CAMP COLUMBIA HERITAGE ASSOCIATION INC.









Brisbane and Camp Columbia, 1941–45

BRISBANE AT WAR

How Brisbane became the Allied Capital of Australia

Edited by Jorien van Beukering, Nonja Peters and Peter Dunn OAM

www.campcolumbia.com.au

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First published in 2026 by
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Front cover images
Top left: Bren gun carriers crossing the William Jolly Bridge, Brisbane, ca. 1941 (State Library of Queensland).
Top right: General Douglas MacArthur at Camp Columbia, Wacol, 1943. Photographer unknown (courtesy of Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc.).
Bottom left: The Dutch flag flown at Camp Columbia, Wacol (Netherlands Ministry of Defence).
Bottom right: Joan Butler and Anne Beetstra at Camp Columbia, Wacol, 1944 (Peters research collection).

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Acknowledgements

The Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. extends its sincere thanks to the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, whose financial and institutional assistance made both the *Brisbane @ War* symposium and this accompanying publication possible. This support reflects the continuing importance of shared Dutch Australian wartime heritage and contributes significantly to advancing academic research, public awareness and international collaboration relating to the Allied presence in Brisbane during the Second World War.

CCHA also wishes to acknowledge several individuals whose support and encouragement contributed significantly to the success of the symposium. We extend our sincere thanks to Her Excellency Mrs Ardi Stoios-Braken, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Australia, for her continuing commitment to preserving and promoting the shared Netherlands-Australian wartime heritage; the Honourable Milton Dick MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Federal Member for Oxley, for his ongoing support of Camp Columbia heritage initiatives; Councillor Sarah Hutton of Brisbane City Council for her valuable assistance and support throughout the project; and Colonel Andrew P. Clark, United States Army, whose participation highlighted the importance of Brisbane's Allied wartime history.

CCHA also recognises the broader support received from Brisbane City Council, which hosted a civic reception in honour of CCHA to open the symposium, and has provided support to CCHA through grant funding. CCHA is also grateful to the Australian Government for its support through commemorative heritage programmes.

The editorial team wishes to thank CCHA's management committee members and its volunteers for their tireless efforts in planning and delivering the symposium, as well as the accompanying exhibition and bus tour. The success of these events has led to the present publication. Special thanks are also due to our contributing authors for sharing their research and expertise in this publication, and to the team of hardworking volunteers whose efforts made this e-book possible.

Foreword by H.E. Ardi Stoios-Braken

Camp Columbia in Brisbane played an important part in the Pacific theatre during the Second World War. Initially a United States army base, it was turned into the administrative headquarters for the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Government-in-Exile in 1944; the only foreign government ever based on Australian soil. The Netherlands East Indies Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS), the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA), and the Netherlands Indies Government Information Service (NIGIS) relocated from Melbourne to support the administration in Brisbane and a NEI transport unit was based at Archerfield. Dutch military forces increasingly operated from Australia, working alongside Australian, American, and British allied forces. As the Fourth Ally, the Dutch contributed to reconnaissance, patrol and transport missions.

Camp Columbia also played an important role in Dutch Australian history in the post-war period when it became a migrant reception centre and refuge. The broader historical relevance of Camp Columbia has only more recently begun to receive greater public and scholarly attention. Initiatives such as a heritage education project, undertaken by the Camp Columbia Heritage Association (CCHA) in 2024, aimed to preserve and share this history with wider audiences. The Embassy provided financial support to this project and to the Camp Columbia symposium, organised by the CCHA in Brisbane, marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in the Pacific. The symposium highlighted Camp Columbia's role in supporting Allied operations, explored the shared histories of Australia and the other Allied forces, and encouraged reflection on its post-war legacy and its relevance today.

This e-book brings together a wide range of contributions covering different perspectives. It will undoubtedly offer readers meaningful and new insights into the history of Camp Columbia and Dutch Australian relations during and in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Congratulations to Paul Budde and the editorial committee consisting of Dr. Jorien van Beukering, Adjunct Professor Nonja Peters and Peter Dunn OAM, for keeping our shared history alive.

Ardi Stoios-Braken
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Australia

Foreword by the Hon. Milton Dick MP

It is a great honour to contribute the Camp Columbia Symposium, an important initiative that deepens our understanding of Brisbane's crucial role during the Second World War.

As Australians, we often reflect on the defining moments that have shaped our national story. During World War II, Brisbane emerged as the Allied Headquarters in the South-West Pacific Area. This period marked an important chapter in our history, when our city became a strategic centre among Allied nations.

Camp Columbia, located within the Oxley electorate, stands as a powerful symbol of this wartime collaboration. It represents not only the presence of Allied forces but also the enduring partnerships forged between nations in the face of extraordinary global challenges. The camp's connection to Dutch forces and the broader Allied effort reminds us of the shared sacrifices made in pursuit of peace and freedom.

The legacy of Brisbane as the Allied Capital continues to shape our community identity today. Places like Camp Columbia are vital to preserving these stories for future generations. In commemorating and documenting this history, initiatives such as this symposium play a crucial role in honouring those who served and strengthening public understanding of our heritage.

As the Federal Member for Oxley, I am particularly proud of the work being undertaken to recognise and celebrate Camp Columbia's historical significance. Efforts like these ensure that the stories of resilience, and sacrifice remain a part of our national consciousness.

I commend the organisers, contributors, and supporters of this symposium for their dedication to preserving this important chapter of our history. May it inspire continued reflection on Brisbane's wartime legacy and the enduring bonds between Allied nations.

Milton Dick MP
Federal Member for Oxley
Speaker of the House of Representatives

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Editors' Introduction

Dr. Jorien van Beukering, Adjunct Prof. Nonja Peters, Peter Dunn OAM

This publication emerged from the *Allied Cooperation in Brisbane During WWII: Australia, USA, Netherlands, UK* symposium (also called the *Brisbane @ War* symposium) hosted by the Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. (CCHA) in Brisbane from 30 August to 1 September 2025. Although timed to coincide with the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in the Pacific, marked earlier that month, the symposium was more than a commemorative event. It was conceived as an important step toward establishing a sustainable framework for future research, heritage conservation and international cooperation centred on Camp Columbia – a Second World War-era military camp in south-west Brisbane – and Brisbane's wider Allied wartime history.

The symposium demonstrated the growing national and international interest in Camp Columbia and Brisbane's role as an Allied centre during the war, and generated several important outcomes. These include a long-term collaborative relationship between CCHA and the University of Queensland that is expected to create opportunities for student research and future academic projects; and a strengthened partnership with the National Trust of Australia (Queensland), formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding that supports future heritage initiatives and the interpretation of Camp Columbia's history through Wolston House, a significant heritage site located adjacent to the former Camp Columbia precinct. Internationally, the symposium has opened new avenues of cooperation with the *Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed* (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands), creating opportunities for future collaboration in heritage management, research and archaeological investigations. The symposium's fourth major outcome is this e-book publication. The enthusiasm of symposium speakers and attendees prompted a decision to compile the research presented at the symposium into this e-book, which CCHA is making freely available to all.

The e-Book

Many of the speakers who presented at the symposium have contributed to this e-book. The e-book is divided into three sections, each covering key thematic aspects of Brisbane and Australia's role as a site of Allied cooperation during the war. Part One examines the roles and activities of the four Allies in Brisbane and Queensland during the war. In the first chapter, CCHA Chair Paul Budde introduces Camp Columbia, a key location in Brisbane's wartime history, and the Netherlands East Indies Government-In-Exile. Peter Dunn OAM follows this chapter with a high-level overview of Allied military arrangements in and around the city during the war, and outlines Brisbane's significance to the war effort. The third chapter, by Gerard Benjamin, delves into the US Navy presence in Brisbane and the development of submarine and navy facilities in the inner-city suburb of New Farm. Benjamin also connects this history to the present day and to local residents' memories of the facilities. This chapter is complemented by David Jones' overview of the British Pacific Fleet, for which Brisbane operated as a repair and supply base. In the penultimate chapter in this section, Roger Marks takes a deep dive into airfields in Queensland during the war, examining their locations and strategic importance to the Allied war effort. The section's final chapter, written by Nonja Peters, draws on personal stories to analyse the VK-KNIL or *Vrouwenkorps* (Women's Corps) of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL), which was based at Camp Columbia during the later years of the war.

Part Two turns to the end of the war in the Pacific in August 1945 and the impact of Allied activities. The first chapter in this section, by Neville Buch, reflects on the book *Allies in a Bind: Australia and the Netherlands East Indies Relations during the Second World War* (1996) by the late Dr. Jack Ford (1957-2025), who was a valued member of CCHA's Research Team. Ford's book remains a key academic publication on the wartime relationship between Australia and the Netherlands East Indies, and Buch's chapter examines *Allies in a Bind* through the lens of cognition history, analysing and explaining key elements of the thinking underpinning Ford's book. The next chapter by Robyn Van Dyk continues the theme of Australia-Netherlands East Indies relations. Van Dyk examines archival material held in the collections of the Australian War Memorial to engage with the experiences of Dutch people from the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) who were evacuated to Australia during the war. The following chapter by Jan Lingard puts a twist on this theme to foreground an Indonesian perspective. Lingard assesses the experiences of Indonesians who were taken to Australia as part of the Netherlands East Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand (NEICANZ), and examines Australians' attitudes toward the Indonesians. The final chapter in this section also delves into archival collections. In this chapter Georgina Devlin uncovers a rich range of source material held by the National Archives of Australia relating to the Netherlands East Indies Government-In-Exile's presence at Camp Columbia – much of which had not been examined before Devlin's research for the symposium. Together, the chapters in this section of the e-book provide insight into a lesser-known dimension of Allied cooperation in the Pacific: the wartime relationship between Australia and the Netherlands, particularly as it concerned the Netherlands East Indies. The Indonesian declaration of independence from the Netherlands in August 1945 impacted Australia in multiple ways, including across migration and military matters, and these chapters uncover aspects of the changes in this relationship.

Part Three contains personal stories from the war. Frances Larder shares her story of coming to Australia as a child evacuee from the Indies, drawing on wall hangings that illustrate her and her family's experiences. Renée Belloni shares the story of her father Claude, who was a prisoner of war (POW) in Japan. In the section's final chapter, Nonja Peters analyses the experiences of Dutch children from the Indies who were evacuated to Fairbridge Farm School in Western Australia in the tumultuous period between the end of the World War and the beginning of the Indonesian Revolution. Each of these chapters provides a personal perspective that reveals the war's profound impacts on civilians as well as military personnel, and underlines the Allied connections that facilitated the evacuation of civilians during the war and the rescue of POWs after war's end. Some of the families whose stories are shared in this section remain in Australia today, underscoring the long-term connections forged between the Allied nations on an individual level as a result of the war.

Taken together, the chapters in this e-book highlight the extraordinary military and political cooperation between Australia, the United States, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom during the Second World War. Operating as the headquarters of US General Douglas MacArthur and the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) command for much of the war, hosting the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile, coordinating civilian evacuations from the Indies to Australia, and developing facilities and infrastructure to support Allied army, air force, navy and intelligence missions required Brisbane to reinvent itself as a city of strategic importance within the Asia-Pacific. The Second World War made Brisbane the Allied capital of Australia, binding the city (and Australia more broadly) to the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands through military, political and social ties that continue to resonate today.

PART

1

THE ROLE OF THE FOUR ALLIES IN BRISBANE DURING WORLD WAR II

- **Camp Columbia, Wartime Brisbane and the Making of a Transnational Heritage Landscape**
  Paul Budde
- **The Allies in Brisbane during WWII**
  Peter Dunn OAM
- **Submarine Base and the Navy 134 Facilities at New Farm**
  Gerard Benjamin
- **The British Pacific Fleet**
  David Jones
- **Airfields in Queensland during World War II**
  Roger Marks
- **The VK-KNIL: Dutch Women and Service in WWII Australia**
  Nonja Peters

Camp Columbia, Wartime Brisbane and the Making of a Transnational Heritage Landscape

Paul Budde
Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc.

Introduction

During the Second World War (WWII) Brisbane underwent a significant transformation, becoming a major hub for Allied operations in the south-west Pacific region. A network of military infrastructure developed in and around Brisbane. One of these facilities was Camp Columbia. Located in Wacol, southwest of Brisbane, Camp Columbia emerged as a strategically important installation whose historical significance has only recently begun to receive sustained academic and public attention.

This chapter situates Camp Columbia within Brisbane's wartime development as a command and logistics centre used by the United States and the Netherlands East Indies government. It examines the camp's operational role, its connection to the Netherlands East Indies government-in-exile, its function in supporting displaced civilian populations, and its post-war transformation. The chapter also outlines the research and heritage work undertaken by the Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. (CCHA).

In doing so, the chapter frames Camp Columbia not simply as a local military site, but as part of a broader transnational historical landscape shaped by Allied cooperation, wartime displacement, decolonisation and post-war migration.

Brisbane as an Allied command and logistics centre

In the early months of 1942 Japanese forces swept through Southeast Asia, defeating the British in Singapore and the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). The fall of these territories to Japan significantly changed Australia's position in the conflict: with Singapore and the NEI under Japanese occupation, Australia became strategically important to the Allied campaign against Japan. Brisbane, in particular, assumed a central role within this new strategic framework.

In July 1942 the American General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Brisbane with his headquarters, a move that consolidated Brisbane's role as a forward command centre for Allied operations in New Guinea and the wider Pacific. Existing military facilities in Brisbane were expanded and new infrastructure quickly developed throughout the city and its suburbs.[1] This included dispersed staging areas in the western suburbs, air operations centred on Archerfield Airport to the city's south, and logistics networks linked to port facilities at Pinkenba. Key installations also included headquarters at the University of Queensland at St Lucia and a range of camps and depots supporting troop movements and supply chains.[2]

This transformation reshaped Brisbane socially, economically and spatially. Brisbane, and Queensland more broadly, hosted American, Dutch and Australian servicepersonnel as well as evacuees from Southeast Asia. As noted by the late historian Jonathan (Jack) Ford, Brisbane's central

[1] See the "Australia @ War" website https://ozatwar.com/ and Peter Dunn's chapter in this e-book.
[2] Jonathan Ford, *Allies in a Bind: Australia and the Netherlands East Indies in the Second World War* (Brisbane: Australian Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association, Queensland Branch, 1996); David Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939–1945* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

role in the Allied war effort has often been under-represented in Australian historiography, which has tended to prioritise northern defence operations and overseas campaigns.[3]

Establishment and operational role of Camp Columbia

Camp Columbia emerged within this rapidly evolving strategic environment. Located in the southwestern Brisbane suburb of Wacol, at the time a semi-rural area, the camp was established in 1942 by United States forces as a major staging and administrative centre for the US Army in the South West Pacific.[4] By April 1943, the camp had become closely associated with the US Sixth Army, which was formed at the site.[5]

Camp Columbia comprised three principal areas: the US Sixth Army headquarters and hospital facilities, troop accommodation, and training installations including the Officer Candidate School. It functioned as a key transit and preparation point for personnel deploying to forward operational theatres. The Americans occupied the camp until June 1944, when the US Sixth Army transferred its headquarters to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea to progress the Allied war effort.



Figure 1: Detail of the Camp Columbia Revised Block Plan Map, 1942. NAA: BP378/1, FOLDER U TO Z FOLIO 35.

NEI Government-in-Exile in Australia

Following the Japanese invasion and occupation of the NEI, military personnel, civil authorities and civilians connected to the Indies were evacuated to Australia. Many were initially accommodated in Melbourne and elsewhere before moving to Brisbane. In the last years of the war, Brisbane and Camp

[3] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[4] For a comprehensive overview of Wacol's pre-WWII history, see Vicki Mynott, *Wacol, Wolston and Woogaroo (1823-2014)*, vol. 1 (Richlands, Inala and Suburbs History Group, 2014), 1-124.
[5] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.

Columbia in particular became an important centre for NEI military reorganisation and administrative coordination.

NEI Army and Air Force personnel, together with Dutch naval units, were retrained in Australia for participatation in the Allied war effort, and were redeployed from operational, logistical and administrative facilities across Queensland and other parts of the country.[6] Camp Columbia formed part of a broader Allied operational landscape in which multinational cooperation was both essential and complex.

Approximately 20,000 individuals connected to the NEI were displaced to Australia during the Japanese occupation, including Dutch, Indo-European and Indonesian evacuees. Camp Columbia and nearby facilities provided accommodation, employment opportunities, schooling and medical care for these groups. Their experiences highlight the intersection of wartime displacement, racialised colonial hierarchies and the formation of multicultural social dynamics in Australia.[7]

From 1944, senior NEI administrative structures including the NEI Government-in-Exile operated from Camp Columbia while preparing for the restoration of Dutch colonial governance in the Indies following the anticipated defeat of Japan.[8] Significantly, the NEI Government-in-Exile is the only foreign government Australia has ever hosted, making this a major development in Brisbane's and Australia's wartime history. However, when Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno announced Indonesia's independence from the Netherlands on 17 August 1945, the context in which the NEI Government-in-Exile operated in Australia altered fundamentally: assumptions about reestablishing Dutch colonial rule in the Indies shifted to make way for a contested process shaped by decolonisation.[9]



Figure 2: Camp Columbia as headquarters of the NEI Government-in-Exile, circa. 1944. Netherlands Ministry of Defence.

The range of Allied activities centred on Camp Columbia illustrate the operational realities of wartime coalition building. Differences in administrative practice, resource allocation and command structures

[6] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[7] See Jan Lingard's chapter in this e-book
[8] For documentation regarding the establishment, accommodation and operations of the NEI Government-in-Exile at Camp Columbia, see Georgina Devlin's chapter in this e-book.
[9] On Indonesian nationalism in Australia during WWII, see Jan Lingard's chapter in this e-book. On Indonesians in Australia during WWII more broadly, see: Ross Fitzgerald and Graham Irvine, "The Tanah Merah Exiles in Australia", *Quadrant* 53, no. 11 (2009): 42-44; Judith Rozeboom, "Merdeka Down Under? Indonesian Civilians and Military Personnel in Australia (1942-1949)", PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2022.

sometimes produced tensions between Allied partners, a dynamic discussed in detail by Jack Ford.[10] At the same time, cooperation was essential. Dutch naval units were integrated into Allied maritime operations, including service within the United States Seventh Fleet. Dutch merchant shipping played a pivotal logistical role in campaigns such as the Battle of Milne Bay, transporting troops, tanks and essential supplies, while Brisbane provided key facilities for ship repair and maintenance throughout the war.[11]

In the air domain, B-25 Mitchell bombers were used to establish the No. 18 Squadron RAAF, a combined squadron consisting of both NEI and Australian personnel. The squadron arrived at Archerfield Airport in February 1942, marking the commencement of NEI air operations from Australian bases.[12]

Intelligence activities were undertaken by organisations such as the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS), which operated in cooperation with Allied intelligence structures including the Allied Intelligence Bureau.[13] Naval logistical support was coordinated across Allied networks, including at the submarine base in Fremantle (Western Australia), where the concentration of Dutch vessels—submarines and evacuee ships among them—was locally referred to by wharf labourers as the "Flying Dutchmen".[14]

Post-war transformation: recuperation and migration

Following the end of hostilities in August 1945, Camp Columbia entered a transitional humanitarian phase. The camp served as a reception and recuperation site for civilians evacuated from Japanese internment camps, providing accommodation, food, medical care and welfare support during the immediate post-war period.[15]

From 1949, the site was repurposed as the Wacol Migration Centre, becoming part of Australia's expanding post-war migration infrastructure. At its peak in the early 1950s, the centre reached capacity with 2,000 inhabitants.[16] The many thousands of migrants who passed through the facility in this period directly link Camp Columbia to national demographic transformations and the broader restructuring of Australian society in the mid-twentieth century.[17] Later, the site was used by the Australian military.

Over time, Camp Columbia's wartime structures were dismantled or repurposed and urban expansion obscured much of the camp's physical footprint. As tangible remains of Camp Columbia disappeared, public awareness of the site's historical significance has also declined.[18]

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[10] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[11] "Dutch Participation in the Seventh Fleet", Dutch Australian Cultural Centre, 12 July 2024, https://dutchaustralianculturalcentre.com.au/archive/dutch-australian-history/maritime-history/allied-participation-in-the-seventh-fleet/.
[12] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[13] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[14] Ford, *Allies in a Bind*.
[15] "Camp Columbia hosted refugees from the Japanese Camps", Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc., 3 February 2026, https://campcolumbia.com.au/camp-columbia-hosted-refugees-from-the-japanese-camps/.
[16] "Introduction", *Wacol Remembered, 1949-1987* (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2003), xi.
[17] See for example the stories in *Wacol Remembered*.
[18] Photographs of some camp remnants are available at https://campcolumbia.com.au/remnants-of-camp-columbia-at-pooh-corner-reserve/.



Figure 3: Camp Columbia, date unknown. Collection Jack Ford.

The Camp Columbia Heritage Association

The Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. (CCHA), established in 2022 and incorporated in 2023, was created to address this loss of historical visibility. As a volunteer-driven organisation, CCHA combines heritage advocacy with historical research, public history initiatives and international collaboration in our aims to draw attention to Camp Columbia's significance in Brisbane's historiography, and to reposition it as a site of shared international heritage. The *Brisbane at War* symposium, organised by CCHA, was a key milestone towards achieving these aims.

To date, CCHA has collaborated with the University of Queensland on archaeological and archival research projects, and we have also initiated archaeological mapping of surviving remnants within the Pooh Corner Bushland Reserve, integrating heritage interpretation with environmental management and supporting ongoing collaboration with academic partners. In addition, we actively collect personal stories and recollections to complement the historical record, providing insight into lived experiences connected to Camp Columbia and its broader wartime context. Our activities extend into public history through exhibitions and educational partnerships; through these initiatives CCHA seeks to reconnect local communities in Wacol and around Brisbane with the wartime past embedded within the local area.

CCHA's future plans include the development of interpretive infrastructure, digital heritage resources and travelling exhibitions, with longer-term ambitions focused on establishing a dedicated interpretation centre. In addition, we are currently developing a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Trust (Queensland) to support educational, exhibition and museum initiatives at Wolston Farmhouse, a Trust site near the former Camp Columbia area. Our plans are focused on repositioning Camp Columbia as a central part of Brisbane's history, and we welcome new members into the association to help achieve this aim.

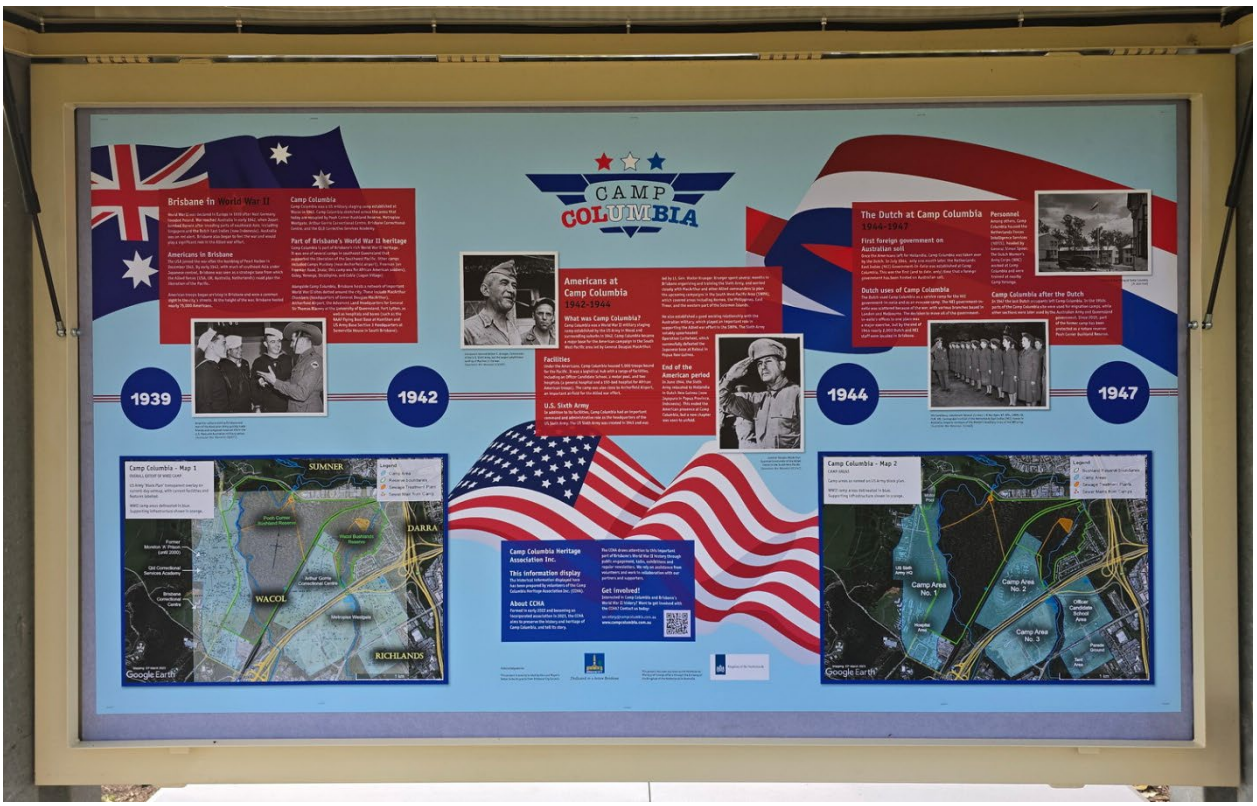

Figure 4: In 2025 CCHA produced a heritage interpretation panel outlining Camp Columbia's history. The panel is displayed at the entrance to Pooh Corner Bushland Reserve in Wacol. Photo by Ed Parker.

Conclusion

Camp Columbia reflects multiple historical trajectories: Allied military cooperation, wartime displacement, colonial transition, humanitarian recovery and post-war migration. Its layered history reflects broader regional and global processes that reshaped the Asia-Pacific during the mid-twentieth century.

Through research, archaeological investigation and public engagement, CCHA is contributing to the reintegration of this site into both academic discourse and public awareness. The *Brisbane at War* symposium and this accompanying e-book represent important steps in that process, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and encouraging renewed attention to Brisbane's wartime transformation.

Acknowledgements

The Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. acknowledges with gratitude the support of the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Brisbane City Council, the Australian Government, and the University of Queensland.

The Allies in Brisbane during WWII

Peter Dunn OAM
Australia @ War

War broke out in the Pacific when the Japanese made their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 (Hawaii time). At that time Australia was vulnerable to any sort of an attack by the Japanese. Most of our fighting Air Force units were either in Singapore, Malaya, the Middle East or the United Kingdom. There were no modern fighter aircraft based in Australia; only a large number of training aircraft were left in the country. Three divisions of our Australian Army were posted overseas in the Middle East, fighting the Germans. The Royal Australian Navy had deployed ships to the Mediterranean Sea and Singapore area. This left Australia open to attack from Japan.

The Start of the Fight Back and Brisbane's Role

At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the American Pensacola Convoy - comprising the escort USS *Pensacola* and eight other ships – was underway to the Philippines to reinforce the American forces there. They carried troops and equipment, crated and disassembled aircraft, bombs, anti-aircraft ammunition and general supplies. The convoy was initially ordered to turn back to Pearl Harbor on 9 December, but President Roosevelt changed these orders on 13 December to order the convoy to Brisbane.

Under General Order No. 1, dated 12 December 1941, Brig. Gen. Julian F. Barnes, the most senior American officer in the convoy and on-board USS *Republic*, assumed command of a new American Command called 'Task Force, South Pacific'. At 2pm on 13 December whilst the Convoy was in Suva, Fiji, General Barnes received a message from General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the US Army, designating him as the Commander of U.S. Forces in Australia (USFIA). Barnes was instructed to report to General Douglas MacArthur for instructions and to prepare a cargo of aircraft for combat and make every effort to get them to the Philippines.

On 18 December 1941 the US Military Attache, Colonel Van S. Merle-Smith, received a message from General Marshall to be hand-delivered to General Barnes. The message advised that General George H. Brett was due to arrive in Darwin from Chungking (now Chongqing, China) and that he had been designated as the Commander of all US troops and facilities in Australia. General Claggett had been ordered from the Philippines as General Brett's assistant.

Under instructions from Washington D.C., Colonel Merle-Smith had made arrangements for the reception of the Pensacola Convoy in Brisbane on 22 December 1941 and for the subsequent unloading and erection of crated aircraft at Archerfield and Amberley Airfields.

HMAS Canberra transferred a number of messages to General Barnes on the Pensacola Convoy on 21 December 1941, the day before he and the convoy arrived in Brisbane. One of those messages from Colonel Merle-Smith read as follows:

> "All arrangements have been completed for unloading and erection of aircraft and reloading of additional cargo for Philippines and for disembarkation and quartering of personnel."[1]

On 22 December 1941, a harbour boat took Col. Merle-Smith, and some Australian Army and Navy officers, to pick up General Barnes from the USS Republic in Moreton Bay. After disembarking, Gen. Barnes established the first American headquarters in Australia, known as USFIA, in Lennons Hotel in George Street in Brisbane city. Later that evening Gen. Claggett arrived and took over command of USFIA; Barnes became his Chief of Staff. General Brett arrived on 1 January 1942.

Immediately upon arrival in Brisbane, the ships of the Pensacola Convoy began unloading cargo and the precious crated and disassembled aircraft. Not everything was to stay in Brisbane. An attempt would be made to get troops and supplies through to the Philippines. On 28 December 1941 the USS Pensacola and transports USS Chaumont and USAT Willard A. Holbrook got underway for Darwin. The next morning, the Dutch ship MV Bloemfontein left Brisbane and caught up with the small convoy.

Amongst the cargo unloaded in Brisbane were the following aircraft:

- 18 crated P-40 Warhawks
- 52 A-24s of the 27th Bomb Group (Light)

The USFIA's headquarters relocated from Brisbane to Melbourne on 3 January 1942, and its name changed to United States Armed Forces in Australia (USAFIA) on 5 January 1942. A group of officers remained in Brisbane and their unit became Headquarters US Troops in the Brisbane Area, still based in Lennons Hotel in George Street.

In anticipation of the arrival of the Pensacola Convoy in December, camps had been established at Ascot and Doomben Racecourses, which became known as Camp Ascot and Camp Doomben (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Camp Ascot on 20 December 1941, two days before the arrival of the Pensacola Convoy. Source: Screenshot from 1941 Aerial Photo Map of Brisbane, Australia, 20 December 1941, Harry Stranger via Soar Atlas, https://soaratlas.com/maps/140593.

[1] Letter from Col. Van S. Merle-Smith to Brig. Gen. Julian F. Barnes, Brisbane, 21 December 1941, "Australia @ War" collection.



Figure 2: Camp Doomben on 20 December 1941. Source: Screenshot from 1941 Aerial Photo Map of Brisbane, Australia*, 20 December 1941, Harry Stranger via Soar Atlas, https://soaratlas.com/maps/140593.*

The arrival of the Pensacola Convoy had a significant impact on Brisbane. One such impact was the frantic acquisition of buildings, schools, parks, houses, etc to house the growing invasion of US forces.

Some troops were also sent to Archerfield Airfield and Amberley Airfield to erect the A-24s and P-40s that had been unloaded from the Pensacola Convoy. The men who were sent to Amberley shared camp facilities with 3 Service Flying Training School of the Royal Australian Air Force (3SFTS RAAF), who also helped them to erect the American aircraft.

At the same time that Headquarters United States Forces in Australia (USFIA) became known as Headquarters United States Army Forces in Australia (USAFIA), an initial four American Base Sections were established in Australia under General Order No. 1 USAFIA (see Fig.3). These were:

- Base Section 1 – Darwin – Col. John A. Robinson
- Base Section 2 – Townsville – Brig. Gen. Henry B. Clagett
- Base Section 3 – Brisbane – Col. Alexander L. P. Johnson
- Base Section 4 – Melbourne – Col. Bird S. Dubois

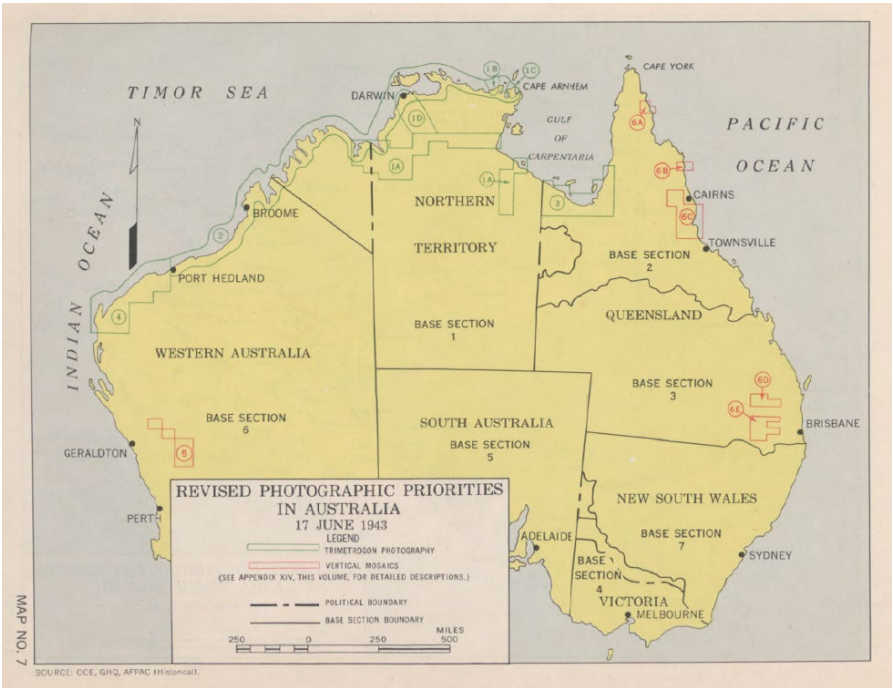

Figure 3: Seven Base Sections were eventually established in Australia. Source: George A. Meidling (ed.), Engineers of the Southwest Pacific, 1941-1945: Reports of operations [of the] United States Army Forces in the Far East, Southwest

Somerville House Girls School at South Brisbane soon became the headquarters for the US Army's Base Section 3. A number of wireless stations were established inside Somerville House and connected via teleprinters and rented PMG pairs to transoceanic transmitting and receiving wireless stations at Redland Bay, Capalaba, Hemmant and Rocklea which provided direct contact with the Chief of Staff and President Roosevelt in the USA, and with forward commanders in the Southwest Pacific Area.

Brisbane's significance to the war effort

The transformation of Brisbane during the Second World War constitutes one of the most significant yet comparatively under-examined episodes in Australia's wartime history. From late 1941 the city evolved into a major Allied operational hub in the Southwest Pacific, accommodating a dense network of headquarters, logistics installations, training facilities, hospitals and refugee accommodation centres.

The rapid Japanese advance through Southeast Asia in early 1942 fundamentally altered Australia's strategic position. With the fall of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies, Australia became a principal logistical base for Allied operations aimed at halting and reversing Japanese expansion.

Prime Minister John Curtin requested the return of two Australian Army Divisions to counter the Japanese threat. By April 1942, 46,00 Australian Imperial Force (AIF) personnel had returned from the Middle East. In addition, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) began to establish many new fighter and bomber squadrons.

One of the most significant developments in this period was Brisbane becoming the headquarters of General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Southwest Pacific Area. On 21 July 1942, MacArthur moved his General Headquarters Southwest Pacific Area (GHQ SWPA) from Melbourne to Brisbane, where he stayed until 14 October 1944.

MacArthur operated GHQ SWPA from the eighth floor of the AMP Building (now often referred to as MacArthur Central) in Brisbane city. He coordinated major campaigns that ultimately halted and reversed Japanese advances. This positioned Brisbane at the centre of strategic decision-making for battles in places like New Guinea and the Philippines.

Military infrastructure expanded rapidly across the metropolitan region and surrounding districts. Installations supporting communications, intelligence, engineering, stores and supplies, medical treatment, transport coordination and troop staging were established at unprecedented scale. This extensive list below gives an indication of the scale of military camps that were established in Brisbane during WWII:

Major Australian camps

1 Australian Personnel Staging Camp Tennyson	17th Australian Personnel Staging Camp Kalinga	Camp Archerfield
Camp Chermside	Camp Moorooka	Camp Rocklea
Camp Strathpine	Enoggera Army Camp	Leave and Transit Depot Exhibition Grounds

Major American camps

Camp Ascot	Camp Ascot Park	Camp Cable	Camp Carina
Camp Chelmer	Camp Columbia	Camp Coopers Plains	Camp Doomben
Camp Luna Park	Camp Meeandah	Camp Milton	Camp Moorooka
Camp Muckley	Camp New Farm	Camp Oxley	Camp Perry Park
Camp Real Park	Camp Redbank	Camp Seabee	Camp Strathpine
Camp Victoria Park	Camp Whinstanes	Camp Yeronga	

Major Hospitals

There were also numerous hospitals established in the Brisbane region, with the following being some of the major ones:

- 42nd General Hospital, US Army at Stuartholme and Holland Park with a detachment at Camp Columbia
- 172nd Station Hospital, US Army at Nudgee Junior College Indooroopilly
- 112th Army General Hospital, Australian Army at Greenslopes
- 105th General Hospital, US Army at Gatton College
- 155th Station Hospital, initially with the US Army at Camp Cable, then Ekibin then Holland Park
- Mobile 9 Hospital MOB 9, US Navy at Camp Hill

Many buildings were taken over in the city and Fortitude Valley areas and turned into barracks, rest areas or service clubs.

Many airfields, satellite airfields and emergency landing grounds were built across Queensland and in the Brisbane surrounding areas for use by the Allied Air Forces, which included the RAAF, United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), United States Navy (USN), Royal Air Force (RAF), and Netherlands East Indies Air Force (NEI-AF).[2]

This militarisation coincided with a substantial influx of personnel and civilians. American forces, Australian service units, Dutch military contingents and tens of thousands of evacuees from Southeast Asia converged on Queensland.

From Brisbane and its associated installations, campaigns were prepared that would ultimately enable Allied forces to regain strategic initiative across the Pacific. Dutch naval units integrated into the United States Seventh Fleet, which had been established in Brisbane on 15 March 1943, and air operations conducted from northern Australian bases exemplified the multinational character of this effort.

Allied Co-operation

There were many Allied Units established in Brisbane during WWII. American, Australian, British, Dutch and in one case Canadian personnel manned these Allied units. Examples of these Allied units include Central Bureau, which was an Allied Signals Intelligence Unit established at Ascot. The Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) was the dirty tricks unit that operated behind Japanese lines. Their headquarters was in Heindorff House (Queen Street) and one of their main camps was at Milton Tennis Courts. The Allied Technical Air Intelligence Unit (ATAIU) operated from Hangar 7 at Eagle Farm Airfield and gathered intelligence from captured Japanese aircraft. This included rebuilding and flying a Japanese Zero, Tony and Oscar. The Allied Geographical Section operated from the Permanent Bank building at 115 Queen Street.

[2] On airfields, see Roger Marks' chapter in this e-book.

It was very common for Australian, British and Dutch units to occupy camp locations vacated by the US Army as the Americans moved forward towards the Philippines. The sharing of intelligence was another aspect of Allied co-operation in Brisbane.

The presence of tens of thousands of American troops also had a profound social and cultural impact on Brisbane. While cooperation between Australian and American forces was generally strong, tensions occasionally surfaced, most notably during the Battle of Brisbane in late November 1942. This incident reflected the strain of wartime conditions but also underscored the complexities of hosting such a large foreign military presence.

Conclusion

Brisbane became the Allied capital of Australia's fight back against the Japanese. Importantly, Brisbane's role in the conflict contributed directly to the success of key Allied operations, including the gradual push northward that weakened Japanese control in the Pacific. The city's ability to function as a secure rear base allowed frontline forces to operate more effectively, knowing they had strong logistical and strategic support.

Over time, Brisbane's wartime structures were dismantled or repurposed, and urban expansion obscured much of Brisbane's former military role. As tangible remains diminished, public awareness of the city's historical significance also declined.

The Allied effort in Brisbane during World War II was vital to the overall success of the Pacific campaign. As a command centre, supply hub and symbol of international cooperation, Brisbane significantly influenced the direction and outcome of the war in the region. Its contributions demonstrate how cities far from the front lines can still play decisive roles in global conflicts.

Brisbane was a multinational Allied command and logistics centre during WWII. It had become the Allied Capital of Australia.

For a detailed account of the Allies in Brisbane during World War II, and for source information, see my "Australia @ War" website at www.ozatwar.com.

Submarine Base and the Navy 134 Facilities at New Farm

Gerard Benjamin

The arrival in Brisbane of US Navy (USN) warships in April 1942 saw the establishment of the New Farm Submarine Base. By June, USN facilities had expanded and Brisbane was designated 'USN Base 134'. With many more personnel to house, the Navy leased part of Brisbane City Council's New Farm Park and developed it into the USN New Farm Receiving Station. This chapter discusses several pieces of USN infrastructure constructed in New Farm during World War II (WWII).

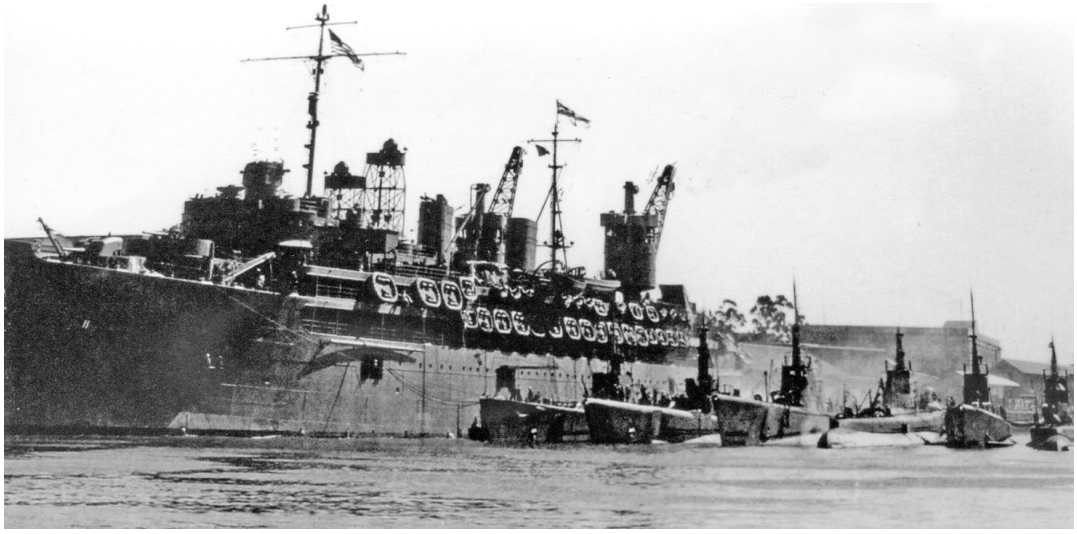

Figure 1- Submarine Tender at New Farm Wharf in 1942, with 6 subs nearby.
Official US Navy photo in the collection of the 'Bowfin' Submarine Museum and Park, Honolulu.

The Submarine Base

On 15 April 1942, the submarine tender USS *Griffin* and her squadron of six S-boats tied up at New Farm Wharf, the takeover of which had been arranged shortly before. The area was on Macquarie Street adjacent to the riverfront between Hastings and Beeston Streets and beyond. A week after the marathon voyage across the Pacific, the first boat to be out on patrol was S-47, its primary mission being to "destroy enemy vessels".

At her new location, USS *Griffin* would be self-sufficient in providing all the refit, repair and supply needs of the squadron. The busiest time at New Farm Wharf was between October and December 1942 when the New Guinea and Guadalcanal campaigns were at their height.

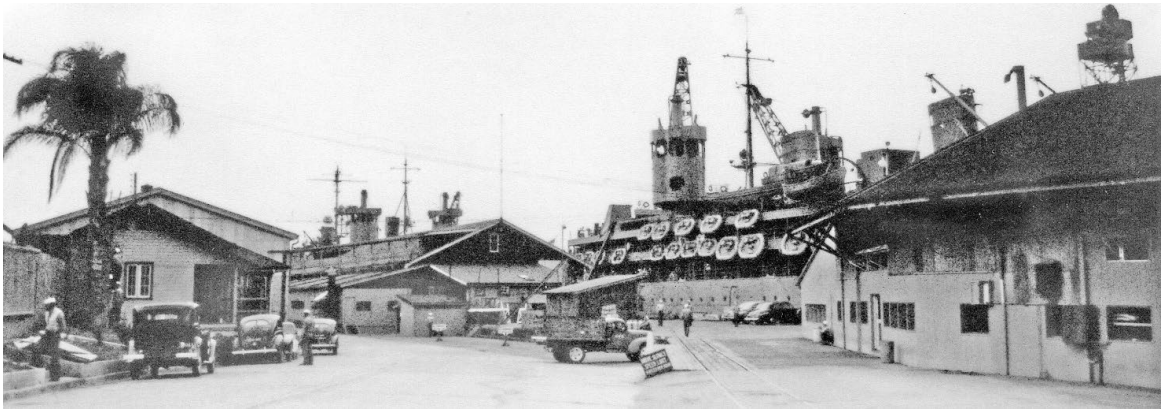

Figure 2 - Entrance to the Submarine Repair Unit at New Farm Wharf.
Official US Navy photo in the collection of the 'Bowfin' Submarine Museum and Park, Honolulu.

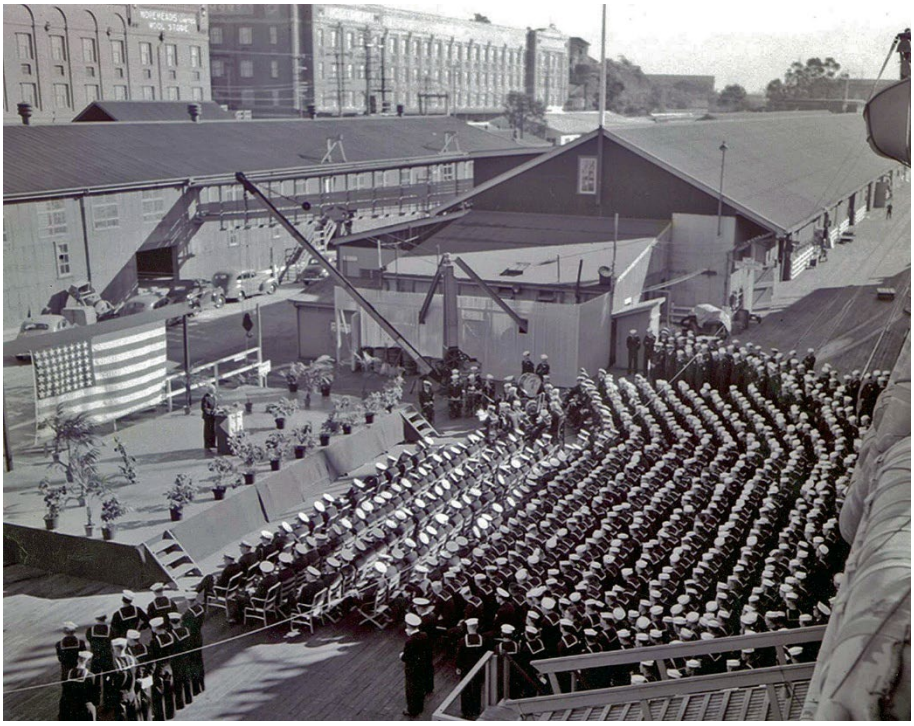

Figure 3 - US Submarine Base, New Farm, viewed from the submarine tender.
Official US Navy photo, US National Archives Record Group 80-G 394374.

The Sub Tender

An insight into the role of the submarine tender is offered by Bill Ruhe in his 1994 book *War in the Boats*.[1] In June 1942, as a 26-year-old Navy ensign from Pennsylvania, Ruhe won the job of engineering officer on S-37. This S-class sub of WWI vintage had been under major repair at New Farm for the previous two months. Every time S-37 tried to put to sea, successive problems forced it back to base. A sea-test enabled it to sit at 103 feet on the bottom of Moreton Bay, but a deeper test to 135 feet resulted in flooding leaks. This is when Bill Ruhe systematically went from workshop to workshop on USS *Griffin* in order to complete the "Repair To-do List", and at last the boat was made seaworthy.

USS *Griffin* performed 50 submarine refits and repairs over seven months. It was replaced in November 1942 by USS *Fulton* which, for almost a year, was the focus of the Brisbane submarine war. The sub tender refitted 67 submarines and attended other ships.

[1] William J. Ruhe, *War in the Boats: My World War II Submarine Battles* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 1994).

Until a hospital was established ashore, *Fulton's* medical department treated all naval forces in the area. "The best tender in the fleet", the "silent partner of the Silent Service" and the "Can-do ship", were some of the laudatory titles that *Fulton* earned. On the other hand, the hard-worked crew sometimes saw it differently: "Send it to the *Fulton*… Steal it from the *Fulton*… Blame it on the *Fulton*… Make it on the *Fulton* – anything from ashtrays to French commodes."[2]

Also arriving in Brisbane in February 1942 (for two months) was USS *Sperry*. As with *Fulton*, it was a large purpose-built tender, fitted with heavy lift cranes and workshops, capable of carrying out a wide range of repairs. It carried all of the facilities necessary to render their squadron self-sufficient at any port.



Figure 4 - Subs returning to the Submarine Base at New Farm, ca. 1943.
Official US Navy photo, US National Archives Record Group 80-G 51800.

New Farm Wharf: The Submarine Repair Unit

The Submarine Repair Unit at New Farm Wharf occupied a narrow 1,089-foot-long space. The original four large sheds and the dock-master's and customs buildings were transformed as new buildings rose around them. New floors and partitions converted simple sheds into multilevel storage areas, workshops and barracks. Elevated walkways connected the buildings.

The main entrance was off Macquarie Street at the wharf's upstream end. A one-way traffic pattern had vehicles pass between the two rows of buildings and then curve around the downstream end to return along the wharf. About halfway along was the old brick public-works building which remains there today.

The facility included several barracks, a medical building with 28 beds, a duty office, fire station, laundry, an officers' club, movie theatre, library, beer hall and a large air raid shelter (underneath); it also had a mess, galley, garage, armoury, the attack teacher, blacksmith and pipe turner shops, the ice plant and the diving and paint lockers. Along the wharf were all the shops needed to overhaul up to seven subs a month. On the roof of the river shed was a "control tower" which communicated with vessels via two 30-foot signal masks and two searchlights.

[2] David Jones and Peter Nunan, *U.S. Subs Down Under* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 81.

This installation was described as 'ingenious', and before long, the workshops could complete 100% of a sub's overhaul.[3]

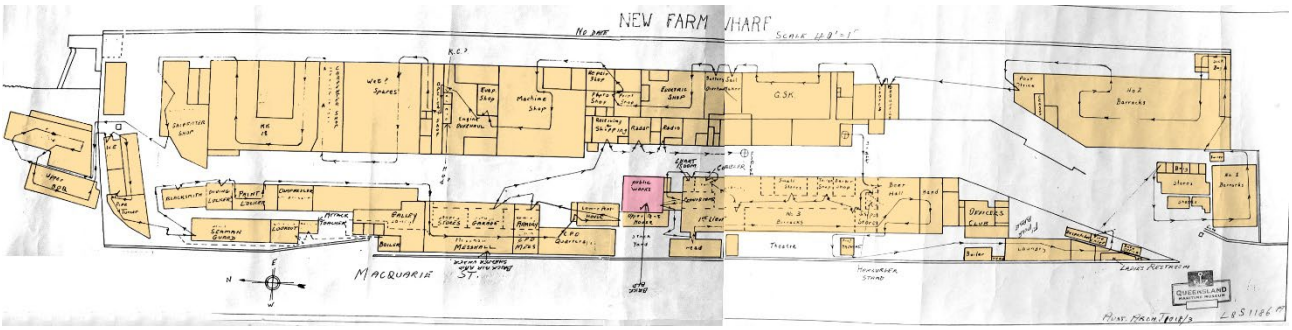

Figure 5 - Plan of the Submarine Repair Unit at New Farm Wharf. Source: Queensland Maritime Museum.

USN New Farm Receiving Station

A large receiving barracks was constructed adjacent to New Farm Park and in an area bounded by Sydney, Lamington, Dixon and Richardson Streets. It included Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ), a dispensary and an armed guard pool, as well as two barracks for Enlisted Men, a mess hall (seating 50) and galley, laundry, enlisted men's recreation room, theatre, ship's store, brig, seabag storage building, two-chair barber shop, subsidiary post office, an administration building, wet canteen and a chaplain's office. The receiving barracks closed in January 1946.

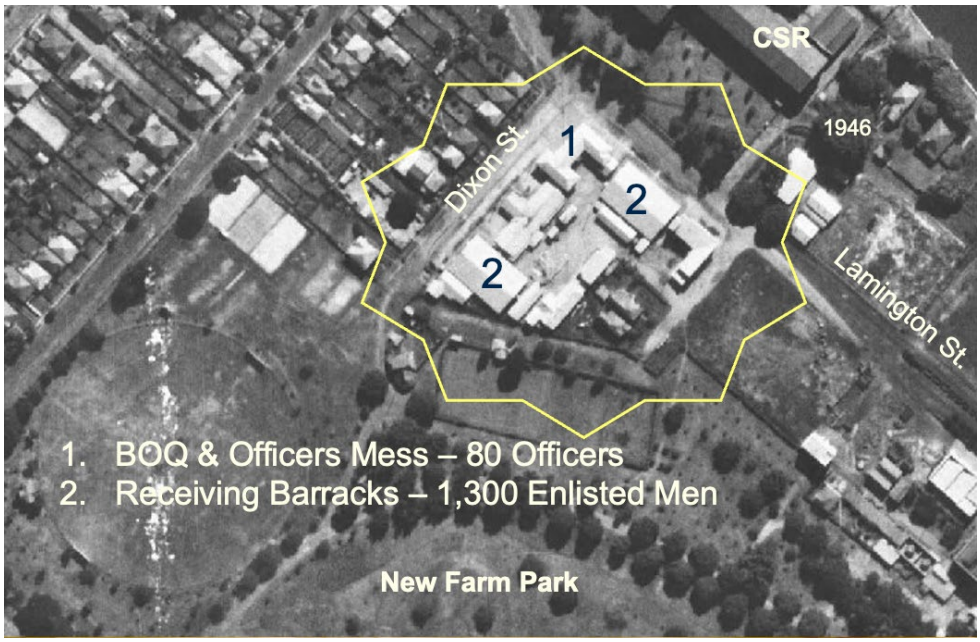

Figure 6 - USN Receiving Station, Lamington Street, New Farm. Source: Peter Dunn OAM.

[3] Jones and Nunan, *U.S. Subs Down Under*, 137.



Figure 7 - Plan of the USN Receiving Station, Lamington Street, New Farm. Source: Queensland Maritime Museum.

Officers' Club, Oxlade Drive

So as to provide relaxation facilities for US Navy commissioned officers, land at Oxlade Drive was acquired from Brisbane City Council and in 1943, an Officers' Club was constructed consisting of two 12m x 30.5m Stran-Steel (Quonset) buildings joined by a foyer. In one building was a Club Bar and Dining Area, and in the other a full Dance floor and Band Stand.

The structure still stands at 50 Oxlade Drive. After the war, it continued as a popular music venue, and for twenty-five years it was a functions centre under the new name Riverside Ballroom. In 2024 it evolved into the "Officers Mess" (probably should have been called the "Officers Club"), a dining hub catering to hundreds, especially on weekends.



Figure 8 - Former USN Officers Club, 50 Oxlade Drive, pictured here in 2008. Photo taken by author.

Closing Down the Repair Unit

The closing down of the Submarine Repair Unit, Navy 134, commenced on 16 February 1945, with stores, fittings, equipment, and heavy installations dismantled and packed for shipment.

Submariners' Memorial, Newstead Park

A memorial in Newstead Park (unveiled in 1995) lists 65 US submarines that were based in Brisbane. USS *Amberjack*, USS *Grampus*, USS *S39*, USS *Seawolf* and USS *Triton* were among those lost on patrol out of Brisbane, four with all hands (including the first listed with 73 on board). At the memorial's launch a former submariner recalled, "When we came up the river returning from a patrol, the people in the park, especially the children, would wave and cheer. The captain would salute them with the ship's whistle. It was as if we had come home, and in a sense we had."[4]



Figure 9 - Submariners' Memorial, Newstead Park. Photo taken by author.

New Farm Wharf Demolition

New Farm Wharf was demolished in 2000 to make way for a luxury development which included 23 detached waterfront houses and eight townhouses.

Submariners Walk Heritage Trail

The Submariners Walk Heritage Trail was opened in 2013. Through a series of plaques, it aims to tell the story of Submarines in Brisbane from WWI and WWII to contemporary times. The Heritage Trail occupies the river walk area between Hastings and Beeston Streets, which was a significant part of the area used as the US Submarine base from 1942 to 1945. The people who provided the impetus for this project were Don Currell (Submarines Association Australia, Qld) and Wanda Davis and her late husband Mike (Wanda's father served on USS *Peto* when berthed in Brisbane). Each Anzac Day, the Submariners Walk Heritage Trail hosts a ceremony which also commemorates the story of New Farm's wartime contribution.

Local Residents Remember

Since its inception in 1994, the New Farm & Districts Historical Society has collected oral histories from long-time residents. The Society has also been the recipient of memoirs from those who grew up in the locality. Such resources often recall WWII, and in some cases a reference to the submarine base. For instance, local resident JB attended New Farm State School until his mother became

[4] Jones and Nunan, *U.S. Subs Down Under*, 253.

concerned about the risk of bombs being dropped on the submarine base nearby. She then moved him to Churchie at Norman Park, considered far enough away to be safe.[5]

By the same token, timber merchant James Green lived in Crase Street, virtually overlooking the new base. He chose to move his family out of the 'target zone' to the relative safety of Coorparoo.[6]

Fourteen-year-old Robert Blaikie remembered seeing the masts of the submarine tenders from the verandah of his grandfather's house at 591 Lower Bowen Terrace. He and friends enjoyed sailing a 16 'skiff. "One day, so as to take a good look at the subs," he said, "we sailed too close and were warned off by a rifle shot across the mast."[7]

According to Audrey Abrahams, who was twelve during the war and whose family had a jetty just downstream from the CSR refinery, "I could come home from school (All Hallows) and look out to the river to see a submarine with the stern on the surface and the bow underwater, and also the reverse."[8]

Barry Whalen grew up in Brunswick Street, a few doors down from the Brunswick Hotel. He remembers his father explaining that it was a popular venue with US Navy submariners. "Sometimes the Yanks would spill out of the Brunswick Hotel very drunk indeed. My father recalled one sailor who hailed (!) a tram, staggered on board and whispered confidentially to the driver, 'Take me to New Jersey, pal'."[9]

"John Gates was just a boy from Harcourt Street who, along with some mates, ignored the 'Keep Out' signs at the US Navy submarine base on Macquarie Street, lifted up a galvanised iron sheet, and descended under the wharf and into the mud. The Yanks called to the boys to get out. Eventually a rubber ducky was sent to extract them, and rather than be sent packing, the trespassers received royal treatment. After being hosed off, they were taken on board a sub, invited below, fed ice cream and each given a gob hat. John's mother, horrified to hear of this exploit, uttered the sobering threat: 'Wait until your father hears about this.' That had John quivering, but when father came home he didn't say a word…"[10]

Happy Memories of Brisbane

The 'Yanks' were generally well-liked locally and appreciated the open-hearted hospitality shown them. H. Gray Forrest, ex-Chief Yeoman in the US Navy, addressed a 'letter to the editor' to a Brisbane newspaper around 1970, expressing regret at not being able to re-visit Brisbane for the 25th anniversary of his leaving Australia. "I may never see Australia again," he wrote, "however please rest assured that I still consider it my second home and always will."[11]

[5] Gerard Benjamin and Gloria Grant, *Reflections on New Farm* (New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc., 2008), 126.
[6] Gerard Benjamin, *New Farm: 50 Stories* (Newstead, 2024), 113.
[7] Benjamin and Grant, *Reflections on New Farm*, 126.
[8] Benjamin and Grant, *Reflections on New Farm*, 124.
[9] Benjamin, *New Farm: 50 Stories*, 148.
[10] Gerard Benjamin, *New Farm: Another 50 Stories* (Newstead, 2025), 176.
[11] "A Yank who'll never forget us", Letter to the Editor, unknown newspaper, Brisbane, date unknown.

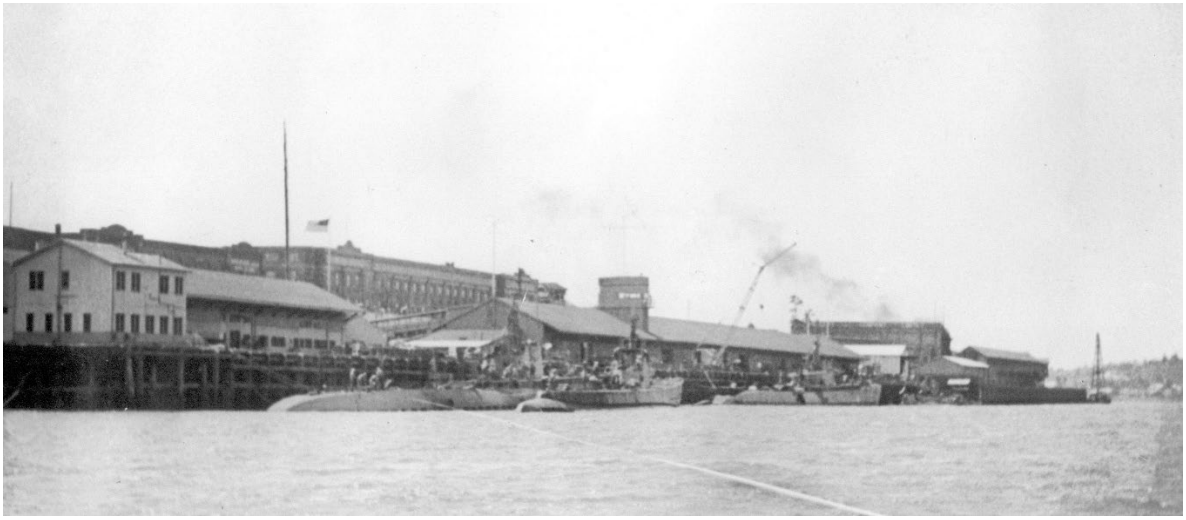

Figure 10 - USS Narwhal and USS Nautilus at the New Farm base (with its lookout tower) at Christmas 1944. Source: Les Cottman, via David Jones.

Postscript 1: Family Connection

Following my father's WWII army service in New Guinea and Rabaul, he was employed by the Postmaster General's Department (PMG). In 1948-49, he was chosen to attend the PMG Technician Training School in Brisbane, which he discovered, was located in New Farm in some of the former US Navy buildings at the corner of Sydney and Lamington Streets.

Postscript 2: Live 'in a Sub' in Helen Street

You can live "in a sub" at 14 Helen Street, Teneriffe (0.5km from the old base). A new apartment block called *Obsidian* has a profile that emulates the cross-section of a submarine. It was apparently designed "to reflect the riverside precinct's rich maritime history." The building's marketing headline states, "Submarine-inspired development surfaces beside the river in Teneriffe."

The British Pacific Fleet

David Jones
Queensland Maritime Museum

The British Pacific Fleet (BPF) was formed on 22 November 1944 under the command of Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser to provide a strong British presence to defeat Japan in the Pacific and to reconquer territory lost to the Japanese.

On 17 December 1944 Fraser arrived aboard the battleship HMS *Howe* in Sydney, where he set up the fleet's main base. Brisbane was chosen as a major repair and supply base, with comprehensive facilities. In both Sydney and Brisbane dry docks had recently been completed for handling large warships. Manus Island, north of Papua New Guinea (at the time a Dutch colony), would also play an important role as a forward base and a staging point for supplies from Australia.



Figure 1 - British Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers at Manus Island, 1945. Source: IWM MH5309.

Over the following weeks the BPF grew rapidly with warships released from British home waters and the Mediterranean by the imminent defeat of Germany. The fleet's operational component, Task Force 113, was a balanced and powerful force with the most modern battleships and the latest aircraft carriers appropriately supported by cruisers and destroyers.

The BPF also possessed a well-equipped fleet train of auxiliary and support ships as the Americans would only accept help from the BPF if it was entirely self-supporting. This presented a challenge for the British as their navy had never had to operate so far away from their shore supply chain before. They had to scrape together whatever shipping they could find to fill the need and master the techniques of transferring their stores to warships at sea.

Constituting Task Force 112 under Rear Admiral Douglas Fisher, the fleet train included ferry carriers, repair ships, oilers, supply ships and transports, down to tugs. There was also a large number of escorting frigates and minesweepers.

Brisbane welcomed the British sailors with open arms, providing hospitality in homes which led in many cases to long friendships.

In Brisbane the Fleet took over facilities recently vacated by the Americans as well as acquiring new properties. and constructing a large Victualling Stores Building at New Farm. HMS *Furneaux* was established as the Fleet's general depot and supply base for Brisbane, providing repairs for smaller vessels, a drafting pool for personnel and victualling and naval stores facilities. After considerable planning and effort *Furneaux* commissioned on 1 April 1945 and the Victualling Stores Building became fully operational that same month.

The BPF base in Brisbane became fully effective from April 1945, though preparatory work had progressed for many months before that. The commanding officer of HMS *Furneaux*, Commander J.F. Steemson, was appointed in January. On New Farm Wharf the Americans shipped out the last of their submarine base's equipment on 20 April and the Royal Navy took over that same day.

Three years of war in the Pacific had proved aircraft carriers were the dominant power of the fleet. The BPF maintained a strength of four fleet aircraft carriers in their task force and their aircraft were at the centre of the action. Supporting them ashore in Australia were a number of mobile air bases. Two of these were in Brisbane.

Transportable Aircraft Maintenance Yard No.1, HMS *Nabsford*, arrived in March to assemble and test new aircraft shipped from Great Britain and the USA. These were then loaded onto escort carriers at river berths and forwarded on to the fleet to replace aircraft lost or damaged in action.

The unit took over a series of large hangars at Archerfield along with accommodation vacated by the Americans at Rocklea. A second Mobile Naval Air Base, HMS *Nabreekie*, joined it in August, and also performed mechanical servicing and maintenance at Meeandah.

The BPF sailed into action on 26 March 1945 supporting the invasion of Okinawa as Task Force 57 within the United States Fifth Fleet. Through April and May, the carriers mounted air strikes on Japanese positions in the Sakishima Islands. During these operations all four carriers were hit by Kamikazes. While these caused severe casualties in personnel and aircraft, the ships themselves were protected by their armoured decks and suffered little damage. This contrasted with US carriers which, with their wooden decks, were as often as not put completely out of action by a Kamikaze strike.

The fleet returned to Australia for replenishment in June. It was one of the highlights of the war in Brisbane, with the Naval Officer in Charge in Brisbane reporting:

> The long preparation of the Port of Brisbane for use by the British Pacific Fleet culminated during June in an extensive replenishment and refit period, 32 ships being the greatest number in Port on any one day. Vessels included a Cruiser, several Escort Carriers and smaller R.N. units, as well as Repair and Supply Ships attached to H.M.S. "MONTCLARE" which was in port wearing the flag of the Rear Admiral Fleet Train, British Pacific Fleet. (RAN Brisbane Command – War Diary, 1st April – 30th June 1945, AWM78, 398/1)

There were two dry docks in Brisbane. South Brisbane Dry Dock could maintain the frigates, sloops and minesweepers of the escort squadrons, as well as submarines. Cairncross Graving Dock had recently been completed as part of the war effort to handle the largest vessels entering the Brisbane

River. Both docks were kept very busy maintaining British warships. Among them were two aircraft carriers, HMS *Unicorn* and HMS *Slinger*, which docked at Cairncross.

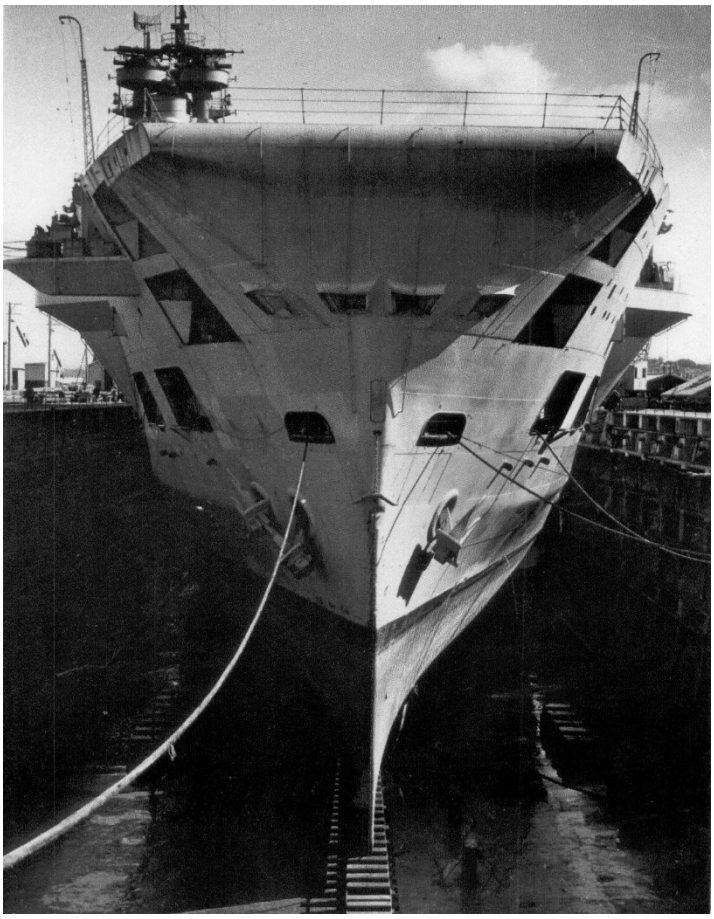

Figure 2 - HMS Unicorn in Cairncross Dock, July 1945. Source: Queensland Maritime Museum.

The fleet returned to battle on 17 July 1945 with air attacks and shore bombardments on the south coast of Honshu, the main island of Japan. Warlike operations ceased when Japan capitulated on 15 August. The BPF was withdrawn while a representative squadron remained for the surrender formalities. It was Admiral Fraser who signed the Japanese surrender document on behalf of Great Britain.

Victory in the Pacific saw most of the bulk of the BPF sailing for Australia for a well-earned period of rest for their crews and repairs to the ships. Once again, a large number of escorts and auxiliaries arrived in Brisbane.

But some unfinished business remained. The Japanese forces were headquartered in Rabaul in New Guinea and had 139,000 servicemen under their command. Hosting the surrender of such a significant force required a major vessel. The aircraft carrier HMS *Glory* was made available and on 6 September 1945 Australian Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee received the Japanese surrender on her flight deck.

There was also the recovery of ex-prisoners of war and repatriating Australian troops from the recent battlefields of Borneo. A wide range of vessels from aircraft carriers to LSTs (Landing Ship, Tanks) were assigned to return them as quickly as possible to Australia. Many of the LSTs terminated their passage in Brisbane, disembarking their troops for an early demobilisation.

The BPF was disbanded at the end of the war and its bases in Australia were progressively closed. After a farewell ball in the City Hall, HMS *Furneaux* paid off on 28 October 1945 and the majority

of its personnel, along with those of HMS *Nabreekie*, returned to the United Kingdom. The other air base, HMS *Nabsford*, followed in March 1946 after disposing of redundant aircraft.

Peace allowed vessels hard worked by war service the opportunity for refits and maintenance. Over the next year 35 British warships were dry-docked in Brisbane before these services were restored in Singapore and Hong Kong. Their mission now accomplished, the ships returned to Great Britain and the sailors to their homes.

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Airfields in Queensland during World War II

Roger Marks

Introduction

QAWW2 is an acronym for *Queensland Airfields WW2 – 50 Years On*, my 1994 self-published book, a once-only 3,000 print run.[1] My wife Jenny and I promised ourselves afterward, 'never again'.

About the book

QAWW2's rear cover proclaims it is "An attempt to thoroughly address all of the WW2 airstrips of Queensland ...show where they were, what they became and how, what Units were 'there', when and for how long ... Recollections by veterans and others who were there, of 'what the place was like - then'. Some of the story of the vital centres like Garbutt, Amberley, Archerfield and Eagle Farm, the frontier airfields from Iron Range to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the hastily prepared strips which in some cases were little, if ever, used by the Air Forces, as the war moved north. Hundreds of photos, maps and drawings. As you prepare to visit any of these 100+ Historic Sites, remember; many are private property ... make sure you obtain permission."

Researched and produced for the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II (WWII), QAWW2 covers all 190-odd airfields that existed in Queensland during the war. The airfields are addressed in order of increasing South latitude and are analysed via six appendices. The book sold out in 2001; after persistent requests, I developed a cover-to-cover PDF version of the book on CD in 2003. Since then it has morphed again and is now available on USB.

Forty of the sites covered in QAWW2 have illustrated text and are assigned Level 1 status, while the remainder are Level 2. These statuses relate to the USB version of QAWW2, introduced in 2021, which contains a KMZ file and individual companion PDFs to the airfields. The companion PDFs allowed me to publish some of the hundreds of photos, maps and drawings that could never be feasibly included in the book. At the 2025 symposium I focused on major additions to the USB, including an .mp4 sampling tour of 15 World War II airfields via Google Earth (Fig.1). This chapter also touches on many of these airfields.

The importance of photos to my research

Before embarking on a precis of QAWW2's treatment of the wartime history woven through these sites, I want to recognise and promote awareness of WWII US Military black and white stilpix photos generated on the Australian mainland, long since inducted to the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).2 Contemporaneous photography was always critical to the history of airfields in Queensland during WWII. My introduction to this came when researching Eagle Farm airfield. The late Robert C. Mikesh's article on the Allied Tactical Air Intelligence Unit (ATAIU)

[1] Roger R. Marks, *Queensland Airfields WW2 – 50 Years On* (Brisbane: R & J Marks, 1994). Hereafter QAWW2.
[2] Stilpix refers to still images, as distinct from moving pictures.

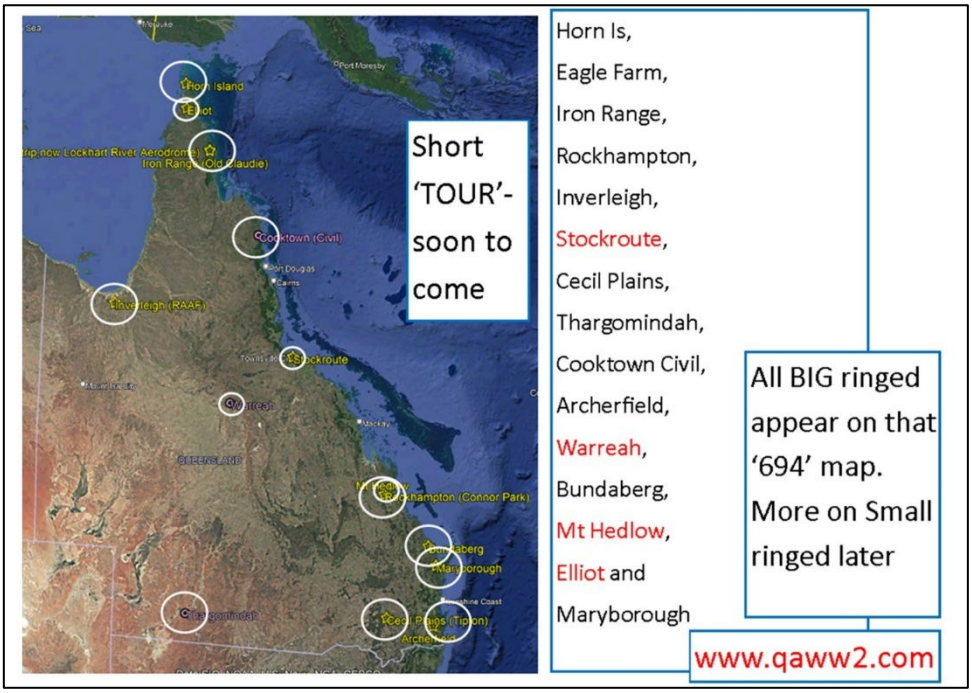

Figure 1: The short tour of 15 WWII airfields in Queensland.

"Made in Japan, Tested in America" led to his passing ATAIU photos to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.[3] Later, the 1989 Australian Aviation Museum's conference and Bob Mikesh's Hangar 7 visit led to a welcome follow-up stream of 'Signal Corps' and USAAF images, several of which made it into QAWW2. Bob Mikesh was then Curator of Aircraft at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.

NARA has been a late starter in digitising these photos relevant to Australia. Energetically encouraged by Bob Mikesh, by 2004 Jenny and I had visited NARA three times. I went looking for photos related to airfields in Queensland, but I came away realising the huge military, not just aviation, historical photo resource lying 'doggo' at NARA. Card-file indexed, these are difficult to search; to order images one needs to quote Record Group and neg number. I resolved to BHTI - Bring Home These Images.

Believing the US Army's Signal Corps black and white stilpix collection (NARA's RG111SC) to be dominant, I have developed an indexed photo database commanding around two-thirds of the likely 5,000-odd images pertaining to the Australian mainland during WWII. I aim to freely release this via my website (www.qaww2.com) and a USB, because it will be years before NARA will embrace this.

Airfields in Queensland during the war

Japan's entry into WWII was spearheaded by naval based aircraft. Such an airborne attack was only possible through use of 'shipborne airfields'. The famous American Doolittle raid on Japanese cities in April 1942, conducted in retaliation for the bombing of Pearl Harbour, showed that aircraft are useless without effective airfields and their host of service assets, not the least of which are trained personnel in all relevant endeavours.

December 1941 saw Brisbane with weather-prone, unsealed runways, and few sealed runways elsewhere in Queensland. With the 70 crated aircraft in the diverted Pensacola convoy due to arrive in Brisbane in January 1942, momentous preparation began. Archerfield was using the Eagle

[3] Mikesh's article "Made in Japan, Tested in America" was published in two parts: the first part in *Wings* (vol.12 no.3 [1982]) and the second part in *Airpower* (vol.12 no.4 [1982]).

Farm ground, where Charles Kingston-Smith had famously landed fourteen years prior, and an area at Runcorn as relief grounds. Amberley was part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, but a lot had to change and quickly.

For instance, serviceability notes on Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Landing Ground record drawings for Eagle Farm in December 1942 and November 1943 (Figs. 2 and 3) are testament to the February initiation of the Allied Works Council (AWC):

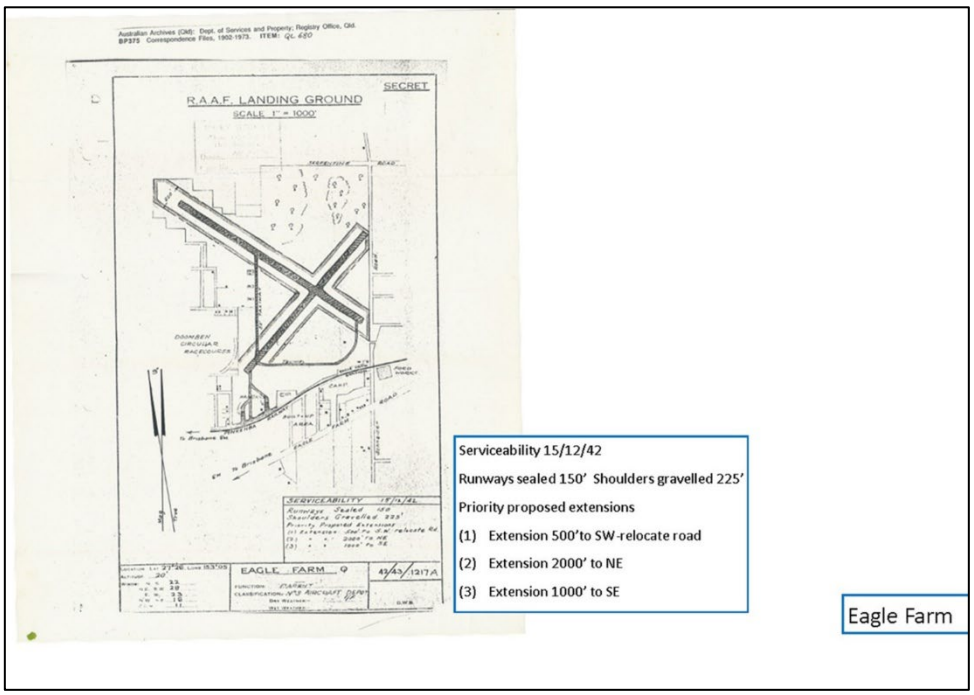

Figure 2: Eagle Farm RAAF landing ground, December 1942.

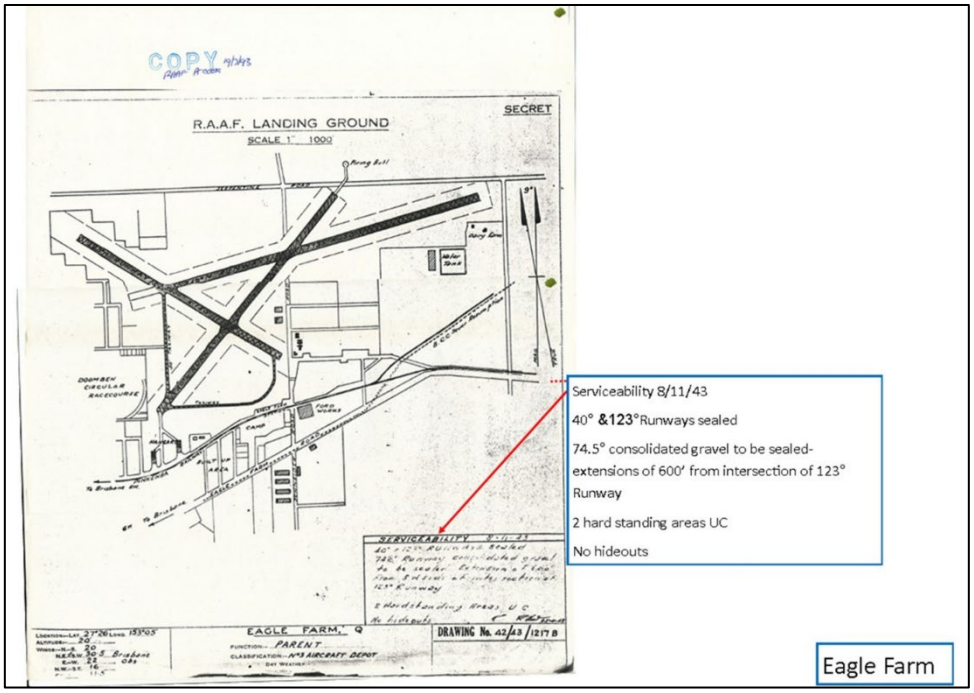

Figure 3: Eagle Farm RAAF landing ground, November 1943.

Fast forward to 1944:

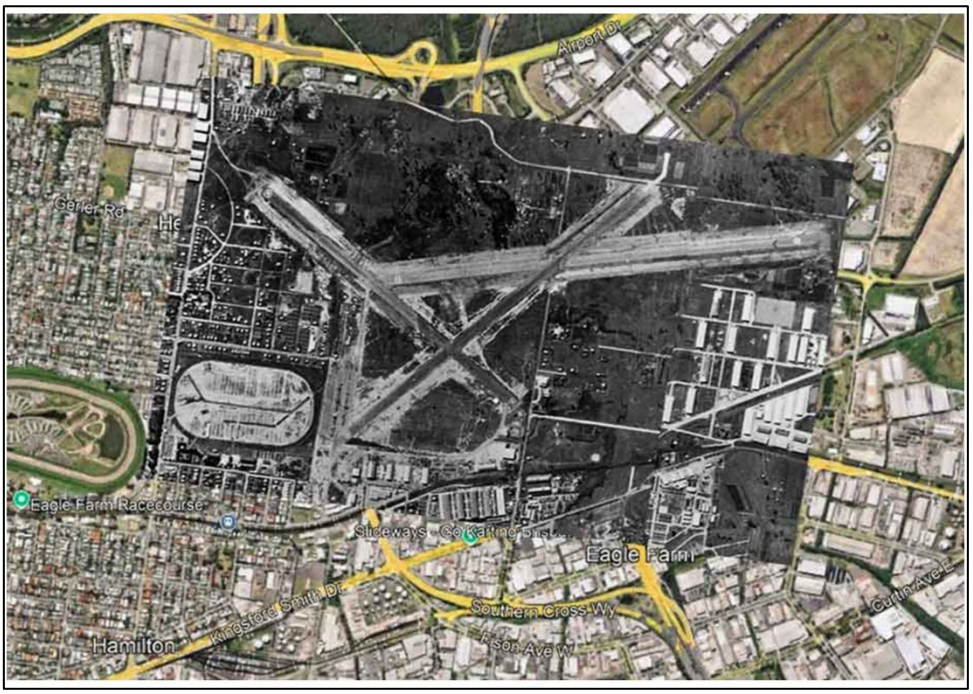

Figure 4: Eagle Farm aerial photograph March 1944, overlaid on a present-day Google Earth map of the site.

Prime among the needs of Queensland's airfields was upgrading several airfields (often through bitumen sealing) for ferry use northward, and site selection of new airfields for American aircraft set to arrive. It was evident that Australian efforts alone would not 'hack it', leading immediately to the earliest despatch of US Engineer units. The 46th Engineer General Service (EGS) regiment disembarked initially in Melbourne before coming to Queensland. In *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Japan*, Karl C. Dod wrote, "After two weeks of combat training near Melbourne the 46th Engineers left by rail for Northern Queensland, an area which might at any time become a battle zone. To protect themselves against enemy air attack the men mounted machine guns on the flat cars of their trains. During the trip they passed train load after train load of refugees headed southward. On 13 March the first of the troops reached Woodstock, a town 20 miles southwest of Townsville".[4]

Lieutenant-Colonel Albert G. Matthews was the regiment's commanding officer. Dod continues, "On 18 March the entire regiment began the work of clearing and grading three runways for a giant airfield at Woodstock. Matthews ordered round the clock operations scheduling three 8-hour shifts a day."[5]

On 22 March, RAAF's P-OHV (Jim) Trench reported the following by telephone to the RAAF's Directorate of Works and Buildings in Melbourne: "Woodstock aerodrome - 1 strip complete (cleared only) 2 others ready in 1 weeks' time".[6] From this it appears that the 'first aircraft to land' would have done so on the 70° strip on 22 March 1942, with P-39 Airacobra fighters arriving on 2 April.

In airfield design, the threat brought change from a simple wind accommodating triangle with little concern for dispersals, to separated runways, winding taxiways with dispersal pads and relevant camouflage concealment. Aircraft tricycle undercarriage, heavier wheel loads and cross wind landing technique all figured with ever present urgency, available construction resource and cost parameters. While the US-Australia Lend-Lease agreement probably saw cost taking a back seat, the inevitable reconciliation took years.

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[4] Karl C. Dod, *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Japan* (Washington, D.C.: Centre of Military History, United States Army, 1966), 125.
[5] Dod, *The Corps of Engineers*, 125.
[6] This quote likely comes from A705 item 71111256: A'dromes North East Area - General (42-45). See my book QAWW2 for detailed source lists.

An example is Mareeba airfield in Far North Queensland, commenced days after the Battle of the Coral Sea in early May 1942. Here dispersals got the full bomber-sized aircraft hideout camouflage treatment. This hideout design was the brainchild of French civil engineer Emil Brizay, a refugee from Singapore who was well known there to the British garrison. Quickly put to work in the Brisbane office of civil engineering company M R Hornibrook Pty Ltd, his 'hideout' morphed to the nailed wooden three pin arch IGLOO, prevalent at both Townsville and Eagle Farm airfields.

The entire US Air Depot 2 at Townsville (see Figs. 5-7), initially manned by the US 4th Air Depot Group, comprised dozens of these beefed-up arch structures with concrete floors and corrugated iron roofs. Depot 2 received deck cargo aircraft direct from the USA, erected, armament fitted and commissioned as fresh issue to hungry squadrons only 1500 kms ferry distance from the front. Repair of combat damage and armament revision were daily stuff for this US Depot 2.

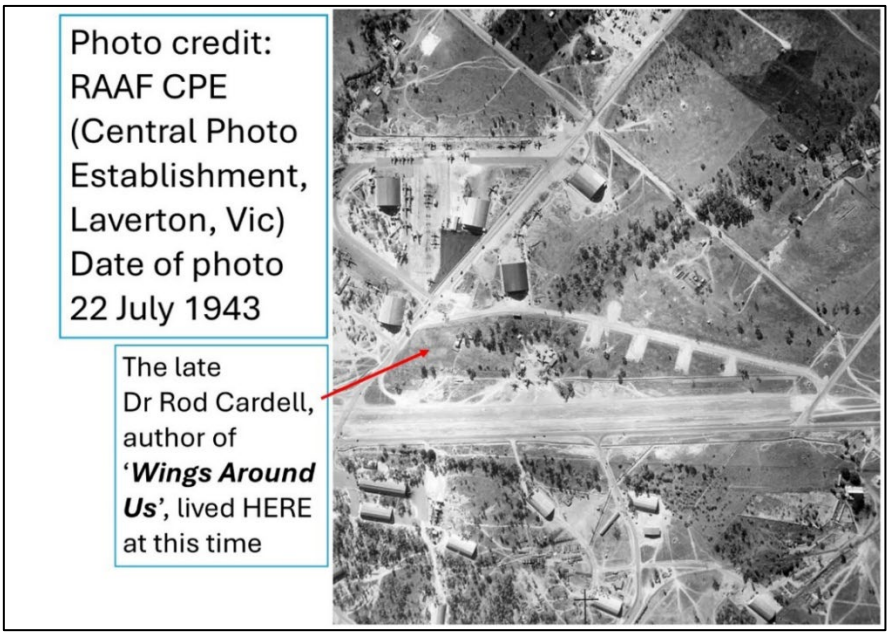


Figure 5: US Depot 2, Townsville.



Figure 6: US Depot 2, Townsville. Stockroute overlaid onto Google Earth at 0% transparency.

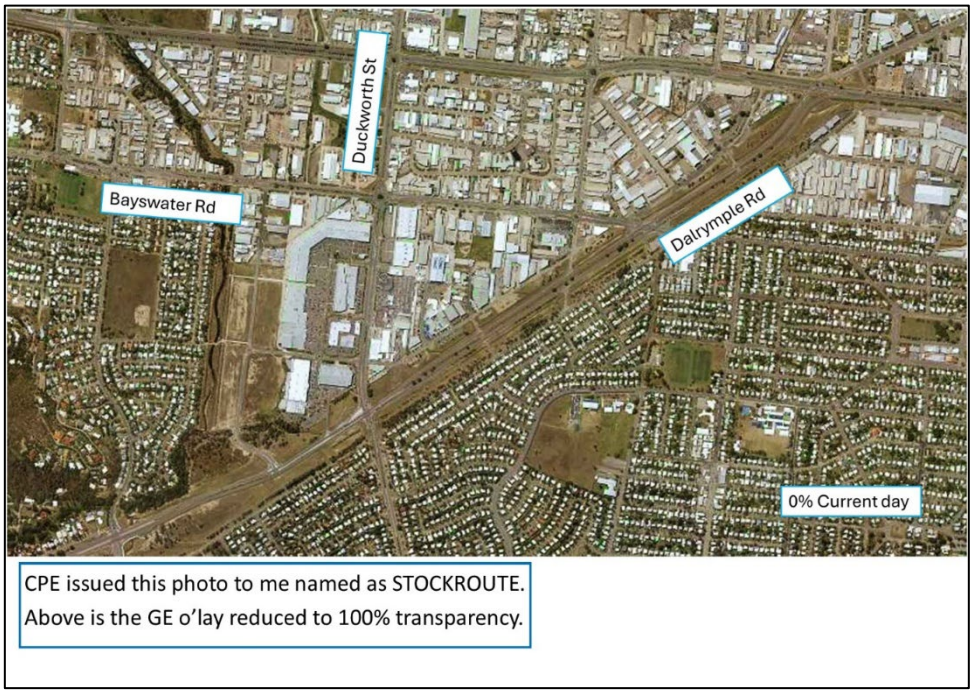


Figure 7: US Depot 2, Townsville. Stockroute overlaid on Google Earth at 100% transparency.

Charles Lindbergh and Queensland's airfields

In the context of 'ferrying', our coastal airfields all played their part. QAWW2 mentions a notable visitor to Brisbane in July 1944: Charles Lindbergh, the renowned Atlantic conqueror and flight endurance specialist.

In his wartime journals (published in 1970) Lindbergh records his time spent in New Guinea 'on Navy orders' informally flying P-38 Lockheed Lightning fighters to assess and advise how their flight range could be improved. It seems that General MacArthur's office had not been officially told about this, so Lindbergh was summoned to Brisbane. With pleasantries over, MacArthur "turned immediately to the subject […] saying that General Sutherland had told him that I [Lindbergh] said the P38's were capable of 700 miles."[7] Maximum range is achieved by flying at the maximum economical speed, for the changing weight of the plane. "MacArthur said it would be a gift from heaven if that could be done and asked me if I were in a position to go back up to New Guinea to [so] instruct the squadrons [...]".[8]

US 5th Airforce General George Kenney was present and "greeted me with a smile [...] told me he was going north in the morning and asked if I would like to go along. I thanked him and said I would like to hold over in Brisbane for one day. I asked if there might not be a plane I could ferry north the following day. Kenney said he could let me have a P-47 any time I wanted it."[9] Kenney tried to persuade Lindbergh to be "satisfied to fly around in a bomber instead of a fighter after you get there."[10] But Kenney knew he wasn't getting anywhere!

[7] C.A. Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1970), 873.
[8] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 873.
[9] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 874.
[10] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 874.

The irony of Lindbergh's departure from Eagle Farm came with the lodgement of his flight plan: “Army operations did not want to clear me nonstop to Horn Island, the captain in charge saying that a P-47 was not capable of making the flight from Brisbane to Horn Island without refuelling, and that he knew because he had gone up there several times in P-47's. I asked him what his fuel consumption had been. ‘About eighty gallons an hour.’ I told him that the R-2800 engine in the P-47 should be capable of cruising in the vicinity of fifty gallons an hour. He said he could hardly believe that and that he had never been able to approach such a low figure. However, he was very pleasant and considerate and cleared me direct to Horn Island as I requested.”[11]

Unusual tourist that he was, Lindbergh’s diary notes he “Dropped down to 200 feet above the ground over the valleys of northeastern Australia in the hope of seeing some wild kangaroos or wallabies, but sighted only cattle and an occasional small ranch building [...] arrived over Horn Island with enough fuel to reach Nadzab [New Guinea] with almost a two-hour reserve. Tried to contact Horn Island by radio to extend my flight plan to Nadzab, but without success. Landed at Horn Island […].”[12]

Two weeks later, flying a P-38 with the 475 FG, on a fighter sweep to Ceram Is, Lindbergh shot down an enemy fighter in combat. On 13 August 1944 he wrote, “[...] General Kenney landed at Biak yesterday and left orders that I am to do no more combat flying! Well, I am about to start home anyway [...]”.[13]

Lindbergh reported back to Brisbane on 21 August. Kenney was firm on the 'Hullabaloo' back home if word of his doings got about, but he and MacArthur were very appreciative of the benefits gained. MacArthur asked Lindbergh, “how many Japanese planes I had shot down. I told him, ‘One.’ ‘Where was it?’ ‘Off the south coast of Ceram.’ ‘Good, I'm glad you got one.’ […]” [14]

Airfields in Central and North Queensland

Rockhampton was an important ferry stop a fifth the way from Brisbane to Horn Island. As I wrote in QAWW2, “While defence strategy called for airfield build-up, there was also the need for contingency plans. Here movable 'obstacles' were fashioned and preparations made to mine the runways. Indeed this was done. Runway upgrading in 1987 brought echoes from WW2**.** Areas of suspicious subsidence appeared. Sure enough, after checking archive records, and some exploratory drilling, remnants of the 1942 demolition tunnels were discovered and hopefully put to rest.”[15] (See Figs. 8 and 9).

[11] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 875.
[12] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 875-876.
[13] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 904.
[14] Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals*, 912.
[15] Marks, QAWW2, 115.

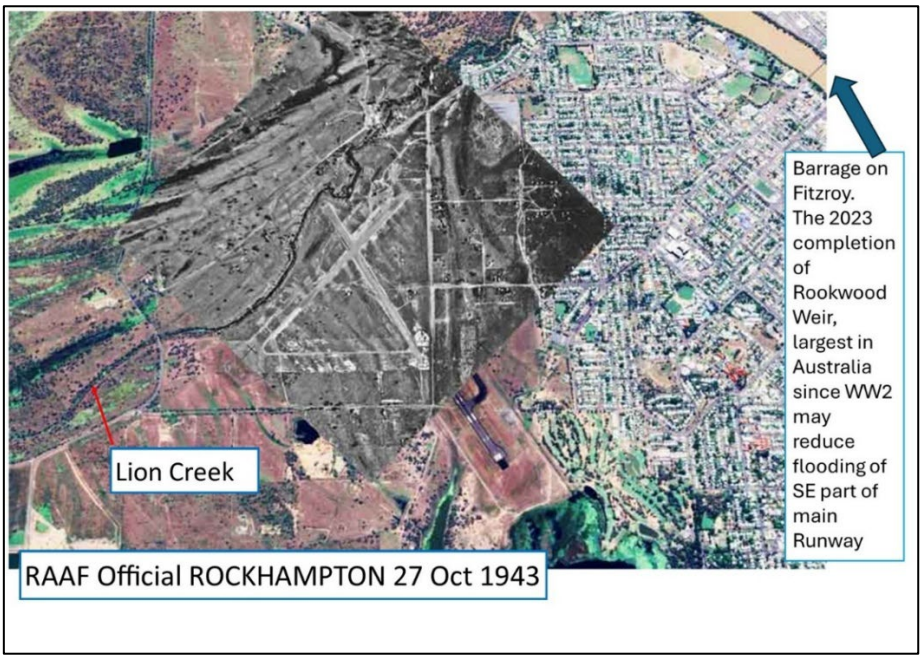


Figure 8: Rockhampton airfield, overlaid on Google Earth at 0% transparency.

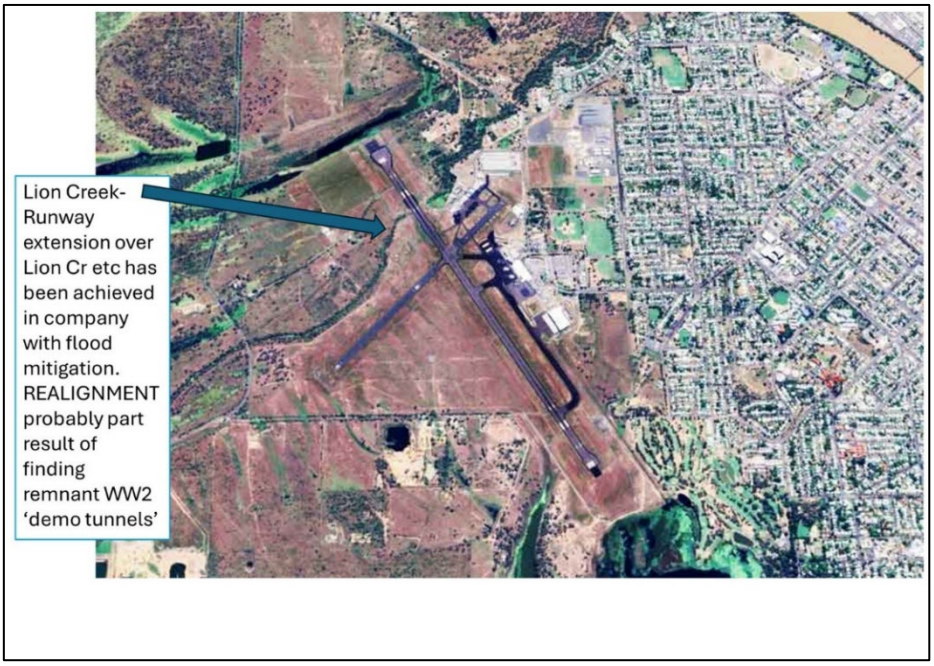


Figure 9: Rockhampton airfield, overlaid on Google Earth at 100% transparency.

Iron Range and Horn Island

Iron Range, 530km northwest of Cairns and 270km southeast of Horn Island, answered a need for a 'fall back' should Port Moresby be lost to the enemy. On the great circle through Port Moresby to Rabaul it is not coincidental that the airstrips were sited in jungle 'easy of camouflage'.

Early ferrying of much needed aircraft to Port Moresby was logically staged through Horn Island, where an airstrip already existed. The distance from Horn Island to Port Moresby is virtually equal to that from Iron Range to Port Moresby; it is not surprising that when Iron Range was available it sometimes became the point of departure for aircraft proceeding to Port Moresby.

A jetty-wharf existed at Portland Road, originally constructed to serve gold mining. British aviation magazine *Flight* published a review of air transport services in Australia. In it legendary Tom McDonald's North Queensland Airways is listed with a "fortnightly DH-84 Dragon service Cairns-Portland Roads".[16] Detachments of the US 46th Engineer Regiment built an airstrip on Tom McDonald's clearing, as well as two more strips named Gordon (after a local gold miner) and Claudie (for the nearby river).

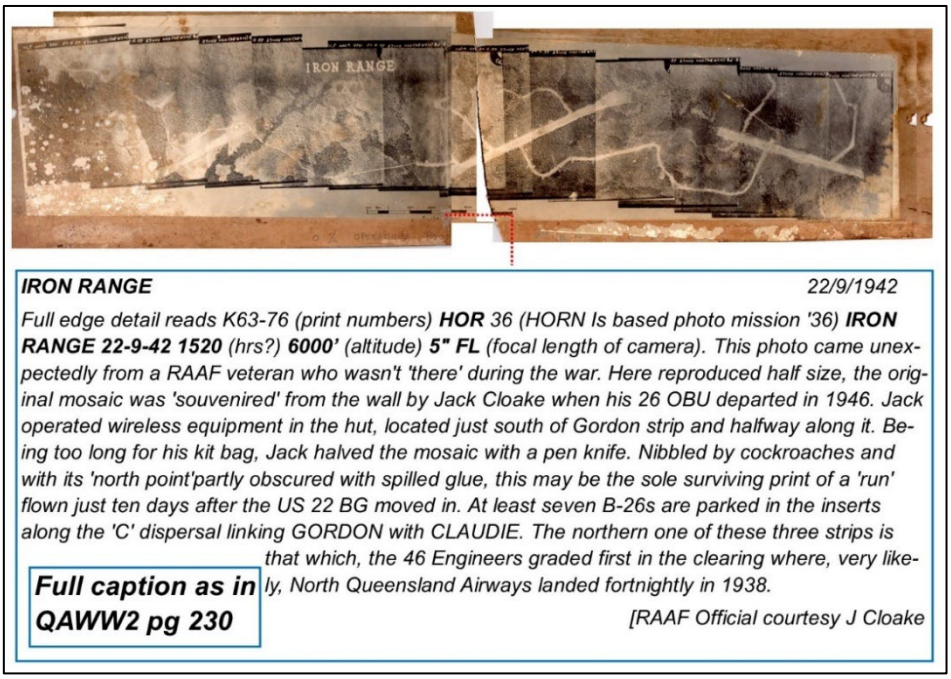


Figure 10: Iron Range Ops Hut wall mosaic, September 1942.

Cooktown and Cecil Plains

Dispersal siting varied depending on the scope for concealment in near vicinity to the airfields. The B-26 Marauder at Cooktown Civil in Figure 11 evinces an exposed site. Contrast this with Figure 12, which shows that camouflage netting was used in medium forest at Cecil Plains to conceal the airfield.

[16] "Review of air transport services in Australia as at 8 August 1938", *Flight* no.1545 (4 August 1938).

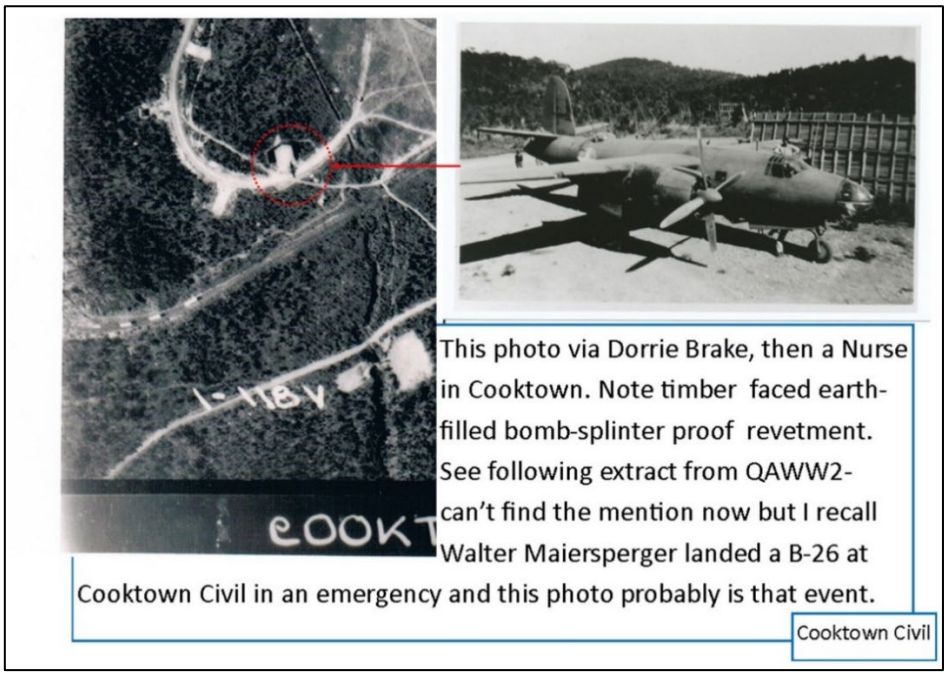


Figure 11: B-26 Marauder in revetment at Cooktown Civil.

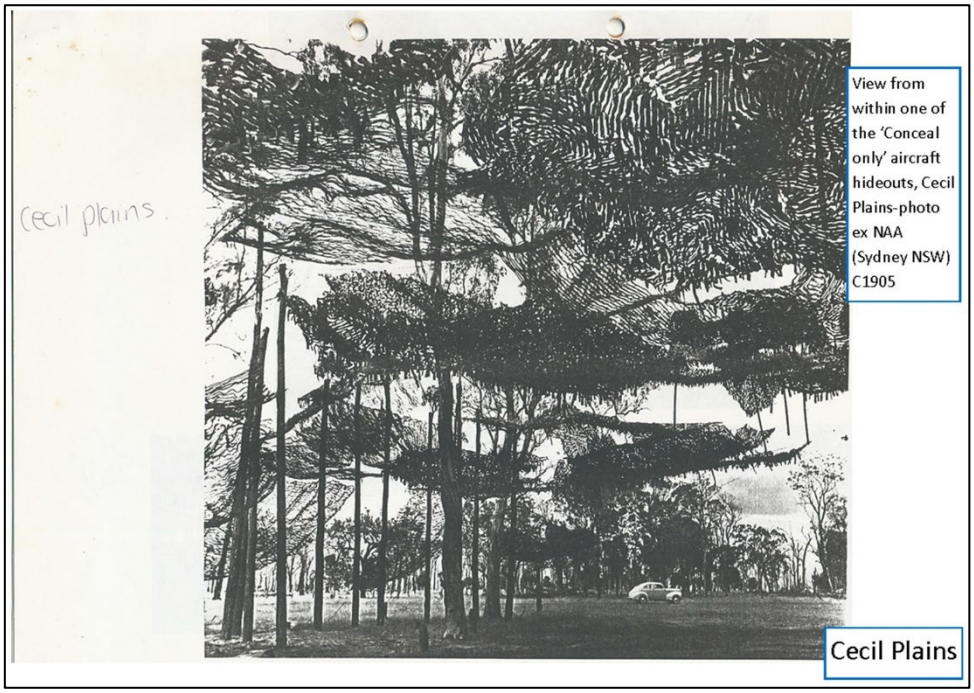


Figure 12: Camo netting strung from trees for concealment at Cecil Plains.

Maryborough

Late in the war, Maryborough hosted units of the UK's Royal Naval Air Service (Fig.13).

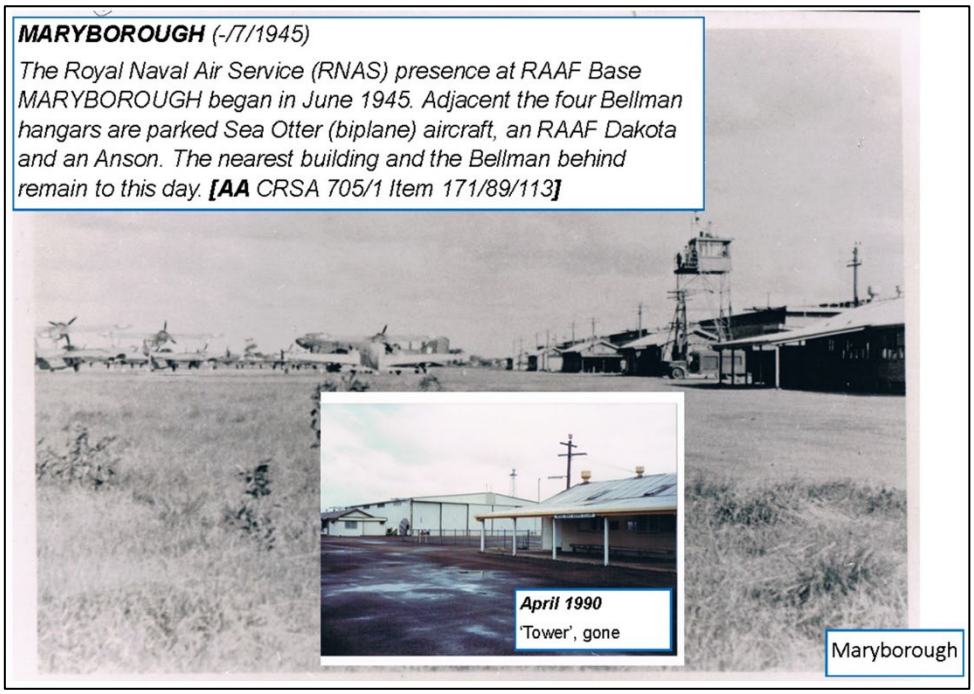


Figure 13: RNAS at Maryborough.

Bundaberg

I started primary school in Bundaberg. Mum saved my Central School ID tags and we played with kids from a neighbouring Netherlands East Indies Air Force family (Fig.14).

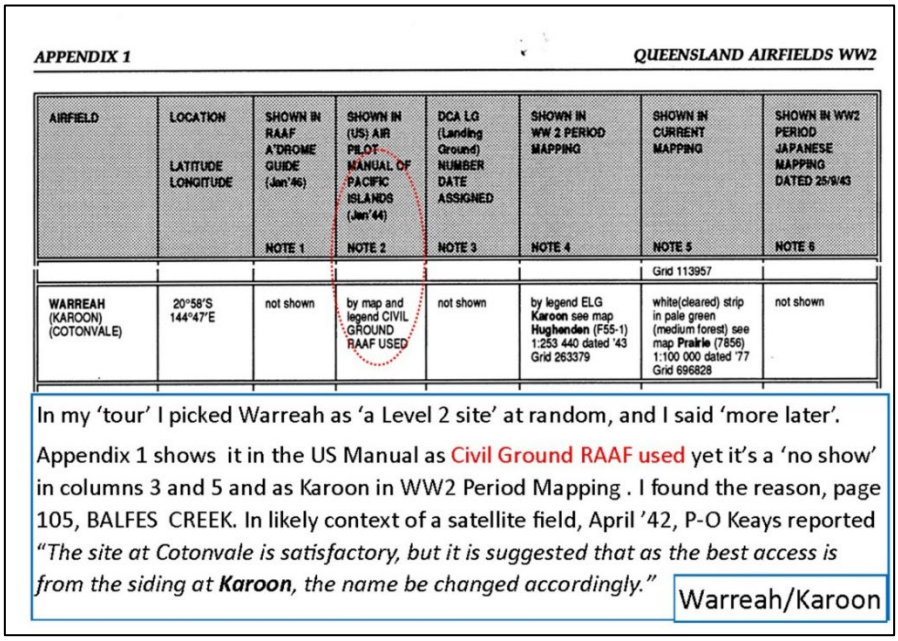


Figure 14 My school ID tags and Bundaberg re: NEIAF family neighbours.

Warreah/Karoon/Cotonvale

Warreah is a Level 2 site typical of the many sites that were cleared but discarded as the need passed. It's also an example of one of the multi-named sites, although Higgins at the 'tip' of Far North Queensland surely takes that cake! From a security perspective it's okay to confuse the enemy but the multiple names could become confusing. A decree was made on 3 June 1943 announcing "that the airdrome now known as Jacky Jacky and/or Red Point, which is located at 10° 55' S 142° 30' E near

the tip of Cape York Peninsula, is officially designated Higgins Field in honour of Flight Lieutenant Brian Hartley Higgins 400620, RAAF, killed on air operations 25 May 1943 - by command of Lieutenant General Kenney."[17] I understand the last straw came when that field was also mentioned as Muttee Head.



APPENDIX 1 — *QUEENSLAND AIRFIELDS WW2*

AIRFIELD	LOCATION LATITUDE LONGITUDE	SHOWN IN RAAF A'DROME GUIDE (Jan'46) NOTE 1	SHOWN IN (US) AIR PILOT MANUAL OF PACIFIC ISLANDS (Jan'44) NOTE 2	DCA LG (Landing Ground) NUMBER DATE ASSIGNED NOTE 3	SHOWN IN WW 2 PERIOD MAPPING NOTE 4	SHOWN IN CURRENT MAPPING NOTE 5	SHOWN IN WW2 PERIOD JAPANESE MAPPING DATED 25/9/43 NOTE 6
						Grid 113957	
WARREAH (KAROON) (COTONVALE)	20°58'S 144°47'E	not shown	by map and legend CIVIL GROUND RAAF USED	not shown	by legend ELG **Karoon** see map **Hughenden** (F55-1) 1:253 440 dated '43 Grid 263379	white(cleared) strip in pale green (medium forest) see map **Prairie** (7856) 1:100 000 dated '77 Grid 696828	not shown

In my 'tour' I picked Warreah as 'a Level 2 site' at random, and I said 'more later'.

Appendix 1 shows it in the US Manual as Civil Ground RAAF used yet it's a 'no show' in columns 3 and 5 and as Karoon in WW2 Period Mapping . I found the reason, page 105, BALFES CREEK. In likely context of a satellite field, April '42, P-O Keays reported *"The site at Cotonvale is satisfactory, but it is suggested that as the best access is from the siding at **Karoon**, the name be changed accordingly."*

Warreah/Karoon

Figure 15: Warreah/Karoon/Cotonvale is a site with multiple names.

Cairns

The 150° runway at Cairns was not bitumen sealed until 1943. Sited in close proximity to mangrove areas fringing the Barron River Delta, it had been hostage to troublesome flooding for years. Every upgrade was critical but probably none more so than one covered by a letter of appreciation addressed by Mr A.B. Corbett, then Director of Civil Aviation, to the Secretary of the Queensland Main Roads Commission. The occasion was the completion of the first section of extensive work on Cairns aerodrome during the last four months of 1940 at a cost of £20 081. The gist was, "In preliminary discussions between your engineer, Mr O F Anderson, and the Officers of the Department, Mr Anderson said that provided the work was started before the end of August he would complete it before the wet season in December at a cost of £20 000. [...] The total cost is 0.5% over the estimate and had there been no hold up in the delivery of flood gates it would have been under the estimate [...] More important still is the question of time. If this stage had not been completed before the wet season, Cairns Aerodrome would have been out of action to the RAAF and all but the lighter planes for weeks if not months [...] By your efforts the aerodrome has been open to all RAAF and civil aircraft throughout the wet season [...] at no time during construction was normal air traffic impeded in any way. In this case I would like to refer specifically to [...] your engineer at Cairns, Mr O F Anderson, [...] his organisation has been masterly and all officers of this Department who have come in contact with him speak of his cooperation in all matters. Furthermore, he did what he said he would do."18 This quote struck me as down to earth, prophetic and memorable. I looked for such openings for all of the forty airfields given illustrated text. This one was my choice for Cairns.

[17] This quote is taken from one of the National Archives of Australia items listed in QAWW2 Appendix 6 – Archival Sources (pg. 262).
[18] This quote likely comes from AA (Qld) BP37511 item QL2033: Cairns A'drome (34-51). See my book QAWW2 for detailed source lists.

Conclusion

Queensland's many wartime airfields played an important role in the Asia-Pacific theatre of war during World War II. The airfields were positioned in strategic locations throughout the state including at Cairns, Iron Range, Maryborough, Horn Island, and several bases in and around Brisbane. My research into these important airfields culminated in my book Queensland Airfields WW2 – 50 Years On and continues today with new information and revisions available on my website www.qaww2.com.

The VK-KNIL: Dutch Women and Service in WWII Australia

Adjunct Prof. Nonja Peters
Edith Cowan University & Curtin University

Introduction

War reshapes lives. It gave unanticipated, unexpected meaning to the four women whose wartime experiences I relate in this chapter. I explore the impact of World War II (WWII) in the Asia Pacific region on the lives of Ineke Thysse (Netherlands East Indies [NEI]), Dien Freese (Perth, Western Australia [WA]), Joan Butler (Wickepin, WA), and Anne Beetstra (Canada).49F1 For Ineke, the unexpected change took place in 1941 while for the other three women it came about in 1944. All four women joined the VK-KNIL, the Vrouwenkorps (Women's Corps) of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, KNIL), which was based in Australia to assist with the war effort. Anticipating Japan's capitulation, in the aftermath of war in the NEI the VK-KNIL were to be trained for deployment as part of the Rehabilitation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) missions' team. RAPWI was established by the British-led South-East Asia Command (SEAC) under the leadership of Lord Louis Mountbatten.50F2 Activated on 15 August 1945, immediately after Japan's surrender, RAPWI was created to coordinate the emergency recovery, medical care and evacuation of Allied prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees in Southeast Asia, including Java.

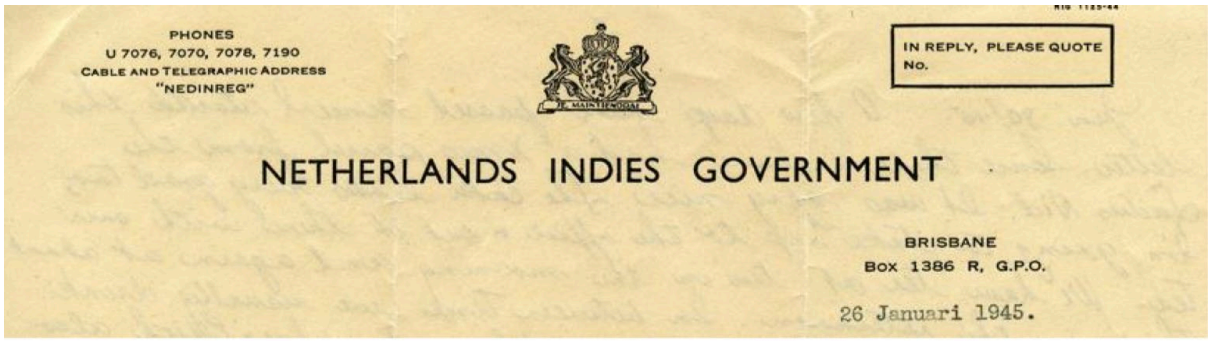


Background

The broader context for this chapter is WWII in the Asia-Pacific, which on 8 March 1942 saw the NEI government capitulate and Japan occupy the region. Earlier, from January until and including parts of March 1942, the NEI authorities had evacuated bureaucrats and military personnel to continue the war effort from Australia. The Australian government supported them on condition that they covered their own costs. Shortly after these personnel arrived in Australia, in 1942 Queen Wilhelmina (who was in London with the Dutch government-in-exile) officially established the Netherlands East Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand (NEICANZ). NEICANZ's headquarters were in Melbourne from 1942 until April 1944, when royal decree formally renamed the organisation the Netherlands Indies Government-in-Exile. This was the first and only foreign government-in-exile to exist on Australian soil. Key agencies were formed, including the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) for civil servants, the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) and the Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE). The KNIL, which

[1] This chapter is based on life stories, biographies, oral history interviews, autobiographies, newspaper articles, archival documents, and photographs.
[2] RAPWI missions were Allied military operations after World War II designed to recover, assist, and repatriate former prisoners of war and civilian internees. Their tasks included setting up reception depots for medical care, collecting records for war crimes trials and locating graves, and providing logistical support for returning personnel and their families. These missions also involved investigating war crimes and documenting the fate of missing personnel.

Indies Civil Administration (NICA) for civil servants, the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) and the Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE). The KNIL, which had been carrying out military operation from Australia since 1942, founded the VK-KNIL. In Australia, the VK-KNIL was militarised from the start but functioned as non-combative. Its mission was to provide unarmed humanitarian and auxiliary support, freeing men for combat duty. Women were to be trained and deployed in the Indies immediately after Japan surrendered.


PHONES
U 7076, 7070, 7078, 7190
CABLE AND TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS
"NEDINREG"

IN REPLY, PLEASE QUOTE No.

NETHERLANDS INDIES GOVERNMENT

BRISBANE
Box 1386 R, G.P.O.

26 Januari 1945.

Figure 1: Netherlands Indies Government letterhead.

Establishing the VK-KNIL

On 5 March 1944, through State Decree No. 1, Hubertus van Mook, Lt. Gov-Gen. of the NEI Government-in-Exile in Australia, founded the women's corps (VK) of the KNIL. Initially based in Melbourne, the corps shifted to Camp Columbia, Wacol, near Brisbane in July that year, when General MacArthur's South-West Pacific Area (SWPA) Command vacated the camp. A total of around 1,000 women from countries not occupied by Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan) served with the corps until the KNIL was abolished in 1950. Their contracts generally lasted between six months to three years.

Healthy women aged 18–45 were to be taught to serve as cooks, clerks, nurses, drivers or in administrative roles. One point of contention was whether married women should be admitted to the corps. The VK-KNIL required married applicants to obtain their husbands' written consent and prohibited them from having dependent children under the age of fourteen. Later, exceptions were made for women with children if proper care arrangements were in place, but admittance always reflected their primary role as wives and mothers. Women with valuable linguistic skills (such as Malay, Dutch and English) were to be accepted regardless of age.[3]

According to Nancy Markus, who examined the VK-KNIL through the lens of intersecting theories of gender, imperialism and militarism, recruitment remained restricted. She writes that despite the desperate need for labour, gender stereotypes continued to shape recruitment practices, adhering to societal norms regarding women's roles and their lower status relative to men in the Netherlands.[4]

Call to Arms: Recruitment & Enlistment

Calls for Dutch women—by birth or marriage—to enlist in the VK-KNIL were circulated by Dutch consulates in Allied territories. These included the US, Canada, South Africa, Curaçao, Suriname, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, the Netherlands West Indies, and in late 1944 recruitment calls were also issued in the liberated parts of the Netherlands. In Australia, recruitment campaigns were held in

[3] See also Sophia Kruyswijk-van Thiel, *Het Vrouwenkorps-KNIL*, Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers (2004).
[4] Nancy Markus, "Bakens voor volk, vaderland en vrouwenemancipatie: Genderbeelden en –praktijken bij de oprichting en ontwikkeling van het VK-KNIL en de MARVA tijdens de Indonesische dekolonisatie-oorlog (1945-1950)", MA Thesis, Utrecht University (2016), 86.

every capital except Darwin, with 51 women joining immediately. Eventually, 230 would enlist via Camp Columbia.

For initial recruits such as Ineke Thysse (4/VK), recruitment was by happenstance. Born in the hills near Bandung (NEI), Ineke dreamed of studying architecture in the Netherlands, but the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in 1940 stopped that. Instead, she sailed to Sydney in September 1941, staying at Hopewood House Finishing School for two months with friends. The early months were full of discovery, but after Japan occupied the NEI in March 1942 she was cut off from her family and financial support. A modest loan from the Dutch Consul (half of what her father was sending her) at least allowed her to begin her architectural studies at the University of Sydney. After living with a Dutch family for a few weeks, she opted to reside at the university's Women's College. Eager to help the war effort, she also volunteered at Air Force House, worked with the Land Army as a cherry picker, and served as a draughtswoman at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), which was located within the university grounds. When the VK-KNIL called for recruits in 1944, after much soul-searching, Ineke suspended her studies and enlisted.[5]

Initial WA recruits were, like Ineke, from wealthy NEI families. They included former schoolgirls Ellie Koen, a student at St Hilda's Anglican School for girls, and Mia la Bree (VK22), a student at Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC). Overseas boarders at WA private schools from Singapore, Malaya and the NEI routinely travelled home for the school holidays in one of three Blue Funnel ships. However, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the ship transporting Ellie was forced to return to Fremantle, leaving the students stranded in WA for the next four years. Fortunately, Ellie's mother and sister were able to evacuate to WA ahead of the Japanese Occupation of the NEI; Ellie had another sister in WA who had married a farmer and lived in the town of Morawa, north of Perth. Ellie, who had just completed Commercial college, joined the staff of US General Douglas MacArthur in Melbourne in mid-1942, before transferring to the VK-KNIL in Brisbane in 1944.[6]

On 4 July 1944, NEI government officials interviewed a second group of VK-KNIL candidates at Perth's Palace Hotel. Dien Freese, Joan Butler (VK43) and Jo Mol were among the group. Dien and Joan were from Dutch families who had settled in WA many years before. Jo Mol, a linguist, was among the evacuees who had fled to WA from the NEI in early 1942. After passing the interviews, the three women travelled by steam train to Melbourne for uniform fitting. All mentioned how the steam meant they were covered in ash, and the narrow-gauge rail in each state demanded changeovers at the borders between Western and South Australia, and at South Australia/Victoria. After their uniform fittings in Melbourne, the women travelled by train to Brisbane (with more changeovers at the borders between Victoria/New South Wales and New South Wales/Queensland), where their final destination was Camp Columbia.

In contrast, Anne Beetstra's path to becoming a VK-KNIL recruit began in Vancouver, Canada, where Crown Princess Juliana had relocated during the war. In February 1944, Anne attended an afternoon tea in the Princess' honour hosted by her uncle on his farm. During this meeting, Juliana asked Anne about her future plans. When Anne expressed interest in contributing to the war effort, the Princess

[5] Douglas Hurst, "Personal stories from the Women Army Corps – trained at Camp Columbia", Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc., 28 December 2025, https://campcolumbia.com.au/personal-stories-from-the-women-corps-trained-at-camp-columbia/.

[6] Oral history interview with Ella Bone by Dr Sue Summers for the Migration, Ethnicity, Refugees and Citizenship (MERC) Research Unit, Curtin University 2006. Ella was Ellie Koen's schoolfriend. Ella Bone was a volunteer with the WA Red Cross in 1942 which assisted Dutch refugees fleeing Java. In 1945, she volunteered to help with the Dutch refugees from the NEI sent to Fairbridge Farm School. In 1946 she joined the VK-KNIL, which probably resulted in her subsequent distinguished military career with the Australian Army.

mentioned that the Dutch Armed Forces were recruiting women of Dutch descent for administrative roles in the VK-KNIL.

To qualify for the corps, Anne had to regain Dutch citizenship, which she did in June 1944, surrendering her Canadian nationality. Two family friends, Alice and Theresa van de Wint, also enlisted with Anne. The recruits from British Columbia assembled in Victoria (the province's capital; not to be confused with the state of Victoria in Australia). They then travelled to Montreal where they were farewelled at the station by Princess Juliana and her daughters, before heading to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia (US) for training with the US Women's Army Corps (WAC).

On 19 November 1944 Anne, the de Wint sisters and their unit sailed for Brisbane. The voyage on a troop ship was gruelling—sweltering heat, cramped cabins at 71°C, seawater baths, no deck chairs and even the loss of the Royal Australian Air Force's kangaroo mascot, who jumped overboard! They docked in Brisbane on 3 December 1944. Anne would become head of the typing pool at Camp Columbia and was ultimately promoted to sergeant. The three Dutch-Canadian women became inseparable, also sharing dormitory style living at Camp Columbia.[7]



Figure 2: Anne W. Beetstra, Alice van de Wint, Theresa van de Wint at Camp Columbia. Smith-Burns, "Anne Beetstra".

The young women in the VK-KNIL came from a variety of origins and enlisted for a range of reasons: patriotism, loyalty, the hope of reuniting with interned family members, and post-war needs for food, clothing and employment.[8] For some, enlistment promised a new adventure or an escape; for others, it represented the fulfilment of an expected 'imperial duty'.[9]

Training

The type of training the women underwent was related to the duties that they would undertake—apart from the general military training, which was the same for them all. It included marching drills and driving lessons.

Ineke Thysse, who was recruited in Sydney, attended medical lectures with Dr. van Leent, a general practitioner employed by the *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij* (Royal Packet Company, KPM).

[7] Claire Smith-Burns, "KNIL Soldier Anne Wiebrigje (Anne Winnifred) Beetstra, stationed at Camp Columbia, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia", July 2025. Anne Beetstra's story was compiled by her daughter and is available from https://campcolumbia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Anne-Beetstra-story-re-Camp-Columbia.pdf.
[8] From the end of 1945, most new recruits were from the Netherlands. In addition, Douglas Hurst notes some ethnic Indonesian women were also recruited, such as Rita Pajow, Puck Manuputty, Tuti Wawaruntu, Juul Manteri, and Elly Tan. They all held the rank of sergeant.
[9] Markus, "Bakens voor volk, vaderland en vrouwenemancipatie"; G.J. Kippers, "Het Vrouwenkorps van het KNIL, 1943–1950", PhD thesis, Utrecht University (1985).

Dr. van Leent was responsible for the healthcare of more than 2,000 Indigenous Indonesian merchant seamen serving on KPM ships away from their home base in the Indies when Japan invaded the NEI.

The VK women received military training lasting from a few weeks to several months. Those enlisting in the liberated south of the Netherlands trained in England, while recruits from Canada, as noted above, trained with the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in the US. In Australia, initial training took place in Melbourne and Sydney. After the NEI Government-in-Exile relocated to Brisbane, training for some women took place alongside U.S. WACs at Camp Yeronga Park (an American army camp; now Yeronga Memorial Park). Other women trained within the Corps at the base at Camp Columbia.



Figure 3: Dutch WACs on the march. Source: Camp Columbia Heritage Association.

Training covered marching, military regulations, weapons handling and vehicle driving, all topics that were uncommon for women at the time and were seen as a step toward emancipation. Physical training at Camp Columbia was led by ex-boxer Bep van Klaveren, with rifle practice under M.P. Topman.[10]

During physical and combative training, each woman's skills were also assessed and matched to suitable roles, which they performed on an eight-hour workday basis. Medical training was provided in Sydney.

Ineke Thysse[11]

Ten months after enlisting, Ineke was posted to Hollandia in Dutch-controlled New Guinea (NG; now Papua/Western New Guinea in Indonesia) for two weeks. She was then posted to Morotai Island in the Maluku region for four months. Mrs Blom-Gelderman, a VK-KNIL recruiting officer in New York City, noted that, "The VK-KNIL was founded with a focus postwar of 'island hopping'. It was thought that the Indies should be conquered island by island and that the troops should go to such an island. Because, where there are troops, you need secretaries, medical analysts, pharmacists and doctors. At that time, these professionals were often recruited from the VK-KNIL, that was its

[10] For a profile of Van Klaveren, see https://www.olympedia.org/athletes/4738.

[11] Information about Ineke comes from Hurst, "Personal stories from the Women Army Corps".

purpose."[12] In Morotai, Ineke assisted in clinics, supported PT boat missions, and worked with Indigenous and West Indies nurses. Japan's surrender in August 1945 did not bring peace: Indonesia declared independence, sparking unrest that made travel and supply lines perilous for everyone including the unsuspecting VK-KNIL recruits.



Figure 4: Dutch VK-KNIL personnel were responsible for the efficient running of the hospital in Morotai, North Maluku Province. Sgt Ineke Thysse looks on over the wall circa May 1945. AWM 090620.

Ineke returned to Australia that same month before being sent to join RAPWI missions in Singapore and at Palembang and Lubuklinggua in Sumatra. Alongside two VK members from Canada, Ineke assisted with the registration of Dutch interned by the Japanese. She also helped distribute clothing. In Palembang, SEAC Gurkha and Sikh troops protected the VK women from young Indonesian freedom fighters (*pemuda*) who were violent towards people they perceived as Dutch or pro-Dutch. The *pemuda* kidnapped several VK-KNIL personnel, who were later rescued by SEAC troops.[13] Niki van Wijck, for example, was captured by the militia on her way from Semarang to Surabaya. She was held at the Hotel Oranje. She thought she would not escape her captivity alive.[14]

Sadly, the humanitarian nature of the VK-KNIL's work gave them no protection and force of arms was essential. Faced with Indonesian anti-colonial sentiment targeting Dutch and Chinese people, British forces in Indonesia had brought in Ghurkas and Sikhs and rearmed some Japanese troops. These measures saved many lives, but many Dutch and Chinese still were killed in these times.[15]

In December 1945, Ineke was reunited with relatives in Bandung, West Java, including her brother, who had been a POW in Japan. She later joined her husband on Banka Island, serving in the local hospital until her demobilisation on 31 December 1946.

[12] See NPO Radio1 podcast series "Mijn Oma de Soldaat", available at https://www.nporadio1.nl/podcasts/mijn-oma-de-soldaat.
[13] Life story of Dien Freese, Peters Research Collection.
[14] Unpublished notes by Douglas Hurst, given to me by David van Embden.
[15] Doug Hurst, unpublished notes via David van Embden, son of Joan van Embden-Butler.

by Dutch naval personnel and Dutch people living in Sydney. Dien also nursed at Camp Victory in Casino, a Dutch-run camp for Indonesians including political prisoners and other Dutch civilians and soldiers.[16]





Figures 5 &6:Dien Freese and Jo Mol are welcomed along with other Dutch women, Yeronga 1944. Camp Columbia Heritage Association.

Joan Butler[17]

Joan Butler came from Wickepin in WA's wheatbelt. At Camp Columbia, her first accommodation was a room in a secure part of the base. Her nearest neighbour was Rika Kroeze, General Spoor's second wife (m.1938-1947).[18] At Camp Columbia Joan underwent military training, including driving lessons. She also attended Malay and Dutch language classes two evenings per week. Military training instructions were in Dutch, so it was necessary for her to learn 'proper' Dutch: Joan's parents came from the Dutch province Zeeland and only spoke the *Zeeuws* dialect (Zeelandic), as did Joan.




Figures 7 and 8: Joan Butler and Anne Beetstra at Camp Columbia, 1944; the women's mess. Courtesy David van Embden.

Assessing new recruits for specific jobs meant tryouts. Joan was tried on the switchboard but preferred a clerical position in the Supply Department. She kept records on equipment cards of clothing and other needs which the army had in store. After a few months she was promoted to Corporal. Army life was "definitely different from my life on my parents' farm."[19] Joan noted,

[16] Freese life story. On Indonesians in Australia see Jan Lingard's chapter in this e-book.
[17] Oral history interview by Douglas Hurst with Joan van Embden, nee Butler.
[18] General Simon Hendrik Spoor (1902–1949), Chief of Staff of the KNIL, was married three times during his life.
[19] Joan Butler quoted in Hurst, "Personal stories from the Women Army Corps".

clothing and other needs which the army had in store. After a few months she was promoted to Corporal. Army life was "definitely different from my life on my parents' farm."[19] Joan noted,

> I was a Land Girl, doing my part for the men at the front. I milked cows, picked fruit, managed a team of eight horses out in the paddocks and rounded up sheep with our Border Collie dog […][20]

Joan returned home to marry Otto van Embden. Otto was a B25 Mitchell navigator/bombardier. He and his family were part of the group known as the *Engelandvaarders*, people who fled the Netherlands for England just before the Nazi German occupation. Otto trained in the US at the Dutch flying school at Jackson, Mississippi, and was sent to Australia to fly in operations for the NEI Air Force No. 18 Squadron. This squadron operated mostly from Batchelor airfield, just south of Darwin, in the Northern Territory.[21] A consequence of marriage to Otto and pregnancy meant Joan would not be deployed as a VK-KNIL in the NEI when war ended, as per its mission. Instead, she flew to Biak Island, then to Bandung to join Otto after their son David was born. Otto and Joan eventually settled in the Netherlands after a few years of seesaw migration between Western Australia and Amsterdam.

Anne Beetstra[22]

Anne Beetstra described life in Camp Columbia as comfortable by wartime standards. Meals were served in large mess halls, and domestic duties were handled by *djongos* (Indigenous Indonesian men) who even polished the girls' boots. Married couples at Camp Columbia could also use this support. On 26 January 1945, Anne wrote:

> I am getting to feel very much at home here… I shall be sorry to leave. The weather especially suits me… warm during the day and cool at night.

The greatest challenges she described included pests: bugs, ants and relentless mosquitoes. Clothes rationing also impacted daily life. Each person received 45 clothing stamps per annum; nine stamps bought a dress while shoes were worth six stamps, making shopping highly restricted. Anne's new cotton dress even shrank in the rain during an outing with her *Jonkheer* (Dutch gentry) date.

Most invasive was the war's human cost. It weighed heavily. The VK-KNIL women often had to hear about friends they had made at the Dutch Club, dying in combat. Anne records how her particular weekend date from one of the islands had been executed when the Japanese invaded the NEI; the man's sisters who had been sent to be 'comfort women' were by war's end catatonic from the trauma.

Despite the underlying realities of war, Anne and others recalled their time at Camp Columbia as feeling "spoiled". It was for them all a rare period of camaraderie, structure and unexpected joy amidst global upheaval.

In their free time, the women went to outdoor movies on base, horse riding, Sunday drives, trips to Surfer's Paradise on the Gold Coast (where sunburn was an issue), and they occasionally dined at the posh Lennon's Hotel, where General MacArthur stayed with his family. However, that needed an invite from an officer with a car.

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[19] Joan Butler quoted in Hurst, "Personal stories from the Women Army Corps".
[20] Butler quoted in Hurst, "Personal stories from the Women Army Corps".
[21] No.18 Squadron was a joint Dutch and Australian bomber squadron formed in Canberra in April 1942. Staffed by a mixture of Dutch & Australian personnel under Royal Australian Air Force operational command. The Squadron RAAF flew over 900 operational sorties in anti-shipping raids, bombing missions, & supply drops. However, 102 airmen including 25 Australians were killed in action during the war.
[22] Smith-Burns, "Anne Beetstra".

The most popular spot for Camp Columbia staff was the *Dutch Club*, reached by shuttle bus from the camp to Brisbane's town hall. There they danced the night away with military and civilian personnel—pilots, sailors, officers, NCOs, soldiers and NICA men—all part of the war effort. Anne enjoyed several *beaux*. Two of the women met their future husbands there: Ineke married a NICA man, and Joan her Squadron 18 navigator.

Time for the VK's to go to the Indies

In late September 1945, VK-KNIL and NICA administrative personnel were transported from Camp Columbia to Java on troopships and military aircraft. NICA's role was to restore Dutch colonial authority in the Indies. Upon arrival, they encountered walls covered with slogans advocating Indonesian independence, written in English. These were aimed at SEAC, which had been tasked with the interim governance of the NEI until the Dutch could resume control.



Figure 9: Street slogans in Indonesia and a Dutch army tank, c.1946. NIOD collection via BeeldbankWO2, item no. 211341. Used with permission.

Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945 had not brought peace. Just two days later, Sukarno proclaimed independence, sparking the Indonesian Revolution. Dutch attempts to re-establish control clashed with Republican resistance. The six-week power vacuum following the end of the war before SEAC arrived saw *pemuda* (Indonesian youth), some of whom had been combat trained by the Japanese, organise a powerful resistance movement against the Dutch. Consequently, the NEI was not the safe environment that the government-in-exile had assumed VK-KNIL personnel would be deployed to.



Figure 10: Dien Freese. Image from Dien Freese's memoir, Peters research collection

Ineke was among the first VK-KNIL nurses flown to Java and Sumatra in this period immediately following the end of WWII. The women were tasked with serving as welfare officers with RAPWI and with the Displaced Persons (DP) offices, which sought to reunite families the Japanese had split asunder. RAPWI's tasks also included securing POW camps, caring for liberated prisoners, recovering records and apprehending war criminals. The VK-KNIL's mission was to register and reunite Dutch civilians with family members from POW camps, internment centres and forced labour sites in Thailand, Japan and other occupied territories. For example, Dien Freese (shown in the photo on the left) was flown to Singapore with 25 Dutch soldiers, where she was accommodated in a hotel. Each day she was taken to the women's internment camp as part of the RAPWI team assessing the internees' health and gathering their demographic details to send to the DP office, so that assistance could be provided immediately. The intention was that those who were well enough to travel would be taken to the Netherlands, while the sick would be sent to hospital.

Dien was overcome by the dreadful conditions in the internment camp: women in rags, bodies swollen from hunger. She wrote,

> "Many ran to us, crying and laughing, desperate for news of their husbands or the outside world. News from husbands could bring joy or grief, and I often felt like crying alongside them. All we could offer was our sorrow and hugs.
>
> We ate with them, sharing large drums of fortified "stump pot"—mashed potatoes with cabbage and sausage. It reminded me of pig slop but compared to what they had endured for three and a half years, it was a feast.
>
> After two weeks, I was sent to a hospital in Medan, Sumatra with 25 Dutch women needing surgery. I spent the next eight months on loan to the hospital. The doctors and matron were kind; the Japanese nurses hadn't experienced the hunger of the interned. The patients—mostly former internees—had heartbreaking stories of hard labour, little food and beatings. Many had hernias from heavy lifting, and it was rewarding to see them regain strength after surgery. Some hid food, unable to believe their freedom would last.
>
> Mothers struggled, caring for children. Outside, Indonesia was restless, seeking independence. At that time, I knew nothing about why flags declaring "Merdeka" were everywhere. Groups of men marched, sometimes gunfire was heard. Some servants joined the 'rebels', but most stayed, supported by the matron and given food."[23]

[23] Freese life story.

Anne's experience was quite different to that of Ineke and Dien. In Batavia/Jakarta she was put to work as secretary to the Food Administrator of the NEI. She resided at the Ursuline Convent, along with most VK-KNIL women in Batavia. While there she became engaged to Louis Hochberg. However, on her return to Canada she called the engagement off and eventually married a Canadian.[24]



Figure 11: Anne Beetstra's Dutch passport, issued in 1944. Smith-Burns, "Anne Beetstra".

Conclusion

The transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia at the end of December 1949 saw the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL), including the VK, disbanded on 26 July 1950. The 1,000 women the VK-KNIL enlisted had been vital to the army's functioning and, post-war, to the recovery of the interned. Markus notes that women serving in the army was ground-breaking in Dutch society, where their role was subordinate.[25] Working alongside men had an emancipatory effect on some of the women. Although assigned mainly "feminine" duties, women gained training, independence, new skills and an income. In the Indies, they had held a paradoxical status—socially inferior as women, but superior as Europeans. The VK-KNIL years impacted all the women's postwar lives.



Figure 12: VK-KNIL recruits in at the training camp in Bandung, 1949. Source: Jwallast via Wikimedia Commons.

[24] Smith-Burns, "Anne Beetstra".
[25] Markus, "Bakens voor volk, vaderland en vrouwenemancipatie".

For many, belonging to the VK-KNIL was life-defining. The stories of Ineke, Dien, Anne and Joan reveal the courage of these young women whose contribution to the war effort involved navigating the challenges of war, revolution, loss, migration and gender roles. Through their presence at Camp Columbia, the women of the VK-KNIL left behind a legacy that forms an integral part of the shared Dutch and Australian wartime heritage—one that is now gradually being reclaimed through community memory, historical research, public exhibitions and this symposium.

PART

2

THE WAR COMES TO AN END AND THE IMPACT OF ALLIED ACTIVITIES

- **Jack Ford's Australian history and its Dutch-European Framing**
  Neville Buch
- **"We Began to Belong More and More": Dutch Evacuees from the Netherlands East Indies in Wartime Australia**
  Robyn Van Dyk
- **Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia**
  Jan Lingard
- **Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile: Archival Sources at National Archives of Australia**
  Georgina Devlin

Jack Ford's Australian history and its Dutch-European Framing

Dr. Neville Buch

Introduction

Dr. Ford (1957–2025) was one of my close friends and a colleague in Australian academic history. His major work was his PhD thesis and book, *Allies in a Bind: Australia and the Netherlands East Indies Relations during the Second World War*. I am not a military historian like Dr. Ford, but I understood the European framing of his topic, and we had many conversations about what Dr. Ford had learnt from the Dutch perspective.

This paper has three parts. After the introduction is an exegesis of *Allies in a Bind*, showing the Dutch–European framing underpinning Dr. Ford's analysis. Exegesis is the careful, analytical interpretation of a text to uncover its original, intended meaning. The third part of the chapter is a hermeneutic description of the interpretive rules within that framing. Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation; an application of rules to the exegesis. Together, these explain how Australian military and intellectual histories intersect with the story of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Government-in-Exile, as articulated in detail by Dr. Ford and illuminated here as cognition history.

Dr. Ford's key thesis in *Allies in a Bind* explains why the alliance between the Dutch and Australians deteriorated between 1941 and 1945. The centre of this story is Brisbane's Camp Columbia, originally an American staging point for the Pacific War, and later home to the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile. This was the only time Australia has hosted a foreign government legitimately established on its soil.[1]

The value of Dr. Ford's book lies in how he synergised diplomacy, politics and military affairs. The facts align within a framework of comprehension.[2] Diplomatically, the Dutch had few bargaining chips because their military assets were not valued by Australian high command, whether in Melbourne or Brisbane. At the intellectual core of this perception of the Dutch assets is General Douglas MacArthur's political biases. An American, MacArthur needed to reassure Australians about their government's war aims, while showing little concern for Dutch interests. Meanwhile, the Dutch government (exiled in London after the Nazi German invasion and occupation of the Netherlands) was focused on the European theatre of war, relegating the Indo-Pacific to a place of secondary consideration. The Dutch government's focus on the Dutch homeland and consequent sidelining of its colony resulted in the population of the Netherlands East Indies being left with micro-solutions and micro-thinking, isolated from the Dutch government.

American macro-thinking prioritised the European theatre of war and initially viewed the conflict in the Pacific as a defensive war. Consequently, Australian macro-thinking tried to balance reliance on American resources with maintaining policy control over the 'Defence of Australia'. In this three-way relationship, the Dutch could not rely on Australia.[3] Supreme command lay with the Americans,

[1] The key source for footnotes is Jack M. Ford, *'Allies in a Bind': Australia and the Netherland East Indies in the Second World War*, First Edition, Australian Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association, Queensland branch, Loganholme QLD, 1996.
[2] A general comment of Dr. Ford's treatment across the source.
[3] Britian was the fourth ally but in the local-national question, which Dr. Ford examined, for the Dutch, the British played a very minor role.

making ‘control’ the key cognitive issue (control is both a basic concept in cognition studies and a central principle in military doctrine). Dr. Ford also highlighted personality as a factor in the Australia-Netherlands relationship, noting:

> […] personality clashes […] were never overcome, with each side blaming the other for the problems that were occurring in their relationship.
>
> Indeed, blame only tended be transferred from one personality to another so that during the course of the War, the Australians had shifted their antagonism from one NEI official, Van Mook, to another official, Van der Plas, whereas the Dutch originally suspected only the Australian Minister of External Affairs, Evatt of being behind Australian designs on the NEI but were convinced by August 1945 that it was the idea of the entire Australian Government, including new Prime Minister Ben Chifley. What was worse for the Dutch, was that the most immediate role model in foreign relations available to the Australians was the “Big Power versus Small Power” syndrome as practised against Australia by the US and Britain.[4]

This reflects a European (especially Dutch) historical framework of thinking throughout the twentieth century, in which the United States was a cognition target; that is, the place where the reader is getting the thinking from. The United Kingdom, as the other Anglo-American imperial power, found it much more difficult to resist American foreign policy initiatives than European nations, and the alliance between the two states was stronger because they shared an Anglo-American worldview. The ‘European War First, Pacific War Second’ policy was an American foreign policy initiative.[5] Although Australia had been formally independent from the UK since Federation in 1901, the country remained consumed by imperial thinking and was beholden to the British ‘European War First’ policy. The Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Evatt, was an Australian nationalist and believed Australians were too meek in foreign affairs. At the same time, Australians were consumed by the belief that the nation’s survival was at stake, as seen in the myth of ‘The Brisbane Line’. Another myth was that ‘The Yanks saved Australia’, which later became a bargaining chip used by the United States in Cold War politics.

Unfortunately, populist Australian thinking has often drifted into unhelpful speculation. For example, whether American casualties would have been fewer if the atomic bomb had not been used; would US President Truman have been under less pressure to use atomic bombs if military strategy had been allowed to start in the Indo-Pacific and cause a stalemate in the European theatre of war; or whether bypassing the island-hopping strategy might have brought peace sooner. Likewise, speculation about whether the Japanese might have overthrown their military rulers under altered conditions is equally uncertain. As in all alternative histories, we cannot truly know how things might have played out, nor foresee all potential consequences. For instance, Nazi Germany might have survived longer before collapsing from internal pressures, as the Soviet Union later did.

Speculation aside, what is not speculative is that policy thinking had to work from these unknowns, and decisions were made accordingly. In Dr. Ford’s book, he argues that one such decision was the duping of the Dutch. That is not speculation – it happened.

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[4] [4]. Bracketed numbers refer to page numbers in the source (*Allies in a Bind*).

[5] The USA and UK agreed to the ‘Europe First’ or ‘Germany First’ policy in December 1941. Under this policy, the USA and UK would prioritise repressing Nazi Germany within Europe by focusing a majority of their resources on this theatre of war; a smaller number of resources would be dedicated to the Pacific, to counter Japan.

The Exegesis

In examining passages from *Allies in a Bind*, several points about the Australia-Netherlands relationship in the war stand out:

1. Senator Evatt, the Australian Minister for External Affairs, played political games in communications between Australia, the NEI Dutch, the Dutch Government-in-Exile in London (led by Prime Minister Pieter Gerbrandy), and Indonesian nationalists. That said, Evatt was not the only Australian politician or bureaucrat to do so.
2. Geopolitics of the time pressured people into using tactics of 'dishonesty'. The open truth was rarely stated.
3. Evatt's nationalist position led him to argue that the Dutch had abandoned their territories without resistance and were unlikely to govern the NEI after the war. He proposed either Australian control or a condominium over the Dutch islands. (p. 10)
4. There were multiple tensions in Dutch–Australian interactions within General MacArthur's command: KNIL forces were too weak to resist the Japanese; Dutch attempts to seek Australian help were frustrated by Australia's focus on the Papuan Campaign; misaligned priorities between MacArthur and Rear-Admiral Frederik Willem Coster of the Royal Netherlands Navy led to wasted defence efforts in the Arafura Sea islands, and later air operations were required to neutralise the Japanese there; Dutch success at Merauke was overshadowed by tensions created by the transfer of Tanah Merah internees to Australia. (pp. xiii, 5, 211, 213, 242, 243, 234; reference on bibliography 4)
5. In my analysis, individuals have agency in their decision-making, even when there are negative consequences, so there is no argument that 'the historical environment made someone do X'. People choose, even under pressure. Moralising cowardice, for instance, is unhelpful – ethics cannot be reduced to simple condemnations or rationalisations.
6. In my analysis, personality matters. Policy rhetoric can hide personal flaws of the people making the decisions. Bad policy may follow from bad personality decisions.

The Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation. In *Allies in a Bind*, Dr. Ford drew out the semantic significance of events relating to the Australia-Netherlands relationship during the war:

- Hermeneutic Rule 1: Power
  Diplomatically, the Dutch had no bargaining strength because their military assets were not valued by Australian command.
- Hermeneutic Rule 2: Facts (as determined externally)
  Military relations between the Dutch and Australians, plus the 'European War First, Pacific War Second' policy decision, sealed the fate of the NEI.[6]
- Hermeneutic Rule 3: Politics–Ideology
  The Roosevelts' thinking in the charter of the United Nations favoured NEI autonomy. Dr. Ford explains that President Roosevelt shifted between pro-Dutch and anti-Dutch stances depending on his audience.[7]
- Hermeneutic Rule 4: Agenda
  Evatt did not see the war's purpose as restoring Dutch rule in the NEI.[8] This position was complicated by Australian and Dutch fears about people who favoured Indonesian

[6] [1]
[7] [228]
[8] [10]

nationalism (interned in the NEI) would escape internment and support the Japanese.[9] This caused further friction between the Queensland Government and the Federal Government when the Queensland Government refused to allow Indonesian nationalists into the state as internees; they were forced to relocate to New South Wales.[10] Evatt subtly advanced Indonesian nationalist interests as Australian interests.[11]

- Hermeneutic Rule 5: Globalism
  Tensions between the Gerbrandy Government (in London) and the NEI Government-in-Exile (in Australia) increased at the end of 1942, officials, with Australian parties quietly taking sides. The tensions were often more about personality than policy.[12] Dr. Ford argues that Evatt and the department of External Affairs played the London Dutch against the NEI Dutch – and both against the Indonesian nationalists.[13]
- Hermeneutic Rule 6: Globalism and the Parochial Position
  Tensions between the Gerbrandy Government and the NEI Government-in-Exile were based on different opinions of what should happen with the Indies after the war, with the NEI officials agitating for more independence from the Netherlands. Australia exploited this situation, cognitively influencing how the NEI officials in Australia were dealt with.
- Hermeneutic Rule 6: Comprehension
  Much of the intrigue within the NEI Government-in-Exile and the Dutch–Australian military command reflects deeper cognitive influences within military micro-decisions and their actual consequences in the war.[14]

Conclusion (Ford–Buch)

Seven key points arise from both my analysis of *Allies in a Bind* and Ford's own conclusions:

1. Political relations between the Netherlands, the United States, and Australia were unequal.
2. Cooperation was mainly technical, with policy as a veneer, and mostly benefiting the US.
3. Britain's influence largely collapsed after the Fall of Singapore.
4. NEI Dutch resources were always small, although this is also about perception.
5. The Australian Curtin Government was "jittery" in foreign affairs, and Senator Evatt was the only actor with a consistent agenda.
6. General MacArthur held a behind-the-scenes 'stranglehold' on Australian policy and military supply. When infighting about strategy occurred, MacArthur could employ divide-and-rule tactics to secure 'control' of his command.
7. The Australian government complied with US wishes by manipulating relations between the Dutch, Americans, and the Australian public through divide-and-rule tactics. None of this would be known without the work of the late Dr Ford. *Allies in a Bind* showed that World War II policy was never uniform or cohesive; personalities used war as a vehicle for their own agendas.

In conclusion, the key take-away from *Allies in a Bind* is that human beings – then as now – are not machines of war or peace, but must make decisions amidst constraints, pressures and imperfect knowledge.

[9] [209]
[10] [209-211]
[11] [219-221]
[12] [232-7]
[13] [238]
[14] [244-269]

"We Began to Belong More and More": Dutch Evacuees from the Netherlands East Indies in Wartime Australia

Robyn Van Dyk
Australian War Memorial

The Australian War Memorial's mission is to lead remembrance and understanding of Australia's wartime experience. As a shrine, museum and extensive historic archive, the Memorial tells the story of Australians at war and in doing so, preserves the stories of those whose lives became entwined with Australia's own. Among the Memorial's collections are records that document the Dutch experience of the Second World War: personal papers, diaries, interviews and official correspondence that came to the Memorial through relationships forged between Australians and the Dutch over a shared experience of conflict.

Between late 1945 and July 1946, thousands of Dutch civilians from the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) passed through Australia. Most were women, children and elderly men who had survived years of Japanese internment. They arrived impoverished and malnourished seeking temporary sanctuary in a country itself struggling with post-war housing shortages. Brisbane, with its proximity to NEI air routes and the military encampment Camp Columbia at Wacol, became one of the principal staging points for the evacuees.

The story of the evacuees received broad news coverage particularly in the local press where the arrivals were of direct impact on the communities. *The Herald* (Melbourne) reported in November 1945, three months after the Japanese surrender, that some 200,000 Dutch subjects in Java were in greater danger than at any point during their captivity. The press reported that the Indonesian independence movement had turned Java into an active conflict zone, and former internees remained confined to prison compounds, facing massacre, starvation and disease. William MacMahon Ball, Australia's representative in Java appointed to observe the conflict, urged the government to accept up to 50,000 evacuees. Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell initially agreed to receive 10,000, designating Camp Columbia at Wacol, Camp Casino in New South Wales, and Camp Darley in Victoria as reception centres, with army tents supplementing hut accommodation.[1]

From late December 1945, the NEI Air Force flew nearly 100 evacuees a week from Batavia (now Jakarta) to Archerfield aerodrome, staging them at Camp Columbia. Colonel W. Zersteegh, commanding the evacuation squadron, hoped to increase the service to 1,000 a week.[2] From Wacol, many evacuees were dispersed to rehabilitation centres across Australia—guest houses at Southport, Coolangatta, Cowes, Katoomba and elsewhere.[3] Brisbane remained a central staging post, accommodating up to 1,500 evacuees at peak periods.[4]

Others arrived by sea in grim conditions. The cargo vessel *Tjibadak* reached Melbourne with 370 people crammed into a space designed for 50, after a three-week voyage surviving on bully beef in the ship's hold. All were penniless, with practically no possessions beyond the clothes they wore.[5]

1 "Refuge Plea for NEI Evacuees", *The Herald*, 28 November 1945, 5.
2 "Dutch Evacuees Arrive in Brisbane", *Daily Mercury*, 29 December 1945, 1.
3 "Homes Found for N.E.I. Evacuees", *Advocate*, 14 January 1946, 5.
4 "Only 2 Dutch Evacuees Left", *The Courier-Mail*, 30 January 1947, 5.
5 "Pathetic Condition of NEI Evacuees", *The Morning Bulletin*, 5 February 1946, 3.

The evacuees arrived with most not really knowing what reception they would receive. A Dutch spokesman confirmed that people in Batavia had believed Australia was politically opposed to them. On arrival, however, they found ordinary Australians kindly disposed and sympathetic.[6]

The Memorial holds a collection related to Mrs M. Koningsberger-Dozy (Collection PR88/139), whose account offers a vivid window into the evacuee experience. She was twenty-two at the outbreak of war and had been living in the Dutch colonies, married to an officer of the Royal Netherlands Navy. They were living in Celebes when the Japanese arrived on 7 February 1942. Her husband was killed and she was imprisoned.[7]

At war's end, ill and weakened, she was taken to a hospital where she met Australian soldiers for the first time. In September 1945 she was flown to Australia. She recalled lunch on the north coast - real bread and butter! - before travelling through Darwin and Cloncurry to Brisbane, where she took up work as a youth welfare officer at Juliana Camp in Coolangatta. She noted that she had no formal qualifications for the welfare role.[8]

Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy's collection comprises three letters addressed to Mr Charles Winders of Burleigh Heads, Queensland. In a detailed letter dated 17 April 1979, she describes her experiences at the Coolangatta camp. Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy had known Mr Winders and his parents during the war. Mr Winders donated the letters to the Memorial in 1988, together with a newspaper clipping about Dutch evacuees at Coolangatta. The article references the letters and describes Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy's account.[9]

Writing to Winders she described Coolangatta as a "beautiful resort" where the evacuees had come to build strength and prepare to return to the colony after three and a half years of internment.[10] She recalled the shock of handling money for the first time in three and a half years, being given £150 to buy clothes, and, thinking they would return to the East Indies, buying only summer clothes. She also remembered receiving too much rich food too soon, which made her ill.[11]

Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy wrote of earlier evacuees who had arrived by the ship *Bloemfontein* ahead of the Japanese invasion in 1942. These earlier arrivals stayed in Australia and later helped the newer evacuees who came in 1945. Children attended local schools, though integrating them after their trauma was difficult.[12] The adults in the camps sought work and picked up all manner of jobs. "We began to belong more and more", she wrote of their growing ties with the locals of Coolangatta.[13] Dutch evacuees met Australians in church or at the beach and were invited to Australians' homes and on trips into the countryside.

Queensland had built up a civilian reception infrastructure earlier in the war, when evacuees from many nations had arrived in Australia following the outbreak of war in the Pacific. By March 1942, Toowoomba's population had swelled by 5,000, and local authorities faced serious overcrowding and anxieties about tropical diseases. Trained Mothercraft Association volunteers met evacuee trains, the Red Cross stood ready with supplies, and the Country Women's Association established evacuation

[6] "N.E.I. Evacuees Pleased by Reception in Australia", *Border Watch*, 17 January 1946, 5.
[7] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C. Winders, 22 March 1979, PR88/139, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
[8] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C Winders, 17 April 1979, PR88/139, AWM.
[9] "Evacuees at Coolangatta 1945-46", *Gold Coaster/Daily News*, 22 November 1980, 9.
[10] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C. Winders, 22 March 1979, PR88/139, AWM.
[11] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C. Winders, 17 April 1979, PR88/139, AWM.
[12] See also Frances Larder's chapter in this e-book, in which she shares her memories of her experiences of the war as a young child.
[13] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C. Winders, 17 April 1979, PR88/139, AWM.

committees.[14] That existing civic capacity shaped the community response to the Dutch arrivals three years later, largely generous, though not uncomplicated. The Dutch authorities themselves objected to disused army camps, preferring hostels and houses. Despite asking for 50,000 places, fewer than 6,000 refugees had arrived by February 1946.[15] Industrial disputes added further difficulty. The former hospital ship *Tasman* was declared "black" by the Waterside Workers' Federation on each of its three trips to Australia, meaning the Dutch evacuees had to unload their own ship.[16] These disputes were entangled with broader sympathies for Indonesian independence; a Dutch parliamentary commission later blamed Australian trade unions for seeking to hinder the Dutch return to the NEI.[17]

The evacuation scheme was always intended as temporary, four to six months of rehabilitation. By March 1946, the NEI Government ceased evacuations, citing a lack of foreign currency.[18] Ships including the *Tasman* and *Bloemfontein* called at Australian ports to embark evacuees, many of whom were bound for the Netherlands rather than a still-disrupted Java. When the *Tasman* pulled away from Fremantle in June 1946 with 530 people aboard, many were tearful, and numerous Australians were among the crowd that farewelled them.[19] By January 1947, when the final 48 evacuees sailed from Brisbane, only two of the roughly 3,000 rehabilitated in the city since November 1945 remained. Sailing with them were five Australian brides of Dutch soldiers.[20]

Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy wrote of the struggle for Indonesian independence and its impact on the hopes and plans of the camp community. She was offered a job in Sydney but had family ties in the Netherlands and returned home to Utrecht.[21]

Many evacuees, however, came back to Australia. Some returned as part of the broader post-war migration, and friendships formed during the evacuation period became the foundation for a large and enduring Dutch community across Australia. Marriages took place between Dutch evacuees and Australians and cultural experiences were shared.

The Memorial's Collections

The Memorial's archive preserves a rich record of the Dutch wartime experience. The collections include letters written by Dutch people returning to the NEI to friends and family in Australia, as well as impressions and memoirs by Dutch NEI civilians and prisoners of war who settled here. The archive also holds interviews conducted as part of war crimes investigations, alongside diaries and personal papers donated by those who experienced internment and later made Australia their home.

[14] "Evacuees Cause Overcrowding", *The Courier-Mail*, 19 March 1942, 3. The civil defence and voluntary reception infrastructure built up in Queensland in 1942 provided the community framework that later received the NEI evacuees.
[15] "Refugees arrive from N.E.I. Canberra", *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 February 1946, 2; "NEI Evacuees: Small Number Here", *Daily Mercury*, 9 February 1946, 6.
[16] "School Boys Load N.E.I. Black Ship", *Barrier Daily Truth*, 8 June 1946, 1.
[17] "Dutch Place NEI Blame", *The Daily News*, 3 May 1946, 2. On Indonesians in Australia during the war, see Jan Lingard's chapter in this e-book.
[18] "N.E.I. Evacuees: No More for Australia", *The West Australian*, 21 March 1946, 9.
[19] "Tears as Dutch Evacuees Leave", *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1946, 1.
[20] "Only 2 Dutch Evacuees Left", *The Courier-Mail*, 30 January 1947, 5.
[21] M. Koningsberger-Dozy, letter to C. Winders, 17 April 1979, PR88/139, AWM.



Figure 1: Dutch internees of the Japanese, waiting for transport to the Royal Australian Navy corvettes evacuees to Australia for medical treatment. Australian War Memorial, collection ID 116915.

Jan van Os, a member of the Royal Netherlands Navy, survived captivity at the Makassar Camp in Celebes (Sulawesi) and settled in Australia after the war. His collection includes a diary written in Dutch between 1942 and 1945 with an English translation, a personal memoir, and a sound interview in which he discusses his experience as an evacuee from the Atherton Tablelands, where he described being treated like a hero, to Melbourne, where he stayed until 1947. He and his Australian war bride travelled to the Netherlands before returning to settle in Australia in 1948.[22]

The wartime diary of Louisa Sophia Hamers, a Dutch national, records her internment between 1943 and 1945.[23] Louisa wrote of the growing cruelty and strictness of the Japanese over the years, alongside small glimmers of happiness and hope sustained through the continued practice of Dutch culture and the celebration of events such as birthdays. She did not survive her internment. Her daughter, who emigrated to Australia after a period of rehabilitation in Adelaide, donated the diary to the Memorial in 2016.

[22] Jan Sigvard van Os, personal memoirs of his time as a Leading Seaman in the Royal Netherlands Navy and as a prisoner of the Japanese, 1942-1945, S03720, Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Jan Sigvard van Os, diary and memoir, 1942-1947, PR03591, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
[23] Louisa Sophia Hamers, diary, 1943-1945, AWM2016.431.1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.



Figure 2: Collection of Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy. Australian War Memorial, collection ID PR88/139.

Together, these official records and personal papers form a valuable record of the Dutch experience of war, the suffering of prisoners and civilian internees, the upheaval of evacuation, and the lives rebuilt in Australia. Mrs Koningsberger-Dozy's letter, alongside the diaries of Jan van Os and Louisa Sophia Hamers, forms part of a historic archive that tells not only the Dutch story of war, but also the story of Australians of Dutch origin and the ties that endure between two nations shaped by a shared experience of conflict.

Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia

Jan Lingard

In accounts of wartime Australia, the influx of over 5,000 Indonesian men, women and some children, subjects of the then Netherlands East Indies (NEI), part of the Dutch colonial empire, has been largely overlooked.

When Japan invaded the Indies in 1942, a contingent of senior Dutch officials arrived in Melbourne to establish an administration to look after the interests of the Dutch and Indonesians evacuated to Australia, and to continue the war effort against Japan from Australia. This was the Netherlands East Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand (NEICANZ).

The Indonesians comprised merchant seamen, members of the Netherland East Indies Armed Forces, civil servants, domestic servants and in 1943, some political prisoners of the Dutch. At the time Australia's racism was enshrined in the White Australia Policy, designed primarily to keep Asians out of the country. The masthead of the popular Bulletin magazine proudly proclaimed, 'Australia for the White Man'. The Indonesians therefore were granted temporary entry only, for the duration of the war. They were dispersed to cities, mainly Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and to country towns in different kinds of camps. For example, in the town of Casino in northern New South Wales (NSW) there was a NEI Technical Battalion. They arrived as refugees, and the majority of them left after the war as rebels, supporting the fledgling Republic of Indonesia that had been proclaimed by Soekarno after the Japanese surrendered.

Most of the Indonesian men were actively involved in the war effort in various ways while they were in Australia. Merchant seamen worked on Dutch ships used for transporting goods and personnel, including hospital ships bringing wounded servicemen back from Europe. Indonesian servicemen were sent to various camps and in some cases were involved in joint operations with Dutch and Australian servicemen. For example, No.18 NEI Squadron was established in Canberra in April 1942 and comprised NEI officers and airmen, including Javanese, as well as Australian officers and airmen.

Others were involved in dangerous and secret missions gathering intelligence in the islands north of Australia and in Dutch New Guinea, with one man, Sergeant Julius Tahija earning the Dutch equivalent of the Victoria Cross for bravery. He was described by one Melbourne newspaper as 'a hero, a black sergeant from the East Indies.'

The presence of these Indonesians in Australia was a catalyst for many Australians to seize the opportunity to seek friendships with people from another culture, in a way that was impossible before the war brought these people to White Australia. In cities and in country towns Indonesians and Australians befriended each other at grassroots level. The Dutch established hostels in Melbourne and Sydney for the merchant sailors, and Australian friends attended cultural performances and tasted exotic food. In Sydney there was an Indonesia Club, where there were dances and other social events for everyone. In the NEI Squadron, Australian airmen were advised not to mix with the 'natives' but some ignored this advice and formed lifelong friendships. In Melbourne, a boatload of Javanese families arrived after being caught at sea by the Japanese invasion and having to divert to Australia. They were all looked after by the local Methodist minister and his family. The children attended the local school and Javanese men and women in colourful sarongs became a common sight in the neighbourhood. Some people had open house gatherings on Sundays for servicemen and sailors,

‘doing their bit’ for the war effort. As time passed, inevitably there were also marriages between Australian women and Indonesian men, and in some cases the women’s families refused to attend the weddings.

Apart from the hospital ships, the Dutch merchant ships in Australia were chartered to the US Army for shipping armaments and personnel in the Pacific region. This was vital and dangerous work. However, in April 1942, some 2,000 Indonesian crew members in various ports walked off their ships and went on strike. The reason was that compared to Dutch and Australian crew members doing the same job, their working conditions were appalling and their pay was miserable. This was the first anti-Dutch action taken by the Indonesians in Australia, though it was for economic reasons rather than political. By walking off their ships the Indonesians became illegal immigrants under Australian law, so they were detained first at Long Bay Jail, then, because there were so many of them, they were sent to the prisoner of war (POW) camp in Cowra, in southwest NSW. From the time they went on strike, the Australian Seamen’s Union had been lobbying for better conditions and pay on the Indonesians’ behalf. When Australian seamen had to take their place to keep the ships operable, the Dutch were forced to concede, and many of the Indonesians rejoined their ships. Those who still refused were conscripted into what was designated as the 36th Australian Employment Company to perform war-related labouring work in camps in Queensland.

In June 1943 another group of Indonesians arrived in Australia. Their presence was to have extraordinary political repercussions. These people were political prisoners of the Dutch, some 800 men and women and children, nationalists who had been exiled to jungle camps in the Boven Digul, Dutch New Guinea, after taking part in anti-Dutch uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s in Java and Sumatra. As the Japanese advanced through New Guinea the Allied Command feared that the political prisoners might collaborate with them against the Dutch, so the decision was taken to bring them to Australia. After a flight to Horn Island in the Torres Strait, they were transferred by ship to Brisbane, then via a long train trip to Cowra, in southwest NSW. They arrived in the middle of winter, which had dire results for these people newly arrived from the steaming hot jungle of Dutch New Guinea, either through pre-existing illness or the cold. Many of the internees were hospitalised and there were nine deaths, including children.

Although the presence of these prisoners in the camp was supposed to be secret, word seems to have leaked out, probably by sympathetic guards. At the time, the Red Cross monitored the treatment and living conditions of internees and POWs by sending a Red Cross visitor to the camps. The Indonesian leaders petitioned the Visitor, bitterly protesting against their internment as they were not prisoners of war. Particular concern was expressed about the detention of children and women. Eventually, with pressure from supporters such as the Communist Party of Australia and the Civil Rights League among others, the Attorney General ruled that it was illegal for political prisoners of another country to be held in detention in Australia and that they should be released.

The release of these people introduced a new political element into the Indonesian population, nationalists who were committed to the struggle for Indonesian Independence. The families were sent to a warm climate, Mackay in Queensland, and some of the single men went to Melbourne where they worked for the NEI administration in various capacities. They were now free to pursue their aims, particularly after Soekarno unilaterally proclaimed Indonesian Independence on 17 August 1945, after Japan surrendered. The Indonesians established various organisations in Australia, including Indonesian Independence Committees.

In June 1944 the NEI administration moved to Camp Columbia in Brisbane, where it officially became the Netherlands East Indies Government in Exile and began preparing to reclaim their colony after the end of the war. However, once news of the Japanese surrender and Soekarno’s proclamation

reached the Indonesian nationalists in Australia they began mobilising and forming organisations to prevent that from happening. One of the Indonesian leaders, ex-Digulist Mohamad Bondan, had picked up the news from the Netherland Indies Government Information Service where he was working in Melbourne, and spread it among his compatriots and sympathetic Australians. The Dutch then transferred him to Camp Columbia in Brisbane. He described the camp as a Dutch and Indonesian village complex, with both military and civil personnel working there.

In September 1945, 83 Indonesian merchant seamen walked off their ship in Brisbane, an act which became the catalyst for a four-year Waterside Workers Union ban against Dutch shipping interests in Australia, and in some cases, other parts of the world. These first strikers joined the population of Camp Columbia under the Dutch, as they had nowhere else to go.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to tell the full story of how support for Indonesian Independence played out in Australia, but as the cry of "Merdeka" (Freedom) echoed around the country and Indonesian servicemen refused to obey Dutch orders, more seamen went on strike in different ports and the bans on shipping took effect, Australian support of all kinds grew at grassroots level. The relationships and friendships which had developed between so many Indonesians and Australians formed the social backdrop for the political relationships which followed.

In Indonesia itself, there were five years of bloody conflict before the Dutch capitulated and relinquished their colony in December 1949. This was a result of United Nations intervention, where Australia represented Indonesia in the negotiations. The Indonesian presence in White Australia because of World War II brought about a hitherto unimaginable result: Australia's support for an Asian country's independence against the wishes of a European ally.

For a detailed account of Indonesians in Australia during World War II, and for source information, see my book Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia *(North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishers, 2008).*

Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile: archival sources at National Archives of Australia

Georgina Devlin
National Archives of Australia

About National Archives of Australia

National Archives of Australia is the federal agency that collects records of Australian government decisions and actions as evidence. We do this to connect Australians with the nation's memory, their identity and history. National Archives provides leadership in best practice management of the official record of the Commonwealth and ensures that Australian Government information of enduring significance is secured, preserved and available to government agencies, researchers and the community.

National Archives' collection contains records about key events and decisions that have shaped Australian history. With 54 million items, the collection predominantly includes Australian Government records from Federation in 1901 to now. Topics range as wide as the tasks and responsibilities of the Australian Government, from immigration to lighthouses, from postal and telegraphic services to foreign affairs, in the form of paper files, photographs, cartographic records, audio visual material, and many more. A rich and popular element of the collection is the extensive holdings on the Second World War and all it encompassed, unsurprising, considering that it was a need to protect Second World War records that paved the way for archiving all Commonwealth records.

National Archives holds many records relating to the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Government-in-Exile and defence forces situated in Brisbane during the Second World War, in particular at Camp Columbia at Wacol.

Netherlands East Indies Government in Brisbane

As the war in the Pacific was waging, after Dutch Colonial Forces surrendered in 1942, the Dutch started to prepare for their re-establishment in and recolonisation of the Netherlands East Indies. On 25 October 1943, a memorandum was sent to the Australian Minister to the Netherlands regarding planning for post-war reconstruction in the Netherlands East Indies. It read:

> Department of Army reports that Acting G.C.O. Netherlands Army Forces in Australia, has received instructions that Major-General L.H. van Oyen has been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Netherlands Forces in Australia and is expected to arrive about November 1st, accompanied by his staff.
>
> According to these instructions, General van Oyen will be in charge of the post-war reconstruction in the Netherlands East Indies and will set up [a] department of War in Australia with a staff to begin with of about 50. staff.

> As we have not been informed by the Netherlands Government of this proposal, please enquire whether this is in fact the Government's wish and advise.[1]

With the approval of the Australian Government, the Dutch decided to establish the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile. Dr. van Mook and Baron van Aerssen met with Dr. Evatt, Minister External Affairs on 7 March 1944. The following day, Baron van Aerssen handed Dr. Evatt an Aide-Memoire which read:

> By letter of the 24th. December 1943, the Netherlands Minister in Australia informed the Right Honourable John Curtin, Prime Minister, of the forthcoming arrival in Australia of Dr. van Mook, Netherlands Minister for the Colonies, the purpose of whose visit was to acquaint the Commonwealth Government with the intention to establish a Netherlands Indies Government organisation (to replace the existing Netherlands Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand), and to approach the Commonwealth Government concerning the temporary sojourn of the said Netherlands Indies Government organisation in Australia.[2]

Dr. Evatt wrote to Baron van Aerssen on 5 April 1944 informing him that the Australian Government welcomed the proposal to appoint and establish, for the time being, in Australia a Lieutenant-Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies.

On 3 November 1944 Baron van Aerssen wrote to the Prime Minister of Australia,

> The establishment of a Netherlands Indies Government, as announced and explained in my memorandum of March 8th, 1944, has therefore become a fact. This Government will avail themselves with gratitude of the hospitality extended to them by the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, and have their temporary seat in Camp Columbia, Brisbane. […] The Netherlands Indies Government is composed as follows:
>
> Dr. H.J. van Mook - Lieutenant-Governor-General and the Head of the Departments and Minister of the Colonies
>
> Dr. N.S. Blom - Director of Justice
>
> Dr. R.E. Smits - Director of Finance
>
> Mr. Ch.O. van der Plas - Director of Interior and Chairman of the Board of Department Heads
>
> Mr. P.A. Kerstens - Director of Education
>
> Dr. J.E. van Hoogstraten - Director Economic Affairs and acting General Secretary of the Government
>
> Mr. P.H.W. Sitsen - Director of Public Works

[1] National Archives of Australia: Department of External Affairs [II], Central Office; A989 Correspondence files, multiple number series with year prefix, 1927-1945; 1943/600/5/1/5, Netherlands East Indies. Proposed establishment of Government in Australia, 1943-1945, page 55.
[2] NAA: A989, 1943/600/5/1/5, page 34.

> Lt. General L.H. van Oyen - C. in C. Netherlands Indies Army and Head of the Department of War[3]

Basing of Netherlands forces in Australia

An Advisory War Council agendum, detailed an approach on 4 September 1944 by the Netherlands Minister in Australia regarding the establishment of 30,000 Dutch Army personnel in Australia. The agendum reads:

> I have the honour, by direction, to inform you, that my Government have decided to organise a force of about 30,000 men soon after the liberation of Holland and to send these troops to the Far East where they will be used in the Netherlands East Indies after having undergone some additional training. My Government would appreciate if this training could take place in Australian and have instructed me to approach the Commonwealth Government on this subject.
>
> I would therefore feel very much obliged, if your Government could let me know whether, in principle, they are agreeable to the arrival, accommodation, training, and maintenance of the abovementioned Netherlands forces in Australia [...][4]

From the same file, on 20 September 1944, the question of basing of Netherlands Forces on Australia is referred for consideration by the Advisory War Council, signed by Prime Minister John Curtin.

> The Department of External Affairs has expressed the following views:- "It would be politically desirable that a Dutch force should be based on Australia. An Australian contribution in the shape of such assistance to the Dutch in the recovery of the Netherlands Indies would assist to a considerable degree in the realisation of Australia's general policy of fostering Australian influence and creating conditions for future development of Australian trade in this region. […]"[5]

Another piece of the story comes from a file titled 'Basing of NEI Forces on Australia' from series MP729/6 – Department of Defence Secret correspondence files, 1936-45, which contains over 3,700 files. On page 15 of this file, we find that on 21 September 1944 the Australian War Cabinet approved in principle the Netherlands Government's proposal to base 30,000 troops in Australia for training and protection of the Pacific, especially regarding the Netherlands East Indies, the files note that "the Government is willing to provide facilities and assistance as may be practicable in the light of its existing and potential commitments."[6]

The War Cabinet approval was followed up by a letter to the Netherlands Minister to Australia, Baron van Aerssen, on 25 September 1944.

A five-page report prepared by the Chief of the General Staff provides insight into the reception, accommodation, clothing, equipment and training of a Netherlands Indies Force of up to 30,000 troops in Australia:

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[3] NAA: A989, 1943/600/5/1/5, page 31.
[4] National Archives of Australia: Advisory War Council; A2680, Advisory War Council Agenda Files, 1921-1946; 30/1945, Basing of Netherlands forces on Australia (contains Advisory War Council Agendum 22/1944; refers to Advisory War Council Minutes Nos 1406(extract), 1424, 1521, 1573), 1944-1946, page 126.
[5] NAA: A2680, 30/1945, page 127.
[6] National Archives of Australia: Department of Defence [II] (Central Administration); MP729/6, Secret correspondence files, 1906-1945; 2/401/220, Basing of NEI Forces in Australia, 1944-1946, page 15.

> The troops will arrive with a minimum of uniform, being untrained and unequipped. They will be trained in Australia using Australian uniforms, clothing, arms, and equipment to the greatest extent to which Australia can supply them. The Force will be used in the Netherlands Indies in conjunction with the other Allied Forces […][7]

The records also reveal interesting details about the needs of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). A list of standard quartermaster items required by the KNIL reports that the Army required almost 193,000 pairs of tan cotton socks, 40,000 mosquito head nets, and 40,500 spoons.[8]

Dutch Occupation of Camp Columbia

Communication and travel between the various Dutch military offices across Australia had become difficult and time-consuming, and to prepare for the return to Netherlands East Indies, consolidation was urgently needed. It was therefore decided to move the various Dutch headquarters to Camp Columbia at Wacol, Brisbane. A letter from 12 July 1944 relates to the Dutch occupation of Camp Columbia and the question of the camp's lease to the Dutch through a Reciprocal Lend Lease (RLL) agreement.[9]

Camp Columbia was offered to the Dutch rent-free. In return for Lend Lease aid, Allied nations were to provide goods or services to the United States for their assistance in the war under a program known as reverse or reciprocal lend lease. Similar arrangements were made between other Allies, such as in this case between Australia and the Netherlands.

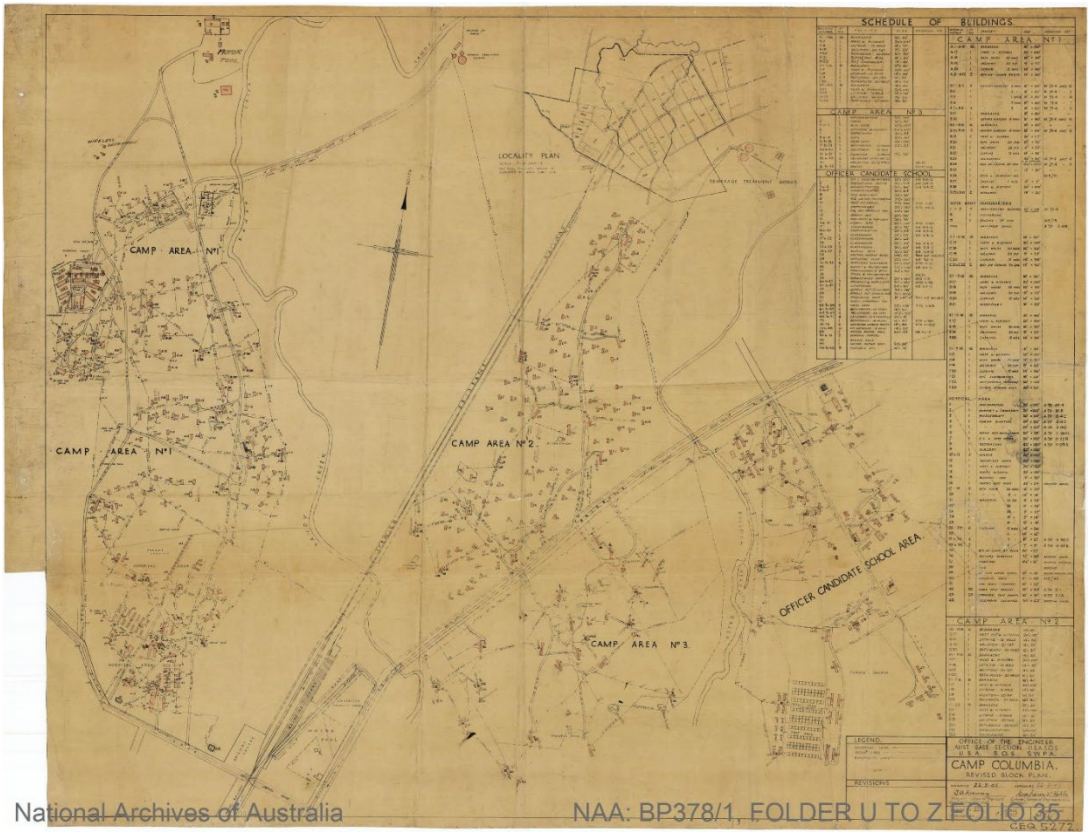

Figure 1:The Revised Block Plan map of Camp Columbia, 1945. NAA: BP378/1, FOLDER U TO Z FOLIO 35.

[7] NAA: MP729/6, 2/401/22, page 7.
[8] NAA: A2680, 30/1945, page 106.
[9] NAA: A989, 1943/600/5/1/5, page 9.

Camp Columbia was built by the US Army in October 1942 and became the headquarters of the US Sixth Army in April 1943. In June 1944 the US Sixth Army departed for New Guinea and Camp Columbia was refurbished by the Dutch in preparation for takeover by the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile. Netherlands East Indies Government members took up residence at the camp from August 1944, with Lieutenant Governor-General Van Mook appointed as the head of the government.

The Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile is the only foreign government to be established on Australian soil. The government used Camp Columbia as its staging camp in its plans to liberate and recolonise the Netherlands East Indies after the end of war in the Pacific. Camp Columbia also became the headquarters of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, while most of the Royal Netherlands Navy and the Royal Netherlands East Indies Air Force was based in Melbourne.

Question of charging rent to the Dutch Government

This issue arises in documents from series MP12/1 - Department of Treasury correspondence files, 1939-49 (653 items).[10] One of the documents in this series is a letter sent to the Quartermaster-General on 5 April 1944, discussing financial implications of the Netherlands East Indies Government takeover of Camp Columbia:

> Some little time ago, Mr Van Hoogstraten came to me and said that they had been in touch with General Alexander in connection with the taking over of portion of Camp Columbia for the Government of the Netherlands which has been established in Australia under Mr. Van Mook and asked by concurrence.
>
> I said that it had nothing to do with me really and in answer to a further query, I said I could offer them nothing better.
>
> I understand that it is all settled between the Americans and Dutch that they should put some 600 individuals into this Camp which was constructed for General Kreuger's Headquarters and to establish their officers thereat. Today, General Van Oyen called just to mention this matter and I asked him whether there would be any substantial alterations to buildings. He said that there would not be, but that they would require telephones, beds, office accommodation etc.
>
> The following questions arise -
>
> a) The financial question of the use by the Dutch Government of a camp built by Australia for the American Forces,
> b) Whether we should help them to secure all the furniture which they require and under what conditions, and
> c) The arrangements for payment of services, lighting, water, sanitary etc.
>
> These are mainly considerations which are beyond my orbit and I would appreciate if you would let me know what you want me to do in any of these matters.[11]

[10] The series note for this series states “the filing is very bad”.
[11] National Archives of Australia: Defence Division, Department of the Treasury [I]; General Correspondence of the Treasury Representative ('A' series), 1939-1949; A56/7D, Camp Transfer (Camp Columbia) United States of America to NEI [Netherlands East Indies], April 1944-November 1944, page 32. This file from series MP12/1 consists entirely of records relating to the transfer of the camp from April to November in 1944.

The question of whether Australia should charge the Dutch rent for the use of Camp Columbia also appears in a letter from Department of Defence Treasury Liaison Officer Mr Dunk to Mr Sheehan in Treasury Headquarters, Canberra, one day later:

> The U.S. General Purchasing Agent has reported that the U.S. Forces no longer require to occupy Camp Columbia, Brisbane. This was a camp constructed for the U.S. under Reciprocal Lend Lease. I am also advised that the Dutch Government desires to occupy the camp as an Administrative Headquarters.
>
> U.S. accepts that, in line with our policy on establishments which they vacate, Reciprocal Lend Lease entry will remain pending any financial settlement. They are not concerned in regard to arrangements which we may make with the Dutch except that if rental is charged, they consider that the credit should be to R.L.L.
>
> Please advise urgently […][12]

A file from series MP12/1, which covers the transfer of Camp Columbia from the Americans to the Dutch, relates to the seeking of approvals and ensuring the Dutch Government followed proper processes. It again raises the question of charging rent to the Dutch:

> It is desired to confirm the information given to you by Mr. Vinery of this Council to the effect that the Brisbane office of this Council was requested by the Liaison Officer of the Royal Netherlands [East] Indies Army in Brisbane to carry out certain works at Camp Columbia, Wacol, to enable the N.E.I. Headquarters to be moved from Melbourne to Queensland.
>
> It is pointed out that Camp Columbia was originally erected for use by the U.S. Army. Full details of the work required by the Netherlands authorities were not available but owing to the urgency of the matter, arrangements were made for the work to be carried out by day labour on a preliminary requisition for 1,000 pounds and a cheque for this amount was received from the Royal Netherlands [East] Indies Army.[13]

Additional comments on this topic were made in a handwritten letter sent to the Treasury department within the Department of Defence on 22 November 1944:

> My recollections of the conditions under which this camp was made available to the Dutch are as under:
>
> At a meeting between Mr Van Mook and Baron someone or other, Mr Chifley and Mr Macfarlane it was agreed that the Dutch could have the use of Columbia Camp without any charge. Any alterations and additions etc were to be met by the Dutch authorities. This would rule out any question of charging them rental of use of this camp.[14]

Netherlands East Indies Accommodation – Alterations to Camp Columbia

An October 1944 memorandum from the Allied Works Council to the Treasury Office within the Department of Defence discussed work being carried out for the KNIL at Camp Columbia. The work included alterations and extensions to existing buildings at the camp. The memorandum notes that the KNIL's Military Secretary stated:

[12] NAA: MP12/1, A56/7D, page 37.
[13] NAA: MP12/1, A56/7D, page 24.
[14] NAA: MP12/1, A56/7D, page 12.

> "It is desired to advise that this work became necessary when the U.S. Army handed over Camp Columbia, through the Australian Army, to this headquarters.
>
> It then became necessary to effect alterations and additions to provide for office and living accommodation for the Netherlands Indies Government Officials, for Army Headquarters Staff, for civilian employees (male and female), Service personnel, all ranks (male and female), Army, Navy, and Air Force, and native troops.
>
> It will be noted that it was impossible to obtain suitable office and living accommodation in the city of Brisbane as has been possible with the Australian and U.S. Forces, and, therefore, with these alterations, and the use of Camp Columbia by this headquarters for the above purposes has been the most practicable and economical solution to our problem."[15]

The Dutch refurbishment of Camp Columbia began in June 1944. All building work needed the approval of the Australian Department of War Organisation and Industry Works' priorities sub-committee, but the work was paid for and carried out by the Dutch.

The Netherlands East Indies Labour Battalion, brought from the camp at Casino, New South Wales, was tasked with improving the camp. This battalion comprised interned non-European Netherlands East Indies nationals as well as Indonesians opposing Dutch rule in Netherlands East Indies and was overseen by Dutch officers. The battalion constructed new office buildings, club facilities and a laundry at Camp Columbia, while showers and toilets were added to the accommodation huts.

The Mess rooms at Camp Columbia were also on the list of facilities to be altered. A Department of Labour and National Service minute from 7 August 1944 describes the mess room facilities at Camp Columbia following an inspection:

> There are four mess rooms of the standard U.S.A. type, on the area, and it is intended to alter two only for the time being, the alterations to be in respect of the kitchens.
>
> Sketch plans will be based on kitchen output of 250 hot meals. One kitchen to cater for Officers, and the other to cater for female clerical staff. All personnel live on the area, so that consideration is to be given to service of three meals per day. […] The kitchen is to be staffed with native labour. Wood fuel will be utilised for ovens, electricity for other items of plant.
>
> Provision to be made for serving both coffee and tea. Separate washing up facilities are required for the mess room.[16]

Further information about alterations and additions at Camp Columbia under the Dutch can be gleaned from series BP1/1 which contains files relating to the Allied Works Council (AWC), Queensland. These files record decisions relating to wartime work including construction, maintenance of camps, roads, aerodromes, airstrips, railways, docks and wharfs.

Established in early 1942, the Allied Works Council was responsible for carrying out any works required by the Allied forces including providing equipment, materials or workmen needed to carry out these

[15] National Archives of Australia: Defence Division, Department of the Treasury [I]; General Correspondence of the Treasury Representative ('A' series), 1939-1949; MP12/1, NEI [Netherlands East Indies] – Accommodation, 1943-1945, pages 11-12.
[16] National Archives of Australia: Industrial Welfare Division, Central Office, Department of Labour and National Service; Correspondence files, 1941-1953; 1509/4/4 - Central Office Area 4 - NEI [Netherlands East Indies] Headquarters Camp Columbia Wacol, page 6.

works. The Council's records are held by National Archives and are a valuable primary source.[17] The minutes provide incredible insight into the sheer amount of building works that were carried out in Queensland during the Second World War

Snippets from an AWC meeting on 25 August 1944 provide insight into the AWC's work in relation to alterations and extensions work for the KNIL at Camp Columbia. For instance:

> […] a memorandum was received from the Deputy Director General of Allied Works, Head Office, asking that a statement showing the work carried out at Camp Columbia, Wacol, be forwarded urgently.
>
> The Deputy Director General, pointed out that authority does not appear to exist to enable this Council to undertake works for Netherlands East Indies without prior reference to the Department of Treasury. There is also the question of such extensive work being carried out without the approval of the Works Priority Committee.
>
> Another aspect of the matter to be considered is whether the approved standards for U.S.A. and Service Departments have been departed from in this case, and to what extent such departures have been made. He asked for urgent advice and that, pending further instructions, this office refrain from undertaking additional works for the Netherlands East Indies Authorities unless prior approval is advised from Head Office.
>
> It was noted that payment by cheque has been received from the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army for all works put in hand. Some further work is also required and a cheque will be provided immediately the estimate is available.[18]

The costs of the alterations to Camp Columbia were also recorded, and a lengthy list shows some of the expenditures.[19] Of note is an entry recording that 350 pounds was spent on a 'Picture Show'. Other expenditures include 64 pounds of shelving for the tailor's shop, signs for 51 pounds, and a detention compound for 5,128 pounds. Likewise, a Works requisition page acknowledges a cheque received for 24,232 pounds' worth of alterations and additions at Camp Columbia for the Netherlands East Indies headquarters.[20]

National Archives' collection also includes plans for the additional work at Camp Columbia. In June 1944 works began on additions to block 5 following this plan:

[17] The QLD AWC minutes in series BP1/1 are all digitised. At 26 volumes, some containing over 1,000 pages, it is a time-consuming read, but if you take the time there are some gems to be found.
[18] National Archives of Australia: Works and Services Branch, Queensland; BP1/1, Allied Works Council, Queensland - Minutes of meetings, single number series, 1942-1945; VOLUME 25, Allied Works Council - Queensland - inter office memoranda - 540 - 589 [Decisions relating to Wartime work including construction, maintenance of camps, roads, aerodromes, airstrips, railways, docks and wharfs for RAAF, Army, USASOS, US Navy and use of labour from the Civil Construction Corps and Aliens], 1944-1975, pages 904-905.
[19] National Archives of Australia: Defence Division, Department of the Treasury [I]; MP12/1, General Correspondence of the Treasury Representative ('A' series), 1939-1949; A88B, NEI [Netherlands East Indies] – Accommodation, 1943-45, page 13.
[20] NAA: MP12/1, A88B, page 15.

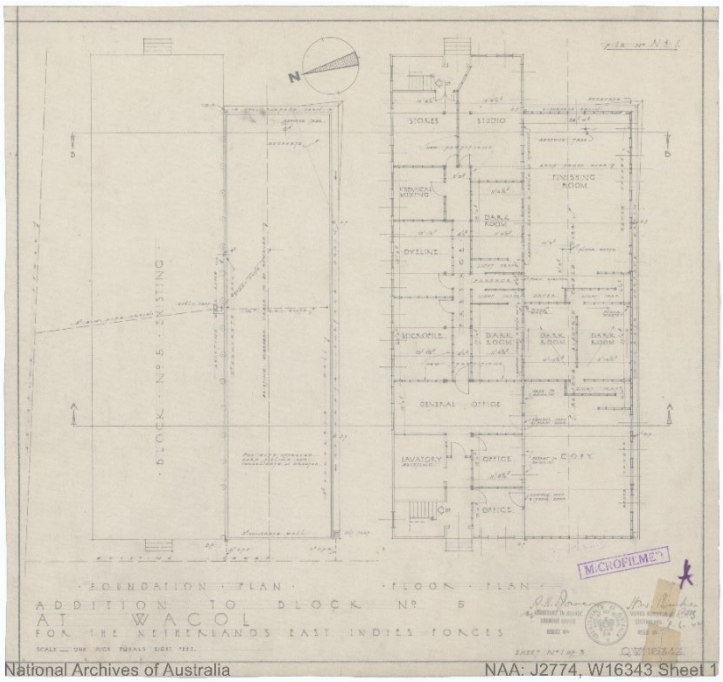

Figure 2: NAA: J2774, W16343 Sheet 1.

This sheet further details additions to block 5 in June 1944:

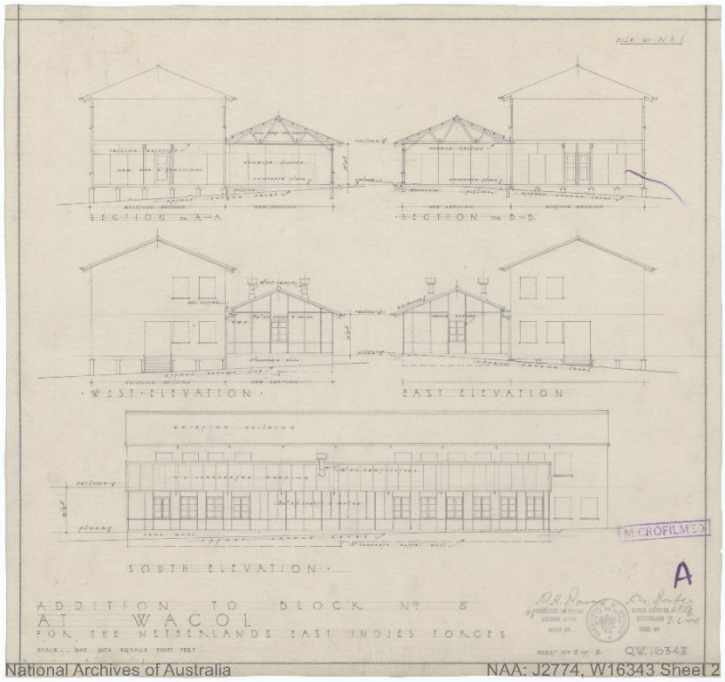

Figure 3:NAA: J2774, W16343 Sheet 2.

Dutch evacuees from the Netherlands East Indies

Dutch, Eurasian and Indonesian evacuees who fled the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies during the Pacific War found temporary refuge in Australia. They were accommodated temporarily at Camp Columbia before being moved to hotels, boarding houses and other unused establishments. Evacuees who arrived without passports were required to fill out a Netherlands East Indies registration form. They were subsequently given a passbook by the Netherlands Indies Welfare

Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE).[21] This document was accepted by Australian authorities in lieu of a passport. On arrival, Dutch evacuees from the Netherlands East Indies were exempted from the Aliens Control Regulation for a period of six months.

National Archives' collection includes a Department of Immigration file which contains a list of the evacuees who arrived at Camp Columbia.[22] This is an example of the passbook that was issued to evacuees:



Figure 4: NAA: PP6/1, 1945/H/595.

National Archives holds many applications for alien registrations for Dutch who arrived in Brisbane during 1945-46 and stayed at Camp Columbia, numbering over 1,200. These registration forms include place of birth, occupation, personal description, date of departure from Australia, and ship name.

Australian Government cancels plan to train Netherlands East Indies forces in Australia

While the Australian War Cabinet had provided in-principle approval for 30,000 Netherlands East Indies troops to be based in Australia, almost a year later on 28 June 1945, the Australian War Cabinet rejected the previous approval to accept the 30,000 Dutch troops. This led to a meeting on 2 July 1945 between the Australian acting Prime Minister Forde and representatives of the Netherlands Government, Baron Van Aerssen, General Van Oyen and Dr Van Mook. Files in National Archives' collection reveal the discussion that took place:

> Mr Forde: I realise that it is only right that there should be something definite on the matter and I will have the question looked into immediately and, if necessary, have consideration given to it at the next War Cabinet meeting. I will see that you are communicated with as soon as possible after that.

[21] On NIWOE, see Nonja Peters' paper in this volume.
[22] National Archives of Australia: Department of Immigration, Queensland Branch; BP9/3, Personal statements and declaration of aliens entering the state of Queensland, 1927-1949; DUTCH EVACUEES, Dutch Evacuees from Netherlands East Indies [List of Dutch Evacuees arriving at Camp Columbia Wacol from Netherlands East Indies], 1946.

> Baron Van Aerssen: If there are any difficulties, it would be very hard to make other arrangements. We would expect nothing less than an approval because things have been approved in principle, and we have never heard anything new or that any change had been made in the decisions.
>
> Dr. Van Mook: In the meantime we are in a very difficult position. If we have to change all our plans, it will set us back 3 or 4 months. These troops will commence to arrive in September. Some of the troops on the water will arrive earlier. We agreed to take over the servicing of the camps and men as soon as we had the men here. It will put us in a very bad position if at the last moment it is not alright.[23]

On 11 July 1945, a letter from the Department of External Affairs to Baron van Aerssen confirmed that the Australian Government could no longer accept 30,000 Dutch men.

> I have the honour to advise you that, as indicated in the letter to you in September last, it is necessary for the Commonwealth to give careful consideration to its existing and potential commitments before accepting any further obligation to accommodate and supply the forces of an Allied Power.
>
> Unfortunately a delay in assembling Dutch forces apparently resulted from the temporary set-back on the European Western Front towards the end of last year. In the intervening period of nine months since it was indicated to you that the Commonwealth Government approved in principle of your Government's proposal to assemble Netherlands troops here, the demands on the manpower and resources of this country have been severe and it has become increasingly obvious this year that a drastic review of the war effort was necessary, including a downward revision of the works programme for the Royal Navy. I regret that these considerations definitely preclude the acceptance of the obligations involved in meeting the requirements of the Force of about 30,000 men referred to in your letter of August 16, 1944.[24]

On 11 September 1945, Prime Minister Chifley sent a letter to Baron Van Aerssen explaining why Australia could not accept the men. This was a very firm response from the Prime Minister. Van Aerssen responded on 25 September, writing,

> My dear Prime Minister,
>
> I acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your letter of September 11th 1945, regarding the proposal for training of Dutch troops in Australia.
>
> I agree with you that the position has completely changed since I originally approached you, and I therefore want to confine myself to thanking you for the trouble you took to explain certain aspects of the matter to me.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> Van Aerssen[25]

[23] National Archives of Australia: A5954, The Shedden Collection; 562/3, Basing of Netherlands East Indies Forces on Australia. File No. 2 (Following War Cabinet's decisions in Minute No. (4293) of 28th June 1945), 1944-47, pages 152-153.
[24] NAA: A5954, 562/3, page 146.
[25] NAA: A5954, 562/3, pages 28-30.

National Archives' holdings on this incident include newspaper reports. For instance, on 5 November the *Argus* published a story under the headline 'Dutch Troops not allowed to land, 1,600 on ship in Sydney'. The article continued,

> Because of the cancellation of an alleged arrangement under which they were to undergo military training in Australia, 1,600 Dutch troops who arrived in Sydney by Striling Castle yesterday were refused permission to land.
>
> Baron F.E. van Aerssen Beyeren van Voshol, Netherlands Minister to Australia, said in Melbourne last night that representations had been made weeks ago to Australian authorities to have Stirling Castle diverted to Java or Singapore, but a reply had been received that this was not possible. It would meet the wish of the Dutch Government if the troops were taken to Java in another ship.
>
> It was stated on Stirling Castle that the original plan was that the Dutch soldiers, who are from Holland and who are untrained, should go into camp near Brisbane.[26]

Originally, the Australian Government had committed to base as many as 30,000 Dutch soldiers for training in bases in Western Australia which had already been surveyed for this purpose. The Dutch, however, wanted to increase these numbers to 100,000. When the first ship with 1,500 new recruits arrived in Brisbane, they received a hostile reception and the troops were unable to get ashore. In the end, the troops were forced to go to Java untrained, and the plans for Dutch training camps in Australia evaporated.[27]

Dutch withdrawal from Camp Columbia and Australia

The Dutch planned to stay at Camp Columbia until the liberation of sizeable towns in the Netherlands East Indies. As no such large population centres were liberated during the war, the Netherlands East Indies government-in-exile remained at Wacol until war's end and continued to use the site until mid-1946.

In April 1946 *The Daily Telegraph* ran a report titled 'Dutch Plan to Leave Australia':

> Dutch authorities in Brisbane were organising the complete evacuation of their nationals from Australia, Colonel de Stoppelaar said today.
>
> Colonel de Stoppelaar is in charge of Camp Columbia, Wacol (Queensland).

He said 500 Dutch civilian evacuees and servicemen would leave Australia before the end of June.

One hundred would leave in the hospital ship Tasman, due in Brisbane on May 6.

> There were now 300 evacuees and servicemen at Wacol, the main camp in Queensland and 200 at private homes.
>
> More than 100 houses and flats will become available to the public when the Dutch people leave.[28]

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[26] NAA: A2680, 30/1945, page 5.
[27] Dutch Australian Cultural Centre, "Dutch at WWII Camp Columbia Brisbane 1944 – 1947", 9 January 2023, https://dutchaustralianculturalcentre.com.au/archive/dutch-australian-history/military-political-history/dutch-at-wwii-camp-columbia-brisbane-1944-1947/
[28] National Archives of Australia: Department of External Affairs [II], Central Office; A1838, Correspondence files, 1948-1989; 401/4/3/1, East Indies - Netherlands Forces in Australia, 1945-1948, page 122.

A letter from Canberra in September 1947 affirms the withdrawal of Dutch forces from Australia by October that year. The letter reads:

> [...] The Department has now to advise that the question of the continued presence in Australia of Allied Forces has recently been reviewed and that, in view of the fact that it is over two years since the ending of the war with Japan, it is desired that Netherlands Forces in Australia should be withdrawn as soon as possible.
>
> The Department has the honour to request the Legation to advise it of the strength of the Netherlands Forces still in Australia and whether the withdrawal of these Forces could be completed by October 10th.[29]

Conclusion

National Archives of Australia has a rich collection of archival material relating to the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile. The files shed light on the relationship between the Netherlands East Indies and Australian governments during the Second World War, and on some of the key actors in this relationship. The establishment of the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile at Camp Columbia in 1944 remains the only time that Australia has hosted a foreign government on its soil – and the files in National Archives' collection reveal important information about this time.

Sources:

In addition to the materials referenced in footnotes, this research draws on the following sources:

Anzac Square and Memorial Galleries. "Camp Columbia (Dutch Forces 1944-45". Accessed 14 June 2025. https://www.anzacsquare.qld.gov.au/historic-places/queensland-wwii-history-map/camp-columbia-dutch-forces-1944-45

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Todorovski, Ruby. "The Big Timeline of the Dutch Occupation of Camp Columbia". Camp Columbia Historical Association Inc. Accessed 23 June 2025. https://campcolumbia.com.au/the-big-timeline-of-the-dutch-occupation-of-camp-columbia/.

[29] NAA: A1838, 401/4/3/1, page 55.

PART

3

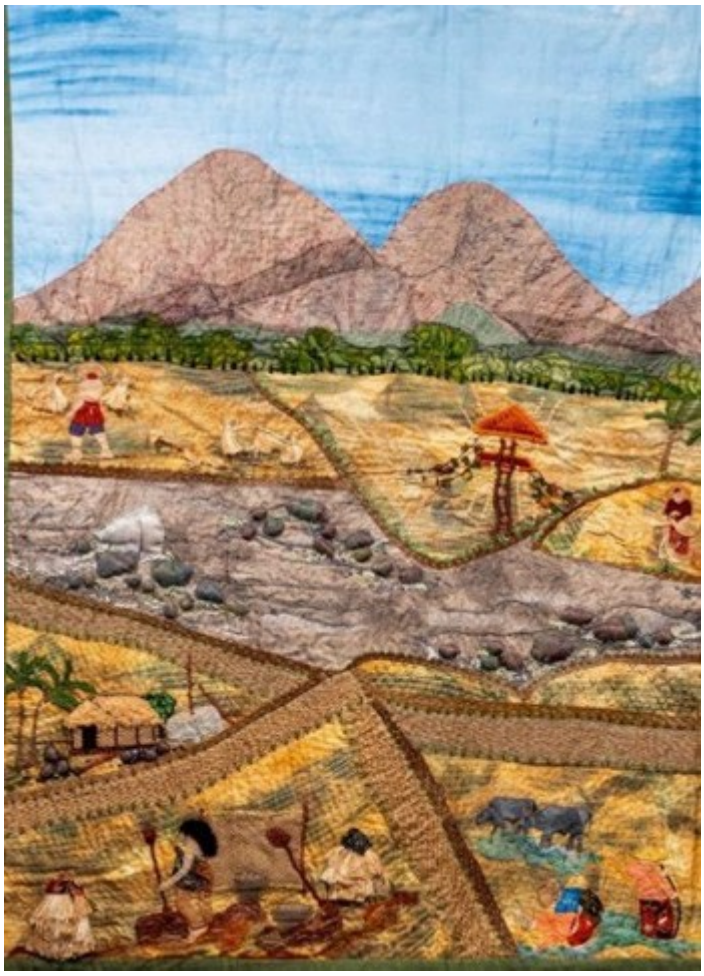
PERSONAL STORIES FROM THE WAR

- **Buitenkampers and the relevance of social history museum exhibitions**
  Frances Larder
- **The Wartime Memories of Claude Belloni**
  Renée Belloni
- **Snapshots of Fairbridge Farm School: Experiences of Children Recalled in Adulthood**
  Nonja Peters

Buitenkampers and the relevance of social history museum exhibitions

Frances Larder

Landscape of the Soul



My chapter offers both a visual and textual exegesis interpretation of *Landscape of the Soul*, a research exhibition I prepared as part of the requirements for the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree. The exhibition comprises nine wall hangings accompanied by pen-and-ink drawings that portray the decline of the Dutch colonial period in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), beginning with the Japanese Occupation during World War II (WWII) and continuing through and beyond the Indonesian National Revolution of Independence from 1945 to 1949.

The experiences of this turbulent period are conveyed through the voices of a group of *buitenkampers*, children who lived outside the internment camps and who later made Australia their home. My artwork visualises their accounts of deeply traumatic events. It reflects how, as adults, they remember the war, a time marked by violence, instability, bloodshed and death that characterised the tragedy and upheaval of WWII in the Asia Pacific region. Their stories encompass the grand themes of life, loss and nationhood, as well as the alienation and despair inherent to war and migration.

I sought to represent these *buitenkamper* children's experiences by giving visual form to the psychological impacts and profound changes brought about in their lives being shattered through war, revolution, and dislocation. Through archival research and interviews, I helped to break the long-held silence surrounding their childhood experiences, giving their history agency to be expressed, shared, and more fully understood.

Childhood Memories



The memories of children who spent their childhood in the NEI prior to WWII recall the pre-war years in the Indies as a time of *tempoe doeloe* - the old good life. They expressed their fond recollections of the good relationships they had with their gardener, their *kokki* (cook), the *djongos* (boys/servants), and their *baboe* (domestic servant), who were always willing to play with them. These were the images that the Japanese invasion and occupation of the NEI shattered as it changed the children's lives forever.

I was born in Bandung, West Java, in 1937. My earliest memories of living in the colony were shaped by the world around me as a young child. In the distance, mountains lay shrouded in the early morning mist, created an idyllic and unrealistic landscape of rolling hills dappled in shades of light blue, pink, green and brown. Nestled amongst this landscape were the *kampongs* (villages). In the early mornings my brothers and I would wake to the smell of fires being lit, the spicy aroma of *kretek* (clove cigarettes) wafting through our bedroom window. Gradually the morning came to life and we heard the bustle of traffic, the sounds of car horns and ringing bicycle bells, warning pedestrians to get out of the way. It was a world of noise and energy.

Some of my favourite memories were being allowed to go on trips with my *baboe* to her *kampong* to visit her family. To get there we had to walk along the *kali* (creek), which was usually yellow-coloured or muddy and brown after heavy rain. On those days the water would rush by us. We continued our walk along the *sawahs* (rice paddies), which glistened in the sunlight. I enjoyed watching the dragonflies dancing above the water. The silhouettes of the tall coconut trees gave an interesting backdrop. Continuing our journey, we passed a temple with statues that stood on watch like sentries, their unseeing eyes staring into the distance. Very often there were offerings of flowers or dishes with food left out at the temples.

Sometimes I was allowed to accompany my *baboe* to the *pasar* (market) to purchase food for the day. The colourful display of spices represented a myriad of colour. I enjoyed listening to the vendors trying to outdo each other to attract the attention of passersby, encouraging them to try their wares, such as the sweet taste of fruits, rambutans or bananas. The tantalising smell of *sate* (skewered meat)

being roasted on charcoal, and the smell of the different spices wafting through the air, all added to the excitement of the day.

This was a very special time for the cherished and only memory I have of my father taking me on a pony ride as a special treat. When night came and we were tucked in our beds under a mosquito net listening to the sounds of crickets and inhaling the strong perfume of flowers floating through the louvered windows, I always felt safe and comforted. When there was a *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre) performance the haunting sounds of gamelan music in the distance contributed to this feeling, lulling us to sleep. These earlier years were carefree and an idyllic time knowing we were protected having my father there. I always felt safe and comforted.

Japanese Invasion and WWII (1942-1945)



My father joined the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL), as did his two brothers. Together, they participated in trying to withhold the Japanese army from taking possession of areas around Bandung. My father was captured and taken to Camp Makassar in Batavia (now Jakarta), where he, alongside 3,188 other Dutch prisoners of war (POWs), was transported to Singapore on the *Harugiku Maru* 2 (the former Dutch S.S. *van Waerwijk*). The journey took four days and he arrived in Changi Prison on 19 January 1943.

Two weeks later he was transferred by train to Burma to work on the railway. During those years he contracted several illnesses and he died on 20 December 1945, before the Allies were able to rescue the POWs.

When the occupation began I had just started kindergarten. That soon closed and my mother taught me to read and write during the war years. Residents were given cascara seeds and were ordered to plant them. The oil of these plants was extracted and used as fuel for the vehicles when fuel became in short supply.

Towards the end of the war the Dutch and Allied forces heavily bombed towns and airfields. Very often we had to spend hours in an underground shelter when these explosions occurred. We always

had to wear a piece of rubber attached to a piece of string around our necks to put into our mouths to protect our teeth from vibrations caused by the bombs.

We were very fortunate that we were not incarcerated. My mother was heavily pregnant and her physician advised her to try to avoid internment. There were complications with the baby, and he doubted she and the baby could survive incarceration. Fortunately, she was able to acquire evidence that her grandfather was of German descent and this kept her and us out of the camps.

Survival

However, life outside the camps was hard and it was difficult to survive, especially with food in short supply. My mother also found it very difficult to take care of four young children without financial means. As the proverb goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention", and my mother found innovative ways to feed her children. These included door-to-door sales of *borstplaat* (homemade sweets), and prettily painted jars filled with skincare creams made from plants. This earned my mother enough money to get by. Rich Chinese families were her best customers.



The younger *buitenkamper* children, including myself, were initially unaware of the traumas and upheaval surrounding us. Over time, though, we could not avoid realising the drastic changes to our daily lives. However, because we were so young our memories of this time are imperfect, meaning our stories present only a partial view of the entire spectrum of events.

The older children, especially boys, were more aware of how everyday life became a struggle to survive from the onset of the Japanese occupation. These young boys tried to contribute financially by working at menial jobs for long hours for a pittance, or by searching for food.



The Ring

My mother joined the underground and smuggled messages from her radio in a secret compartment of her ring. Unfortunately, this was reported to the Japanese. Luckily my mother was forewarned and managed to dispose of the radio before the *kempetai* (Japanese military police) arrived. She was told she would be interrogated and was ordered to pack a small suitcase with toiletries to take with her. While saying goodbye to us, she noticed that one of my brothers had a high temperature. One of her friends, who was visiting my mother that morning, was ordered by the Japanese officer to stay behind and look after us. My mother turned to her friend and begged her to look after her son, not realising that the officer could understand Dutch. Instead of being taken away, Mum was ordered to stay, however we were all placed under house arrest and were only allowed to stay in one room. All other rooms were sealed off. However, both women were able to carefully undo the seals from the doors and managed to get bedding and clothing, before replacing the seals.

Life became very lonely and isolated. I had no friends to play with and I was not allowed to move around freely, except in the back part of the house.

One morning we woke up and discovered that the Japanese sentry was no longer guarding the house. Mum discovered that the war had ended. I can still remember seeing the relief and hope on people's faces.

The Diaspora



After the war, my mother re-married and we left Indonesia for Australia in 1951. I remember having mixed emotions leaving Indonesia: I was afraid of leaving the familiarity of the country where we had been born, and apprehensive of what to expect upon arrival in Australia. We were only allowed to bring one suitcase per family member, so it was hard to decide what to keep and what to leave behind. I felt very sad to abandon my favourite books.

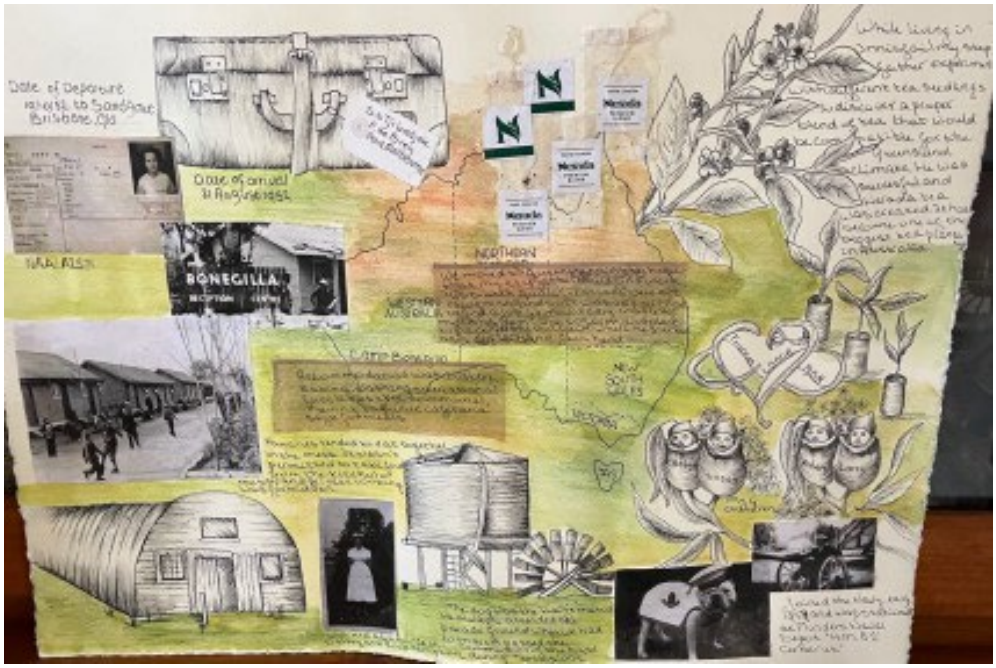
We disembarked in Melbourne on a cold winter's day. Luckily the Red Cross had supplied us with winter clothes. After completing immigration and customs, we were bundled onto a bus taking us to the railway station, destination Albury. On arrival we were placed onto another bus, that took us to Camp Bonegilla. Due to a shortage of accommodation quite a few army bases were transformed into temporary accommodation for the migrants. It was late evening when we finally arrived. Everybody was hungry, cold and very tired. Each family was allocated a hut with just the basics, whereupon we assembled in the dining room, queuing up to receive our meal, which was mutton stew, looking very unappetising and very different to what we were used to. Most of us went to bed still hungry. We settled into camp life.

My stepfather tried to find a job and was offered one working on the Snowy Mountain Scheme. He only worked there for three days. A friend recommended Queensland because plenty of jobs were on offer there, so we travelled north. On arriving in Brisbane, my stepfather couldn't find anything suitable. He had a master's degree in agriculture, specialising in tea, coffee and rubber, but his qualifications were not recognised in Australia. Eventually he eventually found work as a farm hand in the outback, moving to another farm every three months.

We struggled to adjust to the Australian curriculum and the foreign language. Having to change schools every couple of months disrupted our education considerably. My mother tried to adjust to the isolation and to having to rely on irregular ways of transport to obtain food. We eventually moved to North Queensland, still moving from place to place in the hope of finding a suitable job. I stopped going to school, and at the age of fifteen started my nursing career at a nursing home to assist the family financially. This continued until I stopped working and married my husband. I continued my schooling by correspondence and spent several years nursing in Rockhampton, visiting my family once a year during my holidays. By then my parents had settled in North Queensland.

Eventually I joined the Navy and had to travel to Brisbane for the interviews. Out of twenty candidates I was the only one selected. I made headlines in the *Brisbane Telegraph*: "Dutch girl travelled thousands of miles to join the Australian Navy."

My stepfather eventually found a job working for an Agricultural Proof Station and CSIRO in South Johnstone (North Queensland). He became friends with their family doctor and while sharing a drink during the evening they discussed the possibility of starting a tea plantation. Dr. Maruff financed the project, and my father experimented with numerous tea plants until he found a blend that was suitable for the Northern Queensland climate. That was the start of Nerada Tea Plantation. Unfortunately, he was never acknowledged for his achievement.



A New Beginning

The children who, like me, arrived in Australia with their parents directly from Indonesia had a disrupted or minimal school education because of the war. Suddenly, we were immersed in a new education system. Another significant factor impacting us was that we grew up in an environment with no or few extended family members, as most of the family still lived in the Netherlands our mother country. Settlement for these children in immigrant families in Australia was challenging, as we had to get used to a whole new life and adapt to a whole new culture and language.

One of the reasons I began this project was to investigate my own family history to gain a better understanding of the difficulties my mother faced during the troubled period in the NEI, caring for us children without access to appropriate resources.

These difficulties may have been a contributing factor for her repeated depression in later life. My second oldest brother is also frequently beset with depression and has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.



Life Among the Gumtrees

One of the issues that surfaced from the interviews I conducted for my research was that no matter how different their stories were or in which localities the cruelties were performed, the *buitenkamper* children were innocent bystanders caught up in a situation that was not of their making, yet they all were emotionally damaged by it. Many of this cohort, including myself, had to endure the death of a parent due to internment, and/or had one or both parents suffer the aftereffects of war and displacement. This manifested in many ways, such as depression and anxiety, overtly strict discipline, lack of trust in people around them, fear of bureaucracy, or nervous breakdowns.

The result of living with a traumatised parent was that children in effect became the "keepers of the secrets" within the family. This meant that children took on extra responsibilities. The culture of secrets and silences seems to have also contributed to the damage.



Our history is important. By accessing the experiences of the past, doors that had remained closed for many, whether in our minds, our hearts, or in our society, can be opened. The *buitenkamper* experiences were part of this history that up to now has been largely overlooked, particularly in Australia. For me this has been a complicated personal journey of realisation, unusually mindful of the ways in which memories and present considerations can be intermingled when we seek to understand a difficult past.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that art can provide us with a deeper socio-historical understanding and can also be a platform for portraying an accurate and enduring record of this unknown part of Australian history.

The Wartime Memories of Claude Belloni

Renée Belloni

I was living in Australia when my aunty in the Netherlands informed me about the upcoming launch of a new website by the Nagasaki Monument Foundation.[1] The Foundation's website commemorates the Allied prisoners of war (POWs) who were imprisoned at Camp Fukuoka 14B in Japan during World War II, and lived and suffered in atrocious circumstances there. My father, Claude Belloni, had been incarcerated in this camp as a POW for nearly fifteen months during the war. When I visited the website, some testimonials from other former POWs were already present on it. Reading their – my father's contemporaries – stories elicited an emotional response in me and prompted me to chronicle his experiences. To compose the story about my father, I immersed myself in his diary and relevant articles he had authored during that period of his life. Writing this paper serves as a homage to him on my part.[2]

Early years and enlistment in the KNIL

My father Claude (affectionately called Boy by family and friends) was born in the Netherlands East Indies in 1922. He had a character of opposites; he could be as strong and flexible as bamboo and yet as soft as the chalice of a lotus flower. His motto in life was 'Stay strong, never give up, be positive and spread the warmth'.



Figure 1: Claude Belloni. Belloni family collection.

My father's childhood and teenage years were peaceful, but this ended abruptly when he was eighteen. At this time the global situation was intensifying quickly as Japan advanced south into the Pacific, and on 2 August 1941 my father received orders to enlist in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger*, KNIL). His talent for radiotelegraphy quickly led to him being reassigned to the KNIL's Engineer Troops, stationed in Tjimahi, Java. As a radio operator, or TIK, he played a vital role in transmitting and receiving messages through Morse code, although the tropical climate and unreliable signal reception made this a challenging task.

Just a few months into his service my father found himself caught up in the wave of general mobilisation that followed Japan's official declaration of war on the Indies. After a brief period of fighting in Bandung, my father was taken captive by the Japanese on 10 January 1942. Like many other soldiers he

[1] https://fukuoka14b.org/

[2] My father's life story is published in more detail than can be covered in this chapter in my book *The Sun in his Eyes* (Senang Publishers, 2024). The book was first published in Dutch as *De zon in zijn ogen*.

was held in internment camps.[3] Claude's first internment camp in Tjimahi, where he had started working as a radio operator for the KNIL aged only nineteen.

Capture and transportation in 'hell ships'

Japan used so-called 'hell ships' to transport thousands of Allied and Asian prisoners throughout its occupied territory. As a POW my father was on some of these 'hell ships'. He wrote about them in his diary:

May 1944

> "We were to be transported to Japan in the *Miyo Maru* holds. However, we soon ran into a tropical storm which lasted for four days and nights during which time our hold was closed and we were given no food and only very little drinking water. This storm so damaged the ship making that further travel to Japan in that vessel became impossible and we changed ship in Formosa. Our new ship the *Tamahoko Maru* was part of the convoy transporting us the POWs together with a force of around 500 Japanese troops."
>
> "There was no lighting in the holds and each hold had only one bucket. The sick and the dying were left lying in the filth of sickness and excrement. It became almost inevitable that men would get sick or die. It was awful!
>
> As we approached Nagasaki Bay with only six hours or so to go IT happened! A huge explosion accompanied by waves of water, falling beams and bodies being flung everywhere. I was buried under planks, pushing me underwater but I managed to free myself before the ship quickly sank.
>
> There was a cacophony of sound, people screaming, crying and praying to God, whilst many of the Japanese sang war songs. Each in his way a cry for help, all nationalities now as one in the ice-cold water. I have never been so cold.
>
> An escort ship came to rescue the surviving Japanese people but left us to our fate. However, we were picked up the next morning by a small whaling ship which brought us, 211 survivors to Nagasaki. Just one other survivor arrived a few days later. I was so thankful I survived but the images of all those people in the water, their desperation and their cries, friends drowning before my eyes are burned forever in my mind."

This event on 24 June 1944 cost the lives of 560 of the 772 POWs onboard the *Tamahoko Maru*.[4]

Camp Fukuoka 14B

On arrival in Japan my father and his fellow Dutch, Australian, British and American POWs were transported in trucks to Camp Fukuoka 14B, situated near the Mitsubishi Steel Foundry on the Urakami river in Nagasaki. This camp was no different to others: it was rough, bug infested, had poor sanitation, and there was insufficient food, water, medicine and clothing for the POWs. The prisoners were forced to work under a brutal and harsh regime. The work was heavy and arduous with very little rest time. They were beaten and made to suffer as if the goal was complete humiliation, which for many was the hardest to bear. Some of the POWs worked at the Mitsubishi factory.

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[3] Allied POWs and civilian internees were held in camps across the Indies and in Japanese-occupied territories in Thailand, Singapore and Japan.

[4] "Tamahoko Maru", POW Research Network Japan, http://www.powresearch.jp/en/archive/ship/tamahoko.html. In total 212 POWs survived the sinking of the *Tamahoko Maru* (85 Dutch, 42 British, 13 Americans, 72 Australians).

My father was later to be a witness to one of the most historically significant events. At 11.02am on 9 August 1945, the United States hit Nagasaki with a plutonium bomb, the largest atomic weapon ever deployed in war. The bomb caused massive destruction and killed about 73,000 people straight away or within a few months of the bombing.[5]

In his diary my father wrote:

August 1945

> "We returned again and again to the hard shattered city to help wherever we could, nothing seemed to remain whole, devastation everywhere, imprints on charred bricks and human remains. We searched for food, anything edible, oblivious to the fact that any of this might be contaminated by radiation, but anything to survive.
>
> On 17th August we were summoned by the camp commander who, standing on an empty barrel, told us that we were free, our war was over. We just stood and hugged one another and cried in the relief of the moment. Free, finally free!"

Camp Fukuoka 14B was located less than two kilometres from the epicentre of the explosion. Seven of the camp's POWs died as a result of the atomic bombing; at the end of the war the camp had 195 surviving POWs.[6] My father was one of these survivors. The camp was later torched and burnt down.

Many years after the war my father was interviewed about his experience of the atomic bombing. Click the image below to watch his interview in the 2008 documentary film "The Horror of Fat Man" by Serge Viallet.

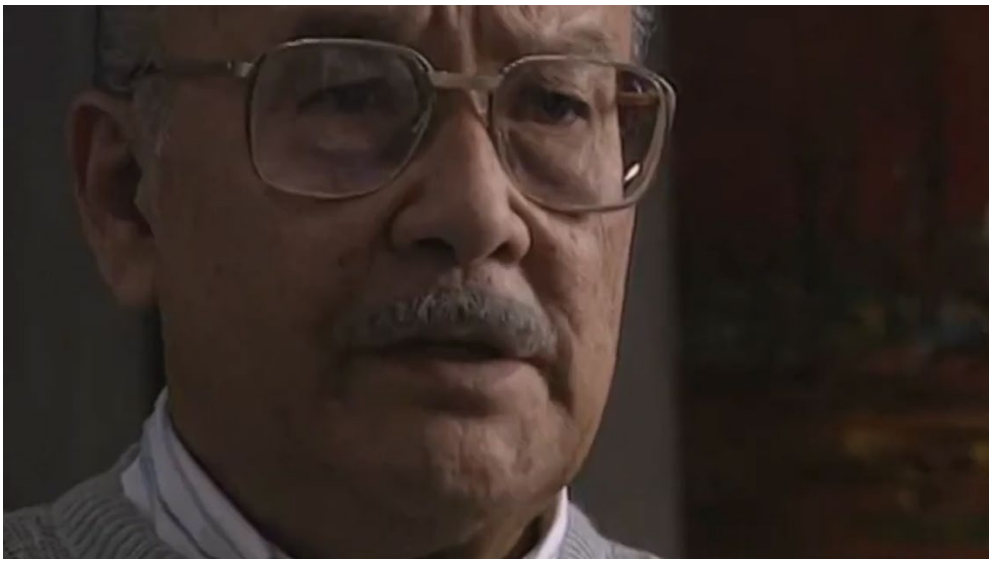

Figure 2: Still of Claude Belloni in the documentary "Nagasaki - The Horror of Fat Man" (2008). Click the image to watch Claude's interview.

[5] Masao Tomonaga, "The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Summary of the Human Consequences, 1945-2018, and Lessons for *Homo sapiens* to End the Nuclear Weapon Age", *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, vol.2 no.2 (2019): 493. The bomb struck outside Nagasaki city centre. The area's geography meant the city was not destroyed, but the bomb caused major destruction and death where it did hit.

[6] Mick Broderikc and David Palmer, "Australia, British, Dutch and U.S. POWs: Living under the shadow of the Nagasaki Bomb", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 13, issue 32, no.3 (2015), article ID 4358, p.6.

In September 1945, my father wrote in his diary that he and his fellow POWs began to leave Nagasaki on their journeys home. Before they split up, one of his closest friends, Ben Drewery, wrote a short poem for him that encapsulated their shared experience and friendship:

And when the stream which overflowed my soul
was passed away,
A consciousness remained that it had left,
deposited on the silent shore of memory.
Precious thoughts that shall not die and cannot be destroyed.

My father carried this poem with him for the remainder of his life. There is a quote that also illustrates the impact of this war on my father and the many others who survived it. This quote is a translation from the book *Kafka on the Shore* by the Japanese author Haruki Murakami:

> And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about.[7]

End of the war, but not the end of war

For my father it seemed that the sun did at last shine in his eyes again as he was going home. However, this ray of sunshine was not to last. Unbeknownst to my father, Indonesian nationalist (and later first president of Indonesia) Sukarno had declared an independent Republic of Indonesia on 17 August 1945, six days after the bombing of Nagasaki and two days after the Japanese surrender of the war. However, the Netherlands refused to recognise the Republic and war broke out.

So there he was, a survivor of one conflict only to be flung into another. For my father this new war was a bitter conflict that was somehow worse than the world war because, as a sort of civil war, it would destroy families, turn once-friendly neighbours into enemies and force thousands to leave all behind and start a new life on the other side of the world. For both of my parents, this independence revolution was a bitter experience.

During the Revolution the Dutch and Indo-Europeans were no longer safe due to their loyalty to the Netherlands and their (part-)European ethnicity. They were now seen as the enemy to be driven out. Ultimately, for them it became one war won followed by one war lost. In December 1949 the Netherlands conceded that their colony had become the independent country of Indonesia.

On 2 February 1948 my father was finally able to put down his weapons upon receiving his demobilisation papers from the KNIL. He remained in Indonesia following the handover in 1949. In 1951 another shock awaited him. After December 1951 every Dutch citizen in Indonesia was forced to decide to change their nationality to Indonesian, or leave the land and environment that they loved.[8] This is what my father said about it:

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[7] Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, translated by Philip Gabriel (Vintage Classics, 2022 [2003]), 8.
[8] Editors' note: After the transfer of sovereignty there was a two-year period in which Indo-Europeans and some others could choose to become Indonesian citizens, as determined at the Round Table Conference of August-November 1949.

> "your mother and I didn't consider it an option to live in the Republic of Indonesia yet since we both preferred to remain in the tropics, we chose for the option of Terra Incognita, New Guinea, which was still under Dutch rule, though many others migrated directly or via Holland to countries like Australia and the USA. We knew from the beginning that we would face a rather tough and somewhat primitive life on the island as everything was so scarce. However together we stood strong, and this became our home in this unspoilt demi paradise.
>
> Neither of us was averse to just rolling up our sleeves to make the best of our new life, we were together and thought we would make it work and despite everything manage to build a future in freedom."

However, after twelve years of happiness, freedom and progress in New Guinea, my parents' world was once again thrown into turmoil. In June 1962 news broke that would change everything: a deal had been struck between the Netherlands and Indonesia concerning New Guinea, in which New Guinea would be handed over to Indonesia. My parents were once again forced to leave their homeland. This time, they chose Europe and a new life in the Netherlands, probably because some of their families were already there. They migrated to the Netherlands and once again built a new life, now with me and my sister Louise. Louise eventually married an Aussie and left for Australia in 1972. I followed her Down Under in 2014 with my Australian husband.

My father lived in the tropics for over forty years. His life was punctuated by many significant events, some of which turned his life 180 degrees around and some of which resulted in hardship. He was drafted into a war and was imprisoned as a POW. He faced death more than once: drifting ten hours in the sea after shipwreck, sleeping amongst snakes and scorpions, and being in the vicinity of a nuclear bombing. Ultimately, his story is one of survival. It exemplifies the appalling ordeals endured by Allied forces, including POWs, in the Indies and Japan during the war. My goal in relating Claude's wartime memories is to illustrate how the momentous events of those terrible years of war shaped not just his life but also many others.

Postscript: Searching for Australian survivors of Fukuoka 14B

I am assisting the Fukuoka 14B foundation to search for families of seventeen Australian survivors of Camp Fukuoka 14B. The Foundation seeks to obtain permission from the families to include the survivors' names on the Nagasaki Monument in Japan. They are:

> M.W. Banks, W. Boyd, R.B Downie, F.W. Fitzmaurice, C.J. Gleeson, Ch.E. Howard, N.J. Marshall, R. McConnell, H.D. Miller, R.W. Nimmo, B.D.A. O'Keefe, Ch.O. Perkin, L Prendergast, W.C. Reed, G. Ross, Ph.J. Smythe, and E.R. Snowden.

If you have information about these men, please send an e-mail to secretary@campcolumbia.com.au. Thank you.

The Dutch government expected many Indo-Europeans to take this option, but a majority elected not to become Indonesian citizens.

Snapshots of Fairbridge Farm School: Experiences of Children Recalled in Adulthood

Nonja Peters
Edith Cowan University & Curtin University

Introduction

This chapter examines how World War II and its aftermath in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI/the Indies) shaped the lives of Dutch-Indies children evacuated to Western Australia (WA) for rehabilitation after three and a half years in Japanese civilian internment camps. Many had endured prolonged internment with their mothers during the Japanese occupation (March 1942–August 1945), only to face renewed danger with the outbreak of the Indonesian Revolution.

Set against the upheaval of the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia and the Indonesian struggle for independence, this chapter reconstructs the 'contested space' of memory and survival through archival records, memoirs, photographs, news accounts and oral history interviews. It incorporates Australian perspectives, including those of Welfare Officer and House Mother Ella Bone, volunteer drivers Pearl Buck and Janie Hardey, and newspaper boy Jim Williams, who recalled encounters with the children. Many of these witnesses waited decades before speaking about their experiences with the Dutch children rehabilitated in WA. This body of research culminated in the publication of *From Tyranny to Freedom: Dutch Children from the Netherlands East Indies to Fairbridge Farm School, 1945–1946* (Black Swan Press, Curtin University). This chapter draws on the earlier research and the book above.[1]

Through these intertwined Dutch and Australian voices, the chapter reveals a largely overlooked episode in Dutch–Australian history and traces the enduring effects of war, displacement and migration. It follows the evacuation and rehabilitation of Indies Dutch families in Western Australia—many in poor health after years of Japanese internment—before their onward journeys to the Netherlands, where most had never been, or return to the Indies. Families who returned to the Indies from Australia would leave it after 27 December 1949**,** when the Dutch government officially transferred sovereignty to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RUSI) following diplomatic negotiations at the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table in The Hague.

Background: Two Wars in the Asia Pacific Region, 1942–1949

The arrival of Dutch children in Western Australia must be understood against the upheaval that followed the outbreak of war in the Asia–Pacific in 1942. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Japanese forces advanced rapidly, invading the Indies in early 1942. The Dutch capitulated on 8 March 1942, and Japan occupied the archipelago for the next 42 months.

In contrast to German occupation policies in Europe, in the Indies the Japanese interned virtually all Europeans: Dutch men, women and children, as well as Dutch and mixed-race members of the *Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger* (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, KNIL), and men holding senior positions in the colonial administration.[2]

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[1] Nonja Peters, *From Tyranny to Freedom: Dutch Children from the Netherlands East Indies to Fairbridge Farm School from 1945 to 1946* (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2009).
[2] Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300*. Second ed. (MacMillan, 1993), 27.

Eric Kramer, who was six when interned with his mother, recalls that the immediate detention of Dutch civilians led to the establishment of more than 530 camps across the archipelago, including around 80 on Java. Women and children were separated from men, and boys over ten were transferred to men's or boys' camps. Conditions, initially administered by Japanese civilian authorities, deteriorated sharply when the Imperial Japanese Army assumed control. At the same time, Dutch property and assets were confiscated, leaving families dispossessed.[3]

By the end of the war on 15 August 1945, following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese rule had produced widespread famine, disease and material deprivation. Medicines, clothing and footwear were largely unobtainable; many people survived by wearing improvised garments made from hessian sacks or rubber sheeting. The Indonesian population suffered on a devastating scale: an estimated 2.4 million Javanese died of starvation, with some estimates as high as 4 million. Dutch internees were likewise reduced to starvation rations.[4]

The interned Dutch were not immediately informed of Japan's surrender. About a week after the event (around 23 August 1945), many internees noticed a sudden improvement in food rations, signalling that the war had ended. Yet liberation did not bring freedom. The Indonesian Revolution had already begun: Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno had proclaimed Indonesia's independence on 17 August 1945, just two days after Japan's surrender.

This declaration triggered widespread and often uncontrolled violence by Indonesian youth (*pemuda*) against those perceived as Dutch or pro-Dutch. In Dutch historiography, this chaotic early phase, known as the *Bersiap*,[5] took hold during the six-week power vacuum between Japan's surrender and the arrival of Lord Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command (SEAC) on 29 September 1945. SEAC was tasked with providing interim governance until the Dutch could, in theory, re-establish control.[6]

For those still confined in the camps, the situation was perilous. Dutch survivor Paul van Es, then aged nine, later recalled: "We were not free to leave the POW camps… caught between Japanese bullets—now defending us—and the Pemuda (young Indonesian freedom fighters) trying to massacre us." Paul also mentioned how bizarre it was having their Japanese oppressors suddenly become their carers![7]

Under the terms of surrender, Japanese forces—until recently the occupiers—were ordered to maintain order and protect internees until British-led SEAC forces arrived. Internees were required to remain in place for assessment and registration by the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI), while avoiding exposure to the escalating independence conflict.

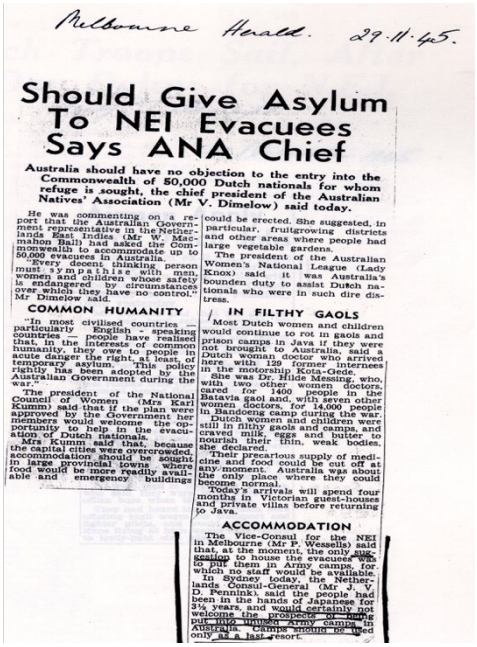
In this climate of insecurity Dutch children, already severely weakened by years of internment, were particularly vulnerable, a circumstance that would later shape their temporary evacuation to Australia for rehabilitation. For many, movement was impossible: identity documents had been lost or destroyed, homes and possessions seized, and communities displaced. Large numbers of the former

[3] Justin Taylan, review of *Japanese Camps in the Dutch East Indies 1942-1945* by F.J. Erik Kramer, Pacific Wrecks, accessed 24 April 2026, https://pacificwrecks.com/reviews/japanese-camps-in-the-dutch-east-indies.html.
[4] Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[5] Esther Captain and Onno Sinke, Het geluid van geweld: Bersiap en de dynamiek van geweld tijdens de eerste fase van de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1946 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022); Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, Being Dutch in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire 1500-1920, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), translated by Wendi Schaffer; Nonja Peters, "Memories of a homeland", Inside Indonesia 103 (January-March 2011), available at https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/chapters/memories-of-a-homeland.
[6] Peters, *From Tyranny to Freedom.*
[7] Paul van Es, oral history interview with Nonja Peters, the Netherlands, 2006.

internees required urgent medical care or prolonged recovery, further delaying any return to civilian life.[8]

Australia Steps Up

Australian diplomat William Macmahon Ball, tasked with assessing the political landscape in the Indies, reported that at least 50,000 Dutch civilians were in a pitiable state (Fig. 1).



Melbourne Herald. 29.11.45.

Should Give Asylum To NEI Evacuees Says ANA Chief

Australia should have no objection to the entry into the Commonwealth of 50,000 Dutch nationals for whom refuge is sought, the chief president of the Australian Natives' Association (Mr V. Dimelow) said today.

He was commenting on a report that the Australian Government representative in the Netherlands East Indies (Mr W. Macmahon Ball) had asked the Commonwealth to accommodate up to 50,000 evacuees in Australia.

"Every decent, thinking person must sympathise with men, women and children whose safety is endangered by circumstances over which they have no control," Mr Dimelow said.

COMMON HUMANITY

"In most civilised countries — particularly English - speaking countries — people have realised that, in the interests of common humanity, they owe to people in acute danger the right, at least, of temporary asylum. This policy rightly has been adopted by the Australian Government during the war."

The president of the National Council of Women (Mrs Karl Kumm) said that if the plan were approved by the Government her members would welcome the opportunity to help in the evacuation of Dutch nationals.

Mrs Kumm said that, because the capital cities were overcrowded, accommodation should be sought in large provincial towns where food would be more readily available and emergency buildings could be erected. She suggested, in particular, fruitgrowing districts and other areas where people had large vegetable gardens.

The president of the Australian Women's National League (Lady Knox) said it was Australia's bounden duty to assist Dutch nationals who were in such dire distress.

IN FILTHY GAOLS

Most Dutch women and children would continue to rot in gaols and prison camps in Java if they were not brought to Australia, said a Dutch woman doctor who arrived here with 129 former internees in the motorship Kota-Gede.

She was Dr. Hilde Messing, who, with two other women doctors, cared for 1400 people in the Batavia gaol and, with seven other women doctors, for 14,000 people in Bandoeng camp during the war.

Dutch women and children were still in filthy gaols and camps, and craved milk, eggs and butter to nourish their thin, weak bodies, she declared.

Their precarious supply of medicine and food could be cut off at any moment. Australia was about the only place where they could become normal.

Today's arrivals will spend four months in Victorian guest-houses and private villas before returning to Java.

ACCOMMODATION

The Vice-Consul for the NEI in Melbourne (Mr P. Weaselis) said that, at the moment, the only suggestion to house the evacuees was to put them in Army camps, for which no staff would be available.

In Sydney today, the Netherlands Consul-General (Mr J. V. D. Penninki), said the people had been in the hands of Japanese for 3½ years, and would certainly not welcome the prospect of being put into unsuitable Army camps in Australia. Camps should be used only as a last resort.

Figure 1: Newspaper chapter from the Melbourne Herald, 29 November 1945.



Melb. Argus. Nov. 30. 1945.

AUSTRALIA WILL TAKE ONLY 6,000 DUTCH FROM JAVA

Referring to a reported suggestion by Mr W. MacMahon Ball, Australian Government representative at Allied HQ in Java, that Australia should receive 50,000 women and children as refugees from Java, Mr Chifley said in Canberra yesterday that arrangements had been made to take in a maximum of 6,000 Dutch people, but this was subject to accommodation being available and erection of special buildings not being involved.

Mr Chifley said that he had no knowledge of any undertaking by Australia to send five shiploads of relief stores, including medicines and food, to Java, as reported by Sutan Sjahrir, self-styled Prime Minister of Indonesia.

Mr Calwell, Minister for Information and Migration, said last night that the Federal Government had agreed in principle to the reception for a limited period for recuperative purposes of as many Dutch men, women, and children—particularly women and children — from NEI as Australia's capacity to accommodate them would allow. In view of Australia's own grave housing shortage, certain camp areas might have to be used for housing the evacuees.

Figure 2: Newspaper chapter from the Argus (Melbourne), 20 November 1945.

Despite this, Prime Minister Ben Chifley limited Australia's intake to 6,000, citing a shortage of available accommodation (Fig. 2). Australia also only agreed to receive the evacuees on the condition that the Dutch authorities would meet the costs.

Ernst Kollmann's family, who arrived in WA in October 1945, recalled,

> you could choose between Melbourne in Victoria or Perth in Western Australia, RAPWI sent us to Perth on board a British ship. We arrived in just the clothes we were wearing. Neither did our family have any money, that had all been taken by the Japanese. We came by air.[9]

Winnie de Vries recorded,

> as my little brother was a very sick and feeble child - we were advised to take the first possible transport. My mother still didn't know whether my father was dead or still alive and where? But we went to Australia because one of the doctors said, 'you better go now, perhaps there won't be another transport'. It was the *MS Oranje* for us.[10]

[8] Peters, *From Tyranny to Freedom.*
[9] Ernst Kollman, oral history interview with Nonja Peters, the Netherlands, 2006.
[10] Winnie de Vries, oral history interview with Dheera Sutan, 2006. See: https://www.radionetherlandsarchives.org/tag/dutch-east-indies/

It had been handed to the Australian Government by the Dutch government in exile in London for use as a hospital ship in June 1941.

Winnie continues,

> No memory is more vivid and amazing than our embarkation, Winnie recalled: "On deck we saw long, long tables covered with white cloth and on it were piles of sandwiches, white bread and all kinds of drinks to choose. Then one moment when I looked out at sea I saw to my great astonishment and shock a piece of that bread in the water! I almost wanted to dive into the water to get it out... I will never, never forget that scene. We had had so much hunger!"[11]

Arrival in Fremantle

When the *Oranje* berthed in Fremantle in November 1945, twenty-year-old Nora Lumkeman, selected for evacuation by her urgent need for medical attention, could hardly believe it was true. She explains:

> On arrival in Fremantle, the Waterside Workers Union strike was in progress in support of Indonesian Independence, so no barges came to help us berth even though we needed urgent medical care! I was put on a stretcher on the quay. I was still very ill from *djarak* seed poisoning. My first meeting with an Australian was emotional. A man who looked like a beggar approached me and offered me a little bag of candies. I will never forget this moment. We were soon taken by ambulance to Perth's Westminster hospital. Later… on the mend, we were encouraged to sit in the garden, and I remember clearly both a girlfriend and I, pinching our arms to feel that we were really awake and not just dreaming a sweet dream.[12]

Starting in September 1945, the Australian Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) and other maritime unions had launched a "black ban" on Dutch ships in Australian ports. The boycott was in support of Indonesian independence, refusing to load or crew ships carrying weapons intended to restore Dutch colonial rule, and lasted until 1949. The ban ignored the plight of the starving Indonesians, and the RAPWI staff needing to assist former internees for medical and protective reasons.

Processing by the Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees

The Netherlands Indies Welfare Organisation for Evacuees (NIWOE) was operationalised out of Camp Columbia when the Netherlands East Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand (NEICANZ) transitioned to the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-exile. Alongside the NICA, NEFIS and VK-KNIL, the NIWOE was one of several key agencies established at that time and took responsibility for Dutch refugees' welfare upon their arrival on Australian soil.[13]

NIWOE maintained offices in each state to oversee the rehabilitation of former internees across Australia. NIWOE staff devised a processing system since none of the refugees had identity documents (see Fig. 3). Some of the forms that NIWOE devised came to functioned as a passport, others ensured refugees had money to spend and new clothes to wear. Following this process, the evacuees were taken to their accommodation.

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[11] De Vries, 2006.
[12] Nora Lumkeman, personal communication, 2006.
[13] On the VK-KNIL, see my other chapter in this e-book.

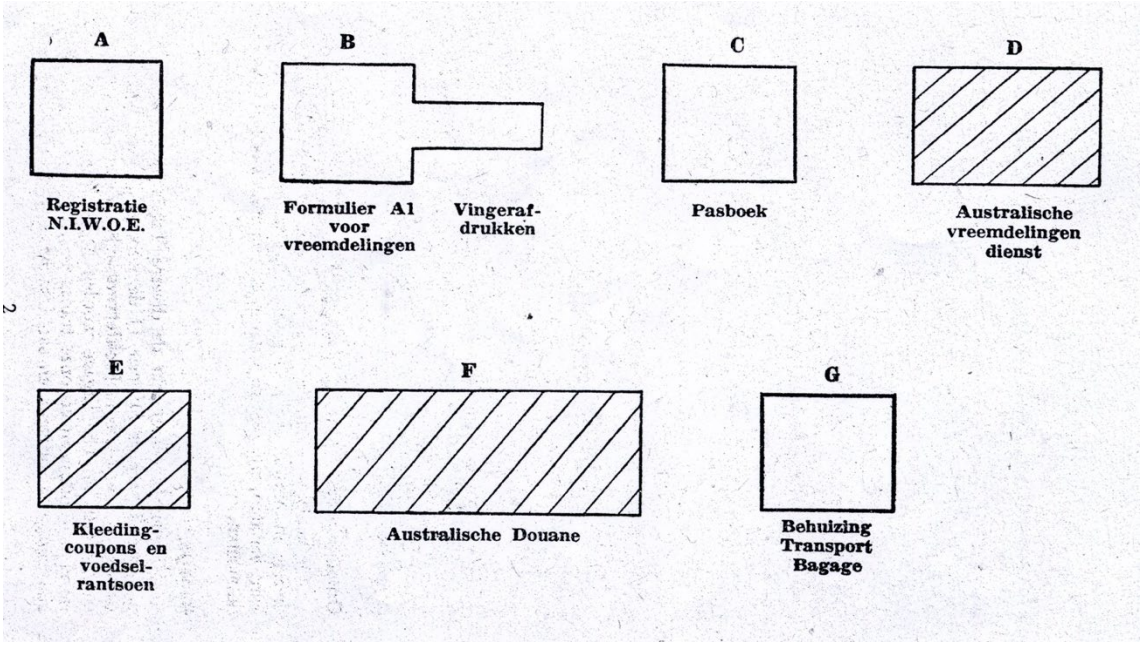


Figure 3: NIWOE Processing Tables A-G: A: Registration; B Proforma A1 for Aliens; C. Passbook; D. Australian Aliens Registration; E. Clothes coupons and food ration cards; F. Australian customs; G. Assigned accommodation, transport and baggage retrieval.

Accommodation in WA

On arrivals the evacuees were placed in city or country hotels, pensions or lodging houses with Dutch or Australian families. Winnie de Vries's family was allocated a room in the King Edward Hotel in Hay Street, Perth. She told us, "Entering the lobby, my brother exclaimed: 'Oh Mam, this is a nice camp!'"[14] Winnie's brother was two years old when the family was interned by the Japanese and had only ever experienced Japanese internment camp life.



Figure 4: Willem Plink (right) with his mother and sister. Courtesy Willem Plink.

Willem Plink (Fig. 4) notes "the reasons our family was sent to Australia urgently for rehabilitation was because within four days my mother heard from the Netherlands that her father had been executed by Nazi SS soldiers, her husband (my father) had died on the Sumatra Railway, and her brother was killed in action. I don't know what went through my mother's head when she also nearly lost both her children in Australia as well. Willem with complicated tonsillectomy and his sister nearly drowned in Pemberton."[15]

The Cloisters (now the Landgate building)

However, if they were very fortunate, evacuees were placed in the Cloisters Buildings in St Georges Terrace, Perth. NIWOE had refurbished the Cloisters to accommodate 60 people. It also sported a dining room that served Indonesian and Dutch cuisine, as well as a kindergarten, which gave mothers a break to rest or follow up on their own rehabilitation treatments. The Cloisters doubled as the Dutch Club and housed the NIWOE volunteers' office. Dutch also gathered at the Wentworth Dutch Club on the corner of Hay and Murray Streets, where many evacuees were also accommodated, and gathered at the Officers' Mess of the Royal Netherlands Marines on the campus of the University of Western Australia (UWA) for some fun times.

[14] De Vries, 2006.
[15] Willem Plink, interview with Nonja Peters, 2006.

Some Dutch naval personnel stationed in WA operated from a military base in the grounds of the UWA and at Catalina base in Crawley. They also ran the Coca Cola social club on campus which had live music every Sunday and no shortage of beer.



Figure 5: The Cloisters, 1945. (Courtesy Willem Plink)



Figure 6: Staff of NIWOE, 1945. Courtesy Willem Plink.

Australian Volunteers

Part of NIWOE's infrastructure included a fleet of Pontiacs and Dodges operated by Australian volunteer drivers, as there were few Dutch with the necessary driving skills to undertake this work. We the researchers, Dr Sue Summers and myself, were fortunate to locate two Australians from that period: Pearl Buck and Janie Hardey, both of whom had served as Red Cross drivers during the war. Although her memory had faded over the intervening sixty years, Pearl still recalled the not insignificant level of discrimination that some Australians directed towards Dutch people of mixed European–Indonesian heritage. Janie remembered that the drivers, "[…] came and went mainly from the Cloisters Dutch Club and the Wentworth Dutch Club, which operated out of the hotel by that name on the corner of Murray and William Street."[16]



Figure 7: Ernst Kollmann at Westminster to see the dentist.

Their duties primarily involved collecting new arrivals from the wharf or airfields and transporting children and parents from their residences to Westminster Hospital in Adelaide Terrace. There, NIWOE had established a medical clinic for refugees—the *Nederland Medisch Centrum*—staffed by a Dutch medical team to address more serious health issues and to carry out dental check-ups.

When interviewed in 2005, Janie still retained the NIWOE pin, brooch, and buttons that she had worn on her uniform in 1945 (Fig.8). Her office at the Cloisters also gave her access to the dining facilities, where she recalled the *nasi goreng* as "delectable." This was at a time in Western Australian history when café menus were dominated by fare such as pie and chips, pie with vegetables and mashed potatoes and gravy, or fish and chips.

[16] Pearl Buck, interview with Sue Summers for the Migration Ethnicity Refugees and Citizenship (MERC) research unit, Curtin University, 2006.



Figure 8: Left - Janie Hardey outside the NIWOE car she drove, taken at Fremantle Harbour. Right - Pins Janie wore. Courtesy J. Hardey.

The teenagers among the 1945 evacuees, soon joined the 490 Dutch children who were or had attended the Dutch high school established in 1942, in Burt Hall, Anglican Cathedral at the other end of St Georges Terrace from the Cloisters. Most of the earlier evacuees had been cared for by congregation families until permanent housing was arranged. By the second evacuation (Oct 1945), Dutch authorities were better organised, but children arrived in poor health, needing rehabilitation and many families still did not know the fate of husbands, fathers or brothers.

Jim Williams, an Australian boy selling papers from the street corner at the Hyde Park Hotel in West Perth recalls that the Dutch kids staying there were very tall, and very skinny. Many had ribs sticking out, and a yellow colouring (possibly jaundiced): "…And I got yapping to them, made conversation with them, and I took them down the street to play football or cricket with an old fruit case and a piece of picket fence for a bat".[17]



Figure 9: Burt Hall, St George's Cathedral, Perth, functioned as a temporary Dutch high school between 1942-1946. Courtesy Donald Schotel.

[17] Jim Williams, oral history interview with Sue Summers, 2006.

Jim remembers some thirty mothers, fathers and children. The children were mostly about ten years of age, pretty well behaved, very much in awe of Australia, and a little apprehensive of what was to come. He described this time for them as a "glorious uncertainty". They didn't tell stories about their experiences in the war, for they were more interested in what they could see around them in Perth and in what they were going to eat. They were never late for meals!

The *Western Mail* newspaper also noted how the evacuees were easily identifiable by their thin frames, poor clothing, and children far too small for their age. However, unlike Jim, they also described the wild behaviour of some of the youngsters. In Perth accommodation, they ran amok on lifts, staircases, escalators in hotel lobbies and took whatever food they came across. They were unaware of a monetary society, as they had never lived in one in their short years on earth.

Willem Plink and Ernst Kollman, Dutch boys who were about eight and eleven at the time, named the taking of food "survival behaviour." They said, "Our attitude was fight for yourself otherwise you will die; and so, we organised everything that we could. Food and whatever we could get." However, their attitude was not appreciated in Perth city because "whatever we saw we picked up and took for ourselves, it was a habit.... No, it was not stealing, we say 'organised', not stealing, because you need food! Our Australian hosts had never needed to engage in similar activities to stay alive."[18]

Fairbridge Farm

The young children's unruliness caused Mr Van Helten, the Chief Welfare Officer employed by NIWOE, to organise their stay at Fairbridge Farm school in Pinjarra. Fairbridge was established in 1913 by Kingsley and Ruby Fairbridge and before taking on the Dutch children, the school had been an orphanage for British child migrants, hosting 1,000 British children after WWI. From 1949 another 1,520 orphans were housed at Fairbridge (decades later it turned out some of these children were not orphans at all).[19]

Fairbridge's acceptance of the Dutch children was reported in local newspapers, with *The West Australian* and *Western Mail* noting that some children, aged eight or nine, looked as young as four due to malnutrition and beriberi, raising fears of stunted growth. The aim was to restore the children's health at Fairbridge and introduce them to social norms and education before repatriating them to the Netherlands or the NEI. Repatriation, however, was a misnomer as few of the children had ever been to the Netherlands.

Welfare Officer and House Mother Ella Bone recalled that most of the younger children had never been to school and had scrounged food where possible for most of their young lives. Hence few were aware of societal mores, values, procedures and customs.

Robyn Wheatley was the Australian-born niece of Stan Healey, the principal schoolteacher at Fairbridge School Farm during the 1930s and 1940s. At the age of twelve, Robyn was invited to spend the school holidays bunking in with the Dutch girls in their dormitory and joining in their activities. Reflecting on this Robyn thought the period was not so carefree for the parents:

> I remember the mothers in the background. They would have been strung out. As a mother when I think of it, I had a straightforward run, compared to what they'd had to deal with. They were all busty grand dames I would have called them. […] they were running after their children trying to say 'Jan (John) come here' and all the while Jan is heading off down the other end of the paddock as far away as he could get. One thing the *Dutchies* did point out was that the discipline the children were accustomed

[18] Kollman, 2006.
[19] Tragically, many WWII children were not orphans at all - see the film *Oranges and Sunshine* (2010).

> to before the war had to be reinstated after life in POW camps and it was not easy. […] Fairbridge enabled them to bond again with mum.[20]

Food, wonderful food…

The ex-internee children considered their recently restored freedom the most overwhelming event to have happened to them since coming to Australia: the children loved their walks in the Australian bush, a totally new experience since coming to Fairbridge, and swimming in the river despite the leeches. However, it was food that held centre stage.



Robyn recalls how the large dining hall, with long benches, "had home grown bowls of food for the children to share. 'They baked the bread on the premises, they made the butter, grew the vegetables and fruit: grapes vines, apricots trees and an orange grove. They made their own marmalade, and what they didn't have, they purchased."[21] All the Dutch Fairbridgeans described their access to food as "awesome". Willem Plink recalls, "I got my health back through milkshakes, apples, lamb and lot and lots of rabbit."[22]

All also mentioned the remarkable food ritual, including Ella Bone and Robyn. Ella notes,

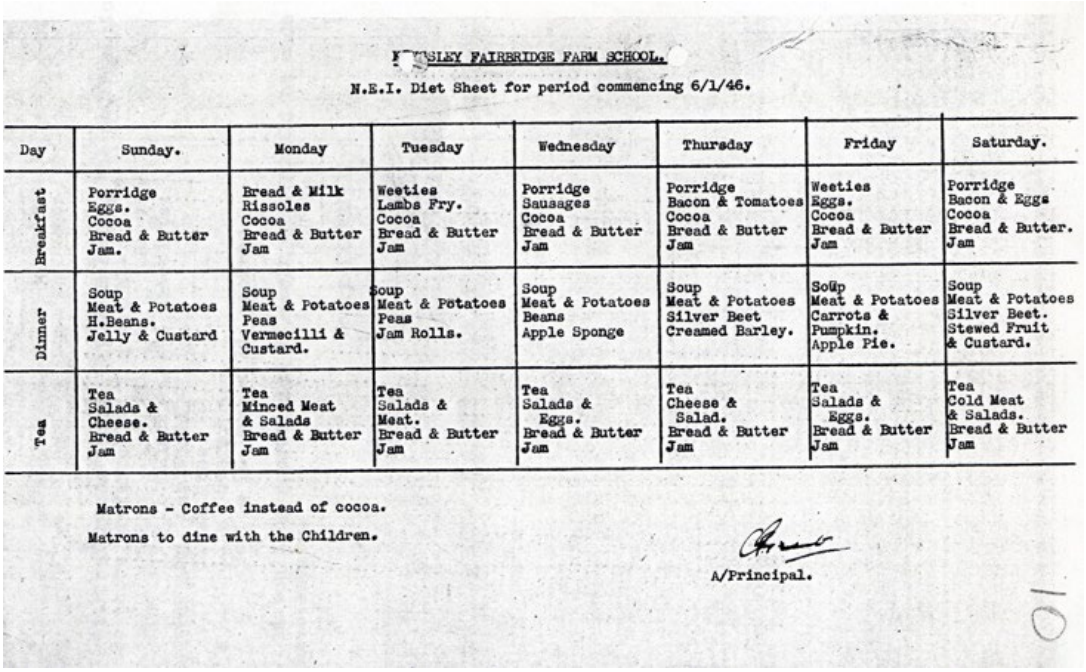
> When the bell rang for lunch, we all walked down to the big dining room with a tin of sweetened condensed milk in one hand and a jar of peanut butter in the other. Everybody had their own 'Dikke melk and Pindakaas'.
>
> I guess they were the things these children were craving for, for years. They had to be fattened up, and so I would eat the same stuff myself!
>
> The practice was to dip one's fingers in the Nestle's milk tin or peanut paste jar and noisily lick/slurp the contents off your fingers or eat large spoonfuls with the same relish. This was undreamed of heaven.[23]

Robyn also reeled off a huge list of all the nutritional food but emphasised how,

> they got ¼ lb blocks of dark chocolate! Well, half their blooming luck because we didn't get it [laughter]. Favourite was the 7d packets of Toffee deluxe a cream caramel – a square about an inch by an inch – and it had a square white paper with the word in blue Plaistow. They put the square in the middle. Put a toothpick up the middle of it, and then they wrapped it and that was a toffee deluxe. And because it was shaped like a dome, you stuck it on the upper palette, held it there for a bit and then pulled it out to see how far you'd sucked on it. […][24]

[20] Robyn Wheatley née Sinclair, oral history interview with Sue Summers for the MERC research unit, Curtin University, 2006.
[21] Wheatley, 2006.
[22] Willem Plink, interview with Nonja Peters, 2006.
[23] Ella Bone, oral history interview with Sue Summers for the MERC research unit, Curtin University, 2006.
[24] Wheatley, 2006.

In fact, the school also bought 1/4lb blocks of light chocolate for 2d, Irish Moss, Life Savers and 7d packets of Toffee Deluxe for the children regularly.



F[illegible]SLEY FAIRBRIDGE FARM SCHOOL.

N.E.I. Diet Sheet for period commencing 6/1/46.

Day	Sunday.	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday.
Breakfast	Porridge Eggs. Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam.	Bread & Milk Rissoles Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam	Weeties Lambs Fry. Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam	Porridge Sausages Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam	Porridge Bacon & Tomatoes Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam	Weeties Eggs. Cocoa Bread & Butter Jam	Porridge Bacon & Eggs Cocoa Bread & Butter. Jam
Dinner	Soup Meat & Potatoes H.Beans. Jelly & Custard	Soup Meat & Potatoes Peas Vermecilli & Custard.	Soup Meat & Potatoes Peas Jam Rolls.	Soup Meat & Potatoes Beans Apple Sponge	Soup Meat & Potatoes Silver Beet Creamed Barley.	Soup Meat & Potatoes Carrots & Pumpkin. Apple Pie.	Soup Meat & Potatoes Silver Beet. Stewed Fruit & Custard.
Tea	Tea Salads & Cheese. Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Minced Meat & Salads Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Salads & Meat. Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Salads & Eggs. Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Cheese & Salad. Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Salads & Eggs. Bread & Butter Jam	Tea Cold Meat & Salads. Bread & Butter Jam

Matrons - Coffee instead of cocoa.

Matrons to dine with the Children.

A/Principal.

Figure 10: A diet sheet for the NEI children in 1946



BACK TO HEALTH

Figure 11: Pages from the Western Mail.

Epidemics of Childhood Diseases

When the mumps broke out as well, 21-year-old Nora Lumkeman, introduced earlier, who had some experience with young sick children in the internment camp in Java, volunteered to help nurse the Fairbridge Dutch patients. She notes, “Afterwards, I became a cottage mother together with Ella Bone, a young WA volunteer. I also gave gymnastic lessons and Ella played *gusti* with the children

— a sort of Indonesian rounders. We had a good time together full of laughter. Those were days in paradise!"[25]

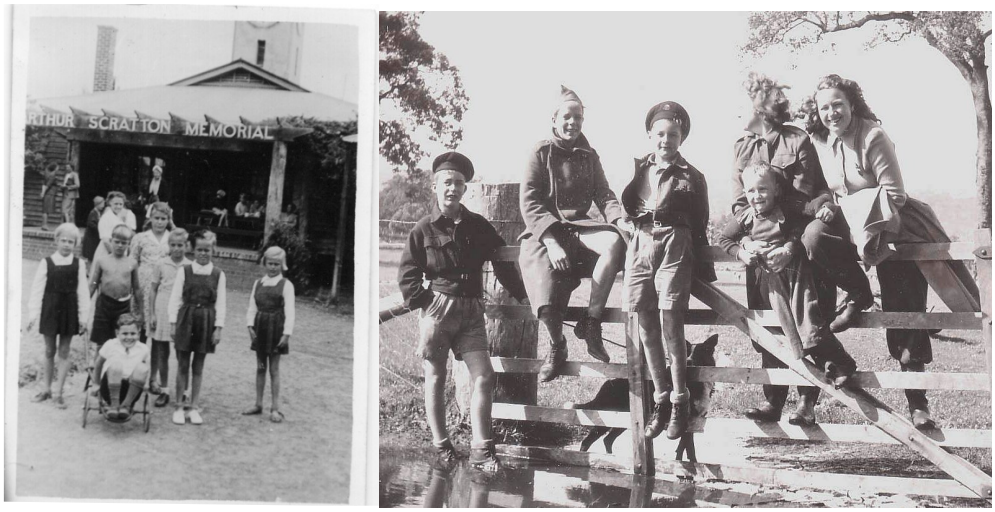


Figure 12: Left - the Family Scratton cottage. Right - Some of the boys' camp chaps with Nora Lumpkeman and Ella Bone. Both photos courtesy of Ernst Kollmann.

Anneke Jongste recalls the measles epidemic that broke out at Fairbridge in April 1946. "There were so many patients that our dormitory was changed into a hospital ward. We were encouraged to visit there, so we got the measles before going to Holland to avoid an outbreak on board ship."[26]

While the milkshakes and fantastic food helped them restore their severely depleted bodies physically from the prolonged starvation that had defined their lives for three and a half years, most Dutch Fairbridgean refugee children were also severely traumatised from witnessing violence against their mothers. If the children had 'wronged' in the Japanese camps, they watched their mothers be beaten. Many had nightmares and wet the bed at night at Fairbridge. They needed a great deal of medical assistance to restore their health. Many would suffer major psychological challenges decades later.

Boys' Camps

An additional major trauma occurred when boys interned with their mothers reached the age of ten. The Japanese forcibly removed them and transferred them to boys' or men's camps, where they were required to work as adults. Many died in these camps from overwork, starvation and beatings.

[25] Nora Lumkeman, personal communication, 2005.
[26] Anneke Jongste, oral history interview by Dheera Sutan for *Wereld Omroep Radio*, 2006.

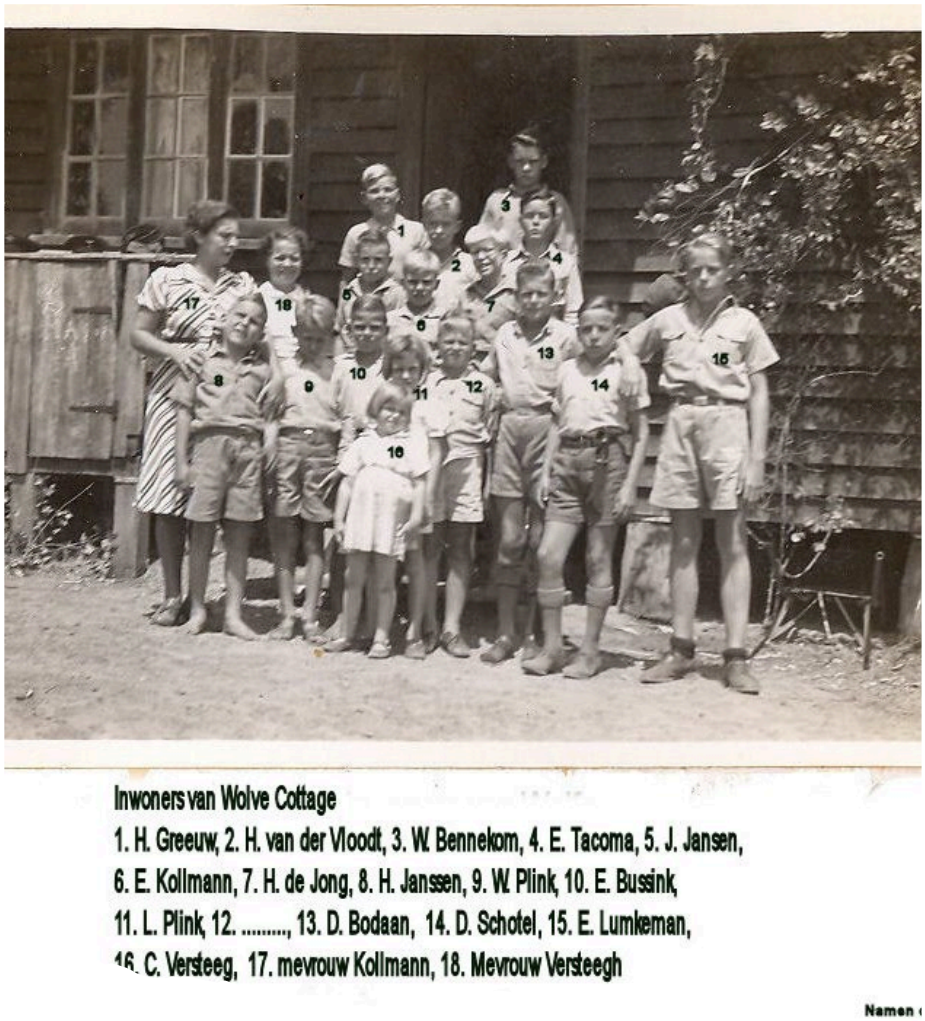


Figure 13: Boys 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14 and 15 were survivors of Japanese 'boys camps' where death rates were very high. The boys had to work 12 hour days. Courtesy E. Kollman.

The loss of their young sons caused profound psychological distress for many mothers, some of whom developed mental illness. Conditions in the boys' camps were harsh, and survival rates were low. The 1946 Tokyo Tribunal reported death rates in Japanese internment camps at 27.1% - seven times higher than under the Nazis; these figures included the boys' camps.[27]

When Donald Schotel, a Dutch Fairbridgean, turned twelve, he was taken from his mother, sister, and grandmother at Halmahera camp and placed in a boys' camp. He recalled:

> One small boy stood in line with a teddy bear in one hand and a small suitcase in the other. In the distance, mothers were yelling and crying, trying to break through to kiss their son's goodbye. The *Heiho* would not allow this. It was all so sad and confusing. I promised myself not to cry. From now on, I was on my own, facing an uncertain future. None of us knew what lay ahead. After much counting, pushing, and shouting, the gate finally opened and we were marched to Bangkong camp. Once in the courtyard of our new "home," a feeling of utter despair came over me.[28]

[27] The Tokyo Trials, or International Military Tribunal for the Far East, ran from 29 April 1946 to 12 November 1948 and tried leaders from the Empire of Japan for war crimes. See "War crimes trials for the Japanese after World War II", Department of Veterans' Affairs, Anzac Portal, accessed 24 April 2026, https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww2/pows/asia/war-crimes-trials#.

[28] Donald Schotel, interview with Nonja Peters, 2006. *Heiho* (auxiliaries) were primarily ethnic Indonesian soldiers recruited by the Imperial Japanese Army during its occupation of the Indies in WWII. Approximately 25,000–

Stefan Anthony, recalling his time in the Pomalaä boys' camp where he was used as slave labour, described how the boys were forced to dig nickel and silver for smelting:

> …the Japanese replaced toys with [tools] to dig. As a child, I was happy to share my sorrow and joy with my parents. I could now only share it with myself. After an exhausting day of labour I silently cried in my bed. As a child I longed for the warmth and safe arms of my mother. Instead I was given loneliness and emptiness. And when the nights turned colder, I had no blanket to keep me warm. Instead I had a ragged […] burlap bag. Everything was taken from me except hope of better days. The most horrific moment I witnessed was the beating of my barrack companion, Wim, by the Japanese until he died. Wim was barely twelve years old. Of Stefan's team of twenty children, only five, reduced to skeletal condition, survived the war.[29]

Mothers in internment were often left in abject despair when informed that their sons had died in the boys' camps. Donald's and Stefan's reflections echo the experience of many former internees interviewed across multiple projects who were 'repatriated' to the 'homeland': "In the Netherlands, our experiences were silenced."

Leaving Fairbridge

When Winnie was told she would be leaving Fairbridge to join her father in Borneo, she was scared. "I wrote to my father: How is the camp (Borneo Kalimatan), is it a good camp?" Winnie's reaction relates to her lack of life experience outside of civilian imprisonment camps. These children thought all of life occurred in camps.[30]

Ernst had this to say about Fairbridge: "While WWII, POW camp life, loss of home and country, had left me feeling mine was a 'fragmented youth'. My overriding time at Pinjarra was: […] happiness, happiness, happiness again. Freedom. These are two things that I remember: Australia […] was a new beginning […] I am always, very grateful for that, to the Australians."[31] Yes. "an unforgettable time where, without really noticing, the normal tenor and discipline of everyday life was reinstated!"[32]

Donald Schotel's sentiments echo Ernsts': "for myself my stay in Fairbridge and generally my stay in Australia immediately after the war will always be remembered as an arrival from hell to heaven; and to my death I will never forget what Australia has meant to me."[33]

42,000 local personnel were recruited to serve as support troops within the Japanese army, often tasked with manual labor, construction, and air defense.

[29] Stefan Anthony in Jan van Wagtendonk (2007), cited in Peters, *From Tyranny to Freedom*, 59.

[30] De Vries, 2006.

[31] Kollman, 2006.

[32] Schotel, 2006.

[33] Kollman, 2006.

Children in War: Summing Up

In this chapter, I have examined former evacuees' accounts of the profound and lasting emotional impact of their Western Australian Fairbridge experience. Donald Schotel wrote that reading the draft manuscript of my book *From Tyranny to Freedom* unleashed a "tidal wave" of long-suppressed memories. Els Duyster expressed gratitude for Australian government support and recalled Fairbridge as a positive turning point. Winnie de Vries captured the essence of wartime loss with the stark observation: "You were no longer a child."[34] For her, Fairbridge offered an opportunity to reclaim fragments of a lost childhood, even as post-war Dutch society discouraged open discussion of these traumatic experiences.



Figure 14: Els Duyster's artwork sums it up: Dutch youth blooms again at Fairbridge. Courtesy Els Duyster.

Scholars such as Jean Gelman Taylor have documented the systematic deprivation within the camps, including policies of slow starvation, forced labour, and routine violence. Memoirists like Dieuwke Wendelaar Bonga similarly recount the loss of childhood, education, and health under conditions of fear and privation, while also recognising the resilience and integrity of many internees. In the aftermath, survivors often experienced what became known as "post-Concentration Camp Syndrome", prompting the establishment of specialised treatment facilities in the Netherlands.[35]

Research on ageing survivors of wartime internment and forced migration further underscores the enduring impact of these experiences. Studies of those who spent their formative years in Japanese civilian camps in the Netherlands East Indies highlight the long-term psychological and emotional consequences that persisted into later life.

These findings echo earlier concerns, including a 1945 UNRRA report on the physical and mental impact of war on children. World War II marked a watershed in which civilian casualties equalled or exceeded those of combatants. In this devastation, unprecedented numbers of children were killed, orphaned or displaced. As UNICEF has observed, children are uniquely vulnerable to the ravages of war: the violence they endure fractures their sense of safety, destroys their homes, fragments their communities.[36]

While humanitarian responses address immediate needs—treating wounds, providing shelter, and supporting displaced populations—the deeper consequences remain. Children who experience war are never entirely restored to who they were before. The long-term task of rehabilitation—nutritional, environmental, emotional, and psychological—continues long after conflict has ended and remains

[34] De Vries, 2006.
[35] Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
[36] "Security Council considers involvement of children in armed conflict; action to ease suffering is urged", United Nations, SC/6536, 29 June 1998, accessed 24 April 2026, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/1998/06/29jun98/.

one of the most pressing and enduring challenges of post-war recovery.[37] Against this backdrop, Fairbridge emerges as a significant and often transformative influence in the lives of the Dutch Fairbridgeans.

Postscript: Motivation to Study the Dutch Fairbridgeans

In 2005, Australia and the Netherlands were approaching the 400-year anniversary of Dutch contact with Australia, commemorating the 1606 voyage of the VOC vessel *Duyfken*, which mapped approximately 300 kilometres of coastline from Cape York to Cape Keerweer in present-day far north Queensland. In the lead-up to this anniversary, Dutch journalists were seeking stories that reflected the historical and contemporary connections between the two countries.

At that time, I was serving on a Western Australian Tourism Board that held a meeting at the former Fairbridge Farm School, originally established for British child migrants and later repurposed as an events venue. During this visit, the CEO showed me a collection of black-and-white box camera photographs depicting a group of "Dutch children" at Fairbridge. He was unable to provide further information about their identity or presence but expressed a strong interest in uncovering their story.

This encounter prompted me to initiate enquiries through *Wereldomroep Radio* (Radio Netherlands Worldwide). One of its journalists, Dheera Sutan, broadcast an appeal which elicited responses from many former Dutch Fairbridge children, by then in their seventies, who began to come forward. Sutan subsequently travelled to WA to produce a radio program on their experiences. To support this work, I engaged Dr Sue Summers to conduct local interviews with participants.[38] Further oral histories were collected during a research trip to the Netherlands in 2008.

[37] Trudy T.M. Mooren and Rolf J. Kleber, "The significance of experiences of war and migration in older age: long-term consequences in child survivors from the Dutch East Indies", *International Psychogeriatrics* vol.25 no.11 (2013): 1783-1794.
[38] My Curtin University Senior Research Fellowship, a five-year appointment that I won in 2005, included funded research assistance.

In August 2025 the Camp Columbia Heritage Association brought together historians, archivists, researchers and families from Australia, the United States, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom for the symposium *Allied Cooperation in Brisbane During WWII*.

Brisbane at War gathers the research presented there. Thirteen chapters trace the years in which Brisbane became the Allied capital of Australia — the commands and the camps, the submarine base at New Farm, the British Pacific Fleet, the airfields of Queensland, the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile at Camp Columbia, and the men, women and children whose lives it reshaped.

Camp Columbia Heritage Association Inc. makes this e-book freely available to all.

PART ONE	The Role of the Four Allies in Brisbane during World War II
PART TWO	The War Comes to an End and the Impact of Allied Activities
PART THREE	Personal Stories from the War

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