

# AUSTRALIANS IN BCOF



**T**he morning had been one of thin, sparkling sunshine, . . . the story-book shores of Japan unfolding as the ship ploughed up the Inland Sea. . . .

*They were passing a hilly island, fantastically banded by cultivated terraces that rose in layers of yellow and green almost from the water's edge to the highest summits. A tiny fishing village crowded down from the heights, the houses squatting round the golden crescent of the beach like cattle drinking at a river's bank.*

Thus the novelist T.A.G. Hungerford describes how Japan appeared to the first large body of Australian soldiers to arrive there. For four years the two countries had been at war. Now that was over, the defeated land lay open to the men from the south, and a new relationship could begin. Hungerford himself was one of those soldiers, a member of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF).

Hiroshima and Nagasaki meant that the Allies did not have to fight their way into Japan. Instead, they arrived as occupiers, to supervise the pacification of the country and to ensure that the Japanese would never again make war on their neighbours. The troops arrived expecting at best sullen resentment and, at worst, guerrilla warfare. To their surprise, they found the people strangely cooperative, ready to accept the Emperor's decision to lay down arms and to get on with the task of rebuilding.

The occupation was mainly in the hands of the Americans, but the British, Indians, New Zealanders

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and Australians together formed BCOF, and were given control over the southern part of the island of Honshu. Australia provided the largest contingent in BCOF, and was therefore given command. The Australians were soon busy supervising the destruction of weapons, maintaining surveillance over the civilian population, monitoring elections, and maintaining a ceremonial presence which would remind the Japanese of the new realities.

Some Australians arrived with a hatred of the Japanese deep in their souls. Others were open to the attractions of an exotic culture, and revelled in their exposure to a place so different from home. For many, a trip to the ruins of Hiroshima (which fell within the Australian area) was a sobering experience. Sometimes they found the Japanese hard to understand. One wrote home:

*It has got me a bit puzzled what form of education got Japan into a fighting mood. The old folk seem to bear no malice – are very courteous and seem to be quite open and honest. The kids from 10 or 11 down are as friendly as can be and the girls are courteous and friendly; but the chaps about military age!! Crikey are they an insolent arrogant sullen team. When I say insolent – they are not openly so, but it is that thinly veiled it doesn't matter.*

Official policy was against "fraternization" of any kind, but human relationships are not so easily regulated. Many friendships were formed and, with the restraints of war gone, many soldiers ended up living with and even marrying Japanese women. At first, the White Australia policy prevented these Japanese wives from coming back to Australia, but eventually, in 1952, entry was allowed, and about 200 Japanese wives of BCOF servicemen came to Australia.

The Occupation Force was the first large group of Australians to come face to face with the Japanese on their home ground. Australia and Japan had begun building their post-war relationship.

*Peter Londey  
Australian War Memorial*



Getting ready for the trip: in New Guinea a soldier of the 67th Battalion, a unit formed for service in the occupation of Japan, prepares by studying a Japanese phrasebook. (AWM 098324)



As the victorious Allies occupied Japan, the defeated soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army also made their way home. These soldiers are returning from Sumatra in October 1946, over a year after the end of the war. (AWM P1205/51/20)



A potent symbol of victory, New Zealand BCOF troops during a changing of the guard outside the Imperial Palace in Tokyo (AWM 145285)



The success of the Allied occupation rested on Japanese cooperation. Three Australians of the 67th Battalion discuss the route of a march with a Japanese policeman. (AWM P01813.132)



Australian soldiers supervise Japanese workers in a BCOF supply warehouse. (AWM 147488)



Friendly meeting: Australian soldier and Japanese peasant woman (AWM P01813.370)



Building bridges: BCOF engineers construct a Bailey bridge to cross the Sakai River in Kure, June 1950. (AWM 146357)



Disposing of unexploded ordnance was a major task for BCOF: here a member of the Bomb Disposal Unit removes the powder charges from cordite bundles prior to detonation. The subsequent explosion (below) sends flames as high as 200 feet. (AWM 145563 and 145568)



Savouring the exotic: Australian troops visit the Gate of Twilight at the entrance to the Toshogu shrine in Nikko. (AWM 131919)



Despite official policies against fraternisation, many Australians in BCOF married Japanese women. Here one such family embarks for Australia in 1953, after the White Australia Policy was relaxed for Japanese spouses of Australian servicemen. The ship's name is *New Australia*. (AWM 148404)

Left: One commitment ends, another begins: members of 3 RAR board the USN *Aiken Victory* in Kure, en route for Korea in September 1950. (AWM P01813.578)