Australian government. As Australian historian John Robertson wrote, "Without Australian political, logistic and military support it is hard to see how MacArthur could have made this grand return [to the Philippines], but no Australian land or air-force unit, and no Australian notables, were there [in Leyte] to share the glory."²⁹

In November 1943, at the Sextant Conference in Cairo, the US Navy gave priority in the Pacific to Admiral Chester Nimitz, who was based in Hawaii, with the understanding that taking small islands would be a faster way to move toward Japan. General MacArthur had other ideas. He argued that an attack based in Hawaii would lose momentum, as the Navy would have to steam back to Hawaii after every operation to regroup before starting the next operation. The Japanese would then be able to reinforce the Mandates, German colonial islands that had been governed by the Japanese since the end of World War I as part of the Japanese colonial empire, since there was no way for air coverage while the Navy was regrouping.

MacArthur also argued that the US Navy was too wedded to the old Orange Plan scenario, one of the color war contingency plans developed by the United States before World War II. The Orange Plan was the color assigned to the plan dealing with a possible war against Japan and assumed that the United States would fight against Japan alone. After many revisions, the Orange Plan had evolved into an offensive plan, primarily naval, to take small islands on the way to rescuing the Philippines. The Philippine garrison was to hold Manila Bay until this superior naval force arrived. It was shelved in 1937 to the chagrin of the Navy, due to the near-impossibility of the Navy to be able to arrive in the Philippines in a timely manner, and replaced with the more reasonable, new natural strategic line of Alaska-Oahu-Panama. In 1939, a new series of plans called the Rainbow Plans were created. Rainbow 5 became the basis for the US strategy during World War II, calling for an alliance with Britain and France and assuming a two-front war in the Atlantic and Pacific.³⁰

To MacArthur, it made more sense to move along the New Guinea coastline initially with air support from the Australian mainland and to create a series of new forward headquarters with airfields and seaports as the Allies pushed the Japanese back. He felt that the Cartwheel Campaign, an operation to neutralize the Japanese base at Rabaul using his troops to advance along the New Guinea coastline as Nimitz's forces advanced through the Solomon Islands towards Bougainville, had shown dramatic progress and presented

an excellent opportunity to reenter the Philippines. MacArthur always saw the Philippines as key to defeating the Japanese.³¹

To prove his theory, MacArthur had his staff create a set of plans code-named Reno, with the expectation that his troops would be able to reenter the Philippines at Mindanao in February 1945. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported conquering New Guinea but were ambivalent about returning via the Philippines, and they were loath to place all of the US troops in the Pacific under MacArthur's command. MacArthur then rallied the US and Australian public with the phrase that became famous from a speech he made after his evacuation from the Philippines in 1941: "I shall return." The US public was viscerally drawn into liberating captured US troops, US civilian captives, including women and children, and the people of the Philippines.

Admiral Chester Nimitz supported MacArthur in this plan to attack along the New Guinea–Mindanao axis, but argued for a two-pronged approach. The Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the following directive: Nimitz was to take the Marianas and hit the Palaus by bypassing Truk from the north. MacArthur was to overrun New Guinea and occupy Mindanao. Nimitz and MacArthur were then expected to work together in defeating the Japanese.³²

This strategy went against Clausewitz's principle of war, mass—a concentration of force in a single offensive push—but the two-pronged approach and dilution of resources to support each approach in this case worked

especially well. The Japanese became very confused, and could not predict the location of the next Allied offensive, causing them to constantly reposition their troops. The Joint Chiefs of Staff from Washington coordinated the two prongs of command with Nimitz and MacArthur, putting up with MacArthur's posturing and bellyaching and the occasional complaints from Nimitz, and getting the best out of both commands. The Japanese, never able to concentrate on either front, whipsawed repeatedly between the two prongs of attack, losing momentum, men, and supplies with each move.³³

Once the decision was made to focus on both prongs of the attack, Australia became a minor player in the war in the Pacific. Australia was also forced to draw down its level of combat participation because of overwhelming manpower demands at home. Australians still fought to have a seat at the table once the Japanese were defeated, but it grew harder and harder for the Australians to influence the war in the Southwest Pacific after the Americans arrived in force, set up routes for US resupply, and moved the Southwest Pacific headquarters out of Australia.³⁴ The Australians knew that MacArthur was downgrading their role in the Southwest Pacific, but there was little they could do about it.

By 1944, Australia had been at war for over four years, fighting in Britain's campaigns in North Africa, Greece, Crete, and the Middle East and then in Papua and New Guinea in 1942 and 1943. They had committed so many men to fight that they nearly

crippled their economy and had to demobilize men to work in the fields and factories back home. The War Commitments Committee estimated a need for 78,602 men in high priority industries by the end of 1944. To solve this major shortage, Curtin directed that the Australian Army release 30,000 men and the RAAF release 15,000 men. Of these numbers, 20,000 were to be released by December 31, 1944 and the rest by June 30, 1945.³⁵

Blamey's remaining Australian forces performed clean up operations and cleared the Japanese out of New Guinea as the Americans swept into the Philippines without the Australians.³⁶ MacArthur made it clear to Blamey that after the encirclement of Rabaul, Blamey's New Guinea Force would be assigned mopping up operations and garrison duties in increasingly rear areas. The last major Australian-led offensive happened in late April 1944, when the Australian 7th Division captured Madang just northwest of Finschafen, as MacArthur had the US forces take Hollandia, then moving the Southwest Pacific Theater headquarters to Hollandia shortly afterward.³⁷

Blamey cautioned his commanders to not risk lives unnecessarily with overly aggressive tactics, but to keep up the pressure enough to not allow the Japanese to counterattack. MacArthur pressured Blamey to stay on the offensive in these "mopping up" operations, although by this time, many of the Australian Armed forces had had enough of fighting for MacArthur and preferred to fight these relatively unimportant battles in New Guinea rather

than to return to MacArthur's control.³⁸ The Australian press started to note the unequal use of their troops, and in April 1945, the *Pacific Islands Monthly* wrote an article about the Australian troops.

Everyone assumed that the hard-fighting Australian divisions, which had done so well beside the Americans when New Guinea represented the front line, would move on north-westwards with General MacArthur. Instead, we heard nothing whatever about them, for many months, until it was announced, late in 1944, that they were doing the mopping-up they have been, ever since. They have fought tenaciously, and with their usual initiative and courage; but the people of Australia are awakening to the fact that this is a wasteful, uninspiring and depressing campaign.³⁹

As a result of this article and criticisms from the families of fallen soldiers, the Australian government started to come under fire by the Australian people for unnecessary deaths of Australian troops and the now questionable Australian tactics.

Australians continued to push for additional involvement in the attack on Japan, but with the death of Curtin on July 5, 1945, the ties to MacArthur, who made many of the post-war decisions in the Japanese occupation, weakened. Blamey saw the need for Australian involvement, and his political awareness caused him to create a shadow diplomatic service with agents in Washing-

ton and London, resulting in the ultimate recognition of the Australian role in the Southwest Pacific Theater.

The Potsdam Declaration declaring full and complete Japanese surrender came as a surprise to the Australian government because they were not invited to play a role in deciding the surrender or the terms of surrender after they had given so much to the fight in the Southwest Pacific Theater.⁴⁰ Australia then rose up and asserted itself. "Britain was informed that Blamey would represent the Australian government 'directly and not as attachment to your representative.'"⁴¹ With the support of General MacArthur, General Blamey signed the Japanese declaration of surrender on September 2, 1945 as an Australian representative. An Australian, W. MacMahon Ball, was assigned to be the Commonwealth representative in the Allied Council for Japan, and the command of the Commonwealth Forces in the occupation of Japan was given to Australia, making it the first dominion government to command British forces, resulting in a movement toward sovereign equality of all Commonwealth members. Australia was recognized as a principal Pacific Power and an important part of the success of the Allied powers in the defeat of the Japanese by the British government.⁴²

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