Victory in the Pacific 1945

Australians in the Pacific War
Crew members of HMAS Napier chalk a sign on a Japanese midget submarine at the Japanese arsenal, Tokyo Bay, September 1945. For full caption see page 60.

(Anonymous War Memorial (AWM) image 019164)

Members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (Red Cross) depart aboard the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMAS Formidable for Tokyo, Japan, to assist in the treatment and repatriation of Australian POWs. For full caption see page 61.

(AWM 115909)

Family and friends wait the docking of the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMAS Formidable (just out of sight) on 13 October 1945. For full caption see page 72.

(AWM 121100)

Metric conversions of imperial measurements quoted in this text are approximate.
Victory in the Pacific 1945
Australians in the Pacific War
Fellow citizens, the war is over.

Few words spoken in Australia’s history have triggered such spontaneous displays of emotion as these words of Prime Minister Ben Chifley, spoken over the wireless on the morning of 15 August 1945. His was one of a number of announcements by world leaders declaring an end to World War II.

This was a defining moment in the twentieth century. The war had been the most far-reaching and devastating in history. From its start with Germany’s invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the war spread across Europe into north Africa, the Middle East and the world’s oceans. Then, when Japan entered the war in December 1941, its forces swept across tracts of Asia and the Pacific and Indian Oceans. It took the Allied nations until May 1945 to achieve victory in Europe and another three months for victory in the Pacific. By the time the last bombs were dropped and the last shots were fired, perhaps 50 million men, women and children had lost their lives as a result of the war.

The day on which this conflict ended is most commonly and popularly remembered for its scenes of jubilation in cities and towns around the world. In Allied nations, cameramen recorded thousands of people pouring onto the streets, cheering, hugging and kissing, singing and dancing, waving flags, dropping confetti from buildings, and unfurling banners proclaiming the simple messages of VICTORY and PEACE.

The Australian Government further marked the occasion by legislating a one-off public holiday, declaring it Victory in the Pacific Day, or VP Day. Others knew it as Victory over Japan Day, VJ Day. Both terms were acceptable to Australians at the end of this long war. All that mattered, really, was that the war was over.

Australia had entered the war on 3 September 1939, supporting Great Britain’s declaration of war against Germany. As a dominion of the British Empire, Australia’s participation was anticipated and widely supported. Australians lionised the contribution and sacrifice of those who had fought in the Great War of 1914-18. It was commonly
stated that in that war ‘the Anzacs’ had established a tradition of war service that would be carried forth, and in battle had forged a national identity. That identity was expressed from the outset of this new war and became stronger during it, especially once Australia appeared threatened. Australians saw themselves as not merely members of the British Empire but citizens of an Allied nation contributing to the just and worthwhile causes of defending their country and empire and defeating tyranny.

Australians paused following Victory in Europe Day, 8 May 1945, to rejoice in the defeat of their original enemy, Nazi Germany. There was less revelry here than in cities and towns of countries more focussed on the war in Europe, such as Paris, Edinburgh, Wellington, New York and Halifax. Although the war had started in Europe and thousands of Australians fought and died contributing to victory there, Australians had an especially strong consciousness of the war in the Pacific. It was in this theatre that the nation faced its greatest test of arms and suffered more casualties. For Australians, the war had started in Europe, but it did not end until six years later in the Pacific.

There had long been an expectation and dread of war against Japan. For years, commentators, including newspaper cartoonists, had conjured up fearful images such as hordes of Japanese setting off south along the path to war or an evil hand reaching out from Tokyo and scooping up Australia. Defence planners believed that if Japan was going to attack, it would be when Great Britain was tied up with a war in Europe and unable to assist with Australia’s defence. Thus from the outset, even with thousands of Australians serving on the far side of the world, many believed they would end up fighting to save their own nation.

On 8 December 1941, Australians awoke to news that Japan had launched attacks across the Pacific from Malaya in the west to Hawaii in the east (where, with the difference in time zones, it was still 7 December). In the first six months the Japanese appeared unstoppable. They inflicted the most shocking defeat of British Empire forces with the capture of Singapore on 15 February 1942. They swept across the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) including Sumatra, Java, Ambon and Timor. They advanced into Burma, took the Philippines, and reached Australian-controlled territory by capturing Rabaul and northern New Guinea. They even attacked Australia, starting with the devastating air raid
on Darwin on 19 February 1942. By the end of these first campaigns and actions, more than 25,000 Australians were missing—how many had been killed and how many became prisoners of war was not known.

It looked to many Australians as though the continent was to be invaded. The government harnessed this fear to pull the nation together. Forces were deployed at strategic areas around Australia from Perth to Newcastle to Darwin, air raid shelters were built, beaches were wired and mined, bridges were prepared for demolition, and anti-aircraft and coastal artillery batteries were put in position. To bolster the home defences, the majority of troops and warships in the Middle East were recalled, and others would return later. Prime Minister John Curtin stood his ground in refusing to permit the returning 6th and 7th Divisions to be diverted to Burma. His government turned to the United States, ‘free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom’, for assistance and, ultimately, to take the lead in the defeat of Japan. Although the senior Allied nations—Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union—agreed on a ‘Beat Hitler First’ strategy, enough men and equipment would be available to block further Japanese advances and to counter-attack.

In those darkest days of 1942, the first bright news was the defeat by American and Australian naval forces of an enemy fleet in the Coral Sea in May 1942; it saved Port Moresby in New Guinea from invasion and the north coast of Queensland from air raids. American fleets inflicted further devastating defeats on the Japanese navy, most notably at Midway Island, north-west of Hawaii. Gruelling battles by Australians on the Kokoda Track and at Milne Bay in New Guinea and by Americans at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands turned the tide of the war being waged to Australia’s north. Meanwhile, other forces continued defending the country’s ‘top end’ against air raids and also conducted raids over Japanese-occupied islands. The midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour and attacks on merchant shipping off the coast brought the war closer, in a small way, to Australians in the south.

Australian forces had then gone on to contribute to the long Allied counter-offensive. From late 1942 onwards, they fought through the bloodiest battles at Buna, Gona and Sanananda, lesser-known campaigns such as Wau–Salamaua, the Huon Peninsula,
Markham and Ramu Valleys and the taking of Madang, supported American ‘island hopping’ across the Netherlands East Indies to the Philippines, and waged final campaigns at Aitape–Wewak in New Guinea, New Britain, Bougainville and Borneo. Others served on the ‘forgotten’ front of Burma, and in the Indian and Pacific Oceans reaching as far north as Japan in the last days of the war.

In a home front effort described as ‘all in!’, every man, woman and child was expected, if possible, to do his or her bit serving or working if they could, or performing voluntary work under different schemes that could, for example, see housewives, office cleaners, bank managers, clerks and students chipping in during harvest season or collecting scrap metal. The return was a sense of contributing to victory.

The civilian effort was not just encouraged by the government but legislated. Virtually every man and woman of working age who was not in the armed forces, was reasonably fit, not caring for children and not in a ‘reserved occupation’ (deemed vital to the war effort) was liable to be ‘manpowered’. Many stayed on family farms or in businesses to ensure production and services did not falter. Others were employed in factories producing everything from tinned fruit to aircraft or on engineering projects in support of the Allied forces, often in remote areas. In the far north, the Army and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) also raised Aboriginal Labour Units to assist with building and maintaining military infrastructure.

Something that was particularly noticeable was the unprecedented number of women who entered the forces or paid employment. For those who elected to serve in uniform, there were options of nursing and other medical or auxiliary services, with women often serving beside men in such roles as maintenance, transport, administration and even anti-aircraft defences. For those who entered industry, many worked alongside men in production, maintenance and administrative roles, mostly in semi-skilled or unskilled positions, having been trained up for wartime production. Others took up occupations previously the reserve of men but open to women for the duration of the war, such as tram conductor or mechanic. Many others volunteered for quasi-military organisations such as the Women’s Agricultural Security Production Service and Australian Women’s Land Army. Still more volunteered their time through organisations such as the Red Cross and Country Women’s Association.
After six years, people had become used to their lives revolving around the war effort and to its disruption and exigencies. Many thousands had left their homes to enlist or take up employment, finding themselves in corners of the country, or world, they might never have dreamt of seeing (and often hoped they never saw again). They had witnessed too many deaths or wounds or injuries, or found out about them from a dreaded telegram or from scanning casualty lists in newspapers. As well as the deaths they could never forget, many in the forces had experienced more discomforts and tins of bully beef and ‘goldfish’—sardines in tomato sauce—than they cared to remember. On the home front, people accepted transport shortages and the rationing of most foods and other products, making do with less-flashier ‘austerity clothing’ and ‘austerity meals’. They realised that non-essential items would not be available until ‘after the war’ unless one was acquainted with an American serviceman or woman, a sailor or merchant seaman able to procure cherished items in foreign ports, or with black marketeers. Australians grasped that by comparison with some countries, their nation had a relatively easy war. Non-availability of products was a necessary inconvenience rather than a hardship.

What generally was not realised within Australia at this time was how terrible were conditions experienced by prisoners of war and internees of the Japanese. Relatives and friends of those believed captured had to contend with persistent rumours of dreadful conditions, including massacres. Some men rescued after they were sunk en route to Japan in September 1944 brought first-hand news of conditions on the Burma-Thailand Railway but the government considered it would be too shocking and distressing to reveal all that was known. On the islands, Australians who came across escaped Indian prisoners of war could also see that the treatment meted out was awful, even depraved. For those in captivity, many nearing the end of physical or mental endurance after years of suffering, the timing of the war’s end had become a matter of life or death. For those waiting for them to come home, in a sense the war would not really end until they heard if loved ones were safe.

VP Day marked the beginning of the end of wartime upheaval, its troubles and deaths with peace confirmed, later, by the official surrender ceremony on board the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. Australia was one of the Allied signatories to the surrender document.
Australians welcomed the war’s end not because they could return to the lives they left at the start of the war or during it—too much had happened and too many lives had been lost for that. Rather, in celebrating this momentous day, VP Day, they were releasing war weariness and taking their first steps into post-war life. They knew it might not be easy, for, as Chifley commented, it was a peace ‘which has to be won’, but they were ready. On 15 August 1945, joy at survival and hope for the future could burst out on city and town streets, be cheered inside the likes of Young and Jackson’s or The Terminus Hotel, or seep out sitting against a tree and swigging water in a jungle camp. In some prisoner of war camps, news of peace and liberation would not come for several days, but when it did those same emotions, perhaps intensified, were let out.

VP Day was also a moment to remember the cost. As well as inviting Australians to celebrate, Chifley asked that the people might pause to give their thanks to God for victory and deliverance, and to reflect:

Let us remember those whose lives were given that we may enjoy this glorious moment and may look forward to a peace which they have won for us. Let us remember those whose thoughts, with proud sorrow, turn towards gallant loved ones who will not come back.

* * *

When statisticians came to count Australia’s contribution and the cost of the war, it became apparent that nearly one million Australians had served in the armed forces or merchant navy. The precise number of Australians who lost their lives is not known. Taking into account servicemen and women and merchant seamen who were killed or died, and civilians caught up in the war in areas overrun or bombed, the figure is in the order of 40,000.

This book offers just a few stories of Australians in the last months of 1945, from when it first became known that the Japanese were considering surrendering, through to the start of post-war lives. They are not representative of all Australians and their experiences, for there were so many and they were so varied. They are stories intended to illustrate what VP Day may have meant to some or many Australians, showing some of the joy, heartaches, difficulties, hopes and changes wrought by the arrival of peace.

* * *
From the moment the news broke of the first atomic bomb dropped on a Japanese city, Hiroshima, on 6 August 1945, in Allied countries shock at the bomb’s destructive power was tempered by hopes of an imminent end to the war. The Soviet Union’s entry into the war on 8 August raised hopes even further. Indeed, so confident did people become that rumblings of celebration began a few days before the end of the war.

Newspapers were read keenly by people following events. In Melbourne, many commuters purchased the afternoon edition of *The Herald*, published six days a week.

**Tuesday 7 August 1945**

**MIGHTY ATOM BOMB SECRETS OUT**
Problems of Colossal Force Solved by Scientists
**TRIED ON JAPANESE CITY**

**Wednesday 8 August 1945**

**MORE ATOM BOMBS READY FOR JAPS**
60 p.c. of Hiroshima Destroyed
**RAIDERS’ STORY OF BIG BLAST**

**Thursday 9 August 1945**

**RUSSIA ENTERS PACIFIC WAR**
Troops Attack Japs in Manchoukuo
**RED AIR RAIDS**

**Friday, 10 August 1945**

**JAPANESE FACING TRIPLE OFFENSIVE**
Russians Advancing Into Manchuria
**US FLEET BLOWS**
President Truman Says Only Surrender Will Stop Atom Bombs on Japs
In the islands, servicemen and women followed developments just as keenly. Gathered around radios and notice boards, reading service newspapers or listening to rumours, they realised their service days now were numbered.

Warrant Officer Arthur Bryant of D Company, 2/17th Battalion, had been in uniform for more than five years and was tired of it. He was almost twenty-nine years old and in his fourth campaign: Tobruk and El Alamein in north Africa, the Huon Peninsula in New Guinea, and now Borneo.
The 2/17th Battalion had landed in Brunei on 10 June 1945. It liberated the sultanate before crossing into Dutch Borneo. At the start of August, Bryant was somewhere up the Baram River, near Marudi. He was hoping to be sent back to the coast, where it was more pleasant, and as a ‘five year man’ to be offered his discharge. He maintained a diary right through his war service, though entries were shorter now, reflecting war weariness and the dreariness of jungle camps. Then a buzz started:

Tuesday 7th: *We hear of the new bomb the Americans dropped on Japan. It is hard to believe that there could be such power in one bomb.*

Wednesday 8th: *There seems nothing to talk about here.*

Thursday 9th: *Things are happening for Japan now. Russia has come in we learn & that ought to hurry the end a bit.*

Friday 10th: *The news is becoming sensational. Japan has offered to surrender. It is unbelievable.*

Saturday 11th: *We are all waiting pretty eagerly for further word.*

Sunday 12th: *The waiting for news for the war to be declared over is keeping us on our toes, & there will be many disappointed if nothing comes of the negotiations.*

Monday 13th: *I took a trip to Marudi today & was mighty surprised at the improvement.*

Tuesday 14th: *We went up to Kuala Arang to contact some 300 natives who were running away from the Japs. They came down by canoe & camped in the ‘long house’.*

Wednesday 15th: *The end of the war was announced at 8 o’clock this morning. Except for a few cheers & a couple of shots there was no celebration. The unit band came up last night & gave us a couple of short recitals. They left for Marudi this morning.*
The Australians maintained their positions, on alert, not knowing if the Japanese in the area would lay down their arms.

One month after VP Day, Arthur Bryant boarded a ship filled with ‘five year men’. He landed at Brisbane ‘without any fuss’ on the last day of September 1945. Although not home—he was from Mudgee, New South Wales—he considered his war service over.

* * *

Lieutenant-Colonel Margaret Spencer’s ‘girls’ could not contain their excitement when reports of peace negotiations started filtering through on the evening of 10 August. The Australian Women's Army Service barracks on Butibum Road at Lae in New Guinea ordinarily was settling down. This evening, however, Sergeant Anita Pritchard, working with the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, was keeping everybody awake. In a letter, Spencer explained:

She was listening in to Tokio and translating to us and I would no sooner put one crowd to bed than I would come back to find another huddle around the radio. I gave it up in the end. The excitement in the camp was terrific ... The official news of the proposal was phoned through just before lights out when they were nearly all in bed and within a minute the camp was in turmoil.

The barracks was enclosed by a three metre high barbed wire fence, patrolled by armed guards. Hundreds of men from around the base who had heard the news came rushing to the fence line.

It would have been hopeless to let them in so we had the sight of 350-odd women on one side ... and about three times as many men on the other side, all singing and shouting.

Spencer admired ‘the lads’. Not one attempted to break into the barracks. They moved aside for women coming back from late shifts, surging back only once the gates were locked.

As I stood and watched them, I realised that almost all of them were wearing a [ribbon of the] 1939-45 Star or the Africa Star and realised how much it must mean to them. I think the excitement was greater then than when the news finally came through ...
Margaret Spencer had enlisted in March 1942 after her husband Jack was reported missing in action while serving with the 8th Division in Malaya. In the intervening years, there was no news—no letters or postcards from him and no mention in any of the few prisoner of war lists released by the Japanese. With the war’s end, Spencer found she was experiencing ‘a mixture of hope and foreboding’ and, to cope, threw herself into work. When lists of survivors from prisoner of war camps started appearing, she rejoiced with the ‘girls’ who received good news and comforted those whose news was awful. She waited to hear news of Jack.

Although she would not admit it, the strain was draining. Colleagues and friends watched this popular and efficient officer begin to buckle. Finally, in November, Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee, General Officer Commanding, First Australian Army, superior officer and friend, instructed Spencer to take a break. At a rest house at Salamaua, she allowed herself to confront the truth:

*I have hoped every day that there might be some news of Jack ... I have not had any news at all except a cable from the Red Cross, in reply to mine, stating that there is no information at all concerning him. However, I have not given up hope and pray that I shall hear of him soon. I realise, of course, that the chances of good news are very slender.*

Lieutenant Jack Spencer, 4th Anti-Tank Regiment, is believed to have been killed in action on 16 January 1942 in Malaya. His body was never found. Margaret Spencer was discharged in October 1945 and subsequently appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for highly meritorious service and devotion to duty in New Guinea. She was 34, a veteran and a war widow. She never remarried.

* * *

On the morning peace was declared, Flight Lieutenants George Redman and John Ahern of 5 Squadron RAAF took off in Boomerangs to conduct one of the last offensive air operations of the war. In a three-hour mission out of Tadji, New Guinea, they reconnoitred Muschu Island and bombed and strafed huts, possibly killing two Japanese.
Redman had arrived from Bougainville five days earlier to take command of a 5 Squadron detachment. It had been supporting the 6th Division in the Aitape–Wewak campaign, but now there was little to do. On 13 August, Redman reported:

_ I find that a perfectly good war is on the verge of petering out. There seems no doubt about the surrender coming shortly ..._

_ I haven’t had a fly yet as no jobs requested ... and I do not intend to make jobs under present circumstances so, like everyone else, I guess we just sit and wait for it to sort itself out._

After it did, monotony became the order of the day for Redman and his airmen. Within a month, virtually their only work was running up engines for fifteen minutes every four to six days – and that was cut back because of petrol shortages. Separated from the rest of 5 Squadron, they felt neglected. In the middle of September, Redman wrote:

_ During the month I have been over here, I have written several times ... but have received no answering note, or gossip except, of course, demands for signatures from the store._

_ The meals here are on the blink, beer is hard to get & only half your ration—spirits fair only._

Redman was another ‘five year man’ and had tried to get out by applying for early discharge. However, he was deemed ineligible because he had not completed his second operational tour—even though the end of hostilities made this impossible. But once surrender documents were signed at Tokyo Bay, discharges were easier to secure. Within two months George Redman, aged thirty-three, was a civilian again.

* * *

Mrs Emma Heckendorf would not express what must have been her innermost fear. Twice in the war she and her husband John experienced the agony of a son missing in action—first Erwin, then John. Six days after VP Day, she sat down and wrote to the one who might possibly still be alive in a prisoner of war camp.
My Dearest Son Curly

Just received the good news that we are allowed to write a full letter to you, I feel so delighted I hardly know what to tell you, but we are thankful in God that Peace is declared, everyone is so delighted we cannot realize it yet.

Erwin—‘Curly’ to his family, ‘Heck’ to his mates—was one of thousands who seemed to vanish on 15 February 1942, when Singapore fell. More than a year later, a card with just a few words scrawled by Curly brought the news that he had survived the battle. In the next two years, two more cards arrived, each more than a year old, and once, Curly was mentioned in a broadcast from Tokyo. But like all families and friends of men and women believed captured by the Japanese, the Heckendorfs lived with a fear. The persistent rumours of massacres and then, in late 1944, the official government warning to the Australian public to anticipate deaths among the prisoners of war were alarming.

Sheep farmers, the Heckendorfs of ‘Mount View’, Lockhart, in the Riverina district of New South Wales, rejoiced on VP Day and at church gave thanks for peace and for the breaking of the worst drought in living memory. They prayed Curly was safe. There was also a word of faith to be inserted into the official postal address for letters: NX36791 Sgt Heckendorf E.E., 2/30 Batt, 8th Division, AIF, Liberated Prisoners of War, C/O Army Base PO Melbourne.

Weeks passed without word. The anxiety was showing on Mrs Heckendorf. Then, exactly one month after VP Day, elation!

My Dearest Curly

I was listening to the wireless last Saturday night [15 September] as they were giving out names of Australians who were being flown out from Singapore, and when the announcer finished, he said, ‘well I’ve got a few minutes to spare I’ll read out a few names from Changi’, and lo & behold your name was among them. Official notification came through on Monday.

Soon a letter from Curly arrived, assuring his family he was ‘quite well and not in bad condition’. He was on the Singapore docks, eating his first fresh bread and butter in three and a half years, while writing this first airmail letter home. He wrote that the treatment
in captivity had been ‘sometimes not too bad and often brutal’ but he was ‘very lucky’ for only on ‘some occasions have I received a bashing’. He was of course sparing his loved ones the true horrors. One of his sisters, Vera, replied:

My Dear Curly

You just can’t imagine the joy & relief it was to us when your name came over the air ... as we were getting very anxious. Mother looks a new woman, & we are all just longing to see you. The phone has hardly stopped ringing since the news came through ...

Now that you will be home it will soften the blow of losing poor old Jacka, a little. He went down over Germany in Dec 1943, was captain of a Lancaster Bomber, & was a Pilot Officer.

From two of the very few letters to reach him during captivity, Curly had known John was missing and then confirmed killed. Nothing could alleviate the heartache of a grieving mother. He could only try and find a few words to place his brother’s death into some kind of context. On the voyage home, he wrote:

We are all going to miss poor John a lot aren’t we, but don’t be down hearted Mother Darling. Many mothers have lost all their boys over here, and I know it was only your prayers which brought me safely through on many occasions ...

Curly Heckendorf, veteran of the first Australian land battle against the Japanese at Gemas in Malaya, survivor of ‘F’ Force on the Burma–Thailand Railway, sailed for home on the Esperance Bay on 22 September 1945. Seventeen days later, among the thousands of people waiting to greet and cheer on the ex-prisoners of war when they landed at Sydney were his mother Emma, brother Ronald and other family members. They spotted Curly on one of the buses taking the men away from the docks, raced back to the car and chased the bus all the way out to Ingleburn. A family reunion there marked the end of Curly’s war service. There was one final communication to be made with a telegram to a man who, although he had not been one to put it in writing himself, missed his son dearly:

JOHN HECKENDORF MOUNT VIEW LOCKHART
ARRIVED THIS MORNING THRILLED TO SEE FAMILY OFF BOAT EVERYONE HAPPY
LOVE CURLY

* * *
In his mind’s eye, Tom Pledger had been reunited with his family, savoured his mother’s cooking, married his sweetheart Jessie, or Jess, and built their home together dozens of times. It was 26 August, eleven days after VP Day, before he and his fellow prisoners of war on Hainan Island were told the war was over. Two days later, Tom wrote to Jessie, from whom his captors had released just one precious letter during his long years of captivity:

*Thank God dear all our worrys are over & now it only remains for us to get together again & then our dreams will be dreams no longer but real live facts. I am as well as can be expected dear in this God forsaken place. I have nearly been taken from you a couple of times with Beri Beri & Dysentery but I wouldn’t let my spirit slip & now I am in reasonable condition although I am only 116 lbs [52.6 kilograms]...* 

Corporal Athol ‘Tom’ Pledger, 2/12th Field Ambulance, survived against dreadful odds. More than three-quarters of the men of Gull Force were dead from battle, massacre or prolonged captivity. Tom was in a group shipped from Ambon to Hainan, off mainland China, in October 1942. Like those still at Ambon, they suffered many deaths. Hope was delivered on the wind in late May 1945 when a newspaper telling of victory in Europe was blown into the camp. The men believed Japan would be defeated although they could be dead before then.

By July 1945, the Australian and Dutch prisoners of war in the Hainan camp were each down to 187 men. Sick and starving, they were eating anything edible including grass, grubs, cockroaches, frogs and rats, to buy time. Although still dreaming and talking of home, as they had done virtually every day of their captivity, faith was waning. Not knowing the war was over, a day after VP Day Tom scrawled in his diary:

*... a little disappointed with the way the war is going. Heavens they should be stuck into the Japs by this. It is 3 months since they beat Germany. We have heard a pretty consistent rumour that Russia is in against Japan, so we hope that will hurry it up.*

The camp commandant conceded his nation’s defeat only after an American rescue party was dropped nearby. In the camp hospital, men debated whether to inform two comrades in the throes of death; in the end, they decided the dying should know they had lived long enough to die as free men. More died before evacuation could be arranged.
On 18 September 1945, Tom wrote again to Jessie as finally ‘that land of bad memories’ was disappearing in the wake of a British hospital ship. On board were caring doctors and nurses, medicines, clean toilets, baths and showers, beds with crisp white sheets, decent food, toiletries and freedom of movement. Tom had worked out that with back pay and deferred pay, he was worth close to a thousand pounds—more than enough to get married on.

After reaching Australia and continuing his recuperation, Tom was discharged on 30 November 1945. He and Jessie married the very next day. They were parted again for a short period in late 1947, when Tom, who had been mentioned in despatches for his devotion to duty in caring for fellow prisoners of war, responded to the call of one more duty: giving evidence at war crimes trials in Hong Kong.

* * *

Signalman Geoffrey Manning was serving in HMAS Pirie, the third Australian warship into Tokyo Bay on the last day of August 1945. Nineteen years old, he had been in the navy for fourteen months and spent the last days of the war escorting tankers of the British Pacific Fleet to about 300 kilometres off Japan. The young sailor wrote to his mother:

Everybody on board were up out of their hammocks very early & lined up to have their first look at Japan & our first sight of it was very rugged mountainous coastline with dark clouds hanging around the higher peaks.

Entering the broad bay, they passed islands on which United States Navy and Royal Navy ensigns were flying. Damaged and partly-sunken ships were testament to the effectiveness of Allied bombing and submarine attacks. In the distance, along the shoreline, they spotted quarries and factories but no activity. White flags fluttered over several locations.

The Allied fleet in Tokyo Bay was possibly the largest of the Pacific war. It was a show of force. Anchored off Yokohama, the crew of the Pirie could not see a great deal because it kept raining and they were some kilometres from the battleship USS Missouri, on which the surrender ceremony was to take place. There was a further show of force before the ceremony on 2 September:
This morning I saw one of the grandest sights I have ever seen. Three huge flights of flying fortresses went over together with myriads of fighter planes. Altogether I suppose there were about 4 to 500 aircraft & I can now imagine what a 1000 bomber raid must look like.

Next day, all were thrilled to see British Commonwealth ex-prisoners of war leaving Japan on an aircraft carrier.

They were all lined up in orderly fashion on the flight deck dressed in various types of clothing & the Aussie slouch hat was evident amongst them. The carrier steamed amongst all the British ships at anchor in the Bay & all the ships companies lined up & gave them a terrific welcome. On board here we kicked up a h___l of a row, singing Waltzing Matilda, waving Aussie flags, cheering & ringing the ship’s bell & for our size we made a considerable noise. The x-POWs responded with cheering ... it was a soul stirring sight to see these lads on their way home & we did our best to give them a cheery welcome.

Two days later, on 5 September, Pirie sailed for another surrender ceremony in another harbour, Hong Kong.

* * *

A day before the ceremony on board USS Missouri, Surgeon Lieutenant Henry Rischbieth of HMAS Warramunga stepped onto Japanese soil. He was in one of the first parties of Australian officers and ratings permitted ashore. Exploring the docklands, they got a closer look at Tokyo’s industrial area, which had been subjected to ‘a most devastating punishment’. They also encountered, for the first time, Japanese people. Henry wrote home:

It was a weird sensation to walk past Japanese soldiers, sailors and policemen, all armed with swords and revolvers while we were, probably rather stupidly, armed only with cameras.
The Japanese gave away not the slightest emotion:

... *faces were inscrutable as the Sphinx. They ... didn’t smile, nor did any of them
attempt to speak to us, for all we could tell the fact that we were there might not even
have been known to the people who passed us in the street so little notice did they take
of us.*

The Australians believed that under other circumstances these same people would
have mounted ‘a banzai charge’; now they had accepted, in their own way, defeat. It was
apparent though, that although beaten, ‘sullen they were, and well disciplined, but still
proud’.

Anchored too far from *Missouri* to observe the surrender, the crew of *Warramunga*
marvelled at American flypasts and gathered around the radio.

*We listened aboard as you probably did to the broadcast of the surrender proceedings
and when General MacArthur said ‘These proceedings are now closed’ one could not
help wondering whether he was referring not only to the surrender proceedings but to
the proceedings of the last six years War.*

Henry Rischbieth had been required to complete his medical training before enlisting
in January 1944. He was discharged in January 1947, just short of his twenty-seventh
birthday, to start on his professional career.

* * *

Apprentice Alan Smith, merchant seaman, marvelled at the discipline and efficiency
evident in the defeated enemy coming aboard the SS *River Burdekin* at Nauru on 13
September 1945. He had watched troops boarding before, but never was it accomplished
so quickly
and smoothly.

Alan had served on the Australian-built merchant ship since its launching in December
1943. Mostly it did supply runs to New Guinea. In July 1945, the *River Burdekin* sailed
for Bougainville taking ammunition, medical supplies and comforts stores. Unloading at
Torokina was going slowly when news of victory broke.

*The anchorage and its foreshore goes wild. We still have the one thousand tons of ammunition and a quantity of beer remaining on board. No prize for guessing what occupies the Dockers’ attention now. The beer becomes common property.*

After unloading was completed, the *River Burdekin* and her sister ship SS *River Glenelg* sailed for Nauru. The destroyer HMAS *Diamantina* went ahead, its captain taking the surrender of the island. Guarded by troops of the 31st/51st Battalion, the 1600 Japanese and Koreans who came aboard were accommodated in four cramped holds between decks. Sailing back through waters that had been a war zone, it occurred to Alan that there was still a possibility of disaster.

*No consideration whatsoever has been given to lifesaving equipment if we hit a mine or are torpedoed by some Japanese submarine commander who will not surrender ... Our four lifeboats and four rafts cannot possibly cope with 160 souls. What happens to the rest?*

Fortunately, all went well on this and another voyage to Ocean Island.

* ***

For Miss Helen Nicholson of Hawthorne, Queensland, and later back home at North Melbourne, Victoria, the end of the war was occasion to step up a letter writing campaign. Like thousands of men and women around the world, she had fallen in love with somebody from another country. She and her fiancé had planned to marry in August, but the month before, with no warning, he was shipped home to the United States. Had it been just a few weeks later, he could have requested, as they had discussed, a discharge in Australia.

*So here we are ten thousand miles apart each with the possibility of normal married life denied to us, not because of his activity in the war—in which he has already made a considerable sacrifice—but because of lack of transportation.*

Helen was one of 15,000 Australian and New Zealand women waiting for shipping to become available to carry them across the Pacific. As she was not yet married, getting there would be even more difficult than for the thousands who already were war brides. Those
who had married, many now with a child, were slowly being offered spaces in transports and at a cheaper rate, with fewer immigration issues.

For Helen, and others like her, no politician or government official was beyond approach. She elicited responses from the Minister for External Affairs, the Premier of Queensland and the Prime Minister of Australia. She sent them newspaper clippings files showing the very public discussion of the women’s frustration and hardships. She even came up with a plan to go to Canada and slip across the border, but there was no shipping there either. She was further disappointed by a perceived lack of priority in trans-Pacific mail services.

The Government is worried about the breaking up of many American war marriages, but it has nothing planned to enable the couples, separated so cruelly by distance and the inability to obtain transportation, to keep in constant communication with each other.

Not only were women frustrated that they could not start their new life, many were worried as reports were circulating of marriages and engagements breaking down because of prolonged separation. For Helen, there was also apprehension lest it have other consequences.

I am older than the average girl concerned in this situation. I am 28. I want to have children ... and the delay which confronts me makes more than possible a future without them. Any doctor in the world advises the birth of the first child before 30.

‘Utterly heartsick and disgusted’, she could only hope the governments were negotiating to ease the plight of war brides and fiancées. Indeed they were. During 1946, more shipping became available to clear the backlog of war brides and children, and Congress passed a bill making it easier for those engaged to American servicemen and women to enter the country and marry. With these developments, Helen Nicholson’s letter writing campaign ended abruptly—the government file in which her letters were deposited contains no further information about her.

* * *

Three weeks after VP Day, Mrs Olive Prophet received a telegram she hoped was the news
that her husband was coming home. Milton had been in the militia when they married at Loira Methodist Church in northern Tasmania in December 1941. As a driver in the 31st Company, Australian Army Service Corps, he was subsequently sent north to Queensland and the Northern Territory, then back down to New South Wales.

VP Day was typical, in a sense, in that Olive shared it with her baby, Coral, and family and friends, but with Milton only by letter. She had been about to walk into town, rugged up against a wintry squall, when she happened to switch on the wireless.

_We heard bells ringing, then Mr Attlee [the new British Prime Minister] made his speech. It certainly sounded music to our ears. We could hear the church bells ringing from Beaconsfield as we walked along the Holwell Rd. I think every man, woman & child was in the street in B'field, and talk about little flags flying. It was quite a busy little town for once. Everyone was so happy._

On Sunday, Olive accompanied family and friends to church and later a Victory bonfire.

_They had Tojo hoisted up on a pole in the middle of the fire, with a little white flag of truce flying from his cap. It was very effective. They also had another ‘Tojo’ which they threw in the fire. I took my Catherine wheel [firework] that I had kept for five years, waiting for the war to finish ... It burnt well._

In the days following, life returned to normal. Olive cared for the baby, helped her mother-in-law run the household where she was staying, juggled ration coupons and wrote regularly to Milton. Except now she was able to start planning better for the future, and was saving for it, hoping her husband might even be home by Christmas.

Olive, and other married women, realised that peace might test and perhaps strain marriages. Women’s magazines and newspaper lift-outs carried articles on how the adjustment to peacetime might be made. One issue raised was that men and women on war service were separated not only from their loved ones but also from the normal demands and constraints of home life. As the wife left at home, it was Olive who was used to managing the couple’s financial and other affairs. It was she who knew, from first-hand experience, the costs of running a household and starting to raise a child. While serving in the forces, with accommodation and rations and clothing provided, Milton and his mates
led a different life from those back home. It was often said they were more inclined to live for the moment.

Olive had this confirmed when she opened the telegram. Rather than coming home, Milton was asking for money. This he was perfectly entitled to do, as much of his pay was issued to Olive. After obliging, Olive thought further about her response. It was time for Milton to be prompted to change some of his ways in preparation for taking on more family responsibilities. She sat down and composed a letter stating what probably needed saying between many couples:

You are married now, with a wife and child and when you come out of the Army you will have these to keep, also a home to keep, which will take more money than you perhaps now realise. I could spend every penny I get if I wanted to, on myself, and pleasure, but I am thinking of the future, and I think you should do a bit towards helping by giving up some of your pleasures, and only go where your money can take you & do what you can afford with the pay you get. I am not mean but if I don’t save, I don’t know who will.

Olive hoped Milton might ‘think a bit’ ahead of coming home and meeting his first child for the very first time. This he did, and after he was discharged in March 1946 the family were able to get on with that long-desired, happy peacetime marriage.

* * *

On 18 September 1945, the fate of sixty-five nurses who had disappeared after the fall of Singapore was published in newspapers. About half of the women who survived the sinking of the *Vyner Brooke* off Banka Island, Sumatra, in February 1942, had been ordered back into the water and machine-gunned. The sole survivor of that group, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, 13th Australian General Hospital, later joined others in an internment camp. She was one of twenty-eight nurses rescued from Sumatra after the war’s end.

Even coming on top of so many other horror stories, the shooting of women chilled the nation to the bone. The editor of *The Age* fumed that it was yet another episode ‘that cannot be forgiven’. Such massacres, he declared, revealed in the Japanese ‘a depth of sub-
human brutality which cannot but arouse fresh anger and abhorrence beyond the power of words to express’.

Among many letters received by Vivian Bullwinkel upon her return home were some from school children.

* * *

Squadron Leader Frederick ‘Jock’ Birchall, war crimes investigator, spoke with dozens of ex-prisoners of war and former internees from Kuching and Singapore before setting out for Sandakan. In a letter to his nephew Tom he explained:

Some of the stories of the horror camps are too ghastly to be described. For all
the refinements of brutality, sadism and inhuman cruelty the Japanese must be unsurpassed.

The fate of the more than 2300 Australian and British prisoners of war at Sandakan, in northern Borneo, had been confirmed. Only six survivors of the death marches were rescued. The Japanese admitted that not one other man at Sandakan or Ranau was alive.

Sandakan Force comprised 1100 Australian troops together with some members of the British Borneo Civil Administrative Unit. A convoy headed by the corvettes HMA Ships Deloraine and Latrobe sailed from Labuan in mid-October. The force was to disarm and intern the Japanese at Sandakan and Tawao. Birchall explained:

We do not expect any trouble but we are going to take no chances. We shall send an Assault Force over first, just as though the Japs were hostile. A beachhead will be established and then the surrender party will be ordered to come on board. I hope there will be no trigger-happy merchants who might provoke an incident. I don't think there will be.

The landing and surrender were achieved without incident on 17 October. War graves troops scoured the burnt-out and overgrown prisoner of war camp while Birchall began identifying and interrogating former guards and members of the reviled Kempei Tei (military police).

I have never met a more evil crowd in my life. I managed to get a confession from one bloke who shot two of our coves. The only excuse they gave for shooting them was that they was too ill to keep up with the lads on those death marches to Ranau.

Birchall hoped war criminals would be hung ‘as it would be a pity to waste a good bullet on them’. Some Australians found it difficult to hold back on retribution, and Birchall was not inclined to stand in their way. After a confession of murder, a soldier asked if he could ‘settle a score’.

I told him that officially I must refuse. But he told me he had lost a young brother in Malaya. I said to him, go ahead son, I won’t be looking. He gave the bloke a hell of a thrashing which he richly deserved. I told him not to break his jaw though as I wanted some more information out of him.
After a month, Birchall headed home on leave. In early 1946, he went to Singapore and then to Java to conduct further investigations. A war of independence had broken out, and on 17 April 1946 Birchall, Flight Lieutenant Hector McDonald and Captain Alastair Mackenzie were ambushed and killed by Indonesian nationalists. Their names are recorded, in bronze, on the nation’s Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.

* * *

Now that the war was over, the mother of Private Bill Towers, 4th Field Ambulance, 27 years old, seemed to want only for him to find a nice woman and settle down. In one letter she implied that it might even be possible on garrison duties at Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, eliciting the response: ‘Where do you think we would find a girl to chase here?’

It was October 1945, and rather than contemplating returning home, Bill had decided to join the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. He explained he had worked out that he was so low in the ‘points system’ which set the priority for discharges that he would be in uniform for at least another year anyway. Staying at Rabaul was not appealing:

*I’m so sick of this place now, that I’m looking forward to going over there. There will be new sights to see, and many of them interesting, and I will be away from the tropics. The heat here is terrific, especially when the breeze is blowing across from the volcano. There are many other advantages too, one being that there may be a chance of seeing China or the Soviet Union.*

Bill had landed in New Britain in late 1944, and after the war’s end went to Rabaul as part of the force which was taking over from, disarming and confining the Japanese. The Australians could see that, although the township was smashed by bombing, it would have been terribly costly to try to take Rabaul by force. The Japanese had built miles of fortifications and tunnels and had thousands of disciplined troops.

The Australians observed the shocking condition of released prisoners of war and internees. Indian troops, in particular, exhibited utter hatred towards their former captors. Many Australians swore never to forgive the Japanese. Bill also could not understand their cruelty, however he was also compassionate, even sympathetic, and could see they were
not all bad. Placed in charge of working parties, he found the Japanese had a sense of humour, worked hard, were intelligent, and even could be helpful.

Only after he reached Japan did Bill admit, in a letter in April 1946, his other reason for joining the occupation force.

... I was sick of all the propaganda I had heard and read about the people here and wanted to see for myself. I wanted to find out why I was taught at school that the Japanese was the world’s little gentleman, and ten years later told ... he is a treacherous and uncivilised barbarian. I ... wanted to develop my political outlook about a nation whose future policies will play a big part in the development of Australia.

Three months later, Bill had to dash his mother’s hopes again, in response to a question about a Japanese woman: ‘there is no need for you to start putting blankets etc by in any hope chest’.

* * *

Months passed and still there was no word of Warrant Officer Arthur Williams, the sole Australian in the crew of a Liberator bomber lost over Burma on 31 January 1945. His family, devout Methodists, had prayed he was safe but after VP Day he had not turned up in any prisoner of war camp.

There was a hint of desperation in a letter written by one of Arthur’s brothers, Harold, to the Air Board on 5 November 1945. Stories of Japanese wandering in the jungles of Borneo and elsewhere, apparently not knowing the war was over, inspired hope among many families of the missing that maybe some Allied servicemen were in a similar predicament. Harold had an idea to attract the attention of any men, perhaps even Arthur, who might still be hiding out in the jungle.

... I am convinced this is quite possible in quite a number of cases. I would like to suggest that if planes were marked WAR OVER in large letters and fly over territory that men may be in hiding this would convey to them the news, otherwise many months may elapse before they learn of this fact, and in the mean time many valuable lives may be lost.
A farmer from Bagotville near Ballina, New South Wales, Arthur enlisted on 1 February 1942 under the Empire Air Training Scheme. He was thirty-one, relatively old for aircrew. Trained as a wireless operator/air gunner, he was posted to India and joined 159 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), in June 1944. He was in the ‘Special Flight’ conducting reconnaissance and electronic warfare sorties to detect enemy radio and radar stations. When reported missing, he was one day short of his third year in uniform.

Arthur’s family received the gut-wrenching telegram a week later on 7 February 1945. They were subsequently advised that the crew was on a ‘highly secret’ mission; no distress signals were received and a search was unsuccessful. Arthur, who had never married, had arranged for his last will and testament to be posted home to his parents, ‘in the event of my death’:

*I am trusting you won’t grieve too much if it happens, I am taken, but just realise that I have gone to be with the Lord ‘which is for better’ and one day we will all be reunited and rejoice evermore.*

Nobody could say if Arthur really was dead—he was just missing. On 18 May, his family received advice that he was believed to be a prisoner of war. Two weeks earlier, Arthur’s pilot and navigator had been liberated from Rangoon Gaol. They stated that Arthur had baled out into Japanese-controlled territory but neither had seen him after landing. The reason for the authorities assuming he was in captivity was not explained—regrettably, though it was not realised at the time, it appears to have been the result of confusion in signals between the RAF in India and the Casualty Section of the Air Board in Australia.

The family received further conflicting information from India, possibly from old squadron mates, that five or six of the crew had been liberated or escaped. In fact, four of the six definitely captured had been beheaded. Arthur’s mother Maude believed her son and two others evaded capture but of their fate she could only say they ‘have not been seen since’.

A party from the Air Jungle Rescue Co-ordinating Centre reached the crash site in January 1946. Villagers confirmed that six airmen were captured; three remained unaccounted for, although apparently one body had been found in the wreckage that was now submerged. It was another four months before the Williams family were advised that ‘all hope of finding him alive must be abandoned’. The RAF made a presumption of death on the day of
the crash. There was finality in the family’s request for a death certificate in order to settle his estate. Another of Arthur’s brothers, Pastor Trevor Williams, wrote to the Minister for Air on behalf of the family:

* We realize that your Department has left no stone unturned in order to trace my brother & we are indeed grateful to you.*

Naturally, we would like to have known just how he died—but in the wisdom of God that will probably remain a mystery until the Great Day when we meet him in Heaven.

On Panel 458 of the Singapore Memorial, commemorating 24,000 members of the British Commonwealth armed forces and merchant navies who lost their lives in the Far East and have no known grave, is inscribed: WILLIAMS A. R.

* * *

One of the hardest tasks facing returning servicemen and women was contacting loved ones of those who died in battle, captivity or other circumstances. Some could not face up to it; others saw it as a last duty. At the start of January 1946, Mr Clarence Prichard of Goulburn, New South Wales, replied to Curly Heckendorf:

* My wife and I appreciate so much your letter ... Kev’s death was a heavy blow to us. Wedding bells were to ring and so many things were to be done ‘when Kevin comes home’ but it was not to be. It is the penalty of war and we must just carry on with a brave face to the world as he would wish.*

Kevin Prichard was twenty-five and living at Lismore in New South Wales when he enlisted in September 1940. He died on the third last day of October 1943, less than two months short of his twenty-ninth birthday, on the Burma–Thailand Railway.

When informed of their son’s death, the Prichards received words of condolence from friends, acquaintances and strangers. One visitor was Sergeant Cecil Phews, who had been with Kevin four days before he died. Others, including his company commander, had written. As Kevin’s next-of-kin, his parents were the natural people for his comrades to seek out but as Mr Prichard observed, sadly, grief was shared:

* Our hearts go out to his little girl in Lismore who remained so loyal for years without
a word or a line from him. She was with us six months ago and I said I wonder if they have been able to knock that grin off Kev’s face and she replied ‘there are not enough Japs in Malaya to do that’ and from what you and others say she must have been nearly right.

The body of Private Kevin Prichard, 2/30th Battalion, was cremated outside the railway camp in which he died. His ashes were recovered after the war and reburied in Plot A14.C.8 of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Thanbyuzayat, Burma. Mr Prichard lamented that none of his son’s personal effects had been recovered, ‘perhaps there was nothing left when he died’.

* * *

During 1945 and 1946, Colonel Sybil Irving, Controller of the Australian Women’s Army Service, wrote to many of her former officers and senior non-commissioned officers as they were being discharged. She thanked them for their service and asked of plans and hopes for the future. Replies paint a picture of the challenges, and pleasures, faced by many veterans as they endeavoured to make the transition to peace.

My Army career did seem to end rather abruptly—life was a whirl about that time—one minute I was an Army officer in New Guinea & the next, it seemed, a housewife in Sydney doing the daily chores again!

*

Cooking no longer holds untold terror, I started my culinary experiments with the aid of ‘The Commonsense Cookery Book’ which I find invaluable, it’s hard to go wrong, though I must be honest and admit to many horrible failures.

*

I’ve learnt what is available on the present markets so I no longer annoy or stagger shop assistants by asking for goods which they have not seen for years.
Well I had great ideas of starting a business, ‘Children’s & Babies Wear’, but after I had tried to get supplies I failed hopelessly to do so, [and] I had to give the idea away.

I have purchased, in partnership, a boat wiring business at Nowra. ... Although, at first, we found the work rather hard, our service with the Army has stood us in good stead. It has helped me to adjust myself to this occupation.

After three weeks of pottering around at home I found that I was ready to find myself some work. I felt I needed something to keep my mind occupied and to help me settle down.

It is good, of course, to be home but it is not so good to begin from scratch at the office again.

When I was discharged I applied through Rehab for a course with the accounting machine and after all these months I have been notified that I am to commence with the very next course.

I am a doting parent these days, & just loving it ... Elizabeth is an enchanting little mite just seven weeks old ...

As my husband is in the State Public Service we shall be living in Hobart permanently, but as yet we are still boarding as flats and houses are as scarce here as elsewhere. We are, like most other service couples, most anxious to find some corner of our very own.
I know that most of us are going to miss army life, as it filled our lives for a number of years, but we must all settle down and concentrate on the future.
A mushroom cloud rises over the Japanese city of Hiroshima after the dropping of an atomic bomb, 6 August 1945. On 9 August, another atom bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. The destruction of these cities caused the Japanese government to open serious negotiations to end the war. An Australian prisoner of war, Gunner Colin Finkemayer, 4th Anti-Tank Regiment, watched the destruction of Nagasaki: ... *it was just a big cloud of smoke billowing over the horizon. It was billowing orange and white. Like a big cauliflower ... Nagasaki has got it, whose turn next?* [Colin Finkemayer, Australians at War Film Archive] (AWM 043863)
Servicemen and women wait around the radio for news of Japan’s surrender, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, 12 August 1945. Between the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the official Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945, Australians confidently awaited the end of the Pacific war. A Melbourne newspaper reported on 11 August: *Melbourne refused to go to bed. At 3 am [11 August] the streets were still alive with happy people. At 4 am they were still there. At 5 am they were still there. Crowds gathered outside The Sun office to buy each edition as it came out. [The Herald, 11 August 1945] (AWM 112999)*
Warrant Officer Thomas Healy, Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit, raises the Australian flag at the Government ‘kiap’ house after the reoccupation of Kiarivu by Australian forces, New Guinea, 14 August 1945. Beside the flagpole is a guard of honour from the 2/7th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and the 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion. Warrant Officer ‘Pat’ Boland, 2/7th Battalion, recorded in his diary that night: At ‘stand to’ tonight it was quite strange to think that this might be the last time any of us would have to do this. The hours are beginning to pass very slowly tonight. I wonder what Mum and Dad are thinking about tonight. God willing, it might be only a short time before we are all together again. [Boland, in WP Bolger and JG Littlewood, The Fiery Phoenix, Parkdale, no date, p. 370] (AWM 095417)
Sister Josephine King, a patient in the 113th Australian General Hospital at Concord, Sydney, reads the news of the day with Sisters Dorothy Ward and T Smyth, 15 August 1945. The paper Sister King is reading is The Sun, which ran the following headline on VP Day: Peace!—Official —Japan Surrenders: Emperor to give Cease-Fire. [The Sun, 15 August 1945] (AWM 113856)
A Japanese prisoner of war on Guam weeps as he listens to Emperor Hirohito's broadcast, at noon Japanese time on 15 August 1945, announcing Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allies. The broadcast had been recorded the previous day. This was the first time in history that the voice of the Emperor, who at that time was considered divine, was heard on Japanese radio. The Emperor’s message stated in part: *Despite the best that has been done by everyone—the gallant fighting by the military and naval forces, the assiduity of our servants of the State and the devoted service of our one hundred million people, the war situation has developed not necessarily to our advantage.* (AWM Poo444.098)
Crowds gather in central Sydney during celebrations marking victory in the Pacific. The Sydney Morning Herald wrote of ‘peace delirium’ in Sydney on 15 August 1945: Peace and tumult came hand in hand to Sydney yesterday when the dramatically simple statement of Japan’s surrender was made at 9 am. An entire city felt the burdens of six weary, war-laden years roll from its shoulders, and plunged full-heartedly into celebration. The paper also reported that one soldier in jungle green uniform ‘amid the noise and excitement in Martin Place ... knelt in quiet reverence in front of the Cenotaph’. [The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 August 1945] (State Library of Victoria, Argus newspaper collection H98.101/336)
Soldiers of the 7th Australian Division and sailors of a Royal Australian Navy Beach Commando attend a thanksgiving service held in the Salvation Army hut on Milford Highway, Balikpapan, 15 August 1945. The 7th Division Headquarters war diary for that day recorded the following: At 0800 hours it was announced that Japan had accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. All troops were issued with a free bottle of beer, a very fitting gesture, though hardly ample for the occasion. [7th Division General Staff Branch, war diary, 1/5/14, AWM 52] (AWM 113205)
Private Leslie Tonks of the 2/43rd Battalion, a sniper, in position with his spotters near Beaufort, Borneo, on 15 August 1945. The 2/43rd’s war diary recorded that one Japanese soldier had been fired on with no result on the evening of 14 August and that at 8.45 am next morning the battalion heard the news of Japan’s surrender: *News was received very quietly by troops for they realize there is still much to be done.* [2/43rd Battalion, war diary, 8/3/14 AWM 52] (AWM 114097)
Captain Robert Cole, Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU), inspects a gathering of local people recently released from Japanese control at Kiarivu, New Guinea, on 17 August 1945. A 2/7th Battalion diarist, Warrant Officer ‘Pat’ Boland, described the event: *There was a big parade today for Captain Cole ... who is the big ANGAU boy in the area. I was told that there were over 1,000 natives lined up for his inspection. Captain Cole has been a real thorn in the side of the Japanese and has killed a fantastic number, from all accounts. His little Praetorian Guard of native police boys always fascinates me. I am sure they would kill anyone from King George down if he said so.* [Boland, in WP Bolger and JG Littlewood, *The Fiery Phoenix*, Parkdale, no date, p.371] (AWM 095457)
The burial service of an indigenous soldier of the 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion who died of wounds suffered in an attack on the Japanese-held village of Kiarivu shortly before VP Day, takes place at Kiarivu, New Guinea, on 17 August 1945. The original caption to this photograph in the Australian War Memorial does not name this soldier but it is likely to have been a New Guinean simply known as Agir. The Memorial’s Roll of Honour database indicates that Agir died of wounds on 16 August 1945 and his name is commemorated on the Roll of Honour at the Memorial along with others of the 2nd New Guinea Infantry Battalion. 

(AWM 095451)
Gracie Fields, the famous English singer, holds a victory cake presented to her by members of the Sisters’ Mess, Australian Army Nursing Service, at Lae, New Guinea, on 19 August 1945. Miss Fields toured a number of Australian bases in the South-West Pacific Area at the end of the war, including Torokina on the island of Bougainville, where she arrived on VP Day, 15 August 1945. Elaborate arrangements were made for her concert at Torokina: **Standing room will be available for spectators not allocated seats in rear and on flanks of seating areas. Those desirous of using this space will not arrive until 1900 hrs. The complete programme on the night of 16 Aug will be broadcast by Radio TOROKINA.** [Visit of Miss Gracie Fields, 319/8/1, AWM 54] (AWM 095015)
Soldiers of the 7th Division at Balikpapan, Borneo, are checked off before boarding HMAS Kanimbla, which will return them to Australia, 23 August 1945. These men had qualified for repatriation under a points system that allowed long service men to have priority for demobilisation and return to Australia. Lance-Corporal Raymond Style, 7th Division, recalled the system: *I was one of the first out. You got points for so many years in the service ... and I was one of the ones with the most points because I was in 1940. So I was one of the first out ... One thousand two hundred and something days overseas I think.* [Raymond Style, Australians at War Film Archive] *(AWM 114456)*
Survivors of the Australian Hospital Ship *Centaur*, sunk by a Japanese submarine off the Queensland coast on 14 April 1943, march in a parade held in Melbourne to celebrate victory in the Pacific, on 24 August 1945. Those lost in the *Centaur* were forty-five Australian merchant seaman and 223 Australian Army medical personnel, which included eleven nurses. One newspaper described the Australia Army Nursing Service’s contingent in the march, held in driving rain and wind: *But the weather didn’t matter to gallant women who, not seeking recognition, had by sheer merit earned decorations, commendations—and eternal gratitude.* [The Herald, 24 August 1945] (AWM 113306)
Private Cyril Davies, Intelligence Section, 2/13th Battalion, talks to a malnourished Javanese boy who had escaped from the Japanese late in the war, Miri, Borneo, 28 August 1945. The boy was then being looked after in the British Borneo Civil Administrative Unit compound. (AWM 115186)
The Officer in Charge of Naval Stores, Yuzo Tanno, hands over the keys of the Yokusuka Naval Base in Japan to Captain Herbert Buchanan of the Royal Australian Navy, 30 August 1945. Buchanan was the commander of the British Landing Force, consisting of both British and Australian sailors, which went ashore shortly after the Japanese surrender to take control of Japanese naval facilities. (AWM 019422)
General Sir Thomas Blamey prepares to sign the official Japanese surrender document on behalf of Australia on the USS Missouri, Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945. An armada of Allied warships, including the cruiser HMAS Hobart, was drawn up around the Missouri that day and Hobart’s chaplain, Barney Blain, later described the occasion: The memory is of sailing through this vast array of naval vessels of all types and from all nations and we were within viewing distance of the Missouri ... it was an impression of tremendous impressiveness, of this might and this power all being gathered in this place ... and the great might and power of the Japanese forces acknowledging that they were beaten. It was a tremendous feeling of relief, of happiness. [Reverend Barney Blain, Keith Murdoch Sound Archive, AWM] (AWM 019122)
An unidentified Australian ex-POW from Japan at the 3rd Australian Prisoner of War Reception Group, Manila, Philippines, 4 September 1945. The soldier shows clear signs of emaciation from the malnutrition he has suffered in Japanese POW camps. Major Stan Morton of the Salvation Army recalled the reception of the ex-POWs in Manila: *They were in such a state physically that the Australian Government felt that they should not be sent straight back to Australia, so we had this rehabilitation camp in Manila, a lovely spot ... And these men were literally feasted while they were there ... that two, three or four weeks that they had in the camp made the world of difference to them.* [Stan Morton, Australians at War Film Archive] (AWM 030261/25)
Men of the 2/14th Battalion relax on the beach near their camp at Balikpapan, Borneo, on 7 September 1945. The battalion’s war diary records that between 5 and 7 September 1945 the days were fine and hot at Balikpapan. Sport kept men occupied as they waited for repatriation to Australia and on 15 September the mobile cinema screened the American-made war classic, ‘The White Cliffs of Dover’. Also on the 15th, the commanding officer held a conference of company commanders ‘to discuss things in general’. [2/14th Battalion, war diary, 8/3/14, AWM 52] (AWM 116344)
General Sir Thomas Blamey signs the instrument of surrender of the 1st Japanese Army at Morotai, Netherlands East Indies, on 9 September 1945. The ceremony took place on the sports ground of 1 Australian Corps and men of the corps were lined up seven deep to witness the event. The Japanese commander, Lieutenant General-Fusatoro Teshima, signed first, followed by Blamey, who then handed Teshima orders concerning the disposal of his army. Blamey gave an address which included these words: *In receiving your surrender I do not recognise you as an honourable and gallant foe, but you will be treated with due courtesy in all matters ... I recall the atrocities inflicted upon the persons of our nationals as prisoners of war and internees, designed to reduce them by punishment and starvation to slavery.* *(AWM OG3474)*
Japanese prisoners are medically examined by an Australian doctor at Balikpapan, Borneo, on 11 September 1945. This was the first batch of 400 Japanese POWs to arrive at the camp on Parramatta Ridge, Balikpapan, after the surrender ceremony of 9 September on Morotai.

(AWM 118687)
Lieutenant-General Hatazo Adachi is carried by Japanese soldiers into the positions of the 2/7th Battalion at Kiarivu, New Guinea, on 12 September 1945. Adachi was on his way to Wewak to surrender all the forces in New Guinea under his command. The occasion is described in the 2/7th Battalion’s history: General Adachi was being carried ... in a stretcher like a sedan chair. The Australians were amused by the sight of this wizened up little man ... Not one soldier present felt pity for the general. When [Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Parbury] was introduced to Adachi, he seemed to deliberately put his right hand behind his back to signify no intention of shaking hands. [WP Bolger and JG Littlewood, The Fiery Phoenix, Parkdale, no date, p.377] (AWM 128800)
Recovered POWs from Ambon, among them the survivors of Gull Force, the Australian force that had helped defend the island in early 1942 when the Japanese invaded, wait for ambulances on the wharf at Morotai, Netherlands East Indies, 12 September 1945. The ex-POWs were brought from Ambon by HMA Ships *Latrobe* and *Glenelg*. A report from Morotai described their physical state: *Of the total of 164, [seventy] officers and men, including stretcher cases, needed medical attention. The remainder were fit for normal travel, all were extremely emaciated, some men of twelve stone normal weight weighing only five stone. The 123 Australians were all that remained of the original Gull Force.*  [G Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy, 1942-1945*, Canberra, 1968, p.698]  (AWM 115775)
Ex-POWs of the 8th Division, recently released from Changi prison, Singapore, arrive home to Rose Bay, Sydney, on 14 September 1945. These men were among the first group of 132 released POWs to arrive in Australia after the Japanese surrender. They were flown home in eight Catalina flying boats from Singapore and as they stepped out of their aircraft, Sydney welcomed them: *No human noise ever surged over the harbour like that which swept out from the shore to greet the first men ... freed at last from their long captivity ... rousing cheers and coo-ees went up, car horns were tooted and a spontaneous roar of welcome greeted the men as they stepped ashore.* [Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 15 September 1945] (AWM 116746)
Two members of the 8th Division, ex-POWs of the Japanese, have their first hot bath in Australia after four years of captivity, 113th Australian General Hospital, Concord, Sydney, 16 September 1945. Both men were part of the first contingent of ex-POWs to arrive in Australia by Catalina flying boat from Singapore on 14 September 1945. (AWM 115977)
Major Lancelot Heinicke hands coffee to a group of nuns from the Mission of the Sacred Heart, Vunapope, Rabaul, New Britain, on 16 September 1945. The nuns had recently been released from Japanese internment. In 1946, Sister Leonora Mueller testified to the kindness shown to a group of indigenous Sisters of the mission by Yamamoto Hisashi, a member of the Japanese civilian administration: *He acted always in a friendly way ... He protected the convent of the Sisters so that nobody was allowed to enter the house, he erected sign boards for the house and in the garden of the Sisters and stopped the stealing.* [Sister Mueller, letter to War Crimes Office, 6 July 1946, 1010/4/178, AWM 54] (AWM 096892)
A Japanese serviceman awaits evacuation by barge from the Bonis Peninsula to the 17th Field Ambulance on mainland Bougainville, 16 September 1945. Part of the surrender agreement on Bougainville gave the Japanese access to medical treatment, and the war diary of the 17th Field Ambulance records for 16 September: *Major May went to Bonis Peninsula and brought back 10 of the sickest Japs. 3 were battle casualties and all were suffering from extensive malnutrition and tropical ulcers.* [17th Field Ambulance, war diary, 11/12/41, AWM 52] (AWM 096662)
The people of Soë, Timor, greet the arrival of Timor Force, ‘Timforce’, 17 September 1945. Timor Force was raised in late August 1945 to proceed to Timor and adjacent islands to receive the Japanese surrender, investigate war crimes and arrange for the repatriation of Japanese soldiers. On 6 December 1945, a surveillance group arrived at Ende: The party was given a most enthusiastic welcome, Union Jacks, Australian and Dutch flags dressed the buildings and jetty and a large crowd lined the decorated street. [Timor Force, Report on Operations, 571A/4/7 Part 1, AWM 54] (AWM 116000)
Major-General Uno, Imperial Japanese Army, lays his sword at the feet of Lieutenant-Colonel Ewan Murray Robson, 2/31st Battalion, during the surrender ceremony at Bandjermasin, Borneo, 17 September 1945. Uno’s placing of his sword has been described in this way: Uno twice tried to hand his sword to Robson as a way of avoiding the indignity of bowing. Robson insisted that the Japanese put the sword where ordered. Officers who knew Robson said he had two aims. The first was to ensure there was no mistaking the fact of surrender. The second was to force the Japanese general to bow, as so many Australians had been forced to bow in servility to their Japanese captors. [John Laffin, Forward Forever, Newport, 1994, p.172] (AWM 118033)
Able Seamen Les Coad and Kevin Sorrenson, crew members of HMAS Napier, watch Petty Officer Allan Mole chalking a sign on a Japanese midget submarine at the Japanese arsenal, Tokyo Bay, September 1945. (AWM 019164)
Members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (Red Cross) depart aboard the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Formidable for Tokyo, Japan, to assist in the treatment and repatriation of Australian ex-POWs. In the months after the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945 more than 13,700 ex-POWs were repatriated to Australia from various locations in both north and south-east Asia. (AWM 115909)
Private BR Francis, an ex-POW of the 8th Division, enjoys his first meal at home with his family after his release from captivity, Melbourne, Victoria, 19 September 1945. (AWM 115890)
Ex-POWs Private Leslie Stephenson, Private Vernon Glossop and Corporal H Whitehead, all 2/29th Battalion, check their weight gain about a month after their release from Japanese captivity, Changi Gaol, Singapore, 19 September 1945. (AWM 116466)
Two ex-POWs, Corporal Herbert Barber and Private Keith Burling, 2/20 Battalion, enjoy their first beer in Australia shortly after their arrival in Darwin by air from Singapore, 21 September 1945. (AWM NWA0974)
Sister Jean Greer, Australian Army Nursing Service, 10th Australian General Hospital, recovers in the 2/14th Australian General Hospital, Singapore, late September 1945. Sister Greer was one of a number of Australian nurses who had been on the SS *Vyner Brooke* when it was sunk by the Japanese in February 1942 as the ship was escaping south from Singapore. The Australian official medical history records: Of the sixty-five nurses and physiotherapists on the *Vyner Brooke* only twenty-four survived to return to Australia after three and a half years of captivity. Thirty-three were lost at sea or massacred at Radji Beach [Sumatra], and eight died from starvation or disease. [Alan Walker, *Middle East and Far East*, Canberra, 1953, p.663] (AWM P01015.006)
Chaplain GR Beatty, 2/14th Australian General Hospital, conducts the burial service of an Australian ex-POW in the Changi War Cemetery, Singapore, 21 September 1945. The hospital arrived in Singapore on 13 September 1945 to treat released POWs before their return to Australia. Four ex-POWs died during the hospital’s time in Singapore, two of whom were Private Phillip Scott, 2/29th Battalion, and Sergeant Alfred Johnson, Australian Army Service Corps. Both men were too sick for evacuation to Australia after being released from the Changi prison hospital on 15 September, and both died on 20 September 1945. [Report, 2/14th AGH, 403/7/1, AWM 54] (AWM 117660)
An Australian ex-POW who had a limb amputated during his time labouring on the Burma–Thailand railway in 1942–1943 arrives in Singapore from Bangkok, 25 September 1945. A number of POWs suffered amputations carried out under primitive conditions on the Burma–Thailand railway. Sir Albert Coates, who worked as a doctor on the railway, described surgery under those conditions: *In the next few weeks one hundred and twenty legs came off; many a toe was removed without anaesthesia and with scissors only. We made ligatures of catgut from the peritoneal coat of the intestine of the yak and sterilised the skin with alcohol prepared ... from Burmese brandy and waste wine.* [Albert Coates and Newman Rosenthal, *The Albert Coates Story*, Melbourne, 1977, p.112] (AWM 119705)
Komoriah, a Javanese woman who had been forced to work in a Japanese brothel in Koepang, Timor, shows happiness shortly after her release by Timor Force, 2 October 1945. She is holding a doll that she kept with her throughout her captivity. According to the original caption, the Japanese had tried to hide the manner in which twenty-six Javanese women at Koepang had been forced into prostitution by issuing them with Red Cross armbands shortly before the arrival of Timor Force. (AWM 120083)
Sergeant Joe Elliot, 6th Division Cavalry Commando Regiment, greets his brother, Sergeant Frank Elliott of the Australian Army Service Corps, an ex-POW of the Japanese, as he comes down the gangplank of the Royal Navy aircraft carrier which brought him home to Australia, 5 October 1945. (AWM 122060)
Signalman Peter Collins, 24th Brigade Signals Section, supervises students in a typing class at Jimpangah, Borneo, on 10 October 1945. The class was held in a converted railway carriage belonging to the 2/43rd Battalion’s Educational and Vocational Training Centre, and it sat in a siding of the Beaufort to Tenom railway line. (AWM 121650)
Fred Simpson, ABC war correspondent, records a message at Kuching, Borneo, from Lieutenant Russell Ewin of 8th Division Signals, an ex-POW of the Japanese, for broadcast to his family in Australia, 12 October 1945. A RAAF press release dated 15 October stated that the repair of the local airstrip was well in hand and that 400 stretcher cases would shortly be flown home. Mention was made of the only RAAF POW at Kuching, Flight Lieutenant CS Johnstone: *He last heard from his wife, who lives at Ashgrove Avenue, Ashgrove, Brisbane, in September 1943, when he got a twenty-five word postcard.* [POWs at Kuching thank RAAF, 1945/5504, A8681, National Archives of Australia] (AWM 118405)
Family and friends await the docking of the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Formidable* (just out of sight) on 13 October 1945. The carrier was bringing home 1300 ex-POWs from Asia, some of whom had been in the vicinity of Nagasaki when the atomic bomb destroyed the city on 9 August 1945. One ex-POW described the scene at Nagasaki to a journalist: *... the explosion was accompanied by different flashes, some red, some blue and some white. The effect was immediate. Ships in the harbour burst into flames and even on the surrounding hills trees caught fire and burned furiously.* [The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 October 1945] (AWM 122106)
Private John Towers (on crutches) and Aboriginal soldier Private Dave Runge (being carried), both ex-POWs from camps in Japan, come down the gangplank of HMS Formidable, Sydney, 13 October 1945. Runge’s loss of his legs was due to the setting in of gangrene after he had been tortured for a week for urging other POWs to work less hard in a Japanese mine: [he was] tied up outside where he was made to kneel on a bamboo pole with another bamboo pole placed behind his knees. It was during the severe cold of winter and snowing at the time and resulted in a very frozen man suffering frostbite. [John Towers, The Tale of a Tojo Tourist, Melbourne, 1996, p.89] (AWM 122108)
Three Voluntary Aid Detachment members hand out cigarettes to returning ex-POWs as they leave the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Formidable* and board buses, 13 October 1945. Les Reid of the 2/19th Battalion recalled his homecoming as an ex-POW: *We were allocated to numbered or lettered double-decker buses ... [at Ingleburn] I disembarked and then saw my mother and father and three sisters. I cannot recall what transpired I think I was just overwhelmed. I think we went into the YMCA for a cup of tea ... I seemed to have a great feeling of insecurity and just wanted to be alone ... I don’t know what I said to Mum and Dad.* [Les Reid, quoted in Michael McKernan, ‘War Never Ends’, public lecture, National Archives of Australia] *(AWM 122109)*
Japanese soldiers dump arms and ammunition under the supervision of an Australian sailor from HMAS Bowen at Beo, Karakellang Island, Netherlands East Indies, 15 October 1945. A force known as Talaud Force was sent to the Talaud group of islands from Morotai in October 1945 to ensure that the provisions of the Japanese surrender were being carried out in the area. Among the arms dumped, according to an RAN report, were 571 rifles, 913 ammunition pouches, 224 steel helmets, 818 hand grenades and 872 bayonets (AWM 119830)
Sergeant R Townsend, Australian War Graves Maintenance Unit, mows the lawn at Soputa War Cemetery, Papua, 16 October 1945. Many of those buried here died as a result of the great losses suffered at the Battle of the Beachheads—Buna, Gona and Sanananda—between November 1942 and January 1943. The Soputa Cemetery was later closed and the graves transferred to Bomana War Cemetery, Port Moresby. (AWM 099128)
Flight Sergeant NA Duckmanton and Flight Sergeant Maxwell Paige, both aircrew navigators, wait to board their Beaufighter aircraft of 93 'Green Ghost' Squadron RAAF, at Labuan, Borneo, 18 October 1945. They were about to embark on a flight back to Australia as part of the RAAF's plan to reduce its strength in Borneo after the end of the war. Six Beaufighters were to escort fifteen Spitfires of 457 Squadron RAAF as far as Oakey in Queensland and then proceed to Wagga Wagga, NSW. The route to be flown was Labuan–Zamboanga–Morotai–Biak–Tadji–Finschhafen–Port Moresby–Higgins–Townsville–Rockhampton–Oakey–Wagga. [93 Squadron Operation Orders, 1/17/AIR, A11369, National Archives of Australia] (AWM OG3604)
Lieutenant Rosina Judd gives Private AV Crawford her discharge certificate from the Australian Women’s Army Service at the General Details Depot, Royal Park, Melbourne, on 23 October 1945. When asked if anyone had said anything to him when he left the Army in June 1946, Edward Asquith, New Guinea Air Warning Wireless Company, replied: *Well, they did. The officer, I think it was a major, said ‘Good luck in civvy life and thanks for a job well done’ or something like that. Some salutary comment.* [Edward Asquith, Australians at War Film Archive] (AWM 117406)
Servicemen surround Red Cross helpers as they distribute sandwiches and cakes at a reception for returned POWs, patients from Heidelberg Military Hospital and other servicemen given by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Winston Dugan, at Government House, Melbourne, on 24 October 1945. More than 3000 servicemen and women attended the garden party, and the newspapers recorded the following colourful incident: *One soldier walked up to Lady Dugan and presented her with two eggs. One had been autographed by him and several of his friends. The other Lady Dugan autographed and returned to him.* [The Herald, 24 October 1945] (AWM 121915)
Flying Officer Gordon Hughes DFC, RAAF, 354 Squadron RAF, disembarks from the SS Sontay, Adelaide, 24 October 1945. Hughes is carrying his HMV portable gramophone, which kept many airmen entertained between 1943 and 1945 in India, Burma and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Hughes also took the gramophone into the air on operations and played records over the intercom during wearying flights home to India over the Bay of Bengal. (AWM P03244.001)
Privates Richard Dell and James Prest, 67th Battalion, of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, Japan (BCOF), prepare to embark at Wewak on HMAS Manoora for Morotai, 26 October 1945. Part of BCOF was raised from troops serving in the Wewak area. The unit war diary records that the final selection for the battalion was carried out on 22 October, when many new volunteers applied: ... amongst these was one man aged 17 years, who had hitched-hiked from Australia. Under the circumstances he was not accepted. [67th Battalion, war diary, 8/4/104, AWM 52] (AWM 098322)
Captain Gerald Cocks, 3rd Prisoner of War Contact and Enquiry Unit, reads out a name and regimental number from the band of a pair of shorts to Lieutenant Eric Robertson at Sandakan, Borneo, on 26 October 1945. All the articles surrounding the pair were found in the former POW camp at Sandakan and many contained identifiable names and numbers of Australian and British servicemen. More than 2300 POWs who had been held in Sandakan Camp in January 1945 perished between then and the end of the war, either in the camp or on forced marches to a place in the mountains called Ranau. Only six men, all Australians, survived. (AWM 121783)
Squadron Leader Maxwell Wiadrowski, Chief Languages Instructor, teaches members of 81 (Fighter) Wing the phonetics of Japanese pronunciation, Labuan, Borneo, 3 November 1945. The squadrons of 81 Wing had been selected as the RAAF’s contribution to BCOF, and in October and November volunteers were being sought for the new force. One hopes the language skills being imparted by Wiadrowski helped them in the following situation in Japan, described in unit records: A curious fact ... was the nervous and jittery reaction of the Japanese labourers and house girls to our occupation troops. An uncooperative attitude existed for a while, however, when they realised that our appearance was not connected with any violence or cruelty, their work improved considerably. [81 Fighter Wing, Unit History Sheet, 25/4/AIR, A11242, National Archives of Australia] (AWM OG3634)
Sisters Evelyn Hopkins, Kathleen Dixon and Florence Dainton, Australian Army Nursing Service, assist Private F Conway, a patient in the 115th Australian General Hospital, Heidelberg, to pick the winner of the first post-war Melbourne Cup, Flemington Racecourse, 6 November 1945. Rainbird, from South Australia, won the Cup: *Rainbird dashed around the field two furlongs from home and with a great burst of speed, won by two and a half lengths. The crowd gave the mare a warm reception.* [The Herald, 6 November 1945] (AWM 118041)
An Indian soldier identifies a Japanese soldier at a parade of suspected war criminals, Rabaul, New Britain, 15 November 1945. A number of Japanese soldiers were later tried at Rabaul for ill treating Indian POWs. One Indian soldier, Tara Singh of the 3/16 Punjab Regiment, described his treatment at the hands of an enemy soldier: *If we were a bit late he beat me. I was several times beaten in this way ... At the time of falling in before or after fatigue, he daily beat all of us.* [Statement, Tara Singh, 1010/6/114, AWM 54] (AWM 098781)
A section of a stores dump of 52,000 empty 44-gallon petrol drums, Morotai, Netherlands East Indies, 24 November 1945. The size of the dump gives some indication of the fuel requirements of the RAAF when it operated from Morotai against Japanese positions in Borneo, Ambon, the Halmaheras and the Celebes in the last year of the war. *(AWM OG3654)*
Members of the Australian Women’s Army Service work in the Statistical Wing, 2nd Echelon Headquarters, in Prahran, Melbourne, 29 November 1945. File cards on every member of the Australian Army during the war were housed here. Sergeant Elsie Solly, Australian Women’s Army Service, recalled the importance of wartime paper work: *My life was filled with nominal rolls throughout my army career ... you have got to have a list ... You can’t shift one person and you can’t shift 100 or 1,000 people without a nominal roll, without documentation and all the associated papers that go with it.* [Elsie Solly, Australians at War Film Archive] (AWM 119267)
Sapper Thomas Broadhurst, ex-AIF, with his wife and friends after being presented with the Military Medal by the Governor-General, the Duke of Gloucester, at an investiture ceremony at Government House, Melbourne, 30 November 1945. Broadhurst received his medal for ‘continued bravery in the Western Desert, 23 October 1942 to 23 January 1943’. *The Herald* described the proceedings: *Today’s was the biggest and because of the presence of royalty probably the most impressive ever held at Government House. Service members, totalling 147, received nearly 20 different types of decorations for war gallantry, three civilians were knighted and four invested with the CBE. [The Herald, 30 November 1945] (AWM 121942)*
Squadron Leader Kenneth Williams (centre), Squadron Leader Martin Kriewaldt (left) and Flight Lieutenant Edwin Scribner (right) examine the remains of a wrecked RAAF aircraft for identification marks, Galela Bay, Halmaheras, 1 December 1945. They had been led to the wreck by local people. Hundreds of Allied aircraft and those who flew in them went missing in the Pacific war zone between 1941 and 1945 and the remains of missing aircraft are still being located. (AWM OG3680)
On 2 December 1945, an unknown Australian soldier photographs the grave of Lance-Corporal Graham James Hunter of the 2/14th Battalion, who died of wounds on 15 July that year and was initially buried at Balikpapan, Borneo. His remains were eventually removed to Labuan War Cemetery, where all the dead of the Borneo campaigns are now buried or commemorated. (AWM 122222)
Private Douglas Fleming receives treatment from an Army physiotherapist, Miss Wigan, at the 103rd Convalescent Depot, Ingleburn NSW, 10 December 1945. The Physiotherapy Department’s report for the quarter October–December 1945 recorded that four trained physiotherapists had been employed in that period, they had treated 537 patients, and that the ‘high standard of efficiency set by this department is being maintained’. [103rd Convalescent Depot reports, 11/4/7, AWM 52] (AWM 124841)
A banner carried by two Australian soldiers on Morotai, Netherlands East Indies, during a march on 10 December 1945 of 1500 ‘high point’ men from the General Duties Depot to Headquarters, 1st Australian Sub-Base Area. It had just been learnt on Morotai that HMAS *Kanimbla*, soon due in Morotai from Borneo, was carrying men with fewer demobilisation points and that the ship would reach Australia for Christmas. On arrival at Morotai, the captain of the *Kanimbla* eventually persuaded those on board with fewer points to disembark in an ‘orderly fashion’ in favour of the ‘high point’ men. *(AWM 126320)*
Workers dismantle the security fences at the 15th Australian Detention Barracks, Tamworth, NSW, 12 December 1945. (AWM 124850)
Lieutenant Charles Bush, official war artist attached to the Military History Section, Timor Force, sketches the wreck of the destroyer HMAS *Voyager*, at Betano Bay, Timor, 15 December 1945. In September 1942, *Voyager* ran aground whilst bringing reinforcements to Sparrow Force, operating against the Japanese on Timor. Efforts to refloat the damaged ship failed and Japanese bombers attacked, causing some damage. The ship was then destroyed with demolition charges and the wreck was later set on fire. The crew was rescued by two Australian corvettes, HMA Ships *Warrnambool* and *Kalgoorlie*. (AWM 121482)
Men of the 6th Division line the deck of the British aircraft carrier HMS *Implacable*, nearing the wharf at Woolloomooloo, Sydney, 18 December 1945. Christened by the newspapers the ‘Christmas ship’, the *Implacable* was reported to have made a ‘dash’ from Wewak, New Guinea, leaving there on 14 December to ensure that 2100 soldiers got home for the festive season. Unfortunately, the eighty-six Western Australians on board were not expected to make it home in time. *(AWM 124858)*
Patients and staff in Ward 4, 118th Australian General Hospital, gather around Corporal R McKay, who was too ill to get out of bed during the Christmas party arranged by ward staff, Rabaul, New Britain, 22 December 1945. (AWM 099537)
Rear-Admiral Hamanaka, Imperial Japanese Navy, takes the oath before entering the witness box at a war crimes trial court, Morotai, Netherlands East Indies, 11 January 1946. Captain Murray Tindale, an interpreter, stands to Hamanaka’s right. Along with Commander Baron Takasaki, Hamanaka was accused of ordering the execution of two Australian POWs near Menado, Celebes, on 19 June 1945. Takasaki was acquitted but the court found Hamanaka guilty and ordered him to suffer death by firing squad, with a recommendation to mercy. The sentence was commuted but Hamanaka was later executed by the Dutch. (AWM OG3705)
Japanese soldiers accused of war crimes on Timor take notes while charges are read to them at a war crimes court in Darwin on 1 March 1946. Among twenty-two Japanese who appeared in the only war crimes trial to be held on Australian soil was Lieutenant-Colonel Yujiro Yutani, commanding officer of the Japanese secret police on Timor. He was found guilty of the ill treatment and murder of POWs and sentenced to death. The execution was carried out, not in Darwin, but at Rabaul, New Britain, on 1 August 1946. Of the other accused at Darwin, nine were found guilty and sentenced to ten years with hard labour. (AWM NWA1043)
Private Colin Boyle, 47th Battalion, sits before Sergeant Thelma Powell, Australian Army Medical Women’s Service, as she paints an artificial eye to match his good eye, 2/1st Australian Facio Maxilliary and Plastic Surgery Unit, 113th Australian General Hospital, Concord, Sydney, 15 March 1946. A new multi-storey section of the hospital was opened during the war: *There is only one thing certain in war and that is casualties ... It is to succour and restore the health of those sick and wounded soldiers that institutions like this [Concord] have been built. In all the trials of war the Army Medical Corps is the only service designed to restore its waste and ravage.* [Notes for the Minister’s speech, 403/7/28, AWM 54] *(AWM 126431)*
Family and friends farewell the Australian contingent to the Victory March in London aboard HMAS Shropshire, Melbourne, 18 April 1946. Many distinguished veterans were part of the contingent, including Sergeant Albert Curtin MM. Curtin had fought in Timor in 1942, in New Guinea in 1943 and at Tarakan, Borneo, in 1945. It was for his bravery at Tarakan that he had been awarded the Military Medal where, working in a Regimental Aid Post, he had attended wounded men under heavy fire. (AWM 126772)
Signaller James Honeybone, Corporal Percy Rowe and Sapper J Clarke receive their official discharge certificates from the Army at No 3 Military Discharge Depot, Royal Park, Melbourne, on 27 August 1946. Between September 1945 and December 1946, the strength of the Australian Army declined through demobilisation from 377,598 to 46,951. A final report on demobilisation stated: While, as is inevitable in a scheme of this magnitude, a few individuals considered that their demobilisation had been unduly delayed, it was generally conceded ... that Australia’s Defence Forces had been demobilised quickly and efficiently, and it is now known that the rate of demobilisation achieved in Australia compares more than favourably with that of any other of the Allied countries. [Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, Canberra, 1970. pp. 612-613] (AWM 131260)
The cockpit and nose of a Beaufort bomber rest at a wrecking yard for surplus RAAF World War II aircraft at Wagga Wagga, NSW, in 1947. In May 1946, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that since the founding of the Commonwealth Disposals Commission to deal with war surplus, over 430 aircraft had been sold. In Yarram, Victoria, where former training aircraft were being sold: ... *one ex-RAAF pilot had bought a plane, then his brother had followed suit, and three other men in the town had bought planes ... the five forming an active aero club.*

[The Sydney Morning Herald, 30 May 1946] (AWM P02122.003)
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