Paradise in Peril. Western colonial power and Japanese expansion in Sout-East Asia, 1905-1941

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Citation for published version (APA):

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Chapter 4.

AUSTRALIA

4.1. Introduction.

When Japanese forces assaulted the natural cordon sanitaire of Australia - the Malay Barrier - Australia found itself in the embarrassing position that over three-quarters of its best troops were fighting the Germans and the Italians in the Middle East, almost three-quarters of its pilots were flying RAF planes over Western European skies, and more than half its fleet was patrolling the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Australia had placed itself in a unique position in that respect in the history of World War II. No other country had its main forces more than 5,000 miles from its own borders, while being threatened by an enemy which was much closer.

How did the Australian Government get into this predicament? This chapter is intended to give an answer to this question, an answer which was also important for the Dutch defence planning of the Netherlands East Indies. It will be shown that the defence of the Malay Barrier was not as strong as it could have been, because of the altruistic Australian defence policies, in the period between the German war declaration and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Dutch paid the ultimate price - the loss of their colony, much loss of life and inhuman treatment of their soldiers and civilians and of the indigenous Indonesians by the Japanese occupying forces. The Australians just barely escaped that fate, but it was a close thing.

How could this happen? To comprehend this amazing situation, Australia's "Grand Strategy" has to be discussed, as formulated by the Australian political parties and influenced by Australian History. Next the foreign policy as formulated by the ruling government is treated. Any credible foreign policy must be based upon sound defence planning, which therefore will be covered extensively. In fact, Australia paid much attention to defence planning, almost from its beginnings as a colony, and even started re-armament much earlier than the Netherlands East Indies.

Like Japan, Australia emerged from the First World War with expanded responsibilities for the peace in the region of Asia and the Pacific. Unlike Japan, however, Australia invested heavily in the development of a social-economic welfare state; together with New Zealand probably the first viable one before the Second World War. It could invest in this experiment, because it had obtained an Imperial guarantee from the Royal Navy for its protection. Australia resembled the Netherlands East Indies in this respect, because that colony also profited enormously from the Pax Britannica without any formal agreement. Unlike the Netherlands East Indies, the Australians were partners in Imperial defence, and therefore had some influence on the extent and credibility of this British guarantee. Subsequent Australian Governments, irrespective of their political colour, did not exploit this advantageous position however, notwithstanding the growing menace of Japan.

Australia as a nation remained in a position of filial bondage to its beloved and much-respected Mother country. Therefore the Australian Government did not challenge the
assumptions underlying the British guarantee, even when it became clear in the late thirties that the guarantee was based on bluff, and no longer on real power. This theme has been more fully explored in Chapter 2. A more independent attitude of the Australian Government however, combined with a faster industrialisation and a higher labour productivity, would have resulted in Australia being better prepared, which might also have been in a position to save the Dutch from ignominious defeat. Therefore, certainly for Dutch readers, the Australian defence policy and pre-war plans and preparations are of more than just academic interest. It should be recalled that eleven months before Pearl Harbor, the Australian Prime Minister was talking to the Dutch Governor General about the possibility of locating an Australian Division in Java\[2054\]. This suggestion came to nought because of Dutch pride, but the potential was there.

The important role of the Australian Government in helping the Dutch colonial administration, during the trying period the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans, has not attracted much attention at all in historical publications, neither in English nor in Dutch publications. Well-known Dutch-language publications, like the 13-volume history of the Netherlands in the Second World War by de Jong\[2055\] or the impressive 3-volume History\[2056\] of the Koninklijke Marine (The Netherlands Royal Navy) do not pay much attention to Dutch relations with Australia.

The increasing formal and informal contacts between Colony and Dominion after May 1940 are highlighted in the second part of this chapter, which lead to a degree of cooperation even before Pearl Harbor. At that time it was unmatched by either Great Britain or the United States. This positive Australian attitude\[2057\], more than anything else, was responsible for strengthening the hand of the Dutch colonial administration, when facing increasing Japanese demands. By contrast, as discussed in Chapter 2, (page 217-221) the British Government refused to give any guarantee to the NEI until a few days before Pearl Harbor. According to mutually agreed plans, however, Australia provided for stocks and maintenance parties in 1941, in those parts of the archipelago which they had agreed to defend. At the time of Pearl Harbor, Australian planes and troops had taken over the defence of those parts of the NEI. Moreover, it was in Australia where, after the Allied defeat, the remnants of the Royal Dutch Netherlands Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger or KNIL) tried to reconstitute itself\[2058\]. The important role of Australia in the support of the NEI colonial administration against looming Japanese aggression, is the

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2054 Telegram Governor-General N.E.I. to Minister for Colonies, no 37/U of 29 January 1941, in ARA, Department of Foreign Affairs, Archives of the Consulate-General in Sydney, accession number 2.05.48.14, inventory number 78. This will be referred in future notes as ARA, Sydney Archives, no 78.

2055 Dr. L. de Jong: "Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog". The most interesting volume of this series, dealing with the war in the Far East, is Volume 11-a: "Nederlands-Indië I", tweede helft, Martinus Nijhoff Leiden 1984. This publication will be referred to in subsequent notes as De Jong, 11a.

2056 Ph.M. Bosscher: "De Koninklijke Marine in de Tweede Wereldoorlog", Volume 2, Franeker 1986. This volume deals with S.E. Asia, and will be subsequently referred to as Bosscher.

2057 Prime Minister Menzies told the Governor-General on January 28, 1941 that Australia would do whatever was in its power to assist the Netherlands East Indies in the provision of weapons and munitions. ARA, Sydney Archive, 78 Ibid.

subject of the second part of this chapter.

It should not be forgotten that another British Dominion played a sometimes decisive role: New Zealand. It had much in common with Australia. New Zealand is not covered in a separate chapter, but is dealt with in the present study where it played an important role.

4.2. A short political history of Australia.

Australia, terra australis incognita (the unknown Southland of the Renaissance maps) is the smallest of the world's continents. Its west coast was discovered by Dutch navigators blown off course on their way to the East Indies. They christened the desert shores north of the modern city of Perth "Nieuw-Holland". Dutch expeditions explored the uninviting North Coast, but the wild aboriginals had no trade potential whatsoever, that being the only subject the Dutch were really interested in. Abel Tasman, in his epic voyage around the south of the continent, discovered Tasmania ("Van Diemen's Land") and the west coast of New Zealand in 1642, but he missed the Australian east coast, which was discovered by James Cook in 1770.

Cook's discovery of the lush Australian east coast came at the appropriate moment. England needed a penitentiary colony to relieve its overburdened prisons, filled with convicts who were being punished under the harsh laws existing in England. The loss of the American colonies also meant the loss of a dumping ground for these convicts. Moreover, the start of the industrial revolution created an underclass which turned more and more to violence, thus overloading the prison system. The Pitt Government then decided to ship prisoners to Australia's east coast, which looked a suitable place, far away from civilisation. This was the start of the Dominion of Australia, a pure white settlement "down under". On January 26, 1788 the "First Fleet", under Arthur Phillip, sailed into Botany Bay, south of present-day Sydney, with 700 convicts and 200 marines. The colony was later on moved to Port Jackson, the excellent natural harbour on which modern Sydney is located today. The colony of New South Wales was founded under a governor. From here colonists spread along the coast and into the interior. In 1810 the nascent colony already counted 12,000 white inhabitants, of which only 700 however were "free settlers".

In the nineteenth century free men and women from Great Britain followed the prisoners and settled the more habitable parts of Australia and Tasmania. They took with them the English democratic political system as a model, but also its set of moral values, including the belief in the superiority of the white race. Australia became an almost "pure white" colony, with strong racist overtones. The gold rush of 1851 was responsible for the number of white inhabitants multiplying almost threefold: from 405,000 in 1853 to 1,145,000 in 1860. Around 1855 the colonists formed "States" with their own elective governments and a government system patterned after that of Great Britain. Australian society was strongly urbanized even then, with most of the population concentrated in a

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few big cities, the capitals of the emergent Australian states. Those states, especially New South Wales and Victoria, implemented very progressive social policies. Australia was, for example, the second country in the world (after New Zealand) to adopt universal suffrage, including the right of women to vote (in 1895).

In 1901 the then still separate States formed the Commonwealth of Australia, with a total of around 3,500,000 inhabitants. The driving force behind its formation was the fear of European expansionism in the Pacific. The Germans in particular were very active in New Guinea and the Solomons, and had taken over the Marianas and Carolines and Marshall Islands from Spain in 1899. This frightened the rather isolated Australian states into closer cooperation. The question of the location of the new capital almost split the new Commonwealth again, until it was decided to have a completely new capital: Canberra.

Canberra however, remained a small and sleepy town up to the end of the Second World War, as it sprang to life only when Parliament gathered in its temporary dwellings. The Dutch Consul General (T. Elink Schuurman) gave a sometimes hilarious description of the Canberra of that time in his reports.


The Federal Executive is chosen from members of both Houses and forms the Government; thus charged with administering the laws. Ministers are selected from the governing political party, or coalition of political parties forming the Government. The formal Head of State is the British reigning monarch, who appoints a Governor General as his or her representative, based on the advice of the Dominion Government. The Governor General has the supreme executive power as representative of the monarch. Until the 1960s, it was usual for distinguished Englishmen to be appointed to this position. One of the most well-known and respected Governors General was Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim, the victor of Burma (1953 - 1960). However, since the appointment of Australian Lord Casey (1965 - 1969), all subsequent Governors General have been notable Australians.

The gradual development of animosity between Japan and Australia in the first decades of

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2064 See for example his letter to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs (MinFA) of 22 July 1941, no T5/5566/102, Secret Archives MinBuZa, London Archives DZ/GA 1940 - 1945, box 13, file 5. The so-called Secret Archives of the Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs will be subsequently referred to as "MinBuZa", the Archive of the period 1940 - 1945 during which the Department was in exile in London, as "London period". The Archives of the London Legation/Embassy kept at the Department will be referred to as "London Legation".

this century cannot be understood without some reference to the *White Australia* policy of the Australian government.

One of the first laws adopted by the new Commonwealth Parliament (the *Immigration Restriction Act*) aimed at halting the immigration of Chinese and Japanese into Australia. This "White Australia" policy was subsequently undisputed until after the Second World War, irrespective of the political background of the party in power. It was never a dividing issue between the political parties, due to its broad acceptance by the Australian electorate. The policy, which was based originally on the concept of racial superiority, has been defended more specifically by the Trade Unions, on the economic need to maintain living standards by preventing cheap labour and to avoid social conflict. The "White Australia" policy however, caused considerable resentment in Japan, giving the anti-democratic forces there yet another argument against the West. All Australian pre-war political parties subscribed to the *White Australia* policy, however.

The Australian Labor Party or ALP (founded in 1891) was consistently an influential, and sometimes even a dominant force in Australian government, notwithstanding the fact that in the 19th and early 20th century Australia lacked a strong industrial base. Early urbanization gave the ALP a stable electorate. Labour Electoral Leagues, supported by the powerful Trade Unions, came into existence before the elections for the New South Wales Legislature of 1891. The same happened in Queensland in 1893, which even became the first State in world history to have a Labour Government. In 1904, and again in 1908, the ALP was elected into government, establishing an early welfare state with one of the highest standards of living in the Western world, until after the Second World War.

The first leader of the Australian Labor Party, William M. Hughes, was strongly in favour of compulsory conscription. Labour considered a professional Army to be dangerous, because it might be used to break Labour strikes. Therefore, when the ALP came into power in 1908, conscription was introduced, with the proviso that the conscripted would not be sent outside Australia against their will.

At the national election of 21 September 1940, the government parties (United Australian Party UAP and Country Party CP) obtained an equal number of seats, and lost in respect to the ALP, but Robert G. Menzies of the UAP was able to form a new government, dependent on the votes of two independent MPs. However, the political foundation on which to pursue a war policy had now become very narrow. After a series of losses at by-elections, also due to the catastrophic military developments in Greece and Crete, Menzies' position as Prime Minister became untenable, and he resigned on August 28 1941. It was formally because he could not muster enough votes for a supply bill, but effectively because he had lost the confidence of Parliament on his handling of the issue of

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who was in charge of the AIF, the all-volunteer expeditionary Force.\footnote{AIF stands for Australian Imperial Forces, the name given to Australia's expeditionary forces, serving outside the country, and manned by volunteers.} After the humiliating defeats of the AIF in Greece and Crete under English strategic leadership, it became clear to the Australians that they were fighting the wrong war at the wrong place, while their back-yard lay wide open to Japanese aggression. Menzies got the blame for this state of affairs, his fall having been foreseen by the Dutch Consul General in Sydney in a report to his Government.\footnote{Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 12 August 1941, no T10/6107/110 in MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, Box 13, inv. nr. 111.}

Menzies was indeed replaced by Arthur W. Fadden of the Country Party on 28 August 1941. Fadden's Cabinet was exactly the same as the preceding one, except for the prime minister. Menzies remained a Cabinet Member, charged with Defense Coordination. However, on 17 and 18 September 1941, Parliament reconvened, putting the government under fire because of alleged impropriety of the payment of government funds for unauthorized purposes (the "Winkler case").\footnote{For a description of this rather complicated case see Appendix 9 in Paul Hasluck: The Government and the People, 1939 - 1941. Australia in the War of 1939 - 1945, AWM Canberra 1952, p. 614 - 615.} Connected to this and a budget resolution, the government was defeated on 3 October 1941 by 36 votes to 33, and Fadden resigned. On October 7 1941 the ALP took over the government with John Curtin as Prime Minister. Curtin had never held ministerial office, and he was now the at the head of an inexperienced minority Labour administration. It was Curtin who had to steer Australia through the more and more strained relations with the Motherland, and through the largest military threat in her history, following the Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies and the Solomons. He became Australia's wartime leader and died in office in 1945.

From this description of Australian political history it can be concluded that there was no strong political leadership in the months just prior to Pearl Harbor. At the most crucial period in its modern history, Australia got its third Prime Minister in six weeks\footnote{David Day: The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War 1939 - 1942. Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1988. page 182. To be referred subsequently as David Day, Betrayal.}. It illustrates the fact, that the war in Europe was considered by most Australians as being far away and thus of almost no consequence to their daily life.

In those fateful last months of "peace" in the Far East, the new Australian Government's external political and strategical decisions were executed by four key players: Curtin and his new Minister of External Affairs, Dr. H.V. Evatt, together with the old stalwarts S.M. Bruce (Prime Minister from 1923 - 1928 and High Commissioner in London since 1932) and R.G. Casey (recently appointed Australian Minister in Washington). Curtin and Evatt were the highest ranking policy formulators of those four, but new to their jobs. Bruce was immensely experienced, and Casey very helpful in a posting which became more and more important. Evatt had a strong personality, clashing regularly with other people inside and outside the ALP, and quickly became controversial notwithstanding his outstanding leadership.\footnote{Kylie Tennant: "Dr. H.V. Evatt: the Man and his times" Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society. 59:1 (1973), 52 - 67.}
The Australian political parties shared many common views on Australia's future, but there were distinct differences with regard to defence. The conservative parties, like the Nationalist Party, the United Australian Party and the Country Party, strongly emphasized the bonds of Empire. The Labour leaders, who included a strong contingent of Irish origin, were critical of certain aspects of British policy, refusing to be drawn into European or Asian conflicts which they believed were not essential for Australia's security. The Australian Labor Party therefore, was strongly against compulsory conscription, and specifically advocated reliance on land-based aircraft and submarines, new weapons of which had been demonstrated in the Great War. Labour leaders believed these weapons were not only cheaper, but less likely to be sent overseas. The ALP was also against the formation of an expeditionary force in the event of war, and was a strong supporter of "Local Defence".

In June 1940 a defence platform was established at a special federal conference of the ALP, which emphasized local defence over imperial defence. The importance of this was the inclusion of the "Malay Barrier", including Singapore, in the definition of local defence. At that conference it was also decided that the ALP would not join the government in a "War Cabinet", as had been done by the British Labour Party in the United Kingdom. Instead the ALP suggested that an Advisory War Council be appointed, which proposal was accepted by the Menzies administration. Due to the fact, that the ALP was excluded from government for all but two years during the interwar period, it were the conservative parties which formulated the Australian defence policy, and saw it to fruition. In this regard there is a superficial likeness to the political situation in Holland before the Second World War.

Even after the declaration of war on Germany on September 3 1939, the Australians stuck tenaciously to their pre-war lifestyle, as if the world around them were not in flames. Working hours were maintained as in peacetime, even in the armament factories. Petrol rationing was blocked by Parliament, notwithstanding the fact that Australia had to import all its oil requirements, having no oil wells of its own. Industrial mobilisation therefore was too slow, the number and severity of industrial disputes even increased, and reached a peak with the coalminer's strikes in N.S.Wales in the period from June 1940 - June 1941. It again illustrates the carefree attitudes of the Australian populace of that time,

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2075 J.J. Dedman: "Defence policy decisions before Pearl Harbor" The Australian Journal of Politics and History, 13 (1967) 331. In subsequent notes this article will be referred to as Dedman.


2077 The Australian Flying Corps was established in 1916, the Royal Australian Airforce RAAF in 1921.

2078 J.J. Dedman, op. cit., 340.

2079 The contrasting views of the ALP and the ruling coalition Parties became very evident within the Advisory War Council, founded in October 1940. See for example the Advisory War Council (AWC) Minute no 431 of 29 July 1941, the first meeting after the American/British/Dutch embargo of Japan. Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937 - 1949, Volume V, July 1941 - June 1942, by R.G.Neside, Editor. Australian Govt Publishing Service, Canberra 1979, Document no 21, pages 30 - 35. This excellent publication of source documents on Australian Foreign Policy will be subsequently referred to as "DAFP".

2080 In his book, Hasluck gives some illuminating graphs regarding industrial unrest in that period. See Paul Hasluck: op. cit., 605.
which no political party dare disturb.

In summary, Australia in the interwar years had no strong and far-sighted politicians, like Roosevelt in the United States, who could prepare the nation for war. The opposition even lacked a Cassandra, like W.S. Churchill in the United Kingdom. It was a well-functioning democracy, with very advanced social legislation, and a myopic populace, which enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world, not caring too much about adverse developments in the rest of the world. An American observer commented bitterly on this "pachydermous quality of a well-fed democracy". The geographical isolation of Australia might be partly responsible for this peculiar psychology, which it shared with the equally isolated and wealthy Dominion of New Zealand.

4.3. Australia's foreign policy.

The new Commonwealth of Australia of 1901 had neither the desire nor the diplomatic and administrative structures to act with complete autonomy in international affairs, even when the Statute of Westminster of 1931 gave it explicit powers in this respect. Along with the Dominions of New Zealand and Newfoundland, Australia deferred the adoption of the enabling legislation granted under the Statute of Westminster. Up to 1936, External Affairs were handled by a small staff in the Prime Ministers' Office. Australia has consistently adhered to the diplomatic unity of the British Empire, almost up to the end of the Second World War. Therefore it had no diplomatic representations with other Foreign Powers until 1940, except the U.S.A., where an Australian Counselor was attached to the British Embassy up to 1940.

Present-day Australian historians, like David Day, typify this as the "colonial mentality" of the Australian Government. There was however a diplomatic representation in London, where Australia and the other Dominions were represented by a High Commissioner, and there was also a British Department of Dominion Affairs, headed by a Secretary, who was a member of the British Cabinet. The Australian Department of External Affairs, which came in existence as a separate department as late as 1936, maintained a separate Office of External Affairs in the British Capital. This situation complicated the foreign policy communication channels, since the Office of External Affairs in London reported to the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, while the Australian High Commissioner was responsible only to the Australian Prime Minister, reporting to his department. Mr. S.M. Bruce, the High Commissioner from 1933 to 1945, and successive External Affairs Officers collaborated effectively however, thereby avoiding what could otherwise have become a serious communication problem.

The way the United Kingdom communicated its Foreign Policy intentions to the Dominions, was by way of sending regular circulars to the Dominions summarising important information and explaining proposed British policy. The intermediaries were the British High Commissioners appointed to each Dominion Government. For Australia this was Sir

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2082 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 258.
2084 DAFP, Volume I, Canberra 1975. p. xii.
Geoffrey Whiskard, who was replaced in July 1941 by Sir Ronald Cross. The circular
dispatches and cablegrams were also supplemented by oral explanations at meetings of
the Dominions Secretary, Foreign Secretary or other British Ministers with the Dominion
High Commissioners in London. They could contact their respective Prime Ministers to
formulate an answer to the policy proposed, but the United Kingdom government assumed
that, in the absence of adverse comment, no objection was raised to the policy under review.


When the Federation started in 1901, foreign policy was not one of the items of the highest
priority for the new Federal Government. Nevertheless, its "domestic" White Australia-
policy did, indeed, have foreign policy consequences for the mother country, Britain. Great
Britain was involved in secret talks with the Japanese on the subject of an Anglo-Japanese
Alliance, at the same time that the new Australian federal Parliament was discussing the
Immigration Restriction Act, intended to stop Japanese emigration to Australia. This was a
matter of irritation for the Japanese, but for them the implicit recognition of Japan as a
major Power by the British government was more important than the admittance of its
subjects into Australia.

The Alliance was extended in 1905, but the British Government did not feel the need to
consult the Australian government formally, refusing to intervene when Japan once more
raised the issue of the Australian Immigration Restriction Act. When the question of an
extension of the Alliance arose in 1911, it coincided with an Imperial Conference. For
the Australian Government, it was one of the early opportunities to influence Imperial
foreign policy, but Australia decided to underwrite Britain's alliance with Japan. This was
also the case in 1921, when the extension of the Alliance came under discussion. The
Australian Government again supported such an extension, although Prime Minister
Hughes warned in a speech to the Australian Parliament: "I hope you will realise one thing
clearly. Treaty or no Treaty, if the power of the British Navy ... sinks to the level of a second-rate
power, then that Treaty is not worth that (and Hughes tore a sheet of paper in two) It is the
foundation of our being.

In what may be the first overt challenge to British foreign policy by the Australian Government,
its Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, invited the American Battle fleet to Australian
harbours in 1908, at the start of its world tour. (See page 52) The New Zealand
government quickly added its own invitation, also without the knowledge of the British
Foreign Office, which could in no way appreciate such open flouting of British relations with
its Japanese Ally. The visit of the "Great White Fleet" in 1908 was a rousing success, and

208 DAFP, Volume I, p. xi.
207 For a more detailed treatment of this Treaty, see Chapter 2, page 9.
210 Quoted from the Melbourne Herald, in letter of Dutch Consul-General P.E. Teppema to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 8 April 1921, no 831/68, ARA, Sydney Archives, accession nr. 2.05.19, inv nr. 800
a none too subtle signal to Japan\textsuperscript{200}. It also caused consternation in the Royal Navy\textsuperscript{201}.

At the Imperial Conference of 1921 (page 136) one of the major discussion topics was the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902, due to expire on 13 July 1921. The treaty had served both countries well. It had made it possible for Great Britain to withdraw its capital ships from the Far East to face the growing threat of the *Hochseeflotte* at home. It had recognized Japan as an emerging world power, thereby strengthening its standing amid the other world powers of that time. In so doing it had immensely strengthened Japanese pride, as an Asian nation being the equal of western powers. The treaty had removed from Australia any serious threat, with the exception of possible infringements on its lines of communications by the German East Asia Naval Squadron, based at Tsingtao. On the outbreak of the First World War, however, Vice-Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee choose to cross the Pacific to South America, chased in vain by both Australian and Japanese naval squadrons.

The Australian Government favoured renewal of the treaty. In a speech to the House of Representatives on 7 April 1921, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Hughes, pointed out that the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was "ludicrously inadequate" to defend the country. He therefore concluded his speech as follows: "I am in favour of renewing the treaty in any form that is satisfactory to Britain, America and ourselves." With that he hinted at the possibility of the Japanese requesting the cessation of the "White-Australia" policy for Japanese citizens, as the price to be paid for the prolongation of the treaty. Such a proposal was clearly unacceptable to him, his party, and also to the parliamentary opposition. Hughes got however the full support of the House for an extension of the treaty.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr. W.F. Massey, also supported a renewal of the Treaty. Both ran into fierce opposition against renewal from Canada, whose Prime Minister, Mr. Arthur Meighen, opposed renewal in any form. This stance was mainly based on the assumption that both the U.S.A and China would regard the renewal with disfavour. There was a very anti-Japanese atmosphere in the U.S.A at that time, resulting in the passage of the discriminatory California Immigration Laws. Canada, with its open and undefended border with the U.S.A, could not risk a confrontation on this issue with its powerful neighbour. On 27 July 1921, the question of renewal was deferred to the respective Parliaments, and to the coming disarmament conference in Washington. During the Imperial Conference (on 11 July 1921) the President of the United States, Warren Harding, had invited the most important naval powers to a naval disarmament conference, hosted by the United States.

### 4.3.2. Interwar Australian Foreign Policy

The Manchurian Incident in 1931 revealed a potential divergence of interests between the United Kingdom and Australia. The Americans, who were not represented at the League of Nations, made much verbal diplomatic noise about the rape of Chinese Integrity. The British and French were far more reluctant to take action, and the belated League of

\textsuperscript{200} G.P.Taylor: "New Zealand, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the 1908 visit of the American Fleet" *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 15:1, april 1969, 55 - 76.

\textsuperscript{201} According to Ian Hamill, the anxiety that Australia would seek U.S. protection against Japan was one of the driving forces behind the Singapore-Strategy. Ian Hamill, op. cit., p.26 afp.
Nations censure of Japan, based on the Lytton Report, caused Japan to leave the League. Australian public opinion and the Government were rather pro-Japanese at that time. The common opinion in Australia was that Japan could better divert its attention to China and the Soviet Union, than to South-East Asia. It was therefore time to mend fences with the Japanese, and after consultation with a lukewarm Whitehall, an Australian Goodwill Mission headed by the Attorney-General, J.G. Latham, went to Japan in May 1934.

The mission also visited the Netherlands East Indies, where they were cordially received and lavishly entertained. Although the mission resulted in a temporary improvement of relations with Japan, it was the unwillingness of the Australian Government to amend the "White Australia" policy in Japan's favour, and to go against the protective Ottawa Agreements on trade, which nullified the temporary euphoria. The mission was of great significance, however, in the development of a specifically Australian foreign policy. Latham was later to become the first Australian ambassador to Japan.

As early as 1935, Prime Minister Joseph A. Lyons began to doubt the parallelism between British and Australian interests, regarding Imperial Defence. He startled everybody present at the Imperial Conference in London in May 1937, with his proposal for a Pacific peace pact, to include both the USA and Japan. Lyons' approach to America represented a considerably deviation from the Imperial orientation in Australian defence planning. His initiative came to nought, but of course his apprehensions about British defence capabilities in the Pacific area, were well-founded. However, neither the Americans nor the British were really interested in the Pacific Pact. The Dutch were against it because it would replace the Four-Power Treaty of 1922. This became clear at a meeting Lyons had with the Dutch Prime Minister, Hendrik Colijn, in the Hague on 21 June 1937. Colijn inquired whether Lyons thought the Four-Power Treaty to be of no further value.

However, in public Lyons confirmed, in a speech to Parliament on August 24 1937 that at the Imperial Conference in London the United Kingdom had agreed: "that an adequate Fleet would proceed to Singapore in an emergency."
The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, on July 7 1937, did not cause any reorientation of Australian Foreign Policy. The Australian government favoured a policy of conciliation towards Japan, as was the case during the Manchurian crisis in 1931, and supported the British appeasement of Japan. The Trade Unions interfered with this policy however, by boycotting the stowage of strategic goods on ships bound for Japan. The Conservative Government refused to bow to Trade Union interference with its foreign policy, and the boycotts were ended.

The fact, that the Australian Government of that time did not have a foreign policy based on its own interests, was duly noted by foreign observers. The Dutch Consul General in Sydney, Thomas (Tom) Elink Schuurman, noted this lack of an appropriate foreign policy in a report to the Dutch Foreign Minister in 1938. He elucidated his observation by pointing out that Australia did not have strong friends in its neighbourhood. Elink Schuurman wrote a large number of letters and reports on all facets of Australia, during his appointment to Sydney (1935 - 1942), which were much appreciated by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies. Much of the contents of this chapter are based on his accurate reporting, resulting in invaluable source material.

At the time of the Munich crisis there were many contacts between the Dominion High Commissioners in London, and the British Cabinet. It remains an open question as to whether the British Cabinet was really influenced by the opinion of the Dominions, because the Dominions in general supported the British appeasement strategy at Munich. The situation was different in March 1939, when British diplomacy made a volte face, and a unilateral guarantee was given to Poland and Romania. The Dominions were not consulted beforehand, and followed the British lead grudgingly. The same applies to the British declaration of War, which followed the German invasion of Poland. Menzies did not support the rush to war, urging the British Cabinet to exercise more restraint in handling the Germans. Unlike Canada and South-Africa, where the declaration of war was left for parliament to debate, Menzies proclaimed war on Germany immediately after learning of the British Declaration of War. He said afterwards that he acted in accordance with popular sentiment, and that indeed proved to be true.

4.3.3. The Netherlands East Indies in Australian foreign policy.

The fate of the Netherlands East Indies, in the case of a German invasion of the Netherlands, was a matter of grave concern for all the Pacific Powers involved: Australia, Great Britain and the U.S.A, but also for Japan of course. The Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs

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200 On 18 January 1938 waterside workers at Sydney refused to load the MELBOURNE MARU with metal for Japan, and on 15 November 1938 watersiders at Port Kembla refused to load the DALFRAM with pig iron destined for Japan. Derek MacDougall, Ibid., p. 225 - 226.

210 Letter Consul-General Sydney to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 16 July 1938, T4/2243/177 in ARA, Sydney Archives, Inv nr. 800.


Affairs, Hachiro Arita, stated formally in The Times of April 15 1940: "The Japanese Government cannot but be deeply concerned over any development accompanying an aggravation of the war in Europe that may affect the status quo of the Dutch East Indies". The Japanese fear was specifically that the United States might make an effort to protect the colony. For the effects of this so-called Arita Declaration refer also to Chapter 1 page 40 and Chapter 2, page 215.

Bruce reported to his Government from London, the total lack of any knowledge concerning the interests and intention of each of the prospective Western allies. To quote his message: "At the moment the Foreign Office view is that the U.K. Government should approach the Netherlands Government and ask what they propose doing about the Netherlands East Indies in the event of a German invasion of the Netherlands, also ask the Netherlands if they see any objection to the United Kingdom notifying Japanese Government that the maintenance of the status quo in the NEI is regarded as important British interest. It is hoped also to ascertain whether the Dutch have in fact approached the United States in the matter. Secondly I think that the question should be taken up immediately with the United States Government and discussed with utmost frankness*.*

Menzie's picked up the suggestion, stating in a cable to Anthony Eden (then U.K. Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs) that "any attempt to alter the status of the Netherlands East Indies becomes of vital concern to Australia*.* This was the recognition of an inescapable fact, but in contrast to his British counterpart Menzie did not play hide and seek (Chapter 2, page 211ff). He pressed the British Government to have the British Ambassador in Washington discuss the future of the East Indies with the State Department.

Bruce had no high regard for Eden and in this instance he was proven right. Eden replied to Menzies two days later with a note, declaring that because of a statement in the Press by Cordell Hull (the U.S. Secretary of State), no further assurances from the U.S. Government were needed with regard to the Netherlands East Indies*.* In the meantime however, Australia had signalled its apprehension to the world. On April 19 the Australian Minister for External Affairs (John McEwen), declared in the House of Representatives that: "Any large-scale invasion of the Netherlands .... would inevitably affect the status of the Netherlands East Indies, a territory at our back-door and our closest neighbour, of which the fate is of immediate and vital concern to Australia"*.* This was a clear statement. Elink Schuurman could assuage Australian fears however, by informing the Australian Government that the Japanese Minister in the Netherlands (Itaro Ishii) had made a statement to his Government to the effect that: "In the case of the Netherlands becoming involved in war in Europe, Japan would respect our integrity, expecting other powers to adopt a similar attitude"*.* Thus, all major powers had declared that they respected the status quo in the Netherlands East Indies, as long as the others did so too, even before the actual invasion.

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of the Netherlands took place!

When the German invasion indeed took place, the British and French Governments expedited detachments to Curacao to safeguard the oil refineries there. The Americans however were very opposed to this, because they considered it to be a breach of the Monroe doctrine and, more serious, would give the Japanese the perfect excuse for doing the same thing in the Netherlands East Indies. The Dutch saw this danger too, as the Dutch Governor General declared on May 13 in Batavia that "assistance from any foreign power will be refused as unwelcome". The very neutralistic attitude of the Netherlands East Indies administration afterwards did not find much comprehension however. The Consul General reported, as early as June 1940, the bewilderment of civil servants at the Department of External Affairs expressed to him privately, about the lack of cooperation between the Dutch and British navies. They were also concerned about the fact that the 19 German ships captured in East Indian harbours had not been transferred to the British. On July 10 he had a long meeting with the Prime Minister, who even made derogatory remarks about the Dutch neutrality policy. Menzies obviously did not much appreciate the Dutch attitude.

Anxiety about a Japanese attack on the Netherlands East Indies also increased in Batavia however. Informally, the Dutch Government had assured the British Government that it would defend the East Indies in the case of a Japanese attack, but understandably the Dutch wanted to know whether in such a case Great Britain would come to its assistance against the Japanese. This matter was discussed at a meeting in London between Bruce and Dutch Minister Michiels van Verduyuen on 5 August 1940, and again on August 7 between Bruce and Welter, Minister for the Colonies. Any doubt that the Netherlands meant business is clear from the fact that on August 7 the Dutch Consul General in Sydney also approached the Australian Government about the U.K. attitude. The British Cabinet relegated the Dutch requests to the COS, who had made an Appreciation

211 T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 13 June 1940, no T4/2554/172, MinBuZa, London period, box 13, file c.
212 T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 11 July 1940, no T4/3105/189 Ibid.
213 The report of Michiels van Verduyuen to Mr van Kleffens does not mention at all any discussions of a British/Australian guarantee, although he had been instructed to talk about it. It confirms the low opinion held by Bruce about the British Foreign Office in general and about Anthony Eden in particular, shared by Michiels. Both diplomats commiserated about the (lack of) qualities of the Head of the East Asia desk of the U.S. State Department, Dr. Stanley Hornbeck. See ARA Archives Min. of Colonies, London 1940-45, accession nr. 2.10.45, inv. nr. 123. The same Document is reproduced in DBPN, C, I, document 253.
214 There is no report about the conversation between Bruce and Welter. However, mr G. Hart, advisor to the Dutch Government, made the following statement in his diary: "The discussion seemed to have been fruitful. If the (British) Government in London needs to be warmed up about our stake in the Netherlands East Indies, a common front with Australia might prove helpful. This was acknowledged by Bruce, who also agreed that the British Government tended to underestimate the problems and dangers in the Pacific" DBPN, C, I, 259.
of the Far Eastern situation on 31 July 1940\(^{218}\). (See pages 218 - 222).

The U.K. Government had raised the question of a British guarantee of the N.E.I. with the Australian Government, on 11 August 1940\(^{217}\). (See page 220). Menzies had answered very carefully, that "almost inevitably ... we would find ourselves at war with Japan". However, he added that because of the military position of the U.K. in the Middle East and the attitude of the U.S.A., it "is the opinion of the Australian Government that we should not enter in a binding unilateral obligation to go to the assistance of the Dutch if Japan attacks the NEI\(^{218}\). As the Dutch Government never had asked for a unilateral guarantee, he therefore could adhere to the British policy for the time being without offending the Dutch.

In a military appreciation in early August 1940, the British COS had already expressed their view that: "One aim of our policy should be ultimately to secure full military cooperation with the Dutch\(^{218}\). (See page 220 and page 221, point 4). It is therefore not surprising, that both the British and Australian Governments welcomed the initiative of the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, to start staff conversations immediately\(^{219}\). This was the genesis of the important series of Singapore staff conversations which have been covered in Chapter 2, pages 244 - 251.

On 29 December 1940, Menzies invited the Dutch Consul General, Elink Schuurman, to a long and frank discussion. The Prime Minister expressed his misgivings about the Dutch policy to be allied in Europe with Britain against Germany, but to remain aloof in the Far East. He strongly urged secret staff talks between Australia and the NEI, and emphasized the vital interest of Australia in the integrity of the Netherlands East Indies. For reasons of British foreign policy it was regretted that it was impossible for his Government to extend a unilateral security guarantee to the NEI\(^{220}\). His Government would assist however, in the provision of weapons and munitions to the Netherlands East Indies as far as possible, out of well-understood self-interest. Elink Schuurman departed a few days later for Batavia, where during a long audience he briefed the G.G. on the discussion with Menzies. It cannot be proven, but it is evident that after this discussion the G.G. appreciably changed his policy of aloofness toward Australia.

### 4.3.4. Australian diplomacy in 1941.

After the French defeat, and the brutal English confession that no main fleet was available for Singapore (page 175), Australian diplomacy was redirected on three fronts. First, Australia sought to improve the strategic situation in the Far East by urging the U.K.

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\(^{218}\) The summary of this Appreciation was sent by Lord Caldecote to the Dominion High Commissioners on August 11, 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 65, page 87.

\(^{217}\) Lord Caldecote to Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, 11 August 1940, DAFP, Volume IV, document 84, page 121.

\(^{218}\) R.G. Menzies to Lord Caldecote, 29 August 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 84, page 121.

\(^{219}\) Lord Caldecote to Sir G. Whiskard, 11 August 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 172, page 221.

\(^{220}\) R.G. Casey to R. Menzies, 1 October 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, doc. 151, page 195.

\(^{221}\) Telegram Elink Schuurman to G.G., 31 December 1940, no T2/6078, ARA Sydney Archive, inv. nr 78.
government to strengthen the forces there. Both Bruce\textsuperscript{2122}, and later Menzies during his long stay in London in 1941, collided with Churchill, who proved to be preoccupied with the defence of the British Isles and the Mediterranean. Churchill was reluctant to face the full implications of the Japanese threat, which he underestimated anyway. Menzies rightly criticised Churchill's domination of his colleagues and his Service Chiefs. (See also pages 476ff). The collisions between Menzies and Churchill remained unknown outside a very small inner circle. The Dutch Consul General did at least report to his Government, the fact that Menzies seemed to get on very well with Churchill\textsuperscript{2123}.

After his return to Australia on May 24, 1941 Menzies complained that Churchill had "no conception of the British Dominions as separate entities" and that "the more distant the problem from the heart of the Empire, the less he thinks of it"\textsuperscript{4124}. Menzies tried unsuccessfully in July 1941, to get Canadian and South African backing for his proposal to have a representative of the Dominions in the United Kingdom War Cabinet. After Menzies' resignation, his successor A. Fadden sent Sir Earle Page, his Minister for Commerce, to London as Special Representative, despite the explicit reservations of Churchill. (See also para. 4.7.6, pages 489ff of this Chapter).

John Curtin, who replaced Fadden not long afterwards, renewed Page's mandate. This in itself was proof of a growing Australian irritation, regardless of political colour, about the high-handed way in which the British Government - inter alia Churchill - ran the show. In London Page found out that the real decisions were not made in the War Cabinet, but by Churchill, after consultation with the British Chiefs of Staff and senior officers of the Foreign Office\textsuperscript{2125}. Churchill effectively kept Page out of the Allied decision-making process, the first line of action of Australian diplomacy therefore coming to nought. There is again a strong parallel with Dutch foreign diplomacy, which had good rapport with the Foreign Office, but lacked access to the power center around Churchill\textsuperscript{2126}. (See page 307).

The second area of Australian foreign diplomacy was focussed on gaining a better understanding of Japanese aims, by establishing a separate Australian Ministry in Tokyo. In spite of opposition by the British Foreign Office, Sir John Latham took up duty as Australia's first Minister in Japan on 24 December 1940. Latham gave his government a new insight into the minds of Japanese policy makers. The Dutch Consul General in Sydney reported to his Government, that he could remember that the previous Dutch Governor General, de Jonge, was not very impressed by the qualities of Sir John when he visited the East Indies as head of an Australian delegation in 1934. He did add however, that five years later Sir John Latham was undisputedly one of the few Australians who had

\textsuperscript{2122} Cablegram of 3 July 1940 from Bruce to Menzies, in which Bruce complains about the lack of information about the British plans and strategies for the conduct of the War. DAFP, Volume IV, document 7, page 10.

\textsuperscript{2123} Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 24 April 1940, no T4/3005/57. MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, Box 13, inv. nr. 111.

\textsuperscript{2124} DAFP, Volume IV, page xx.

\textsuperscript{2125} DAFP, Volume V, page x.

\textsuperscript{2126} G. Teitler: De Val van Nederlands-Indië. Dieren, 1982, p. 89.
an intimate knowledge of the Far East.\textsuperscript{217}

The first Japanese Minister to Australia, Tatsuo Kawai, took up duty on 14 March 1941, amid a rather acrimonious dispute over Australia's refusal to allow Japan to appoint service attachés to Canberra. In London, Bruce took care to open a separate line of communication with the Japanese Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Mamoru Shigemitsu. This second Australian initiative can be therefore considered to have been successful.

The third Australian spearpoint in external diplomacy was the establishment of better relations with its neighbours China, Portuguese Timor and the Netherlands East Indies, offering economic and military assistance to the hard-pressed Dutch. This aspect will be covered in somewhat more detail further on. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S.A. and Canada in 1940, this was a logical next step. Sir Frederick Eggleston was appointed Australian Minister to China, arriving in Chungking in October 1941. The visit of Menzies to Batavia in January 1941, on his trip to London, was followed by numerous meetings between Australian and Dutch representatives, as will be elucidated below.

Australia attempted to have an Australian Minister in London attached to the Dutch Government in exile, and another one in Batavia. The initiative ran up against Dutch sensitivities however, because the Dutch Government in exile still considered the Netherlands East Indies a colony, and it was therefore impossible to have an Australian Minister in Batavia. The Dutch G.G. also disliked this proposal, as it "would have an adverse effect on the Dutch colonists as they were already clamouring for more influence on Dutch foreign policy", and it would set an undesirable precedent for China and Japan\textsuperscript{218}. This Australian initiative therefore was not successful. In London, the High Commissioner, S.M. Bruce, was appointed as Australian Minister to the Dutch Government.

In December 1940 the Portuguese Government approved the establishment of an Australian air service to Portuguese Timor, and Qantas flying boats established a link between Dili and Darwin in January 1941. A representative of the Department of Civil Aviation, David Ross, was posted to Dili to develop political and trade contacts with the colony and to report on Japanese activities there. The aims of the Australian government in establishing relations with its neighbours therefore had been implemented, with the exception of the Netherlands East Indies.

One of the objectives of the establishment of an Australian legation in Washington was to obtain some kind of guarantee from the Americans in the case of a Japanese attack. R.G. Casey, the first Australian Minister in Washington, found the Americans rather unreceptive about extending a guarantee to Australia\textsuperscript{219}. The Dutch shared the same experience in their contacts in Washington.

In summarizing the Australian diplomatic efforts, it is clear that there was gradually a


realisation in Australian government circles that there was less parallellism in British and Australian objectives than had been thought before the outbreak of war in Europe. The way in which the British Government handled the war in the Middle East did not endear it to the Australian Government, but Australian public opinion was generally still very pro-British. The Government started on a policy of buying a second insurance policy in Washington, and of gradually increasing its interest in its first line of defence, i.e. Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. Politically however, neither the Dutch nor the Americans initially proved to be very interested in shared defence agreements, as will be discussed in the next sub-chapters.

4.4. Australian defence policy until 1935.

4.4.1. Introduction.

This sub-chapter is an important one. Notwithstanding its isolated position "down under" the Australians never totally neglected their defence. In the nineteenth century the potential threats emerged from European powers: Russia, later Imperial Germany, and France to a lesser extent. The first line of defence however, was the Royal Navy. Although Japan had been a British Ally up to and including the First World War, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) eyed Japan's fast growing navy warily. The Washington Naval Disarmament Treaties and the (albeit slow) realisation of the Singapore base, gave a certain measure of security to Australia. The important role of the First Australian Imperial Forces (First AIF) in the Middle Eastern and Western Front Theatres during the First World War was very important to the Australian psyche. A tradition was established of defending the Empire, and therefore Australian security in the Middle East, making Suez the perimeter of Australian defence. On the other hand Singapore was not given due credit. The Australian Army Staff was not at all convinced of the wisdom of the "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy. The Australian Labor Party also opposed this strategy, but did not hold power for most of the period under consideration.

4.4.2. The Russian and the German threat.

Before 1859 Australia was part of the East Indies Station of the Royal Navy, and Sydney was in effect the main fleet base. The Crimean War heightened fears of a "coup de main" of the Russian Pacific Fleet against Sydney, and resulted in the construction of Fort Denison in Sydney Harbour in 1856, and the erection of a couple of shore batteries\[2130\]. It should be remembered that at that time Russia had a sizable battle fleet in the Far East, based at Wladivostok. A small colonial navy was formed in Victoria to keep out the Russians. In 1859 the Royal Navy created the Australia Station to guarantee the emergent British colonies a better protection. Russia remained the obvious potential enemy till around 1900, when Germany increased its presence in the Far East.

Another war scare over Russian penetration in Afghanistan in 1885 resulted in the hasty fortification of Thursday Island in the Torres Straits, and the installation of shore batteries

at the major Australian ports\(^\text{2131}\). (e.g. Fort Lytton, Brisbane). Notwithstanding the presence of an albeit small Royal Navy squadron, some Australian states developed small colonial navies of their own, which were brought under the control of the Royal Navy at federation in 1901.\(^\text{2132}\)

The victory of the Japanese over the Russians in 1905 made Japan the most likely threat to British, Dutch and Australian interests in South-East Asia. Officially, however, Japan was tied to Great Britain by the Anglo-Japanese Naval Treaty of 1902, and the anxieties about Japanese aims were therefore strictly confined within the Australian government\(^\text{2133}\). In recognition of increasing pressure by Australian public opinion due to the growing presence of German naval power in the Pacific, and with the Japanese threat in the background, the Australian Government succeeded in including, as the first Dominion, in the constitution the possession of its own dominion navy, against opposition by the Royal Navy. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN), founded in 1909, was a self-contained fleet unit, owned and paid for by the Australian Federal Government, and administered by the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board. Operational control of the RAN was however given to the Royal Navy.

In the years immediately before the First World War, the RAN consisted of one battlecruiser, HMAS AUSTRALIA, 3 light cruisers, 6 destroyers and 2 submarines\(^\text{2134}\). It was a balanced fleet unit, ready for fast strikes against the German China Squadron based at Tsingtao, China. The Germans had meanwhile replaced the Russians as the most probable future enemy. The RAN was closely patterned along the lines of the Royal Navy (RN), using its regulations and training methods until well after the Second World War. There was also a continuous interchange of officers and men, and a common understanding that in time of war there would be unified operational control over the RAN, exercised by the RN. The Australian Government had fully accepted the principle of the indivisibility of the seas, and the consequent need for unified control of naval forces during both World Wars. There was already a lingering fear, at a surprisingly early stage, that the Royal Navy would not be able to fulfill its protective role\(^\text{2135}\).

The Australian Army grew out of the various colonial regiments of the Australian states. Some of these colonial units were first officially involved in war in 1885, when the government of the State of New South Wales sent a contingent to the Sudan\(^\text{2136}\). Aus-

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\(^{2134}\) G. Hermon Gill: Royal Australian Navy, 1939 - 1945 Collins/Australian War memorial, Canberra 1985, Page xii. To be referred subsequently as G. Hermon Gill.

\(^{2135}\) New Zealand Defense Minister Colonel Allen to CID, PRO, CAB 2/3 CID Minutes, 13 April 1913.

\(^{2136}\) This war is covered in some depth in Ken Inglis: The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan Rigby, Sydney 1985. See also: Peter Firkins: The Australians in Nine Wars: Walkato to Long Tan Robert Hale, London 1972, and specifically Malcolm Saunders: Britain, the Australian Colonies and the Sudan Campaigns of
tralian volunteers joined the British Forces in the Boer War of 1899 - 1903, and in 1900 it was again the State of New South Wales, which despatched a 500-strong naval force to China, to assist the British in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion. These expeditionary forces illustrated the willingness of Australian State and Federal Governments supported by public opinion to assist Great Britain in sharing its Imperial burden. The implementation of a system of compulsory military training in 1909 was a logical next step. Australia, however, was the first English-speaking country to do such in peacetime.

4.4.3. The Kitchener Report.

A Defence Policy had already been formulated before the First World War. At that time two possible war-threats had emerged. First there was Japan, Lord of the Far East, but still bound by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Treaty of 1902. The Australians with their White Australia policy, so strongly despised by the Japanese, had no illusions however. The second threat concerned Germany, which had a fleet base at Tsingtao in China with a powerful naval squadron, and which had obtained the Carolinas, Marianas and Marshall Islands from Spain. This, added to Northern New Guinea and the part of the Solomons already under German control, made Germany a powerful neighbour to Australia. The Boer War caused strong anti-British feelings in the Netherlands, and the marriage of the young Queen Wilhelmina to a German prince in 1901, provoked fears in Australia about a German - Dutch alliance, which was potentially very threatening to Australia. The spectre of a German-dominated East Indies was to haunt the Australians again in May 1940.

The fear of Germany manifested itself in sometimes unpredictable ways. In May 1941 the highest civil servant of the Australian department of External Relations, Colonel Hodgson, startled the Dutch Consul General by remarking that the Netherlands East Indies administration still employed a number of Nazi-sympathizers, even in high office. Mr. Elink Schuurman forcefully objected, but found it necessary to report the statement to both the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Governor General.

At the specific request of the Australian Government, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener of


2137 R.L. Wallace: The Australians at the Boer War. AWM, Canberra 1976, and Peter Firkins, Ibid.


2139 M.B. Hayne, Ibid. 284


2142 Letter T. Elink Schuurman to G.G., 2 June 1941, no T2/4251, MinBuZa, London period, box 13, file 8.
Khartoum had been asked to advise and report on Australian defence. He arrived in Australia in December 1909, and offered his final report in February 1910. His conclusions were:

- The first line of defence for the Australian continent was the Royal Navy.
- Important Ports should be prepared to ward off "coup de mains" by large enemy raiding parties, by way of coastal batteries, forts and garrisons.
- Should the Australian Squadron of the Royal Navy be destroyed in a naval action, the enemy would probably land in force on the coast between Sydney and Newcastle. A Mobile Striking Force should therefore be stationed in S.E. Australia behind the Blue Mountains, ready to strike at the enemy landing site.

Most of Kitchener's recommendations were acted upon. Up to the Second World War, the conclusions formed the basis for Army war planning. In June 1911 the Royal Military College was established at Dunroon (South of Canberra) with the Westpoint Military Academy as a model, and not Sandhurst. Also before the First World War, Australia erected its first small arms and ammunition factories, all located in Victoria, away from the vulnerable Sydney-Newcastle area. The strategic Perth-Adelaide transcontinental railway was completed in 1917. Planning for an enemy invasion received little further official attention until the defence build-ups of the late 30's.

The official Australian defence policy, supported by the government, was further refined during the many Imperial Conferences. The first one took place in 1911, resulting in the agreement of the principle of uniformity of organisation, training and equipment for the armed Forces of the Empire. The Australian Army and Air Force were therefore modelled on British lines in the inter-war years. This also implied a separate air force, the RAAF. As we have seen in other chapters, neither the United States nor the Netherlands had a separate and independent air force, nor did Japan. Another consequence of this Imperial Conference was the standardisation of Navy, Army and Air Force to British weapons, even if these were proven to be inferior to weapons which could be obtained from neutral Powers, like the USA. The Australians refused steadfastly, even in 1940, to deviate from this policy, as was experienced by a Dutch military mission in October - November 1940. The Australians were then asked to produce the 6.5 mm small-arms ammunition for the Dutch, instead of the standard British .303" munition (7.7. mm).

4.4.4. The ANZAC.

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2144 Jeffrey Grey, Ibid, p.80


2148 Jeffrey Grey, Ibid, p. 136

2147 Verslag KNIL-Commissie, Batavia, 31 december 1940, p. 15, ARA Londens Archief MinvKol., toegangsnummer 2.10.45, inv.nr.772.
The First World War saw the Australian Army coming of age. The (first) Australian Imperial Force was an expeditionary Corps of volunteers. Of a total population of around 5 million, more than 300,000 young Australians volunteered for service overseas. The Australian/New-Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) fought gallantly at the beaches of Gallipoli, but weak British leadership resulted in withdrawal in December 1915. It was there that a nation was born. In war and defeat the Australians realized their nationhood at those beaches, and Anzac Day (25 April) is still a national holiday in Australia.

Then came the grinding mill of the Western Front, with the Somme and Flanders. More than 28,000 Australians were killed or wounded at the Somme, near the little village of Pozières, between 19 July and 5 September 1916. The Anzac Corps also covered itself with glory in the Middle East in 1917-1918, when Australian troops under the British General Allenby defeated the Turks in Palestine conquering Jerusalem. In the Far East, Australian troops raced against the Japanese (supposed to be allies) to occupy the German possessions in New Guinea and the Solomons.

During the autumn offensive of 1918 on the Western Front, the Australian Corps spearheaded the Allied thrust under the capable leadership of Lieut.-General Sir John Monash, who became a national hero. From 27 March to 5 October 1918, the five divisions of the Australian Corps under Monash mauled a total of 39 German Divisions on the Western Front. With only about 10% of the total strength of the British Army, they captured a quarter of all prisoners taken, but at frightful cost. One out of six Australians were killed, wounded or missed in action. The Australian Corps however was regarded as the supreme fighting formation at the Western Front. It was the junior officers especially who turned out to be outstanding leaders of men, proving themselves to be resourceful, flexible and adaptable soldiers.

The Australian performance in the First World War has gone into in some detail, because this experience had a profound influence on Australian politics, defence planning and public opinion, and therefore upon the Australian view of the outside world and its "Grand Strategy". Without this background knowledge, it is hard to understand the way Australia almost automatically sent its best troops to the Middle East again at the start of the Second World War, while a far more dangerous enemy was now lurking on its doorstep.

The First World War led to many myths about the Australian soldier: the "digger" as he

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216 The enigmatic and charismatic personality of Sir John Monash has been the subject of a number of biographies:

219 Peter Firkins: op. cit., 158.
became to be affectionately named. Myths about the primitive bush background of the men, and of elevation of officers straight from the ranks, persisted till the sixties. A new generation of historians then debunked those myths, against stiff opposition from the veterans. The Australian experience in the First World War was to have a profound influence however on the political conduct of Australian defence planning prior to and during the Second World War.

4.4.5. The Jellicoe Report.

In the light of the developing naval rearmament race between the USA and Japan after the First World War, the Australian Government asked the Admiralty for a naval authority of sufficient standing to advise on the whole question of Australia’s future naval defence. Kitchener had set a precedent, and therefore Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe, commander of the Grand Fleet at the battle of Jutland, was appointed. He arrived in Australia in May 1919, remaining there for three months before returning to England by way of New Zealand and Canada. His ”Report on the Naval Mission to the Commonwealth of Australia” was submitted to the Governor-General in August 1919. This Report was the most perceptive and far-sighted interpretation of possible Japanese intentions in the entire interbellum period.

Jellicoe argued that the dispatch of any considerable British Naval Force from home waters to the Far East was extremely unlikely, that prior to an invasion of Australia, Japan would occupy New Guinea, the eastern islands off the Australian coasts, or the Dutch East Indies, prior to or concurrently with, an attack on British bases at Hongkong and Singapore. He therefore recommended the creation of a large Far Eastern Imperial Fleet, including capital ships and aircraft carriers, based in Singapore, Hongkong, and a new naval base at Cockburn Sound, south of Perth in West Australia.

Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand would share the costs of this Fleet. The RAN contribution to this Fleet would be 2 battle cruisers, 8 light cruisers, 12 destroyers with one flotilla leader, and 8 submarines.

Nothing was done with Jellicoe’s Report. As was the case in Holland with the ”Fleet Law” of 1922, this was not the time for a naval expansion programme. The recently created League of Nations promised collective security, and funds were diverted to social and economic goals. Even the Admiralty acridly distanced itself from the Report, declaring that Jellicoe “had entered into a sphere never contemplated by the Admiralty and far beyond his terms of reference.”

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216 G. Hermon Gill, Ibid. 14

217 PRO ADM 116 - 1834: “Jellicoe to Admiralty” enclosing the Australian Report, 21 August 1919.

218 In effect, the Jellicoe Report was used as an argument in the Dutch Parliamentary discussions on the Fleet Law of 1922. Handelingen der 2e Kamer, 7e vergadering, 18 october 1923, p. 135.

219 PRO ADM 116 - 1815. Admiral Jellicoe’s visit to the Colonies; Naval Defence of the British Empire, Admiralty to the First Lord, 31 October 1919.
4.4.6. Army Defence Planning.

After the First World War the Australian Army continued low-key war planning, even without official encouragement.\(^2157\) At a conference at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne in January 1920, under the chairmanship of war hero Lieut.-Gen. Sir Harry Chauvel, the conclusion was reached that an invasion by a Japanese force of 100,000 men was possible, and that the Royal Navy could not guarantee the prevention of such an invasion.\(^2158\) This was before the decision to build the Singapore base had been taken. The conclusion of the conference was that an Australian force of four infantry divisions and 2 cavalry divisions was necessary for "local" (i.e. Australian) Defence. These recommendations were in effect incorporated in the Army Plan 401 of 1922, which was further elaborated. An Appreciation of the Army Staff in 1930 provided for an army of two corps in the Sydney-Newcastle area, with a major supply base at Albury, midway between Sydney and Melbourne.\(^2159\) The other capital cities would have small garrisons for local defence against enemy raids.

These proposals were stillborn at that time however, like Jellicoe's Report. The army was unsuccessful in persuading the navy that invasion was a credible threat, and successive Australian governments declined to reallocate budgets more in favour of the Army. The RAN simply maintained that no Japanese invasion could be mounted because of the counterthreat of the Royal Navy operating from the Singapore base. Therefore, many of the revisionist Australian military historians of the 1970's rightly highlighted the pernicious influence of the Singapore Strategy on Australian war capabilities.

The Versailles Treaty made Australia and Japan neighbours: the distance between the Japanese-held Kapingamarangi island south of the Carolines, and the Australian-held Malum Islands north of Bougainville was less than 400 kilometers. For Australia, the Europe-centered expression "Far East" was not relevant at all; that area of the world now became for the Australians their "Near North"! Therefore, the Australian Government watched the Japanese battle fleet building programme in the early twenties with some alarm. It was therefore with relief, that the Australian Government accepted the British invitation to have its delegation to the Washington Conference joined by a highly placed official.

The Washington Fleet Disarmament Conference indeed opened on 12th November 1921. Australia was represented by the Minister for Home and Territories, senator Sir George Pearce. The Americans did not allow individual Dominion representation at the Naval conference, to the dismay of the Australian Government.\(^2160\) In the chapter on the USA we have dealt extensively with the results of this conference and the ensuing Treaties, especially the Four Power Treaty.\(^\text{See pages 23 - 27, 95 - 97}\)

The direct result of the conference was a decrease of funds for all three Australian
Services. The RAN was reduced to a strength of 3 light cruisers, and 3 destroyers. Both submarines were scrapped, as was the battle cruiser, and further construction on the Cockburn Sound Naval Base was suspended. The diminutive air force, established in 1921, was barely kept alive. When the ALP regained power in 1929, it even abolished the compulsory military training of the militia. The 47,000 strong militia was replaced by a volunteer force which in 1930 was up to only some 27,000 men. Due to the international economic depression, the subsequent conservative Lyons government of 1932 could not do much more than continue the gradual decline of Australia’s fighting forces.

4.4.7. Singapore in defence planning.

The 1923 Imperial Conference affirmed the responsibility of each independent member of the Empire for its own local defence. At this conference the importance of the provision of a naval base at Singapore was agreed upon. This understanding was based on the necessity of maintaining the world-wide supremacy of the Royal Navy, as the best guarantee against incursions from east or west into Commonwealth territory. It was at this Imperial Conference, that the "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy was born; a strategy which effectively barred Australia itself from having a protective fleet.2161 The main fleet stayed in home waters and in the Mediterranean, leaving only a token force to protect Australia’s trade routes and coasts.

That was hardly acknowledged at that time. Prime Minister S.M. Bruce even boasted, after the Imperial Conference in the Australian Parliament "that Britain had recognized that the heart of the Empire had moved from the North Sea to the Pacific".2162 Unfortunately for the Australians, that was not the way British Government saw the Singapore base. 2163

The Australian Army was not in favour of the base,2164 emphasizing Singapore’s outstanding weakness: a base without a fleet, and with no backing in continental, population or industrial resources. In a lucid and far-sighted article the Australian Army Chief of Staff, colonel J.D. Lavarack, already warned in 1933 that Australian defence by sea-power was dependent on the presence of a battle fleet to ensure protection against enemy landings, and a cruiser force to maintain the trade routes. The Royal Navy did not have a battle fleet in the Far East, nor did it have enough cruisers for trade protection. In his opinion "war in the Far East would probably be accompanied by simultaneous complications on the other side of the world, and the possibility of the detachment of adequate forces would be remote".2165 That was exactly the situation in 1941! In the comment on the Admiralty plans connected to the visit of Sir Maurice Hankey to Australia in 1934 (see below), the Army staff reiterated its disbelief in the Singapore strategy in even stronger terms.2166

2161 Jeffrey Grey, Ibid. 128
2163 Minutes of the Subcommittee on Singapore, 16 January 1925, PRO CAB 16/63.
2164 AA CRS A981 Item Defence 330 "Defence Singapore base, Australian interests" 3 August 1923, p. 4.
2166 Ian Hamill, op. cit. 396.
The opposition Australian Labour Party was also against the Singapore Strategy, and advocated instead the defence of Australia by a combination of air force and a fleet of coastal and submarine craft. The First World War had brought the submarine and the airplane into prominence, and Labour held that they had completely changed the character of sea-power.\textsuperscript{2167} It was supported in this view by authorities no less than Lord Fisher,\textsuperscript{2168} whose views received wide publicity. The fallacy of such a policy, however, was exposed by Major Robertson in an award-winning essay in 1934.\textsuperscript{2169} He argued that submarines had a place in Australia's defence as long-range scouts, and that airplanes were irreplaceable for aerial reconnaissance closer to the shore, but that it would be irresponsible to trust the defence of Australia to submarines and airplanes exclusively. The size of Australia and its resources made it unlikely that it could be starved into submission by a maritime blockade. Australia's weakness was the location of most of its population and her wealth in only a few urban centres on the seashore, which were vulnerable to sneak attacks by carrier-based aviation. Therefore, Australia should have an air force strong enough to give it superiority over air attacks made from carriers. For the Army he figured out that, because the size an invading force would need to occupy at least one of the major cities. In view of the limitations placed upon it by logistics over the immense Pacific distances, the Australian Army needed a mobile striking force of about 3 divisions. His essay provided a blueprint for Australian Defence Strategy.

As the Australian Labour Party was in power in 1930, it was logical that at the Imperial Conference of that year the Labour Government supported the Army viewpoint, pleading for a strong regional defence for Australia.\textsuperscript{2170} In this context there raged a debate about the extent of regionality within Australian defence circles. The Singapore strategy made it imperative to defend Suez as the gateway to Australia. Was the defence of Suez therefore a logical component of Australian defence responsibilities? In the inter-war years, depending on the political colour of the government in power, there was a pendulum movement on defence between a strictly regional concept of Australia proper, and an expanded regional concept including Suez. Successive British Governments, supported by the Committee on Imperial defence, insisted on the defence of Australia as a worldwide problem and not a regional one.\textsuperscript{2171} Even in 1937 the ALP was still strongly in favour of regional defence, based on a strong RAAF. This viewpoint is discussed in depth in a letter from Dutch Consul General T. Elink Schuurman to his Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this letter, as in a subsequent one,\textsuperscript{2172} he estimated as very improbable the possibility of defeating a Japanese invasion in full force, supported by aircraft carriers above Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{2167} Ian Hamill, op. cit., 243 - 247.

\textsuperscript{2168} Lord Fisher, in a letter to the London Times of 20 October 1919 wrote: "It is as clear as daylight that the future of war at sea absolutely precludes the use of any war vessel except submarines. Therefore why keep any of the present lot." Hermon Gill, ibid. page 17 note 4.


\textsuperscript{2171} See the comments of the Australian Army Chief of Staff Bruche in AA CRS AA 1971/216, item 1/1935, Australian Army Organization 1934 - 1935, 5 March 1935.

\textsuperscript{2172} Letter Consul-General to MinFA, DE.1/2943/240 of 13 september 1937, and letter QO.2/3888/327 , ARA, Sydney Archives, ibid.
Contemporary military historians, like Jeffrey Grey, have pointed out another unforeseen result of the Singapore Strategy. Reliance upon Singapore had two consequences for Australian defence in this period: it led to unreasoned reliance on a flawed strategy, and it skewed the development of Australia’s own forces. The second argument has some merit, but the first had not, as the Singapore strategy was not perceived as being flawed by most of the decision-makers of that period. A strong counter-argument in the debate, as repeatedly used by Hankey during his visit to Australia, was that the main fleet was already based in the Mediterranean, and not in the British Isles.

In the last few years some Australian historians have also questioned the integrity of the British Foreign Office and Imperial Staff. At the Imperial Conferences there was, for example, no clear parallelism between the foreign policy goals of the four major “white” Dominions. Australia and New Zealand were predominantly afraid of the Japanese; Canada and South-Africa were far more focussed on developments in Europe. In his study of the Anglo-Saxon reactions to the Manchuria Incident, Andrews paints a picture of an intensely self-interested British foreign policy, including manipulations of the Imperial Conferences for its own purposes. Hamill has reinforced that argument by his discovery of two separate Far East Appreciations at the 1937 Imperial Defence Conference.

One of the problems caused by the very close cooperation with Britain in defence matters was the inter-service rivalry, existing in Australia and in the motherland, which had the tendency to mobilise its counterparts in the case of perceived bureaucratic threats. The Australian naval board, for example, routinely sought the back-up and support of the Admiralty when cornered in the defence debates. The same applied to the Army and the RAAF. J.M. McCarthy gives some hilarious examples of these service alliances in the Australian inter-service struggles.

Due to budget restrictions caused by the world-wide economic depression, Australian defence expenditures reached their lowest ebb at the beginning of 1933. The training strength of the military forces was below 28,000 men. The navy counted 2 cruisers, one destroyer and a depot ship, and a total of 3122 seagoing personnel! The Air Force had an approved establishment of less than a thousand officers and men. In addition this was a difficult time politically because of the electoral defeat, in December 1931, of the ruling ALP by the more conservative parties the UAP and CP, resulting in a change of policy.

After the withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations on 27 March 1933, a discussion

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272 Jeffrey Grey, Ibid. 129

274 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 401, 406.


278 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 444, note 59.


278 Paul Hasluck, op. cit., 40.
arose about the possible Japanese threat to Australia. Hankey, the influential secretary of the CID, branded the raising of this point as panicky.\textsuperscript{2179} The Australian Government however decided upon a slight increase of the services budgets, the start of the Darwin harbour defences, and the sending of the Australian Eastern Goodwill Mission under John Latham to Japan, China and S.E. Asian countries in 1934. \textsuperscript{2180} (See page 441)

The Manchurian crisis of 1931, but more specifically the Shanghai incident of 1932, was a major signal about Japanese intentions. It was not however, interpreted that way by the Australian Governments of those days. With hindsight, it should have been used to question the Australian reliance on Britain and her power at Singapore. But the ominous signs of British economic and military weakness and neglect of her Far Eastern Defences were not perceived as such by the coalition Government of that time, which instead pursued its electoral stance of "imperial foreign policy in consultation with the United Kingdom"\textsuperscript{2180}

4.5. Defence planning during the re-armament period.

4.5.1. Primacy of Imperial Defence.

The Abyssinian Crisis of 1935 came as an eye-opener to the political parties in power, and that resulted in a relatively rapid increase in defence expenditures: from £ 5.400.000 in 1934 - 35 to £ 7.500.000 in 1935 - 36 to £ 8.800.000 in 1936 - 37. (about 9 % of federal revenue).\textsuperscript{2181} This growth of expenditures was carefully managed by the Government, which solicited the sound advice of a number of well-respected British military authorities, in the tradition of Kitchener and Jellicoe. The most important adviser was Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence CID. Hankey served as an officer on the Western Front. As a most influential civil servant as permanent secretary of the CID, when he made an imperial Tour in 1934, and also visited Australia.

In November 1934 he presented to the Australian Minister of Defence, Sir Archdale Parkhill, a number of reports on the whole spectrum of Australian Defence.\textsuperscript{2182} Hankey represented the school of Imperial Defence, and his advice was to strengthen the RAN and the expeditory forces of the AIF. The Australian Army Chief of Staff, Major-General Bruche, opposed his recommendations on the basis of the different perspectives of Australian (local) requirements and world-wide Imperial objectives.\textsuperscript{2183} Bruche stated: 

\begin{quote}
To (Whitehall) authorities the defence of Australia is but an incident in a world-wide problem ... necessarily overshadowed by other aspects of the problem of much greater importance to the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{2179} M. Hankey to PM, 17 november 1934, PRO CAB 63/70


\textsuperscript{2181} Gavin Long: The Six Years War. AWM Canberra 1973, 5.

\textsuperscript{2182} Report by Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to the Committee of Imperial defence: "On certain aspects of Australian Defence", 15 November 1934, PRO CAB 21 - 368.

\textsuperscript{2183} For the Army's views see Memorandum by the Chief of the General Staff and memorandum by Colonel J.D. Laverack, chief of staff designate, on the Report of certain Aspects of Australian Defence by Sir Maurice Hankey, 14 March 1935. PRO CAB 21 - 397.
Empire considered as a whole. However, according to McCarthy little notice was taken by the Government of the advice of the Service Chiefs, like Bruche. When Parkhill announced the new Government defence policy in December 1935, Hankey was delighted. The RAN would be strengthened more than the two other Services. The "Imperialists" in defence planning had won the day.

There was indeed a real danger in South-East Asia. British naval power in the Pacific was totally inadequate. This can be seen by comparing the strengths of the main Japanese and British naval forces in South-East Asia to what they were in 1935.

| Japan | Royal Navy (China Station) |
| Capital ships | 9 | 0 |
| Aircraft carriers | 4 | 1 |
| Seaplane carriers | 2 | 0 |
| Heavy cruisers | 12 | 4 |
| Light cruisers | 22 | 1 |
| Destroyers | 102 | 10 |
| Submarines | 65 | 15 |

It was expected, that "in the worst circumstances" the Royal Navy could send two additional heavy cruisers from Australia, two light cruisers from New Zealand and one light cruiser from Africa and, within a particular time frame, one heavy and one light cruiser from the South America Station. With the gathering storm in Western Europe, the Far Eastern Stations would be even further denuded of large warships, while the Japanese navy increased in strength with every passing year. It was in these circumstances that the Australian Government devised the idea of obtaining a new capital ship, especially adapted to service in the Pacific, and based in Singapore. The idea was proposed by G.F. Pearce, Minister of External Affairs, in a Memorandum to the Prime Minister, Lyons. The building cost, estimated at between 8 and 10 million pounds, would be contributed by the Dominions; the Royal Navy would be responsible for manning the ship, and for its maintenance. A credible battle squadron could be formed, in combination with the light warships of China Station, based in Singapore. It would resemble the situation before the First World War, when the battleship HMAS AUSTRALIA formed the nucleus of a naval

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216 See the Appreciation made by Sir Frederick C. Dreyer, C - in C China Station, in PRO ADM 116-3338 "The General Strategic Situation in the Western Pacific" 8 August 1935.

217 DAFP, Volume 1, Document 1, page 3.
task force.

The British Cabinet however, although fully appreciating the importance of having capital ships based in the East, considered that the best contribution Australia could make towards Imperial Defence was a substantial increase in the Air Force in North Australia and the expansion of the munitions industry.\(^{2106}\) The matter did not rest there, because the issue of an Australian battleship was again raised in 1938, in a discussion between Lord Chatfield, First Seallowd, and Sir Earle Page, then Minister for Commerce of the Australian Cabinet. Chatfield dismissed the Australian proposal to buy one of the KING GEORGE V class battleships which were under construction, because these ships were explicitly designed for European waters.\(^{2100}\) It left the possibility open for Australia to acquire one of the LION-class battleships of the 1938 programme (which ships would not be operational before 1943!) or to build a new battleship.

Alas, nothing came of this interesting Australian approach, due to British misapprehension.

4.5.2. The Imperial Conference of 1937.

The Imperial Conference of 1937 was very important to Australian defence planning. It was the last Imperial Conference before the outbreak of the Second World War, shaping Imperial defence Policy. The Australian Government had been really disturbed by the formulation by the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Anthony Eden, in mid-1936, on the circumstances under which Great Britain might go to war. Nothing was mentioned about what might impel Britain to resort to war in the Far East. Therefore, Mr. Lyons went to the Imperial Conference to sound out British policies on the Far East. Would Britain go to war in defence of Hongkong, or the Netherlands Indies? These were important questions.\(^{2100}\)

Internally, the Australian Navy Department had assessed as low the importance of the Dutch East Indies and of Micronesia as a protective shield for Australia. The reason was British sea power. "With it, the importance is low. Without it, this importance does not matter, for the enemy can work his will regardless of the geographical situation".\(^{2191}\) In contrast, the External Affairs Department was more concerned in pursuing possible allies in the region in order to reinforce the effectiveness of the Singapore Strategy. It was recognized, that the Dutch defence problem had much in common with Australian and New Zealand defence planning.\(^{2192}\) The Australian Government did not as yet contemplate contacts with the responsible Dutch authorities on common defence issues.

\(^{2100}\) DAFP, Volume I, doc. no 24, page 64.

\(^{2106}\) Notwithstanding that perception, the PRINCE OF WALES of the same class was sent to Singapore in December 1941, there to meet its end. The Memorandum for Mr. Page also contains an interesting table showing the estimated direct costs of principal classes of warships as they were in 1938. See Document no 214, DAFP Volume I, pages 368 - 370.

\(^{2100}\) For a summary of the questions which the Australian Delegation took with it to the Conference, see DAFP Volume I, document 32, page 88.

\(^{2191}\) A A CRS A 816, Item 11/302/6: "Imperial Conference - Strategic importance of Pacific Islands, 1937", dated 17 February 1937.

In the 7th meeting of the Imperial Conference, on 26 May 1937, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Samuel Hoare, addressed the Australian fears. He stated: "At the present moment we are satisfied that our naval strength would allow us to despatch an adequate fleet to the Far East whilst retaining sufficient strength in Home waters to cover our European commitments." He conceded that the period 1938 - 1939 was a dangerous one, because the Home Fleet could barely contain the German Navy, due to the withdrawal of a number of British capital ships for modernisation. Therefore the Far Eastern Fleet to be sent to Singapore would be slightly inferior to the Japanese Fleet, but "by the adoption of a defensive policy and relying on the superior fighting qualities of the British race, this Fleet should achieve its object of assuring the Dominions from serious aggression." The Australian Minister of Defence, Sir Archdale Parkhill, thereupon said that he was quite satisfied with the statements made by the First Lord, with respect to the defence of the Far East.

On 1 June, 1937 the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. M.J. Savage, and Sir Parkhill discussed Far Eastern defence questions with the Chiefs of Staff, who had prepared a Far East Appreciation. Lord Chatfield, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, explained the strategic thinking underlying the Appreciation. Singapore was next in importance to the Home Front, and paragraph 81 of the Appreciation clearly stated "that no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a Fleet to the Far East". Naval control of the Mediterranean might be lost, with the subsequent loss of Malta and Cyprus. That would not imply the loss of the Middle East however, because reinforcements could still go to Egypt via the Red Sea. The Far Eastern Fleet would consist of about two-thirds of the British battle fleet at that time, which would mean 8 to 9 capital ships, against a similar number of Japanese capital ships. If Germany were not to interfere in the West, this Fleet would operate on the Japanese shipping lanes, bringing Japan economically to its knees in about two years. If the United Kingdom were to be involved simultaneously in a war with Germany, the British Fleet would be on the defensive in the east until Germany had been defeated. Nevertheless "the British Navy had every reason to think that they were more efficient (than the Japanese) and could win, even with inferior forces, as they had often done in the past." The Royal Navy planned to judge the efficiency of the Japanese in the early stages of the war by their conduct in the expected cruiser and destroyer actions, and planned to take measures according to the results of this evaluation.

One important question was the time factor for the arrival of the Far Eastern Fleet at Singapore. It was estimated as being between 53 and 70 days. It was considered unlikely, that the Japanese would launch a major expedition against Singapore in the meantime. The Japanese could use their aircraft carriers to obtain a temporary air superiority over Singapore, but that would mean a serious risk to their carriers. Another uncertainty concerned Hong Kong. (See page 201) Hong Kong was not defended due to the provisions of the Washington Treaty of 1922. This treaty had lapsed at the beginning of 1937, but the U.K. had not yet had time to strengthen the defences of Hong Kong. The Crown

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219b Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of Principal Delegates to Imperial Conference, paragr.16. DAFP, Volume I,document 32, page 86.

219c Ibid., paragraph 17.


219e Ibid., page 111.
Colony would therefore, in all probability, be lost to the Japanese in the case of war, and even in the case of the Far Eastern Fleet arriving at Singapore, it was deemed unwise to recapture Hong Kong. If however, the garrison was still holding out, the Far Eastern Fleet would relieve Hong Kong and use it as a Fleet Base against the Japanese.

Lord Chatfield gave three reasons why it was impossible to maintain a naval force in the Far East in peacetime, sufficient to contain the Japanese Fleet. First, sending two-thirds of the British battle fleet to Singapore now, would be a most challenging act from a diplomatic point of view, as there was no direct threat by the Japanese at the moment. Second, having the larger part of the Fleet in the Far East would mean a much greater portion of the Navy personnel being permanently on foreign service, with the attendant morale problems. It also would mean a further expansion of the Singapore Naval Base, which could only handle up to 4 capital ships. (See page 189). Third, the general public in the United Kingdom might not look at all favourably at the permanent retention of their Navy at such a distance from Home waters, and there would certainly be an outcry if the majority of the capital ships were in the Far East if a European war broke out.²¹⁷⁷ (See page 164)

According to the Minutes of this meeting, there was no challenging of the British position by the Australian and New Zealand representatives. They could have pointed out that it was not necessary to send the whole Eastern Fleet in one massive operation. The reinforcement of the Far East could be done gradually. Without such a reinforcement, they could have pointed out that the Australian and New Zealand populations would be denuded of protection, much more than the population of the British Isles would be, thereby exposing the hypocrisy of the third argument given by Lord Chatfield. To us, living more than sixty years after this discussion took place, it is abundantly clear that the British Chiefs of Staff seriously underestimated the Japanese, had no high regard for the Japanese air force, and had not considered the possibility that Japan might have secured bases in Thailand in order to be closer to Singapore. Even in 1937 that was a distinct possibility, far more than a Japanese occupation of Southern French Indo-China.

4.5.3. The COS Appreciation of 1937.

The main thesis of Lord Chatfield, that the Pacific Dominions should not be worried about their security, had been worked out in a document by the Chiefs of Staff, which answered a number of questions posed by members of the Australian delegation to the Imperial Conference.²¹⁸⁸ Question 7 posed by the Australian delegation, was whether the maintenance of the integrity of the Netherlands East Indies was vital to the security of Singapore. The answer given was, that “the integrity of the Dutch East Indies was a major British interest, but in existing conditions it was inadvisable to announce this”.²¹⁹⁰

Much space was devoted in the document to the question of an adequate defence against an invasion of Australia. The main argument was the protection given by distance, and

²¹⁷⁷ Ibid., page 114.


²¹⁹⁰ Ibid., page 146.
consequently time for execution. The distance between Tokyo and Sydney is 8,000 kilometers, and a Japanese expeditionary force of 2 divisions needed at least 70 transport ships, which were vulnerable against the British Far Eastern Fleet. Moreover, it was claimed that it was not considered possible to establish local air superiority over the landing beaches with ship-borne aircraft against adequate land-based aircraft.\textsuperscript{200} The document then goes into a very detailed specification of the allocation of capital ships by name, between Home and Far Eastern Fleet in the case of a combined conflict against Germany and Japan. In the period 1937 to spring 1938, and the period from the summer of 1939 to the spring of 1940, 10 capital ships were to be available for the Far Eastern Fleet, with only 8 available in the period in between, because of the withdrawal of the RENOWN, VALIANT and QUEEN ELISABETH due to modernisation. From the end of 1940 the five modern battleships of the KING GEORGE V Class were to become available, and the four non-modernised REVENGES gradually withdrawn.\textsuperscript{200} In addition to the capital ships, the Far Eastern Fleet would consist of 4 aircraft carriers, seven heavy cruisers and 48 light cruisers, and five destroyer flotillas. The conclusion of the Chiefs of Staff, was that an invasion of Australia would only be possible after the Japanese had captured Singapore and had defeated the British Far Eastern Fleet, a combination of mishaps which was considered highly unlikely.

Part of the British maritime strategy to contain the Imperial Japanese Navy was to attack the Japanese sea lanes, for which task the heavy cruisers would be employed. In the early months of the war Japan would be fully occupied in protecting her merchant fleet and in safeguarding her lines of communications with Korea, Manchuria, China, Formosa and the operational areas further south. Remembering how much tonnage was required during the First World War to protect the Channel routes from England to France, it would be far more difficult for the Japanese to protect their lines of communications against prowling British submarines and cruiser squadrons. It was the mirror argument of British worries of keeping open their lines of communications in the Indian Ocean, in the case of a resolute Japanese \textit{guerre de course}.\textsuperscript{203}

In this Appreciation it was taken into consideration that the French would be allied with the British in case of a war with Germany. The possibility of a three-Power war, with Italy on the side of Germany and Japan, was nevertheless also considered. The opinion of the Chiefs of Staff, was that \textit{"the intervention of Italy against us would at once impose conflicting demands on our fleet. In this situation our policy must be governed by the principle that no anxieties or risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East"}\textsuperscript{203} In other words, as Lord Chatfield had pointed out, the Mediterranean would be evacuated and left on its own.

An Australian delegation under Sir Archdale Parkhill discussed with the Chiefs of Staff on 21 June 1937, the remaining issue of how long Singapore could be expected to withstand a Japanese siege. Parkhill said that his reason for pressing the Chiefs of Staff on this point, was that an important section of opinion in Australia advocated the concentration of

\textsuperscript{200} ibid., page 150 - 151.

\textsuperscript{201} ibid., page 152. Also W. David McIntyre: \textit{"The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base"} London, 1979, 133.

\textsuperscript{202} Tyler Bennett: \textit{"Australia's Defense Problem"} \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 18:1, October 1939, 118.

\textsuperscript{203} DAFP, Volume I, document 42, page 156.
defence expenditure on the Army and the Air Force instead of on the Navy. Obviously, he had the Australian Labour Party in mind. The ALP maintained two arguments: the first was that the British Fleet would not be sent to the Far East at all; the second: that even if it were sent to Singapore it would not be strong enough to oppose capture of the base by the Japanese before its arrival. The first argument had been disposed of by the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, but an assurance was required that the second argument was also groundless.

The Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of the Imperial Committee, Sir Maurice Hankey, countered that a huge scheme of defence was in the course of implementation in Singapore, including the provision of 15-inch gun coastal batteries. Stores and equipment would be ready for a siege of at least 3 months. The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Edward Ellington, argued that heavy and sustained Japanese air attacks could not be maintained on the fortress until the Japanese had established shore bases within range, which would mean prolonged operations on the Japanese side. Lord Chatfield added, that the Japanese would not embark on prolonged operations against Singapore, as long as there was a risk that they might have to break off such operations and engage the approaching British Fleet. To sum up, Singapore could be regarded as a first-class insurance for the security of Australia. Thereupon Parkhill expressed himself as satisfied with the assurance given him by the Chiefs of Staff.

That ended the discussions at the Imperial Conference. The Australian delegation got the assurances it was seeking. Looking back it is evident that a number of underlying assumptions about the Singapore strategy had not been challenged sufficiently. Port Arthur and Tsushima spring to mind, but also the possibility of Japanese bombers operating from neutral or weakly defended territory, e.g. Thailand and the Netherlands East Indies (especially Sumatra, which had some good civil airfields). This possibility had been reported by the commanding general, Malaya Command Major-General W. Dobbie in early 1937. At the same time, unknown to Dobbie and the Australians, the Joint Overseas and Home Defence sub-committee of the C.I.D. had completed a study of the possibility of Japanese shore-based air attack on Singapore. The committee concluded that such a possibility was remote due to the loss of surprise if the Japanese were to occupy airfields in Thailand or the Dutch East Indies. In short, the mind-set of Australian and British members of the discussion at the Imperial Conference was the same. It did not result in an intellectually challenging exchange of opinions on the defence of Singapore.

Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London had a number of conversations with the First Lord of Admiralty and the First Sea Lord in the period up to the outbreak of War in Europe. During these meetings the state of defence readiness of Singapore was discussed, in combination with the strength and composition of the British Far Eastern Fleet. In a conversation with both on November 1 1938 (directly after the Munich crisis), he was told that in the case of a Japanese threat the two NELSON-class Battleships and the

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2204 Minutes of Meeting to discuss Defence Questions, 21 June 1937. DAFP, Volume I, document 47, pages 166 - 170. This important document also to be found under PRO CAB 53/31, COS 599.

2205 David McIntyre, op. cit., p. 134.


five (obsolete) REVENGE-class Battleships would be sent to Singapore immediately. That would make 7 battleships instead of the minimum of 8, promised at the Imperial Conference. Their Lordships however were unwilling to send just one of these, already earmarked, capital ships to Singapore as a deterrent signal to the Japanese.\(^{228}\)

The result of the Imperial Conference was to give the respective Australian Governments a false sense of security, but in fairness it must be admitted that the impression is given that the Australian Government representatives wanted to be told that they were safe under the protection of British arms. At least they did not challenge seriously British assurances about their capabilities to extend such a protection to Australia. It was the Pacific Defence Conference at Wellington, 14 - 26 April 1939, which shattered Australian complacency because at that conference the British Service representatives bluntly told the delegates, that in all probability no fleet would be sent to Singapore.\(^{229}\)

In summary, it has been seen in this sub-chapter that the Singapore strategy was considered to be the corner-stone of Australian naval security, and was sanctified as such at the Imperial Conference of 1937. The Australian Government had been critical about the wisdom of having a strong base without a fleet. It was even willing to pay for the acquisition of a battleship to form the nucleus of a Singapore-based fleet. However, convoluted thinking by the staff of the Royal Navy, combined with Australian credulity, prevented a thorough analysis of the assumptions underlying the Singapore Strategy.

### 4.5.4. The mobilisation of Australian Industry.

A particularly important result of the Imperial conference of 1937 was the British assertion of the inability of British industry to rearm their own Services in a few years, much less those of the Dominions. It was therefore strongly recommended that the Dominions should expand their own ammunition and aircraft factories and shipyards as rapidly as possible. Australia was in a better position with regard to its industrial base than in the First World War. Steelworks, established in 1915, were producing somewhat more than 1.000.000 tons of steel a year. The shipyard at Cockatoo Island, Sydney, was capable of building a range of warships, up to light cruisers. There were a number of light weapons and munition factories. In short, there was a basis on which to build.

The Commonwealth Aircraft Company had been formed in Melbourne in October 1936, to assemble a fighter aircraft of American design together with its engine. The plane in question was the North American Harvard Trainer and fighter-bomber. This was a break with earlier agreements at Imperial Conferences in the past to standardise British weapons and planes. Technically however, British aviation was lagging behind American aviation, and the British Air Ministry could only propose obsolete aircraft for production in Australia.\(^{230}\) However, Australia's work-force lacked experience in high-precision engineering work and that was a serious drawback in producing the complex weapons, vehicles, ships and planes which modern war demanded. A plan to produce engines for motor vehicles

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\(^{228}\) DAFP, Volume I, document 315, page 511 - 512, and document 336, page 534, in which S. Bruce expresses his anxiety about the apparent unwillingness of the Royal Navy to station even one old battleship at Singapore.

\(^{229}\) W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 152. For the Pacific Defence Conference see also Chapter 2, page 164.

was therefore examined, but abandoned for the same reason.

One very important planning process took place at the Department of Defence under F.G. Shedden, secretary of Defence. He and his staff prepared the War Book, a detailed statement of the steps to be taken by government departments on the outbreak of war, based on British experiences during the Great War. In November 1938 a Manpower Committee was established under the chairmanship of Major-General Sir Thomas Blamey, which did much detailed planning on manpower resources available in the case of an emergency. In 1939 a Ministry of Supply and Development was established to coordinate the defence industry. It took over the munitions factories, had a general responsibility for supplying the Services and for co-ordinating secondary industry for emergency production tasks. Other planning was being carried out unobtrusively within the administration. For example, since 1936 wartime control of food exports had been discussed with the British Board of Trade; Australia had been warned that shipping shortages might cause Britain to seek food supplies from places nearer home. A Financial and Advisory Committee, established in 1939, analyzed the effects of these possible interruptions of sea-borne trade. It made proposals for stockpiling, control of imports, and readjustments of domestic industries. Moreover, an Advisory Panel of Industrial Organisations was created, under the chairmanship of Essington Lewis, the managing director of Australia’s biggest private industry conglomerate, Broken Hill Pty Ltd. All this planning effort bore fruit when the real emergency began.

Meanwhile the pace of rearmament quickened. In August 1937 a new three-year programme was announced. It amounted to a total sum of £43,000,000 to be spent over three years, with £15,000,000 for expansion of the RAN, £12,500,000 for the RAAF, £11,500,000 for the Army, £3,000,000 for munitions supply and £1,000,000 for industrial adjustments. Moreover, the Australian government asked the British Chiefs of Staff for senior officers of the British Army and the RAF to report on the readiness of the Australian Army and Air Force. This because, as premier Lyons said, “Australian defence was related to a wider pattern of Empire defence, and its fundamental basis is Empire sea power and the Singapore naval base.” In the event Lieut-General E.K. Squires came from England to report on the Australian Army, and the Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Edward Ellington, to report on the air force.

Australia started its planning for war production rather early, compared with other nations. It was however slow in executing the plans, due to a lack of urgency in the management and the work-force, of which examples will be given later in this chapter.

4.5.5. Rebirth of the RAAF.

A predecessor of Ellington, Air Marshall Salmond, had advised on the development of the RAAF in 1928. At that time its strength was very low. In 1929 the RAAF possessed no more than 6 reasonably modern Bristol Bulldog biplane fighters. In 1937 its striking force comprised only 2 squadrons. Under Ellington’s plans the RAAF would be expanded.

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2212 Gavin Long, The Six Year War, Ibid. 9.

2213 Jeffrey Grey, Ibid. 134.
to 12 squadrons in 1939, with seven more squadrons in 1940. The main problem however, was obtaining modern aircraft. By 1939 the delay in deliveries from Great Britain and the United States had become so disturbing that it was decided to establish a second group of aircraft factories to make bombers: the British-designed Bristol Beauforts. The administration ordered 180 of these planes. The first group of aircraft factories had been established in 1936 under the aegis of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, but was not yet at full capacity.

There was no way however, in which the RAAF could be modernised quickly. In September 1939 the RAAF counted 82 Avro Anson bombers, 54 Demon fighters, 7 Wirraways and 21 Seagull seaplanes in 13 squadrons. The Demon was an obsolete biplane fighter-bomber from 1935, the Seagull was an obsolete amphibious plane from 1936, the Ansons were designed as civilian planes, obsolescent anyway, but nevertheless employed as bombers. The Wirraway was an American trainer, the North-American Harvard, which was used as a fighter. New planes had been ordered: Beaufort bombers in the U.K. and Hudson bombers and Catalina seaplanes in the U.S., but none had yet arrived.

The Munich crisis of October 1938 resulted in a reversal of the standardisation rules, which dated from the 1911 Imperial Conference. McCarthy describes the panic in government circles because of the slow rearmament, resulting in the invitation to the American firm Lockheed to bid for the delivery of Hudson Bombers, whereas the same company had tried unsuccessfully for the previous three years to get a foothold in Australia2214. To Premier Lyons it must have appeared that the British delivery of ordered weapons systems was unreliable.

It is significant to note that the shift towards America as a supplier of war materials first began with aircraft. The Munich crisis also resulted in a rehearsal of the defence measures which had been planned for such an occasion. The naval squadron was concentrated, reserve ships were manned and the forts were put in a state of readiness. In December 1938 an additional amount of £19.500.000 was voted for the Armed Forces. A recruiting campaign proved successful, and doubled the militia forces to 70.000. This was a remarkable result, bearing in mind that the total number of men aged between 18 and 26 was estimated at 482.000. It demonstrated convincingly that a large proportion of young Australians were ready to spring to arms in a crisis threatening the motherland, Great Britain.

However, for years the Services and their supporting industry had been starved of money. Now they had enough to spend, but there was not enough production capacity and skill. In the first year of the 1937 - 1940 rearmament period £1.7360.000 remained unspent. In the second year more than £3.000.000. All the Powers (including neutral countries like The Netherlands!) were hurriedly re-arming and orders for aircraft and weapons placed by small nations were not being delivered. Moreover, the British used armaments deliveries as a means to exert political pressure. By 1938, for example, two squadrons of the Turkish air force had been equipped with Blenheim Bombers2216. This was because it was very important to keep countries like Turkey within the British sphere of influence by providing them with aircraft. Finland came into the same category in 1938, being supplied with Blenheims in 1938. By June 1939, 126 Hurricanes had been promised to Rumania, 24

2214 J.M. McCarthy, opus cit., 25

2215 PRO AIR 8 - 221. Aircraft orders placed in the U.K.: Note by AMSO Department, 13 May 1937.
Spitfires to Greece, and a further 60 Blenheims and Spitfires to Turkey, notwithstanding an explicit request by Parkhill, at the Imperial Conference in 1937, that the requirements of the Dominion Air Forces should be given priority over those of foreign countries. Long unequivocally states that Australia should have heeded the recommendations of the 1937 Imperial Conference to build up a local defence industry faster than it actually did. For a nation in Australia's situation one of the foundations of military strength, second in importance only to morale, is an ability to produce a full range of weapons, ships and vehicles from its own resources. By contrast to The Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies, Australia had the mineral resources, the heavy industry, and the skilled manpower within its borders to support a rapid build-up of its defence industry.

4.5.6. Preparation for War.

In the four months between the formation of the Menzies government in April 1939 and the outbreak of the war, defence preparedness was increased by the passing of two Acts of Parliament. The Supply and Development Act undertook the creation of of a new Department, the Ministry of Supply and Development, which was headed by the competent R.G. Casey, the future Australian ambassador in Washington. It was his Department which undertook the full mobilisation of Australian resources. The National Registration Act provided for a general survey of manpower and for a national register of all males between 18 and 64. The first census taken under this act in July 1939, revealed that 264,000 males, 12½ percent of the wage-earners in this age group, were unemployed. A clear indication that Australian industrial mobilisation had not yet taken place.

There was a beginning of industrial mobilisation however, quickening after September 1939. Essington Lewis was now appointed Director-General of Munitions, with autocratic powers. He put plans in place to increase within a year the number of workers in munitions, armament and aircraft factories from 15,000 to 80,000. The first 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns were being produced at a rate of one per week. Twenty Bren-gun-carriers a month, 170 rifles and 20 machine-guns were manufactured a week. New small-arms ammunition and gun munition factories were built in South-Australia, a cartridge-case factory in Queensland, and another small arms factory at Bathurst, NSW. The Dutch Consul General reported to his Government that the expansion of the Australian Munitions Industry was truly remarkable, producing even the highest quality "Red Label" ammunition for airplane guns. The main armaments factory at Lithgow, Victoria, concentrated on heavier armaments. After the German tank successes in France the Government had ordered the
building of 859 cruiser tanks ("Matilda’s"), and more than 2,000 Bren-carriers. The Australian Tank Corps, founded in 1927, now got some teeth at last. The young tank corps of the KNIL was very interested in the Matilda tank as will be seen further on.

By June 1940 the Australian aircraft industry had produced 75 Wirraways, 8 De Havilland Tiger Moths and 76 single-row Wasp aircraft engines. This was quite a performance. In the following year 225 Wirraways, 453 Moths, 195 Wasp engines and 319 Gipsy Majors aircraft engines came off the assembly lines. That was also a major achievement, if one recalls that unique skills had to be acquired and specialised manufacturing equipment imported from abroad.

The objectives of the arms production programme for 1941 included the yearly production of 840 25-pounder guns and howitzers, 300 anti-aircraft guns, 1500 2-pounder antitank guns, 3000 Vickers heavy machine guns and 6,000 Bren light machine guns, 100,000 rifles, 1,000 tanks, and 2,000 Bren carriers, figures which would have seemed incredible and unrealistic in 1939. In June 1941 around 53,000 people were employed in the armaments industry. In August 1941 new projects were being undertaken: the manufacture of the 6-pounder anti-tank gun, the manufacture of the locally designed Owen submachine-gun, and the Bofors anti-aircraft gun based on a Swedish licence. By June 1941 the aircraft factories had delivered 313 Wirraways and Wackett trainers and 461 Tiger Moths light reconnaissance planes, but had not yet completed a bomber. The first Australian-made Beaufort bomber was delivered in August. The air force squadrons were, in effect, still poorly equipped. Their only fighter plane was the Wirraway: in fact an American trainer, and not a modern fighter. The only front line machines received from overseas up to June 1941, had been 100 Hudson bombers and 4 Catalina flying boats from the U.S.A.

According to Day the Australian authorities became so frustrated about not being able to obtain modern aircraft from somewhere, that the Australian Minister in Tokyo was instructed to inquire whether the Japanese could provide planes and spares! Tokyo replied, with tongue in cheek, that it was anxious to supply both service and training aircraft, but regretted they were unable to deliver until the end of 1941. Then they delivered with a vengeance!

The Dutch military mission (See hereunder), which visited 65 weapons and munitions factories in October - November 1940 was very impressed by what it saw. The mission duly reported that the Australian divisions fighting in the Middle East were almost fully provided with weapons and munitions by Australian industry, which also exported guns and munitions to the U.K. The Australian armaments industry had come of age, albeit

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222 The Matilda-tank was apparently named after a popular pre-war cartoon duck - as the tank waddled as it moved. Communication by Dr J. Ford, Univ. of Queensland.

222 Gavin Long, ibid, note on page 15.

225 David Day: The Great Betrayal, 104.

224 Verslag KNIL Commissie, Batavia, 31 december 1940. p. 10. ARA Londens Archief MinvKol., toegangsnummer 2.10.45, inv. nr. 772.
rather late, and was still plagued by strikes and not producing to full capacity.\footnote{According to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald of 8 January 1941 the production of ammunition had already surpassed the most optimistic expectations. Australia was producing more ammunition than Canada or India, and was supplying almost all the ammunition needed in Egypt, Singapore and New-Zealand, with munitions even being exported to England.}

In August 1940 a group of influential American journalists visited Australia. According to the Dutch Consul General, the Americans expected to find an agrarian society based on sheep, wool and wheat, and found a modern state with an impressively high standard of living, and a modern industry, producing steel, ships, weapons and ammunition, and even planes! They also found the Australians amazingly relaxed and not at all adapted to war conditions\footnote{Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 5 September 1940, no T2/4011. MinBuZa, London, inv. nr. 101.}

The naval building programme in Australia was also making rapid progress: by March 1941, 3 destroyers, 2 sloops, 26 corvettes and 3 boom vessels had been built or were under construction.\footnote{The Dutch Consul-General reported the launching of the corvette BENDIGO of 850 tons, which was the seventh corvette launched in succession. Letter C.G. to MinFA, 6 March 1941, no T6/1600/32, MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, inv. nr. 111.} By July 1941 a total of 60 corvettes had been ordered plus some 1400-tons frigates. Seven yards were building naval vessels. Four-inch naval guns to arm the corvettes were being produced locally, although at a slow rate. At last, in March 1941, steps were taken to establish merchant shipbuilding on a scale comparable to that attained in the First World War. Four yards were each given orders for two 9.000 ton vessels and the first keels were laid in July 1941. There was no real urgency in the execution of the shipbuilding orders however, as the Australian Chief of Naval Staff complained in January 1941. There were continuous strikes and labour problems in shipyards and docks which had resulted in a 25% drop in output over the previous months.\footnote{Advisory War Council Minutes of 5 February 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document no 271, page 364.}

In summarizing this sub-chapter, it may be stated that Australian industrial mobilisation was well-planned and that it started early (in 1936), but it was executed too slowly. The different Governments did not instil a sense of urgency in the population, as the American Government had in 1940. Therefore, the full potential of Australian war production was not reached. This would later have serious consequences for the re-armament of the Netherlands East Indies.
But while all political parties were unanimous in support of the war declaration, there were grave differences of opinion regarding the extent and nature of Australia's participation in the conflict.

4.6.1. Naval dispositions.

The Navy mobilised quickly by calling up some 4,500 reservists, including 450 former regular officers. The navy possessed a reasonably modern fleet of two heavy cruisers (the AUSTRALIA and CANBERRA), and four light cruisers (the PERTH, HOBART, SYDNEY and ADELAIDE), five old destroyers (STUART, WATERHEN, VAMPIRE, VENDETTA and VOYAGER) and 2 sloops. With the exception of the PERTH, then on its way from the United Kingdom to Australia, all the ships were in Australian waters.

On 24 August 1939 the British Admiralty had asked the Australian government for permission to retain HMAS PERTH at the West Indies station, the ship being in the Caribbean at the time. The administration agreed, with the proviso that the decision could be reconsidered should war break out in the Far East. The position of Japan was not at all clear. In a couple of days it did become clear that Japan would adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude. Within a week, on August 29, the British Admiralty asked for the transfer of an additional Australian cruiser to the Mediterranean, and for the transfer of operational control of the RAN to the Admiralty. On 8 September the British Government asked for the transfer of another Australian cruiser and the 5 destroyers to other naval stations. On the 6th October the War Cabinet agreed to send the destroyers to Singapore and place HMAS HOBART under operational control of the Admiralty, with the proviso that the ship should not proceed west of Suez. With much misgiving, the War Cabinet dropped this proviso on 17th October because of unrelenting pressure of the Admiralty. This decision was based, at least in part, on advice received from the chief of the Australian Navy, Admiral Colvin. Colvin was a British Naval Officer on secondment from the Admiralty. His colleagues in London had used naval signals to brief him on the arguments of the British Naval Staff. The formal transfer of operational control to the Admiralty took place on November 7.

In the months thereafter the Australian Government very gradually lost control of the largest units of its Fleet, with the heavy cruisers AUSTRALIA and CANBERRA and two of the four light cruisers and all five destroyers being assigned to other naval stations. Not enough ships were left to give adequate protection against German raiders, when they entered the Pacific and Indian Oceans in the summer of 1940.

4.6.2. The Empire Air Training Scheme.

With respect to the Air Force, the most important development in the first months of war was the establishment of the Empire Air Training scheme (EATS). This was proposed by the Australian High Commissioner in London, S.M. Bruce, to the British Under-secretary for Air. His proposal was to pool the Empire's air training resources. Elementary
air training should be carried out in each Dominion, after which further training would take place in Canada. The graduates would then join the Dominion squadrons to be formed in the United Kingdom. The objective would be to train 50,000 aircrew a year, of which somewhat more than half would come from the Dominions. This proposal was worked out with all concerned at a conference in Ottawa. The Canadians were to take about 2,800 aircrew every four weeks from the other Dominions and the United Kingdom. In Australia 4 initial training schools, 9 elementary flying training schools, 7 service flying schools and 13 other schools were to be established. It was hoped that the EATS would alleviate the manpower problems of the RAF and the Dominion air forces.

The chief of the Australian Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal S.J. Goble, objected to the Empire Air Training Scheme EATS in September 1939, because it was centered on feeding air force personnel to the European Theatre of War, doing nothing to improve Australian Home Defence. Therefore Prime Minister Menzies replaced him in December 1939 by a British Air Chief Marshal, Sir Charles Burnett, who faithfully executed the EATS, and who was not really interested in Australia's home defence. Menzies supported the EATS on the grounds that the new airfields and equipment would improve the infrastructure of Australian defence, would stimulate the local aircraft industry, and would increase the number of modern planes available for Australian defence. Alas, it turned out that the planes the U.K. delivered were not modern at all, and moreover their delivery was very slow. Therefore, the local aircraft industry started the production of training planes, and plans to produce the modern Bristol Beaufort torpedo bombers, and even the De Havilland Mosquito, had to be scaled down. At the time of Pearl Harbor, the local aircraft industry had produced 1309 training planes, unfit for operational use against the Japanese, and only 10 Beaufort torpedo bombers. The net result of the EATS was that at the time of the Japanese onslaught, the RAAF had almost ceased to exist as a fighting organisation, with most of its Australian personnel flying RAF Bombers and fighters in the air war against Germany. Of this personnel, 37,738 served with the RAF in Europe, of whom 5,319 were killed. The EATS had delivered aircrew, but not for Australia. The same observation is also relevant to the Royal Canadian Air Force, where due to the the EATS the evolution of the RCAF as an independent air force was stunted, with 60% of all Canadian pilots still serving with the RAF in 1944.

4.6.3. The Second AIF.

With respect to the Army, the Government had steadfastly refused to raise a proper standing Army in the past, notwithstanding the increasing risk of war. The army therefore consisted of a core of a few thousand regulars, supplemented by 80,000 part-time militiamen, who had 12 days of camp training a year. It was not until 19 October 1939 that

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2233 According to the Ottawa agreement, Australia would be provided by the United Kingdom with 150 Avro Ansons, 336 Fairey Battles, 243 Tiger Moths and 440 Anson Airframes to be fitted with locally made wings. The Anson however was already in 1938 an obsolete bomber, and the single-engined Battle light bombers proved worthless in the campaign in the West in May - June 1940. See J.M. McCarthy, Op. cit. 332.
the War Cabinet took the decision to reintroduce conscription for home service in the army, and to raise an Australian Infantry Division as recommended by the Military Board. Menzies promised that the administration would not introduce conscription for overseas service however. As the leader of a minority Government, supported by the strongly Empire-oriented Country Party, but under continual attack from the opposition ALP, he had the problem of showing the general public his willingness to assist the old motherland, while maintaining the unpopularity of general conscription, which was anathema to the ALP. The popular press, especially the Argus of Melbourne, urged the formation of a second AIF, like the first Australian Imperial Forces of the First World War. On the other side of the globe, Winston Churchill, who as First Lord of the Admiralty, had joined Chamberlain's War Cabinet, was lamenting "that Australia appeared to be forming only one division, and even that was remaining home for the present".

In making that comment, Churchill was not alone. The influential American Journalist, Tyler Dennett, acidly observed in Foreign Affairs that the Australians were able to become very sentimental about the Empire, "but that they wanted to be left with complete liberty to amplify their programme of social experimentation in ways which would be far beyond their means if they were to take over anything like full responsibilities for self-defense".

Menzies dispatched his Minister for Supply and Development, Robert G. Casey, to London in order to clarify British needs for army resources. On 5th November 1939 Casey reported back on the discussions that he and other Dominion Ministers had had with the British War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. The British did not expect a German attack in the West till April 1940, nor a Japanese campaign in South-East Asia. Again Casey had received assurances from the First Lord of Admiralty (W.S. Churchill) that Britain would sacrifice its Mediterranean interests, if need be, in order to aid its "kith and kin", in Churchill's flowery language. These assurances were, it is true, hedged at various points, but the general line was unchanged as from the Imperial Conference of 1937: in importance Singapore ranked second after the British Isles.

But Australia had to show something for the British guarantee. The COS therefore suggested that an Australian Corps of 2 divisions should be sent to Egypt and Palestine to relieve British troops over there. Casey let it be known that Australia was willing to dispatch a force overseas, but wanted an assurance from the British Government about the threat from Japan. He spent more than a month in London to get just some kind of British guarantee, and even visited the (quiet) front in France, where he concluded that under no circumstances Australian troops should be sent to the Western Front.

After much debate it was indeed decided by the Australian Government in the fall of 1939.

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2236 Report by the Military Board on the Raising of a Special Force for Continuous Service either in Australia or overseas, 13 September 1939. AA Canberra, A 5954, Box 261.
2237 War Cabinet Conclusions, 19 October 1939, PRO CAB 65/1, WM 53/(39).
2238 Tyler Dennett op. cit., 118.
to send one Australian division to Egypt in early 1940. It helped the internal political situation (e.g. the Country Party) that the British Government had declared its willingness to purchase a huge quantity of Australian wheat. In announcing this decision to the Parliament, Menzies stated that "adequate assurances have been given with respect to the capacity and availability of the Royal Navy, which is after all our first line of defence, to give us protection against any major aggression". It is illustrative of the bickering and hesitancy within the administration, that of the three artillery field regiments sent overseas, only one would be fully armed. At that time there were in Australia enough guns and howitzers to equip the field artillery of five infantry divisions and two artillery divisions, a larger force than the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1939. At last a convoy of 11 liners with the Australian 6th Division and the 4th New Zealand Brigade set sail for Egypt on January 10 1940, escorted by the old R-class battleship HMS RAMILLIES, and the cruisers HMAS SYDNEY, HMS KENT and the French heavy cruiser SUFREN. It was the biggest convoy of the war up to that time. However, almost no heavy weapons went with the convoy.

The appearance of the big capital ships HMS REPULSE and HMS RAMILLIES in Australian waters, in order to protect the convoys to the Middle East, left an indelible impression on Australian public opinion, enhancing the standing of the Australian Government. If these ships could be spared for escorting convoys, it was clear that the Royal Navy would unquestioningly be able to assemble a far larger fleet of capital ships for the defence of Singapore.

The "wheat for soldiers" deal has been used to demonstrate the independence of the Australian Government from London, because it illustrated that it had a clear appreciation of what it considered to be its own vital interests, and that it was quite capable of looking after them. Others have pointed out, that by sending its only combat-ready Infantry Division overseas, the Australian Government failed to insure Australia's security, so ensuring its political survival. In January 1940 however, there was only a very latent danger from Japan, while there was a clear need for more troops in the Middle East, where a war raged. At that time no vital interests of Australia were really damaged by employing one Infantry Division elsewhere, with a sizable recruitment drive underway in Australia. At that time the decision taken was still very rational.

4.6.4. The German occupation of the Netherlands.

The blitzkrieg in the West eliminated all complacency. The fall of The Netherlands, Belgium and France came as a shock, the rescue of the BEF at Dunkirk as an eye-opener. It was more the fall of the Netherlands that posed the question of what would happen to the

2242 David Day: Ibid, 29
2243 J.J. Dedman, op. cit., 336.
2244 Gavin Long, ibid., page 21.
2245 Letter of Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 12 January 1940, T6/185/15, ARA Ibid.
Netherlands East Indies and strengthened the case of those opposing the government policy with respect to the deployment of the AIF in the Middle East. The entry of Italy into the war played into the hands of those who argued that the AIF in the Middle East should be augmented in order to safeguard the eastern Mediterranean. Premier Menzies made a broadcast on 16th June 1940, appealing for "all-round sacrifice, unremitting toil and unflinching devotion". The populace rose to the challenge: in July 21,000 volunteers had enlisted, in August this was 32,500. The administration had authorised the formation of a corps of 3 divisions, it now could raise twice that number. Further air and naval forces were committed to service overseas.

The rapid dispatch of Australian forces did not meet with general approval within the populace. In February 1940, for example, the Wollongong Branch of the Australian Labor Party already protested against the sending of Australian troops abroad, while they might be more urgently needed for the defence of the homeland, adding that Australia would be "faced with imminent peril from the Dutch East Indies if Holland is invaded in the German spring offensive". It were Trade Union auxiliaries and Local A.L.P. branch organisations which expressed their anxiety in similar fashion in 1940-1941. The government argued, that Australia was a Dominion, with the same King as the British Motherland, and that therefore Australia could not stand aside, watching the "old country" being overrun by German hordes. In this the government was probably correct, judging by the general support of the populace for the measures taken and the large number of volunteers for overseas service. Other Dominions, like Southern Ireland, Canada and South Africa, did not adhere to this reasoning, or at least not initially.

The second argument used by the Australian government, namely that Australia and Britain had largely identical interests, is more debatable. The Australian initiatives and pressure on the British Government to involve the Dutch in a common defense of South-East Asia was not really supported by the U.K. Government, but was plainly an Australian interest. The second part of this chapter discusses these Australian initiatives in some detail. Therefore it remains an open question, as to why the respective governments of Menzies and Curtin did not recall Australian Service Units back to S.E. Asia in time to meet the Japanese onslaught. In December 1941 the 100,000 troops of the militia were estimated to be roughly 40% effective, and were therefore no real shield against the Japanese. The effort to maintain the Empire Air Training Scheme had led to a situation where the air force was drastically understrength in first-line aircraft.

4.6.5. The end of the Singapore Strategy.

The Australian Government remained very anxious about the situation in S.E. Asia, specifically after the fall of the Netherlands, in contrast to the British Cabinet, which had already decided in March 1940 to withdraw two Blenheim bomber squadrons from

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229 John McCarthy, ibid. 179.

Singapore and send them to the Middle East\textsuperscript{2252}. The Australians replaced these squadrons with one squadron of Hudson Bombers flown over from Australia, refuelling at Surabaya. Dutch agreement was obtained without Japanese interference\textsuperscript{2253}. The British Cabinet had informed the Australian Government on June 13, that the entry of Italy into the war probably precluded the sending of adequate naval reinforcements to the Far East.\textsuperscript{2254} It was, in effect, the death announcement of the "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy.

Three days later the British Cabinet asked for an additional squadron of Hudson bombers and one Squadron of Wirraways to replace RAF squadrons which were urgently required in the Middle East\textsuperscript{2255}. The Australian chiefs of staff informed the Australian War Cabinet, on June 18, that without the aid of the French Fleet, Britain could not contain both the German and Italian Fleets, at the same time sending a fleet to Singapore. This was confirmed in a cablegram from the British Government to the Australian Government, which also instructed the British Ambassador in Washington to ask for American help. Paragraph 8 of the message states: "The collapse of France would provide Japan with the temptation to take action against the French, British or Dutch interests in the Far East. We see no hope of being able to despatch a fleet to Singapore. It will therefore be vital that the United States of America should publicly declare her intention to regard any alteration of the status quo in the Far East and the Pacific as a casus belli."\textsuperscript{2256} In a discussion with Bruce, the British Chief of Staff Major General, H.L. Ismay, confirmed that the British worried about the possibility of the Italian battle fleet entering the struggle in the Atlantic, basing itself on French ports, in the case of the British Fleet leaving the Mediterranean for Singapore.\textsuperscript{2257}

The British predicament could not be kept secret. There was much scepticism in the international Press about the possibility of the Singapore strategy ever being executed, should the necessity arise. For example, Tyler Dennett had already stated in Foreign Affairs\textsuperscript{2258} of October 1939 that in the event of a war in which England was engaged both in Europe and the Far East, no battleships would be sent to Singapore until after the German pocket battleships had been eliminated.


\textsuperscript{2253} DAFP, Volume III, documents 295 and 365.

\textsuperscript{2254} In a cablegram from Lord Caldecote, UK Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, to Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, UK High Commissioner in Australia, the following statement (in paragraph 8) was made: "In the circumstances envisaged it is most unlikely that we could send adequate reinforcements to the Far East. We would therefore have to rely on the United States of America to safeguard our interest there". With that message, the 20- years old strategy of the "Main Fleet to Singapore" was laid to rest definitely, and did the British Government place the destiny of its possessions in the Far East in the hands of a still very reluctant and strongly anti-colonial Power: the United States. The importance of this policy statement cannot be overrated in the light of the subsequent history of S.E. Asia.


\textsuperscript{2256} Lord Caldecote to Sir G. Whiskard, 19 June 1940. DAFP, Volume III, document 406, pages 459 - 460.


\textsuperscript{2258} Tyler Dennett, Opus cit., 121.
Yet Singapore must be held. The question was how much Australia could do to help defend it. On 28th June 1940 the British Government asked whether Australia could send one Division to Malaya at once and, if that were not possible, even a Brigade.\textsuperscript{225} The Seventh AIF Division was ready for reinforcement of the Sixth AIF Division in the Middle East, but was not equipped adequately. The War Cabinet considered, but rejected, the possibility of bringing back the fully-equipped Sixth AIF Division from the Middle East. The British however were not too concerned about the lack of equipment for the 7th AIF Division, "in view of the unlikelihood of Japanese being able to bring mechanised troops with the latest form of equipment to attack them."\textsuperscript{226} However, because of this lack of equipment, the drive for more recruitment had to be suspended. The War Cabinet therefore decided to adhere to its original plan of sending the 7th Division to the Middle East, rejecting the British request to send it to Singapore.

Looking back, the fatal decision not to accede to the original British request to send an Australian Division to Singapore, must stand out as the most fateful decision made by the Menzies government. The official reason given, was the Australian dislike of seeing its troops on garrison duties in Singapore, the kind of duties which were less compatible "with the psychology of the Australian soldier."\textsuperscript{227} Just as earlier in the war, the Australian Government had given priority to the dispatch of expeditionary forces to the War Theatre, where predecessors of an earlier generation had covered themselves with glory, above home defence. So once again, as anxiety over possible Japanese attack began to wane, the Government became more interested in fighting an actual enemy in the Middle East, rather than sitting down in Malaya and waiting for a prospective foe. Having an active A.I.F. in the Middle East resulted almost automatically in more persuasion in favour of reinforcement of that same theatre of operations.

Meanwhile, the War Cabinet had approved an ambitious plan for expansion of the Australian Army Forces during 1941. The Australian Home Army would consist of five divisions of militia troops with the equivalent of two cavalry divisions.\textsuperscript{228} The Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) consisting of volunteers, would have 4 infantry divisions and 1 armoured division, to be equipped with the Matilda-tanks. The AIF, which consisted of volunteers only but with a professional cadre of officers, could be employed at other Theatres of War outside Australia. Anyway, in total this meant an army of 12 divisions, an almost unbearable burden for so such a small population of 9 million people. The Canadians, for example, contributed 5 Divisions and 2 Armoured Brigades to the Allied cause, based on a population of 12 million.\textsuperscript{229} In addition to the Army Forces, a Home Guard was founded on 6 May 1941, with an initial strength of 50,000 men, all volunteers between

\textsuperscript{225} Lord Caldecote to Australian Government, June 28, 1940. DAFP, Volume III, document 459, pages 517 - 518.

\textsuperscript{226} Lord Caldecote to Sir G. Whiskard, 10 August 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 61, page 81.

\textsuperscript{227} R.G. Menzies to Lord Caldecote, 29 August 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 84, page119.

\textsuperscript{228} According to the Constitution, the militia could only be employed outside Australia in Australian territories such as Eastern New Guinea, the Solomons, etc.

\textsuperscript{229} D. Morton, ibid.
War was not immediately brought to Australian shores, until the second half of 1940. The German raider ORION entered the Pacific via Cape Horn and wreaked havoc in the Tasman Sea in August 1940. A heroic battle on 20 August with the freighter TURAKINA, equipped with just one 4" gun, resulted in the loss of the freighter. Mines were laid east of Auckland, resulting in the loss of the 14,000 tons liner NIAGARA on 19 June 1940. She was joined later by the raider KOMET, which came with Russian assistance via the Behring Sea. The two raiders bombarded the guano island of Nauru and sank a number of ships. According to press reports at that time, they were actively assisted by the Japanese Navy. On 27 November the two ships intercepted and sank the large liner RANGITANE near New Zealand. The Dutch Consul General in Sydney duly reported these losses to his Government and the panic caused in Australia.

The German actions resulted in a greater consciousness within the population about the political and military situation. The ALP Member of Parliament Dr. Evatt even told his audience that the Australians lived in "a fool's paradise" and that a voluntary all-in war effort was needed. This was aimed directly at the Australian Trade Unions, who had disrupted war production with wildcat strikes and walk-outs.

A third raider, the PINGUIN, was active in the Indian Ocean. The shortage of cruisers now became apparent. Since the RAN had most of its ships under Admiralty control in the Atlantic and Middle East, only HMAS HOBART and HMAS ADELAIDE were available for patrolling in the Indian Ocean, and HMNZS ACHILLES (of Battle of the River Plate fame) and the armed merchant cruiser MANOORA in the Western Pacific. None of these raiders were intercepted.

The light cruiser HMAS SYDNEY was despatched from the Mediterranean to Australia in the second half of 1941. In the Indian Ocean she intercepted the German raider KORMORAN near Christmas Island on 25 November 1941. In the ensuing fight both ships were lost, but the SYDNEY blew up with the loss of her entire complement of 645 men, the largest single loss of the RAN in the Second World War.
the ship was recovered. The long, long list of names from this ship on the wall of remembrance in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra leaves an indelible impression on the visitor. The museum also exhibits the tragically empty flat as the only remaining proof that the ship once existed. A very valuable ship with its well-trained complement was lost for the approaching battles at the Malay Barrier.

4.6.7. Political Failures.

Notwithstanding the efforts made, most modern writers on Australian military history are very critical about the government in the period September 1939 - July 1941. It was a time which could be characterised as an extended "phony war". Australian civilians plied their trade as before the War, and Australian life-style did not change appreciably during that period. There was even an extended strike in the NSW coal-mines, as if there were no war, and little signs of a decrease in the consumption of consumer goods. The distribution of petrol started on May 1 1941, notwithstanding the lack of any indigenous oil sources. The Dutch military mission, visiting the Port Kembla Steelworks and other plants in the Wollongong area in October 1940, noted with amazement the total halt of production due to a strike. On 13 May, Minister Hughes warned: "All is not well with Australian industry. For months, it has been in a state of unrest. Vitally important production has been held up by stop-work meetings, strikes, bans upon overtime, and threats to cease work unless demands ... are granted".

Throughout 1939 and 1940 the war, according to de Maria, was "a spirited collage of smiling diggers in uniform, heroic tales from volunteers, troop-ships leaving port in a festive mood, higher and higher production figures, parades and bands and still more parades". Decisions, which should have been made, were not made. The EATS for example proved to be disastrous for the RAAF, as has already been discussed on page 471 - 472 Australia paid most of the cost of initial training, but received no benefit from it. The majority of Australian crews served in British squadrons, which limited promotions and meant that few Australians rose to high rank or gained experience in senior command posts. One of the glaring mistakes of the Australian government, was that it failed to exercise control over the thousands of young men sent to fight in the skies of Europe.

The same observation can be made with respect to the Navy, with no operational control whatsoever over its own ships by the government and the AIF. To illustrate this point: the British Government deemed it unnecessary to inform the Australian Government about the use of HMAS AUSTRALIA, the RAN flagship, as part of the covering force for the abortive attempt to recapture Dakar for the Free French Forces from the Vichy domination in

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Verslag KNIL-Commissie, Batavia 31 december 1940, page 34 -35 of annex on visits to Australian industry. ARA, London Archive Ministry of Colonies, toegangsnr. 2.10.45, inv. nr. 772

Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 28 May 1941, no T6/4121/71, MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, inv. nr. 111.


Jeffrey Grey, op.cit. 149.
September 1940. The loyal Dominion had to learn of this fiasco from the Australian newspapers. According to Day, the Dakar fiasco produced the first major dispute in the war between the Australian and British Governments.

In the first nine months about 100,000 Australians of an age group of 600,000 volunteered for service overseas in the war against Germany. For a small nation it was an unbelievable figure. It was equivalent to 2,000,000 Americans volunteering for service against an enemy in another hemisphere. It illustrated the deeply-felt bonds of kinship existing between the white Australians and their motherland. This large number of volunteers enabled the administration to raise an additional division, the 7th, for active duty in the Middle East. As Gavin Long has pointed out, the Government did not do much more than channelize the flow of recruits. It could have gone for full mobilisation of the Services and an extension of manufacturing capacity, as the still neutral United States was going to do in a couple of months. Another, less dramatic course, could have been the formation of a sizeable volunteer army, fully armed with the output of Australian factories. The actual course adapted was that with the least foresight: to enlist a small military force, to send part of this force overseas but with few heavy weapons, to embark on a cautious increase in arms production in Australia without full usage of the potential production capacity available, and to leave the home army unmobilised.

The historian David Day has even argued, that the Menzies Government obviously did not do enough to secure the safety of Australia, because the available forces were all sent overseas, leaving just a thin shield for Australia's defence. He takes issue with the argument of Menzies, that Australia could only maintain her independent state as a nation by adhering to the family of nations headed by Great Britain, loyally supporting it. This policy was to place Australia in a position of great peril in 1942. This cannot be denied, but of course the political failures of the Menzies government are judged objectively with hindsight.

Even to outsiders it was evident that Australia had to invest more in its forward defence, specifically with respect to the Malay Barrier. The influential American journalist Callender stated in an interview: "Britain and the Dutch East Indies are allies against Germany in Europe but apparently not in the Far East. Australians can fly here to defend Singapore, but they cannot stop on route to lend help in the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch East Indies bear to Australia much the same strategic relations as Canada bears to the United States. Three Western Powers have vital interests in this part of the world and in the maintenance of defence forces here. Yet apparently no two of the three Western Powers have had staff talks or have taken specific steps towards collaboration in a possible emergency. Singapore and Pearl Harbor look at each other with friendly eyes, but that is all. Callender was right, of course, but it was not only the Australians who to blame for this state of affairs.

The apparent lack of trust by the Australian War Cabinet in the capabilities of senior Australian officers is unexplainable. It is a documented fact, that at the end of 1939 British


Gavin Long, op. cit., 27.

David Day: The Great Betrayal, 34.

officers commanded all three Services. In the case of the RAN there was a clear motivation: no officers of the RAN had as yet reached flag rank. The Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin RN, was already appointed in 1937 and knew Australian culture. The commander of the naval squadron, Rear-Admiral J.G. Crace, was Australian-born but joined the Royal Navy as a youth and rose through its ranks. When Colvin fell ill however, he was replaced on June 1 1941 by another British Admiral, Vice-Admiral Sir Guy Royle, RN. The situation was different for the Army, which had a good potential of senior officers. In 1939 the Cabinet appointed British Major-General E.K. Squires as Chief of Staff Australian Army to replace the Australian Major-General J.D. Lavarack. This action created considerable resentment in the regular officer corps. Also at the RAAF, the Australian Chief of Staff Air Vice-Marshall S.J. Goble was replaced at the end of 1939 by Air Chief Marshall Sir Charles Burnett RAF, who had been Inspector-General of the RAF. This appointment resulted in Australia now having a triumvirate of British senior officers in charge of its defence.

4.7. Facing the Japanese menace.

4.7.1. Introduction.

Casey discussed with Churchill during his stay in London in November 1939, on the explicit instruction of Menzies, whether Great Britain would assist the Netherlands East Indies in the case of a Japanese attack. If Britain failed to respond to such an attack, the Japanese would be sitting on Australia's doorstep, able to launch a lightning attack or even an invasion before the main fleet could even work up steam! The British Government got itself out of this predicament by declaring that it could in no way give any guarantee to Australia and/or the Netherlands East Indies without knowing the attitude of the United States. In effect, even the United States were considered by the British Government to be the dominating power in the Far East, due to its own weakness in that theatre. Churchill's admittance of British weakness eventually started the process of transfer of power from Great Britain to the United States in S.E. Asia far ahead of the same transfer in Western Europe some years later.

In the end, Casey and Bruce gave in on the assurances given that the main fleet would sail for Singapore in the case of a Japanese hostile act towards Australia, although the conditions under which it would sail remained unclear. Casey was supported by Bruce, who however had severe doubts about the overstretching of British naval forces, and who confided to a friend that British assessments of the Far East situation were "obviously framed in order to reassure Australia and make certain that the Expeditionary Force should be dispatched at an early date". Bruce's misgivings, potentially of great importance, were never communicated clearly and unequivocally to the Australian Government however.

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277 Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MunBuZa, 28 May 1941, no T6/4121/71. Secret Archives MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, Inv. nr. 111.

278 This resentment is still voiced in a modern military history of Australia like that of Jeffrey Grey, op. cit., 133.


From the same fear for the Japanese, the Australian Government sounded out Dutch willingness to defend themselves against Japanese incursions. On 1 December 1939 the Australian Minister of External Affairs, Sir Henry Gullett, had an open discussion with Mr. Elink Schuurman. Gullett stated that his Government feared a Japanese attack on Borneo's oilfields after the abrogation of the U.S. - Japanese Trade Treaty in the spring of 1940. The Dutch Consul General posed the question of why the Australians were sending their expeditionary Force to the Middle East, when they were so afraid about the fate of their northern neighbour. No satisfactory answer was given.

4.7.2. Deficiencies in the defence of the Malay barrier.

Like the Netherlands Indies, Australian security in defence against Japan depended on the fate of Singapore. Successive Australian Governments had been repeatedly assured that in time of need, a British battlefleet would be sent to contest with the Japanese fleet the control of the Malay Barrier. The problem now was to provide Malaya with an army and air force strong enough to hold out until such a fleet arrived. A liaison conference took place in Singapore from 22 to 31 October 1940, attended by staff officers from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, known later as the First Singapore Staff Conference. The conference identified a number of deficiencies in the defence of Singapore.

The results of the (First) Singapore Staff Conference were discussed in the Australian Cabinet, which concluded that the position of Singapore was so alarming that the prime minister, Menzies, should go to London to discuss this and other matters with Churchill. It also decided to send a brigade group (the 26th, part of the 8th AIF Division in the process of formation at that time) to Singapore as a temporary measure, but that it was to be relieved by Indian troops and concentrated in the Middle East as soon as possible. Bruce cabled from London that more than 60,000 Canadian troops stationed in the British Isles were becoming restive due to lack of activity, "particularly in face of Australian achievements in the Middle East". The Canadian Government was not willing, however, to consider relocation of the Canadians to Singapore. It was only at the end of 1941 that two Canadian battalions would arrive in Hongkong, there to be the first Western troops to be marched off into Japanese captivity.

It can be stated after the event, that the Australian government's preoccupation with building up land forces in the Middle East at the expense of Singapore could not be justified in any way, and was therefore a serious blunder.

When the successful British air attack on Taranto, on 9 November 1940, had put a large part of the Italian battlefleet out of action, the Australian Government again increased pressure on London for the despatch of three or four battleships to Singapore. Meanwhile, the new battleships of the KING GEORGE V class became available, relieving the

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2281 Letter Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 1 December 1939, T4/5304/337, ARA Sydney Archive, inv. nr. 800.
2283 S.M. Bruce to W.A. Fadden, Acting Prime Minister, 14 February 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 299, page 407.
pressure on capital ships. Bruce was instructed to talk to the Admiralty again, but to no avail, however. Churchill rejected any immediate possibility of dispatching (part of) the Mediterranean Fleet to Singapore, but reassured the Australian Government by stating that “if Australia is seriously threatened by invasion, we should not hesitate to compromise or sacrifice the Mediterranean position for the sake of our kith and kin.” This assurance was going to haunt Churchill in the coming months.

On the basis of the results of the First Singapore conference, the Australian Chiefs of Staff advised the cabinet to include Timor and the South Moluccas into Australia’s area of responsibility. The War Cabinet agreed, and when in February 1941 another staff conference took place in Singapore with the Dutch in attendance, the Australian proposal to reinforce Timor and Ambon was accepted by all parties concerned. The Australian Government however, noted the complete lack of a co-ordinated naval plan for the Far East, and asked for another Staff Conference in Singapore to complete such a plan without delay.

Another result of this conference was the set-up of an outer defence perimeter in the unprotected South-West Pacific Area. Small Australian detachments went to Rabaul, Vila in the New Hebrides, Tulagi and Buka in the Solomons, Manus in the Admiralty islands and Noumea, New Caledonia. Moreover, in the 1920's the Naval Intelligence Division had organised and instructed a network of “coast watchers” chosen from patrol officers, missionaries and plantation owners living among the local population on the coasts of New Guinea and the Solomons, and on Australia’s long tropical coasts. When war broke out, this secret service was around 800 strong, most of them on the Australian mainland. A retired naval lieutenant-commander, E.A. Feldt, who had long experience in New Guinea, was posted to Port Moresby to enlarge the organisation and to equip the coast watchers with portable teleradios. At length there was a line of watchers with teleradios, spread at intervals of 50 to 150 miles all along the chain of islands from the Ninigo group in the Northwest, through the Admiralties and New Ireland to the southern Solomons, and similar inner lines along the northern coast of new Guinea mainland and along new Britain - about sixty posts in all. These "coast watchers" proved invaluable when Japan invaded the South-west Pacific.

The visit of an American squadron to Sydney (20 - 23 March 1941) and Brisbane (25 - 28 March 1941) was much appreciated. The squadron consisted of the heavy cruisers USS CHICAGO and PORTLAND and 5 destroyers. At the same time the light cruisers USS BROOKLYN and SAVANNAH together with 4 destroyers, visited New Zealand and Fiji. It was a clear demonstration from the United States towards Japan. According to the Dutch C.G. the enthusiasm of the Australians was so great that it was almost embarrassing.

Another visit to Brisbane by the heavy cruisers USS SALT LAKE CITY and

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2284 R.G. Menzies to S.M. Bruce, 3 December 1940. DAFP, Volume IV, document 214, page 289.
2285 Cable 510, Lord Cranborne to Commonwealth Government, 23 december 1940, DAFP Volume IV, document 236.
By mid-1941 the Australian defence build-up was in full swing. The overseas forces had been designed on as large a scale as reliance on volunteers would permit. The navy was 16,000 strong. Of its six cruisers, three were in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic, (notably HMAS AUSTRALIA), and three in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The 5 destroyers were in the Mediterranean. The AIF consisted of 4 infantry divisions and corps troops, and the First Armoured Division was being formed, equipped with the home-built Matilda tanks. Australia had 62,000 men overseas and 53,000 in Australia. The Air Force numbered 33,000, with 7,900 volunteers on the waiting-list for training. The nineteen-squadron plan had been achieved and the Air Force planned to have 33 operational squadrons in Australia at the end of the year, albeit equipped with obsolete planes. There was still an imbalance, with the largest part of its best forces still employed in Europe and the Middle East.

4.7.3. Menzies in London.

Menzies had talked to the British Chiefs of Staff in London in March 1941. Menzies was informed that there were then 118 aircraft in Malaya, whereas in their view, 336 were needed, although the First Singapore Staff Conference had recommended 582 planes. Churchill intervened personally when he learned of this recommendation, claiming that he had not approved these "very large diversions of forces". At the request by Menzies that Hurricane fighter planes to be sent to Singapore, the Chiefs of Staff informed him that the 450 shore-based aircraft that the Japanese could marshal against Singapore were of "obsolete types", and that "we have no reasons to believe the Japanese standards are even comparable to those of the Italians". Hurricanes could be sent to the Far East only at the expense of the Middle East, but the American Buffalo Fighter "would probably prove more than a match for any Japanese aircraft". Moreover, the Dutch Air Force possessed 162 aircraft, "of types at least equal in performance to those of the Japanese", and had ordered an additional 245 aircraft from the United States, due to arrive in April 1941.

Churchill's under-estimation of Japanese strength and of the aggressiveness of its intentions had strongly influenced the thinking of his military advisers, who seemed to be very ill-informed on many aspects of the military situation in the Far East. For example, Menzies was told that Sir Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief Far East, had told the war cabinet, in February, that he was of the opinion that Singapore could defend itself for six months.

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2288 Ibid., letter of 12 August 1941, no T4/6147/111.

2289 Letter Consul-General Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 6 March 1941, no T6/1600/3. MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, no 1, inv. nr. 111.


2291 Memorandum for U.K. War Cabinet by U.K. Chiefs of Staff Committee, 11 April 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 400, pages 568 - 576. This is a most revealing document, which can also be found at PRO, CAB/4, COS(41), 230. It was especially prepared to answer the questions of R. Menzies during his visit to London and the discussions he had at the Admiralty on March 8 and 28, 1941.

2292 Ibid, page 569.
until a fleet arrived. On his visit to the Australian War Cabinet on 14 February 1941, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham repeated these statements. In reply to a direct question by Menzies, the British Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff Vice-Admiral T.S.V. Phillips (who was later to perish with the British Fleet in the South China Sea) answered, that "he would have no hesitation in engaging the Japanese Fleet with 60% of their number of British ships." The weakness of Menzies' position in London was his earlier acceptance of the Middle East as the theatre of war, in which Australia would make its greatest contribution and the fact that Australian troops would be abandoned in the case of the Mediterranean Fleet steaming away at full speed to relieve Singapore. The Australian Government had in effect run into a trap set by itself.

Menzies met the UK Cabinet in London on 8 April 1941, discussing an exchange of guarantees between Britain and the Netherlands East Indies. Agreement was reached to propose a mutual guarantee of support to the Dutch, who had been angling for such. As has been seen, the British Government did not honour the agreement. (Chapter 2, 212-214).

In the spring of 1941 the Australian Imperial Forces fought fierce battles in Cyrenaica (Tobruk), Greece, Crete and Syria. Menzies discovered, in London, that the British Cabinet had misled the Australian Government by asking Menzies to agree with the deployment of an Australian division in Greece with the assurance that the Australian Commander (Blamey) had already given his fiat. Blamey was told by the British COS, that Menzies had agreed to the use of the division, while Blamey himself was opposed to such use in Greece. There was surely a certain deviousness, in that the British used the apparent breakdown in communications between Menzies in London, Blamey in the Middle East and the Australian Government in Canberra to advance its own designs. As is known, the Australian landings in Greece ended in disaster.

Predictably, the long lists of casualties caused unrest in Australia about the handling of the war by the Government. The Dutch Consul General duly reported the considerable commotion within the Australian population. The Members of the ALP in Parliament even accused the British of "cold-blooded murder" in despatching poorly equipped troops

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2236 J.J. Dedman, op. cit., 342.
2237 War Cabinet Minutes, 14 February 1941. AA CRS A 2673, Volume 5, Minute 801.
2240 Enclosure at Letter Mr R.A. Butler to Mr R.G. Menzies, 11 April 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, doc. 399, page 567, and PRO FO 371/27775.
2243 Letter T. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 24 April 1940, no T4/3005/57, MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, inv. nr. 111.
to be "butchered" in Greece and Crete. They claimed that Churchill was "not entitled to the
tributes paid to him". This threatened the credibility of Menzies as a war leader more
than even the Japanese move into Southern French Indo-China. It also led to serious
conflicts between Menzies and Churchill, with Menzies attempting to obtain a larger
influence in running the war.

4.7.4. A possible Australian guarantee for the Dutch.

Soon after his return to Australia Menzies advised his war cabinet that the British govern-
ment displayed too much complacency regarding the defence position in the Pacific, and
that "it is now evident that, for too long, we readily accepted the general assurances about
the defence of this area". The discussion about the relative importance to Australia of
the Middle East theatre versus Singapore continued in the Advisory War Council for many
weeks. Curtin of the ALP made it clear that he was not satisfied that a proper balance had
been struck "between what we can do in those theatres and what we are called upon to do
in Australia".

In order to put pressure on the negotiations with Britain concerning a security guarantee,
the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Van Kleffens, in a farewell broadcast given on
leaving the NEI on 6 May 1941, promised resolute action by the Dutch to any outside
threat. He declared that the Dutch were willing to fight if necessary. He mentioned that the
British Commander-in-Chief had indicated in a conversation with the press that a line,
running from Singapore to Australia via the Netherlands East Indies, must be treated as a
whole. Van Kleffens stressed that an attack from the outside on any point situated on this
line had to be considered as an attack on the whole line, affecting all parties alike. It
was a courageous speech. Van Kleffens thereafter travelled to Australia for an official visit.
There he met with Menzies and other members of the Cabinet.

Menzies concluded from these conversations that the Dutch Government could live with
private assurances about a guarantee. He stated to Van Kleffens that the Australian
Government would welcome and endorse private assurances to the Dutch Government,
expressing the hope that corresponding private assurances could be obtained from the

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2301 David Day: "Anzacs on the run: the view from Whitehall, 1941 - 1942" Journal of Imperial and
Commonwealth History, Volume 14, no 3, May 1986, page 189, note 13. Also Memorandum by Cranborne, 21
August 1941, PRO CAB 66/18, WP (41)198.

2302 For a somewhat overcharged account of the conflict between Menzies and Churchill see David Day:
"Menzies and Churchill at War: a controversial new account of the 1941 struggle for Power" Angus &
Robertson, Sydney 1986.

2303 War Cabinet Submission by Mr. Menzies, 4 June 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 484, page 700.
See also the quotes from the Mnezie Diaries in David Day: "The Great Betrayal", page 127.

2304 J.J. Dedman, op. cit., 343.

2305 Lord Cranborne to A.W. Fadden, 22 May 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, doc. 484, page 691.

2306 Van Kleffens and Welte reported in depth about their visit to the Dutch Council of Ministers of 27 June
1941, which alas has been reduced to some sentences in the Minutes of the Council. DBPN, Series C, Volume
III, document 67.
Moreover, Menzies made it clear to Whitehall that Australia could not allow a Japanese invasion of the Netherlands East Indies to go unanswered. The Dutch, however, were kept in the dark about this Australian position. The Staff Conversations in Singapore of April 1941 had given all parties concerned the feeling that whatever the political expediency of a declaration or of a guarantee, the prospective Allies were all in the same boat. It was this feeling of no longer being isolated that gave the Dutch the courage to join in the American oil embargo against Japan, a few months later.

Another anxiety in this respect was the American determination to reinforce their Atlantic Fleet at the cost of the US Pacific Fleet. It was a consequence of the "Germany First"-policy developed by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff and approved by President Roosevelt (page 90-91) The Australian Government was quite aware of this American strategy, thanks to the reports of Casey from Washington. The arguments of those in favour of such large-scale Fleet movements were, according to Casey, "that Japan would be so impressed with America's determination that Britain shall win and that these moves will be taken to mean that the United States is about to enter the war, that Japan will hesitate to take any action that will place her on the losing side. It is on this gamble on Japanese reactions that advocates of the proposal rely". Proponents of this move were the Secretaries Stimson (Army) and Knox (Navy), supported by their Chiefs of Staff Stark and Marshall. The Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Kimmel, stated in a confidential meeting with Casey that if any more battleships had left the Pacific, it would have resulted in Japanese aggression.

The Australian Government was, of course, not enthusiastic about this move either, but found consolation in the fact that large-scale Fleet movements into the Atlantic would possibly free British capital ships to reinforce Singapore. The losses to the British Fleet during the disastrous evacuation of Crete, in May 1941 prevented such a reinforcement however, even causing the Americans to stop projected further transfers of ships from the Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic Fleet. The decision to end the weakening of the US Pacific Fleet was taken in consultation with the British Admiralty, illustrating the hollowness of the arguments used to rationalise the transfer of the ships as given above. The transfer was now limited to 3 battleships, 1 aircraft carrier, 4 cruisers and 19 destroyers, and was completed before the middle of June 1941. In combination with the Lend-Lease transfer of 51 old destroyers to the Royal Navy, it also illustrates the degree of cooperation which already existed at that time between the two navies.

After the fall of Menzies his successor, Arthur Fadden, inherited a most unfortunate situation concerning the control of the Second AIF. Since the Syrian campaign of July 1941, Australian Army Units had been dispersed between Tobruk (the Ninth Division),

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207 Commonwealth Govt to Lord Cranborne, 30 May 1941. DAFP Ibid. doc. 476, page 691.

208 DAFP, Volume IV, documents 438, 441 - 443, 445 - 446, 455. The last document is an Australian War Cabinet discussion paper dated 14 May, 1941.


211 A.W. Fadden, acting Prime Minister, to Lord Cranborne, 4 May 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 446, page 636.

Syria and Cyprus (the Seventh Division) and Palestine (a depleted Sixth Division). The whole episode of the Greek campaign illustrated, in Australian eyes Britain's handling of the Pacific Dominions as though they were mere pawns. The Canadian Government had been more astute with respect to control of its own forces. The Canadian commanding Generals, A.G.L. McNaughton and H.D.G. Crerar, kept their divisions in a separate Canadian Corps which did not see any action, with the exception of the Dieppe raid, until it was partly deployed in Italy in April 1943. In contrast, the Australians had already been fighting for the Empire since early 1940! The AIF Commander, Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Blamey, and the Australian Government, sought British agreement to the relief of the Australian troops in Tobruk and the consolidation of the Australian corps into one force. Australian disappointment on the British posture during the Greek campaign together British foot-dragging in the Tobruk case, led to an escalation of an acrimonious disagreement between Churchill and Fadden, and later John Curtin, on the issue of control over the Australian troops.

4.7.5. Strategic Outlook in October 1941.

During his visit to Australia in October 1941, the Commander-in-Chief Far East, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, was invited to attend an Advisory War Council. This Council meeting took place on October 16, and Sir Robert used the opportunity to give an overview of the defence of the Far East, seen from his vantage point. He stated that the whole area, comprising Burma, Malaya, Netherlands East Indies, Australia, New Zealand and The Philippines, comprised one strategic area. The defence of one affected the others and this was now fully realised by the countries concerned, thanks to the Singapore Staff conversations. The U.S.A. would definitively defend the Philippines, and the Netherlands East Indies were fully prepared to defend their own territory and to co-operate in the defence of Malaya, for which 4 Dutch fighter squadrons would be provided. On the ground, Malaya was growing from strength to strength. In the last six weeks another Brigade had arrived from Australia and one from India. The strength of the Air Forces was improving and there were now five single-seater fighter squadrons equipped with new aircraft. (Breuster Buffaloes) The Minutes state that according to Sir Robert "Our fighters are of the Buffalo type, which are superior to the Japanese and well suited for the work in Malaya, but there is a shortage of long-range bombers". There was also a shortage of torpedo bombers, for which reliance was placed on Australian production of Beauforts. Prodded by the PM (John Curtin), Sir Robert declared that, compared with the expansion programme of 336 aircraft adopted by the UK Chiefs of Staff in April last, the total number of aircraft in Malaya was now about 180, and still deficient. He expected a substantial increase in aircraft not earlier than next year, and said, that he had made all representations short of resigning. He pointed out, however, that all indications suggested that Japan had

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2314 For the Minutes of this Meeting see Advisory War Council Minute 533, 16 October 1941, DAFP Volume V, document 84, pages 141 - 146. The document gives an excellent insight in the Intelligence estimates on the British side about Japanese war aims, and strengths and weaknesses.

2318 Ibid., page 143. The Buffalo however was no match for the Japanese Zero fighter - a fact which was well known to Intelligence Staffs in Singapore and Melbourne, but not widely circulated. Gavin Long, op. cit., 120.

2316 Ibid., page 144.
temporarily diverted its attention from the south to the north, because of the German successes in Eastern Europe. It would take some time for Japan to re-concentrate for a move southwards and it would not be able to undertake a large-scale attack in the south for the next three months\textsuperscript{2317}. While the Russian threat persisted, the maximum number of aircraft Japan could provide for operations in the south was about 500, not all of which were modern types. Due to the lack of aerodromes in Southern Indo-China, the availability of aircraft for operational use was restricted to about 250. Sir Robert stated that "Our existing air forces could cope with any aircraft the Japanese could base on their present aerodromes during the next three months"\textsuperscript{2318}.

Presumably it was unknown to Brooke-Popham that Churchill, at the end of August 1941, had offered Stalin an extra 200 Hurricanes on top of the forty already being sent, and he had promised another 200 Tomahawk P-40 fighter planes from the United States. Therefore, the Chiefs of Staff had to inform Sir Robert that their plan to accumulate a force of 336 aircraft in Malaya at the end of 1941 could no longer be met\textsuperscript{2319}. Between June and December 1941, Britain itself shipped some 600 modern fighters to Russia, where they quickly disappeared in the cauldron of the Eastern Front\textsuperscript{2320}.

With respect to the Naval situation, Sir Robert remarked that the British strength had shown little improvement since February, but that a strong force of capital ships was to be placed in the Indian Ocean by the beginning of the next year.

4.7.6. The Page Mission.

In September 1941 Fadden had already decided to send Earle Page, a former Prime Minister and an eminent member of the Country Party, to London to represent Australia in the British War Cabinet and to seek reinforcement for Singapore. The subsequent Curtin Government confirmed this appointment. On his way to London, Page visited Batavia, Singapore and General MacArthur in Manila. During his stay in Batavia, he met the Dutch Governor-General on 27 September 1941. The G.G. reported to the Dutch Government that the mission of Page in London was to get British battleships to Singapore. He strongly urged the Dutch Government to act in concert with the Australian Government, out of evident self-interest\textsuperscript{2321}. Early in November 1941 Page was in London and pressing for more reinforcements for Malaya. When he arrived however, the nature of the reinforcements to the Far East in which Australia was most interested, the battle fleet, had already been determined.

Earle Page met the Foreign Secretary (Anthony Eden) after his arrival in London, telling

\textsuperscript{2317} Ibid, page 143.

\textsuperscript{2318} Ibid., page 143.

\textsuperscript{2319} Cable no 34, COS to Brooke Popham, 17 sept.1941, V4/33 Brooke-Popham Papers, King’s College, London; David Day "The Great Betrayal", p. 184, note 37. The result was , that in December 1941 the only modern fighter available in Australia was an unarmèd Hurricane, shipped to there for demonstration purposes.

\textsuperscript{2320} Raymond Callahan: "The illusion of security: Singapore 1919 - 1942" Journal of Contemporary History, 9:2, april 1974, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{2321} Telegram Governor-General to Minister of Colonies 27 September 1941, no 586/U, ARA Sydney Archive, inv. nr 78, and MinBuZa archive London Legation, telegram DZ 5251 GA/1256, inv. nr. 1415.
him that Australia was keen to send forces to the Netherlands East Indies to pre-empt any moves by Japan in that direction, but was hampered by the lack of any defence agreement with the Dutch to do so. Eden brought the viewpoint of the Australian Government in discussions at the War Cabinet Meeting of 3 November, but was rebuffed by Churchill, who claimed that there was "no evidence of any early intention" by Japan to attack the NEI, and that it must be Britain's policy to persuade the United States to underwrite the security of South-East Asia. Page presented his case once again to the War Cabinet on November 5, and to Churchill on 16 November, but he achieved nothing due to Churchill's stubbornness.

Earle Page reported on the discussion he had with Churchill on 16 November 1941. Churchill restated his willingness to break off actions in the Middle East if Australia was menaced by Japan. He also stated that it would be a grave strategic error to move forces to the Far East now - possibly to remain inactive for a year - while these forces were now actively engaged against the Germans and the Italians. The correct strategy was to move British strength from theatre to theatre as the situation demanded. At that time, the theatre in which forces could be most profitably employed was undoubtedly the Middle East. Churchill obviously underestimated the possibility of Japan going to war within a month.

It was not only Page, who pressed Churchill for a guarantee to the Dutch. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir Bruce Fraser, did the same in October 1941 when he had a meeting with Churchill. After his return from England, the Dutch consul in Wellington Mr. Vigeveno asked him pointblank what he thought was the reason for Churchill's opposition to such a guarantee. Fraser answered that the British did not have enough battleships in the Far East to give such a guarantee any teeth, but added that in his view that argument was false. Implicit in the asking for a guarantee was, of course, the assumption that it could never be maintained and that such a guarantee should also be effective. Furthermore he thought that Britain was obliged to support the Netherlands East Indies in case of an attack, irrespective of the scale of the support.

Looking back on the Australian pressure on the British government to get some kind of security guarantee for the Netherlands East Indies, it must be concluded that the Australian (and New Zealand) initiatives were stonewalled by Churchill and the Admiralty. The statement by De Jong that Australia would not guarantee Dutch integrity, is therefore fundamentally incorrect.

4.7.7. The Duff Cooper Mission.

A very important discussion took place on the other side of the globe on November 7, 1941, between Mr. Duff Cooper and the Australian Advisory War Council. Alfred Duff Cooper was an intimate friend of Churchill, and was sent by him on a fact-finding tour of the Far East. His first action proved an unlucky one. On his arrival in Singapore, he proposed the replacement of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham.

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2322 War Cabinet Conclusions, 3 November 1941, PRO CAB 65/24, W.M. 109(41).


Churchill concurred, ca using a strong protest from the Australian Government, which was not consulted, although Australia was providing much of the defence force of Singapore. Churchill thereupon reversed his decision. The effect of the dispute was that Singapore had a "lame duck" commander, when the Japanese attacked.

At the Australian Advisory War Council, Duff Cooper stated, that the main objection to giving a specific guarantee of assistance to the Netherlands East Indies came from the Admiralty. Their view was supported by Churchill, based on the belief that if the Japanese attacked the N.E.I., it was advantageous for the U.K. to delay a declaration of war to Japan for a few weeks, to enable the U.K. to make the necessary naval dispositions and to arrange for the protection of shipping. The value of these weeks gained might be inestimable. Mr. McEwen (Minister of Foreign Affairs) said that he was "profoundly shocked to hear that the U.K. War Cabinet might delay warlike operations in the defence of the NEI for three or four weeks. The position of the NEI in relation to Australia was similar to the Channel Ports in relation to England" and he felt that to delay operations in order to save a few ships was unjustified. He asked that the Commonwealth Government should make a vigorous protest against this. Mr. Menzies added, that the motion of the Admiralty to delay action was something that existed in an unreal world.

Hard pressed, Duff Cooper stated that it was never contemplated that the U.K. should not go to the assistance of the Netherlands East Indies. The question of when this should be done was a purely strategic one. He reiterated that the U.K. Government was prepared to abandon the Mediterranean altogether if this were necessary to hold Singapore. This statement was met with disbelief by some participants. Menzies openly doubted whether Churchill was in fact fully conversant with the vital significance of Singapore. The Prime Minister, Curtin, closed this part of the meeting by stating that Australia would go to war if Japan attacked the Netherlands Indies or Russia. It was the firm conviction of all political parties in Australia that the Far Eastern Powers should co-operate to the fullest extent. They should not permit a situation to develop which would enable Japan to attack them one by one. This clear statement by the Prime Minister was intended to make it very difficult for the U.K. Government to abstain from action should the Netherlands East Indies be attacked by Japan, with Australia rushing to aid the Dutch. As we now know, this is theoretical conjecturing however, for Japan attacked the British first before they attacked the Dutch. From the above discussions however it is clear, that Australia at least was prepared to go to war against the Japanese in the case of them attacking the Netherlands East Indies.

On his visit to New Zealand, Duff Cooper gave a press conference on 21 November 1941 in Auckland. On insistent questioning why no British guarantee had been given to the Netherlands East Indies, the Minister said he was unable to go into that matter fully. He thought, however, that the Dutch authorities understood the position and were quite happy

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227 Advisory War Council Minute no 560, Canberra 7 November 1941. DAFP, Volume V, document no 104, page 179.

228 Ibid., page 181.

229 Ibid., page 180.

230 Ibid., page 181.
about it\textsuperscript{231}. That may have been the position of the Governor-General a year ago, but the statement was obviously not true at that time.

4.7.8. American War Warnings.

Minister Casey at Washington rang the alarm bell on 29 November 1941. He had spoken to the American Secretary of War, H.L. Stimson, and Maj.-General S. Miles, head of the U.S. Army Intelligence Service. According to their information, the Japanese had withdrawn troops from Central China and deployed them in Southern Indo-China, Hainan and the Mandated Islands. Aircraft was flown in quantity to the Southern Indo-China airfields, and a sizable Japanese naval task force of 4 battleships, 3 aircraft carriers, 11 heavy and 5 light cruisers and 47 destroyers was concentrating at Taiwan and Hainan. Miles concluded that the Japanese now had a task force ready of about 5 divisions, supported by sizable naval and air units for the execution of aggressive moves in South-East Asia, and that this force was now on its way south to unknown destinations. His estimates proved to be accurate later. Casey concluded his information with the statement that “War Warnings” had been issued by the American CNO (Admiral H. Stark) to the Commanders of the US Asiatic and Pacific Fleets and the Army Commanders in the Philippines and Hawaii\textsuperscript{232}.

Pearl Harbor laid to rest the possibility that Australia would face a Japanese attack without American aid - the ultimate nightmare of Australian defence planners. Like the Netherlands, Australia was excluded from the discussions between Churchill and Roosevelt about the creation of ABDA-Command and, like the Netherlands, denied any effective voice in decision making at the top of ABDA-Command. Australia was not consulted either when Roosevelt and Churchill, after the fall of Java, decided, on March 18, to create two new war zones: the South-East Asia Command Area SEAC, and the South-West Pacific Area SWPA. Australia and New Zealand were in the SWPA, like the Netherlands-Indies with the exception of Sumatra, and with that ended the direct British involvement in the Pacific War. Australia became a junior partner in an alliance with the United States. As has been noted\textsuperscript{233}, Australia simply lacked adequate status: its limited military strength confined it to the role of petitioner to Britain, and later on to the United States. The parallel with the predicament of the Dutch Government in exile is striking indeed.

4.8. Dutch - Australian relations.

4.8.1. First contacts.

Although they discovered the western and southern part of Australia, Dutch interest in Australia was almost non-existent till the 1850’s and the goldrush in Victoria. That event created trading opportunities, albeit not without certain risks.

The development of the Federation of the Australian States into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, was an occasion for many festivities. The Dutch Consul General in

\textsuperscript{231} Letter of Consul M.F. Vigeveno at Wellington to Consul-General in Sydney, 27 November 1941, Secret Archives MinBuZa, Sydney Archive, box 13, inv. nr. 111.


\textsuperscript{233} DAFP, Volume V, page xv.
Melbourne, W.L. Bosschart, urged that a warship should be sent to join the festivities. He was supported by the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, W. Rosenboom. The request ran into trouble with the Cabinet in The Hague, however, due to the strong anti-British feelings in the Netherlands due to the Boer War. When an official invitation from the British Government was received, the Dutch Government decided to send a warship anyway. The armoured cruiser HNMS NOORD-BRABANT from the East Indies squadron arrived in Melbourne on May 1 1901, to take part in the International Fleet Review and other festivities. The arrival of this ship made a favourable expression, and strengthened the commercial ties between Australia and the Netherlands.

In 1908, the Java-Australia Line was founded by the Dutch inter-island shipping company KPM (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij: Royal Dutch Steam Packet Company), and regular shipping routes were established.

The agitation in Australia to buy, or otherwise occupy, the Western (Dutch) half of New Guinea in order to forestall a German occupation, caused the Dutch Government in Batavia to prepare another showing of the flag. In August 1910 a squadron of 3 armoured cruisers left Batavia to visit the major Australian ports. No less than 145 crew members, however, decided to stay in Australia, with as a result that the ships returned to Java severely undermanned. Nonetheless, the cruise was a qualified success.

Trade relations remained steady thereafter. The importance of it is illustrated by the appointment of an Australian Trade Commissioner attached to the British Consulate at Batavia in 1916, even earlier than the appointment of Commissioners in Paris (1917) and New York (1918). Although East Indian imports and exports declined overall in the early thirties, trade with Australia increased. Flour and dairy products like milk and butter, coal and horses for the KNIL were imported from Australia; tea, sugar, kapok, rice, oil and oil products went the other way. The Trade Commissions Act of 1933 resulted in the appointment of an Australian Trade Commissioner in Batavia, not being stationed at the British Consulate-General. The only other Commissioners at that time were based at Shanghai and Wellington, N.Z. The Dutch entry in the London-Melbourne Race of 1934, with the famous KLM airplane UIVER (Stork), resulted in the Netherlands in general and the Dutch Airline in particular, enjoying much publicity in Australia. In 1938 a regular air service was instituted between Batavia and Sydney via Darwin.

The Australian Goodwill Mission to the Far East, under J.G. Latham, started its tour to Asia with a ten-day visit to Java, where the Mission was extensively entertained by colonial officials, both military and civil, between 1 and 11 April 1934. In his Secret Report on the Mission, Latham recommended closer cooperation, especially between the Australian and Dutch navies. Anticipating the criticism that this might cause, Latham stated that such
a move would be appropriate. At the very least he proposed the instruction of a number of Australian naval officers in the Dutch language.

The increasing menace of Japan, and the "abandonism" of the U.S.A. with respect to The Philippines, resulted in growing interest in diplomatic contacts between Australia and the Dutch Government. After the Imperial Conference in London in June 1937, the Australian Premier, Joseph Lyons, visited the Dutch Premier in the Netherlands, Hendrik Colijn. The Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, De Graeff, and the High Commissioner of Australia in London, S.M. Bruce, discussed their common problems vis-à-vis Japan during the Disarmament Conference in Brussels in November 1937. It only resulted however in a condemnation of the Japanese invasion of China.


Both Governments, Dutch and Australian, had one problem in common: Japanese economic penetration into Portuguese Timor. A Japanese company (the Nanyo Kohatsu Kaisha or South Seas Development Company) would like to prospect for oil there, negotiations being reported with the Portuguese owner to buy an area of about 20 square miles in Portuguese Timor. It was the same company which already had a strong foothold in Davao, the Philippines, and which had approached the Dutch Government for oil concessions in Western New Guinea. Portuguese Timor would also make an admirable base for Japanese fishermen, whose activities in the past years had caused much concern to the Governments of Australia and the Netherlands East Indies.

Exploration for oil in East Timor was underway by the Allied Mining Corporation (AMC) of Manila, which had obtained a concession from the Portuguese in 1936. This company was headed by Mr. Serge F. Wittouck, Director of Asia Company of Hongkong and president of its subsidiary, the AMC. Rumours had it that the AMC was financed with German, and maybe even Japanese capital. The British Consul General in Batavia, Henry Fitzmaurice, described Wittouck as a most unscrupulous financier, who might use his leverage to sell his Company to the Japanese at a good price. It was also Fitzmaurice, who had warned the Foreign Secretary, Mr. A. Eden, on 14th July 1937 about the activities of the Japanese in Portuguese Timor, information which he had obtained in strict confidence from the Adviser for Far Eastern Affairs in Batavia, A. Lovink. His Office of East Asian Affairs was in effect the Dutch counter-espionage bureau and Lovink worked together in deep secrecy with the British Intelligence Unit in Singapore. (Chapter 2, pages 214, 228) In November 1937, Vice-Consul Edward Lambert from Batavia visited Portuguese Timor for an investigation on the spot. He found that the Portuguese had not concluded any new concessions, either with Wittouck or the Japanese.

Lambert also discussed the possibilities of an airline to Dilly with the new Portuguese Governor, Major Alvaro Neves da Fontoura. He found the Governor strongly anti-Dutch,
because of the misuse the Dutch had made of the monopolistic position of the KPM with regard to import and export to and from the colony. The Australian government investigated the possibility of an airline between Dilly and Darwin, but found the expenses prohibitive. It was now up to the Portuguese to consider an offer for a connecting line Koepang - Dilli by the Dutch KNILM, or to turn to the Japanese to finance such an air connection. Both possibilities were however unacceptable to the Portuguese. Therefore the Australian government in 1939 reversed its position, and agreed to open a fortnightly air service between Darwin and Dilli, with the exclusion of any nation other than Portugal.

4.8.3. The visit of the Australian Governor-General to Batavia.

Under these circumstances, the Australian government considered it wise to sound out the Dutch on closer cooperation between the two governments. R.G. Menzies suggested, in a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. J.A. Lyons dated 23 December 1937, the possibility of a goodwill visit of Lord and Lady Gowrie to Batavia on their way to London in April 1938. Brigadier-General Alexander Gore Arkwright Hore-Ruthven, Baron Gowrie was the Governor-General of Australia, and as such the highest authority of the Australian government. Mr. Elink Schuurman, the Dutch Consul General in Sydney, confirmed that the Governor-General was welcome.

The informal request for an official invitation, via the British Minister in The Hague, caused real consternation within the Dutch Government. Reasons for this, as given by the Dutch Governor-General, Starkenborgh Stachouwer, were the precedent it would give other, less welcome visitors, like the Governor-General of (Japanese) Taiwan, or - still worse! - the new President of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon. The latter's possible visit would be a most unwelcome stimulus in increasing nationalist fervour in the Netherlands East Indies. The Governor-General therefore suggested issuing not an official invitation, but the following formula: the Dutch Government, upon learning of the planned holiday visit of the Australian Governor-General to the Netherlands Indies on his way to the United Kingdom, would invite him to visit the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia. This formula was indeed proposed by the Dutch Government to the British Minister, but from the correspondence between the Governor-General and the Dutch Government it is abundantly clear, that the Dutch were not at all happy with this Australian initiative.

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2346 Letter of W.M. Hughes, Minister External Affairs to Mr. Fitzmaurice, 5 April 1938. DAFP, Volume I, document 176, page 311 - 312.

2347 Cablegram Australian Government to Sir Walford Selby, UK Ambassador to Portugal, 10 August 1939. DAFP, Volume II, document 130, page 168.

2348 Letter of Lyons to M. McDonald, UK Secretary for Dominion Affairs, in which Lyons asked for an official invitation of Lord Gowrie to be secured through official diplomatic channels. DAFP Volume I, document 117, page 243 - 244.


2350 ARA, Archief Dept. van Kolonien, dossier 10/1/1938 A-1 doos 509.
Lord and Lady Gowrie arrived in Bali on April 2, 1938. They were escorted by Lt. Col. F. Milius KNIL and Dr. K.F.J. Verboeck at the Cabinet of the Governor-General. After Bali, the dignitaries visited Surabaya, Solo, Yogyakarta, Semarang, Bandoeng, Batavia and Buitenzorg. At Bandoeng, on April 5, 1938, a visit was made to the headquarters of the Netherlands Indies Army. The next day, the Army Commander, Lieut.-General M. Boerstra, staged a display by the Militaire Luchtvaart ML - the Air Section of the Army. On the seventh of April Lord and Lady Gowrie paid a formal state visit to the Governor-General, had tea with the Council of the Netherlands Indies, and in the evening attended a gala banquet at the Rijswijk Palace in Batavia. Next day, Lord and Lady Gowrie again visited the Governor-General, now at his palace in Buitenzorg. The party left for Singapore by plane on 9 April, escorted by six Glenn Martin bombers of the ML.

Although military cooperation was not formally discussed, the Dutch authorities did try to impress upon the high-ranking visitors the state of readiness of Dutch defences of Netherlands East Indies, and really tried to put the recently acquired Glenn Martin bombers in the limelight. In this they succeeded, as the visitors were duly impressed.

The visit of Lord and Lady Gowrie aroused speculation in the Australian Press about Anglo-Dutch defence co-operation. However, no documentary evidence has been found, neither in Australia nor in the Netherlands, that defence had been discussed. The strongly neutralistic attitude of Dutch officials, for whom neutrality was Holy Writ, would have precluded a formal discussion of defence matters at that time. That informal discussions on military matters had taken place can be deduced however from a letter sent by the Colonial Office in London to the F.O., in which it is stated that should the Committee on Imperial Defense CID object to proposals for closer collaboration with the Dutch, Lord Gowrie should be informed without delay.

Another indication that defence cooperation had indeed been discussed informally, is to be found in the report on a meeting between Lord Gowrie and the Dutch Minister, Count van Limburg Stirum, on 11 May 1938. Lord Gowrie talked freely about Australian re-armament plans and about the defences of Singapore, which he had inspected after his visit to Batavia.

To the outside world however, the image of strict Dutch neutrality had to be maintained. Therefore, the articles appearing in the Sydney Morning Herald of 6th and 7th April 1938 regarding Anglo-Dutch defence co-operation caused acute embarrassment to the Dutch vis-à-vis the Japanese. The Dutch Consul General asked formally for a kind of official
statement by the Australian government that no defence issues had been discussed\textsuperscript{2354}. Prime Minister Lyons obliged, and made such a statement in the House of Representatives on 27 April 1938, in which he referred to Lord Gowrie's visit and emphasized that, contrary to press speculation, the visit "had no political or military significance whatsoever"\textsuperscript{2355}.

On June 26 1938 the Australian Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Earle Page, visited the Netherlands to assist in the inauguration of the KLM "Flying Dutchman" line from Batavia to Sydney, in cooperation with Qantas Airlines and Imperial Airways. Sir Page drew the attention of the Dutch officials to the possibility of Dutch emigration to Australia, but common defence subjects were not discussed, as far as we know\textsuperscript{2358}.

In the final months up to the outbreak of war in Europe, Australian interest in the Far East situation decreased noticeably. All attention was drawn by Hitler's machinations with Czechoslovakia and later Poland. The Dutch Consul General reported a far more imperial orientation of the Australian Defence Staff, caused by the steadily worsening situation in Europe and the Middle East, and the activities of the Japanese Army on the Manchurian-Russian border. The willingness to discuss possibilities to assist the Dutch should they be threatened by Japan, diminished appreciably\textsuperscript{2357}.

4.8.4. Necessity of closer cooperation.

The genesis of military cooperation between the Anglo-Saxon Dominions and the Netherlands originated not in Australia, but in New Zealand. The Dutch consul in Wellington, Mr. M.F. Vigeveno, reported on March 23 1939 on a frank discussion with Commodore W. Horan, the Naval Chief of Staff New Zealand. Horan strongly emphasized the need for Dutch cooperation in the defence of the Pacific, therefore stressing the importance of Dutch representation at the approaching Pacific Defence Conference, which was planned to take place in Wellington from 14 to 26 April, 1939. He stated to Vigeveno: "You must come in beforehand", i.e. before Japan had actually attacked\textsuperscript{2358}.

The Pacific Defence Conference in Wellington has been covered in some depth in the Chapter 2 on Great Britain. (Page 37 - 38) One of the conclusions of this conference was, indeed, that an approach should be made to the Netherlands\textsuperscript{2359}. It was the Australian Naval Chief of Staff, Sir Ragnar Colvin, who approached the Dutch Consul General in Sydney about the possibility of a visit by him to the Netherlands East Indies to discuss

\textsuperscript{2354} Letter of Mr. T. Elink Schuurman to W.R. Hodgson, Secretary Dept. of External Affairs, DAFP, Volume I, document 192, page 337 - 338.

\textsuperscript{2355} Ibid., note no 3.

\textsuperscript{2356} A. Stirling to Sec., Dept. of Ext. Affairs, letter S.5672, July 2, 1938. AA Canberra, accession no A 816/1, file no 19/305/58.

\textsuperscript{2357} Letter Mr. Elink Schuurman to MinFA, 17 March 1939, no T4/1186/71, ARA Sydney Archives, accession number 2.05, inv.nr.800.

\textsuperscript{2358} ARA Sydney Archives, inv. 800, letter of March 23, 1939 no 628/CG 66, p. 7. For the conception of this Naval Conference, see W. David McIntyre, op. cit., p. 141 - 143.

\textsuperscript{2359} Ibid, Letter Vigeveno of 29 May 1939, no 956/CG 112, p. 2.
Relations with the Netherlands East Indies remained quiet up to the outbreak of war in Europe, but Australian anxieties increased about the possibility of a change of the status quo in the Pacific in the case of a German attack on the Netherlands. On November 10 1939, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, W.R. Hodgson, approached the Office of External Affairs in London, with the question as to whether Great Britain had any policy in relation to such a change in status quo. As we have seen in chapter 2, Admiral Dreyer had raised the same issue in 1935 (page 188). The issue was discussed with the Foreign Office and the British War Cabinet Secretariat. The British view was that the Dutch would resist a German attack on the Netherlands and would cooperate with Great Britain as allies. This would include, if required, co-operation with the British in dealing with German interests in the Netherlands East Indies. It was expected that the Dutch would have no difficulty in handling this matter themselves and that local naval commanders would immediately collaborate in catching German ships leaving East Indian ports.

This expectation was based on a report by the Commander-in-Chief China Station, Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Noble RN, who had visited Tandjoeng Priok in April 1939 on board his flagship, HMS KENT. He met the Dutch Naval and Military Commanders in Chief, and reported on the conversations to his superiors. A copy of this Report went to the Australian Navy Board in Melbourne. The talks must have gone further than the normal exchange of pleasantries, because Sir Percy gives information about the secret Dutch airfields in Borneo, and reflects on the implied Dutch criticism on the lack of a British coast watchers’ organisation in British Northern Borneo and Malaya. The report is also politically important, because it clearly states the intention of the Dutch to defend their neutrality by force. To quote: “the use or occupation of any part of the Dutch East Territory by the Japanese will at once be countered by bombing, and the Dutch will immediately declare war themselves in the event of Japanese aggression”. Before this Report, there was uncertainty in British and Australian defence circles about the willingness of the Dutch to defend themselves, in the case of Japan occupying parts of their territory. As the Sandakan Report highlights, it was even informally proposed by the Dutch that the British Fleet and aircraft would operate in the Singapore-Sumatra-Borneo theatre, and that Dutch forces should operate East of this area with Soerabaya and Ambon as their bases.

All this was discussed in secluded quarters on board the British ships. As has been seen in the previous pages, the official policy of the Dutch was the maintenance of a strict neutrality. At the same time that the Dutch formally turned down the invitation to join the Pacific Defence Conference, they informally proposed cooperative measures to Admiral

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2360 Letter Elink Schuurman to MinBuZa, 14 June 1939, T 20/2541, ARA Sydney Archives, inv.nr. 800.


2363 Vice-Adm. Sir Percy Noble: Intelligence Report Dutch East Indies. 17 April 1939, HMS KENT at Sandakan. AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File 2021/8/202. The Report also gives interesting information on Japanese peaceful penetration in the East Indies (including a map of all Japanese concessions) and on Gunnery in the Dutch Navy, which was commented on favorably.
Noble. It seems incomprehensible, but that is the way of politics.

4.8.5. Secret munitions supplies for the N.E.I.

At about the same time, articles appeared in the American Press with speculations about a Japanese seizure of the East Indies in the case of a German occupation of the Netherlands. The Australian Counsellor at the British Embassy in Washington, Mr. F.K. Officer, reported a chance meeting he had with the Dutch Minister, Dr. A. Loudon. Loudon did not like these press comments and stated that the Dutch East Indies were well able to defend themselves even if the Netherlands was at war in Europe. He then "very hesitantly" proposed the possibility of an exchange of views on this subject between Australian and Dutch officials at Batavia. This chance discussion coincided with an informal approach by Elink Schuurman of the Prime Minister's department. He wanted to know whether Mr. R.G. Casey, Minister for Supply and Development, could pay a visit to Army (KNIL) Officials in Surabaya on his way back to Australia from London. He referred to secret and informal discussions between the Dutch Consul in Sydney, J. van Horst Pellekaan, and the Australian Controller-General of Munitions Supply, N.K.S. Brodribb, concerning the possibility of obtaining various Defence materials for the Netherlands East Indies from Australia. These discussions, on which no reference material could be found in Dutch archives, must have taken place in October 1939, because Brodribb thereafter accompanied Casey on his trip to London, and came back with him to Australia. Both men seem to have spoken with Dutch Army Officers on the day of their arrival by flying boat at Surabaya on December 14, 1939. No notes have been found regarding this conversation, but the subject was the possibility of supplying ammunition to the East Indies.

In a letter to his Minister of Foreign Affairs however, Elink Schuurman refers to this discussions between KNIL-officers and Mr. Brodribb in Surabaya. Another letter, which could be traced, was written by Major J.K. Coffey of the Australian Army to the Dutch naval attaché, De Booj, in London, dated 12 February 1940. Coffey was a member of the Australian section of the Imperial General Staff. Appended to his letter is a telegram from R. Menzies to S.M. Bruce, dated 7 February 1940, which confirms the secret discussion in Surabaya and proposes an exchange of technical information between officers of both countries. Menzies' telegram is reproduced below. It is obvious that the strict maintenance of its neutrality was still the Dutch official policy, but in Batavia also there were fears about the possibility of a German occupation of the Netherlands, and therefore the loss of its ammunitions supply.

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296 Dept. of the Prime Minister to H.A. Peterson, Australian Govt Commissioner at British Consulate, Batavia, 7 December 1939. DAFP, Volume II, document 411, page 452. According to note 3 of this document, background on this discussion is to be found in AA Canberra, accession nr A 981, NEI 15, i.

297 ARA, Archive Ministry of Colonies, accession number 2.10.45, Inv. nr. 772, Letter T.Elink Schuurman to MinFA, May 2, 1940.

298 Letter major Coffey to De Booy, 12 February 1940, MinBuZa, Archive London Legation, accession number Aa.22, inv. nr. 996.
The secret conference resulted in a formal request by the Dutch Government to the Australian Government to explore the possibilities of supplying Australian munitions to the Netherlands East Indies. Bruce informed his Prime Minister, Menzies, about it in a cablegram dated January 25, 1940, which is quoted below.

"The Dutch Government are enquiring as to the possibility of supplying Munitions to the Dutch East Indies. No official enquiry has been made, but I understand that this is forthcoming shortly. Their enquiry covers the whole range of armament stores in general but in particular light and heavy A.A.-guns, A.T. guns, rifles and machine guns ad ammunition. They would consider British patterns. They are interested in long-range policy rather than the question of immediate supply, and if you consider it worthwhile, the Dutch government will probably suggest sending small military mission to Australia to investigate. In view of your present commitments, request advice if any likelihood of being able to supply. Dutch Minister in London (Michiel van Verduyen) is aware of pooling arrangements and that we are informing the Ministry of Supply (Casey) of this enquiry."

Menzies answered back on 7th February, 1940:

"Commonwealth officers have been in personal communication with the Dutch Consul [T. Elink Schuurman] following Brodribb interviews at Sourabaya in December. They also have lists of the proposed materials and consider that after detailed examination it may be possible to supply at least some of the requirements later in the year. The Consul agreed that it would be wise to defer the proposed visit of the Military Mission for several months when our own capacities will be better known. During the interim period technical information can be exchanged between officers of both Governments. As there is no immediate urgency it is proposed to follow this course."

It can be inferred from this cablegram, that the discussions in Sourabaya were already on a very detailed level with respect to the Dutch requirements, but it looks as though the KNIL was not really in a hurry to improve its armaments position. The Netherlands was still unoccupied, and when the Australians asked for some more time, the Dutch did not object. As far as can be ascertained, no documents have turned up to show any exchange of technical information between officers of both Governments up to October 1940. One clue in that direction is a letter by Elink Schuurman to the Secretary of External Affairs, dated March 20 1940, in which it is asked if a single technical officer could come over to Australia. In the meantime, a proof-order for 100,000 percussion caps was placed by the KNIL at ICI Melbourne. Apparently, the quality of the percussion caps was fine, as a formal order for 10 million percussion caps was placed in July 1940.

Moreover, in July 1940 the Australian Government agreed to the demagnetization of Dutch ships in Australian harbours (in order to neutralize German magnetic mines) and gave permission to install Australian-built 3" anti-aircraft guns on Dutch ships bound for Great Britain.

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237 Prime Ministers Dept. to S.M. Bruce, 7 February 1940. DAFP, Volume III, document 48, page 68.


2372 Letter T. Elink Schuurman to C-in-C KNIL, 2 May 1940; MinBuZa, London legation, file F.2(3) DZ/GA, Inv. nr. 1110.

2373 Letter Michiel van Verduyen to MinFA, 15 August 1940, Ibid.
Britain.\textsuperscript{224} This was an important approval by the Australian Government.

On the issue of a Dutch military mission, there were preliminary contacts between Mr. van Holst Pellekaan, Dutch trade commissioner in Sydney, and the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Colonel W.R. Hodgson, in June 1940. As no formal answer was given, and the Netherlands was meanwhile lost as a supplier, Elink Schuurman, urged by his Government in exile in London, wrote a somewhat stronger worded request on August 26, 1940.\textsuperscript{225} The Dutch Minister in London also approached S.M. Bruce on August 15, 1940 on the same issue.\textsuperscript{226} The Australian Defence Committee, consisting of the three Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of the Department of Defence reviewed this request on 5 September 1940. In view of the special significance of the defence of the Netherlands Indies, as indicated in the UK Chiefs of Staff appreciation on the Far East, the Committee recommended that the Government agree with the proposed visit of such a commission.\textsuperscript{227}

The Australian Government thereupon decided, on 16 September 1940, that a small KNIL Commission should visit Australia to discuss the purchase of weapons and ammunition. It was agreed that the visit should be carried out as unobtrusively as possible and that the Commission should be referred to in public as an Industrial Research Commission.\textsuperscript{227} The Commission appointed by the KNIL Commander, consisted of three Members: Colonel P.H.T. van der Steen (KNIL Artillery Commander, Coast Artillery Surabaya), Air Force Major Dr. G. Otten, and KNIL Artillery Captain F.B. Kroese. They arrived on October 23, 1940 with the KNILM regular flight. With the exception of Van der Steen, who stayed for about a week, the two other Members of the Commission were taken on a very extensive tour of the Australian defence establishment, leaving the country early in December 1940.\textsuperscript{227} The Commission was allowed to visit 65 factories producing weapons and munitions, and a number of military installations. Its members were very appreciative of the openness and degree of cooperation displayed by officials of all levels, from the Australian Prime Minister down to low-ranking officers and officials.

The Dutch History of the Second World War by de Jong does not mention the attempts of the KNIL to secure weapons and stores from Australia. There is only one passing remark about some Australian assistance to Dutch weapons factories in Java, which also seems off the mark.\textsuperscript{228} Also, in another semi-official publication by the Koninklijke Marine (Royal Dutch Navy), it is noted that "Australia did not possess an armaments industry of

\textsuperscript{224} Letter Colonel Hodgson External Affairs to Elink Schuurman, 25 July 1940, ibid.

\textsuperscript{225} Letter of T.Elink Schuurman to Minister of External Affairs, 26 August 1940. AA Victoria, MP 729/6, File No 4/401/57.

\textsuperscript{226} Michiels van Verduynen to van Kleffens, letter 15 August 1940 no 2530/699. ARA, Archief MinvKol., toegangsnummer 2.10.45, inv.nr. 772.

\textsuperscript{227} Minute of the Defence Committee, Meeting of 5 September 1940. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{228} War Cabinet Minute no 512, Melbourne 16 September 1940. AA Victoria MP 729/6, File no 4/401/57.

\textsuperscript{228} AA Canberra, A 981, NE 15, ii and A 1608, F27/2/3. The Report of the KNIL Commission to its superiors can be found in ARA, Londens Archief Min.v.Kol., toegangsnummer 2.10.45, inv. nr. 772.

\textsuperscript{229} L.de Jong, 11a ibid., page 630.
any significance\textsuperscript{231}. This is the more surprising, since the list of requirements of the Commission was quite extensive. The requirements of the Netherlands East Indies were divided into two categories, i.e. immediate and prospective (three to six months). The immediate requirements concerned 5 million rounds of .303 inch small arms ammunition and 500,000 pieces of links for this type of ammunition, which could be supplied by the Australians at short notice. The Trench mortars (500) and Trench Mortar Bombs (3.100.0-00) and 380 tons of TNT could not be supplied at short notice however.

The prospective equipment needed consisted of anti-tank guns and ammunition, tanks, searchlights, armour piercing shells and aircraft bombs. The Commission stated that the total requirements of small arms ammunition were around 100 million rounds per annum, and that therefore it was considered necessary to establish a new factory in Java, with plant and equipment obtained from Australia\textsuperscript{232}. The Commission indicated that there was a debate within the Dutch Defence establishment on change from the .260 inch to the (British) .303 inch type of rifle and machinegun. In the case of a change over, an additional 100,000 rifle barrels and 5,000 machine-gun barrels were needed. The Australians responded to the Dutch request on 25 November 1940, when the Defence Committee endorsed the sale of 5 million rounds of small arms ammunition, but withheld approval of the other items because of the tight supply situation. It was decided to give the Dutch the specifications of the fuse of the Australian 3” mortar bombs and of the 250 lb aircraft bomb, and full specifications of the characteristics of Australian manufactured TNT.

On its side the Commission had handed to the Australians full information on the anti-aircraft fire control instruments in use with the KNIL, and drawings and specifications of N.E.I. bombs\textsuperscript{233}. Bruce in London informed Menzies, on 17 December 1940, that the British War Office did not object to the disclosure of the specifications requested by the Dutch.

Although the original Dutch request regarding munitions and weapons supplies was only partly met by the Australian Government, both parties involved had worked together in remarkable unity and with due speed to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. The Dutch military command thereupon decided to equip all KNIL/ML Air Force personnel with .303” rifles, as almost all the planes in service also had .303” Vickers and Colt/Browning machine-guns. This would have as an added advantage that if the KNIL/ML were ever to carry out duties in conjunction with the RAF and RAAF, no supply difficulties would arise from the use of different types of rifles, machine-guns and ammunition.\textsuperscript{234}

The Second Singapore Staff conference took place from 26 to 28 November 1940. (page 247). One of the results of this conference was the appointment of liaison officers. Australia appointed Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN as Naval liaison officer at the Koninklijke Marine Headquarters in Batavia; the Dutch appointed Cdr G. B. Salm as their liaison officer in Australia. The Dutch also agreed to provide fuel, spares and ammunition for the


\textsuperscript{232} War Cabinet Agenda no 205, Supplement no 1, Supply of Munitions to the Netherlands East Indies, 25 November 1940. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{233} Minute of Defence Committee Meeting of 25 November 1940, Ibid., no 107/1940.

\textsuperscript{234} T.Elink Schuurman to Secretary, Ministry of Munitions, 16 December 1940, no L17/5757. Ibid.
RAF/RAAF at their military airfields in Sumatra, Borneo and the Eastern N.E.I. The Dutch also informed the Australians about their current lack of adequate stocks of small arms ammunitions and asked for assistance in overcoming it.\textsuperscript{2385}


On January 12, 1941 the Australian Minister for the Army, P.C. Spender, visited the Dutch G.G. at Batavia, and obtained his agreement for staff talks between Australian and Dutch officers\textsuperscript{2386}. The Australian government reacted very quickly and positively; as soon as January 22 1941 Menzies accepted the Dutch invitation of January 18 to despatch a military delegation to Batavia. The Australian delegation consisted of Wing Cdr W.L. Healy and Squadron Leader H.W. Berry of the RAAF, Commander V.E. Kennedy of the RAN, and R.H. Doyle, Controller of Production and Statistics, Munitions Department\textsuperscript{2387}.

4.9.1. The Australian military mission to Java.

On 11 and 12 February 1941 this delegation met Dutch Defence Representatives from both the Koninklijke Marine and the KNIL to discuss a number of points on cooperation. The meetings took place at the Department of the Navy in Batavia with Captain J.J.A. van Staveren, the Dutch Naval Chief of Staff, in the chair. Cdr Kennedy RAN reported to the Secretary of the Australian Naval Board on 14 February, saying that the discussions were open and pleasant. Agreements were reached on reporting to each other the position of ships bound for or leaving the Dutch East Indies and the Australia Station. To his amazement, Kennedy found out that C-in-C China Station had already reported the position of Australian warships in that area to the N.E.I. authorities\textsuperscript{2388}. It was evident that in operational matters there had already been very close British-Dutch cooperation on an informal basis since September 1940. (See page 101 of chapter 2 on Great Britain). Information about minefields was also exchanged. The Dutch informed their Australian counterparts that all Dutch shipping between the U.S. West coast and the N.E.I. would be re-routed through the Torres Straits to minimise the risk of Japanese interference, and that the harbour of Tjilatjap on Java's south coast would be expanded to handle more freight.

On Thursday 13 February the Air Force and Munitions representatives proceeded to Bandoeng for further discussions with Dutch Army Air Force and Munitions personnel, while the Naval representative had daily meetings in Batavia with Dutch Naval representatives. On 18 February he joined his colleagues in Bandoeng. The Australians observed that Dutch inter-service cooperation was not very developed. The arrangements for

\textsuperscript{2385} Lord Cranborne to Sir G. Whiskard, 3 January 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 245, page 322 - 324.

\textsuperscript{2386} Spender reported to the War Cabinet, that a complete change of opinion had taken place in the Netherlands Indies with respect to the need for staff conversations. He attributed this to the victories of the British forces in North Africa. Advisory War Council Minute no 145, 13 February 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 289, page 391. Also telegram van Holst Pellekaan to Australian Govt., 14 January 1941 no T3/254 in ARA, Sydney Archive, inv.78.

\textsuperscript{2387} Letter R.G. Menzies to J. van Holst Pellekaan, acting Consul-General, 22 January 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 254, page 343, and ARA Sydney Archives inv.78, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{2388} Report Cdr V.E. Kennedy to Sec. Australian Naval Board on discussions with N.E.I. Defence Authorities, February 14, 1941, page 2. AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File 2021/5/570.
despatch of an air striking force (Army aircraft) after location of enemy ships (by naval aircraft), did not appear to be very satisfactory2390. With that the Australians had discovered one of the weak points in the Dutch defence organisation for the Netherlands East Indies.

It was intended that the Dutch Army Chief of Staff, Maj.-Gen. H. Ter Poorten, should attend the meeting between Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and the Australian War Cabinet in Melbourne on February 10 - 17, 1941. However, this visit was cancelled by the Governor-General personally at the last moment, because of threatening Japanese moves. (See also page 100). This caused Elink Schuurman considerable embarrassment, as some Australian generals and politicians interpreted this as a signal of appeasement by the Dutch to the Japanese. He therefore sent a strongly-worded telegram to the Governor-General2390. Sir Robert did have the opportunity to talk to Ter Poorten during a short stop in Batavia on his way to Melbourne. The same day Sir Robert Brooke-Popham also talked to the Governor-General2390. Ter Poorten himself was present at the (Second) Singapore Staff Conference later that month. He also visited the Australian Army Headquarters between 15 and 28 March 1941. The result of this meeting was an agreement to detach 6 KNIL-Officers of the Tank Corps to the Australian Tank Corps School at Seymour, and the visit of the Commander Australian Coast Artillery to the Coast Defences of Surabaya2392.

The fact that the Qantas Airline Service from Sydney to London used the Batavia airport for refuelling, made more frequent contacts possible between Australian and Dutch officials than would be normally be the case. That of course also applied to British diplomats and officers, like Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, on their way to or from Australia. On his way to London, Menzies stopped there and had a long talk with the Dutch Governor-General on January 28, 1941. The Report of this meeting by the Governor-General to the Minister of Colonies, stated that Menzies was willing to go to war with Japan if Dutch territory were violated. It also mentioned the willingness of the Australian Government to discuss the possibility of garrisoning an Australian Army Division in Java2393. The G.G. did not consider that such a measure was necessary yet. It turned out to be another missed chance to get the Australians deeply involved in the defence of the Malay Barrier.

On the basis of the information Menzies obtained from Tjarda, at his first meeting at the Foreign Office in London on 26 February 1941, he asked "whether we regarded the Netherlands East Indies as vital" (meaning that violation of its integrity would be a casus belli)2394. The Foreign Office left the question unanswered. The Naval Staff was less diplomatic, for at a discussion with the Vice Chief of Naval Staff on 8 March 1941, Vice-Admiral T.S.V. Phillips stated that "we should not go to war with Japan over their occupation of

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2390 Letter Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN to Sec. of Naval Board, Enclosure A, point 18, page 3, Ibid.
2390 Elink Schuurman to G.G., telegram T3/948, 11 February 1941, ARA Sydney Archives, inv.no 78, Ibid.
2390 Sir Robert was quite impressed by the Governor-General, and his fighting spirit. Bosscher, op. cit. p. 76 and note 148 on page 458.
2390 The officers were Col. J.S. Whitelaw and Lt.Col. F.N. Nurse, who visited Soerabaj a from 1 - 4 April, 1941. Telegram Australian Army HQ to Elink Schuurman, 24 March 1941, ARA Sydney Archives, no 78 Ibid.
2390 Record of Meeting at UK Foreign Office, 26 February 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, Doc. 324, page 457.
any part of the Netherlands East Indies, this would only add to the number of our enemies, and if Germany could first be defeated we could turn to Japan later and deal with her. It was a straight answer, but not the one the Australian Premier wished to hear.

During his talk with the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia, Menzies got the commitment for attendance by Dutch senior officers at a staff conference with U.K. and Australian representatives. After conferring in Singapore with the British authorities on January 29, he pressed for a staff conference in Singapore at the earliest possible date. This conference took place on February 22 1941, much later than Menzies had hoped. It became the 3rd Singapore staff conference. The delay was due to the visit to Australia by the Commander in Chief Far East (Sir Robert Brooke-Popham), who first wanted to complete this planned visit (from 8 to 18 February) before joining the staff conversations. To avoid duplications, the Australian Military Mission, due to have staff conversations in Batavia, was instructed to avoid matters of major strategy and policy, but to concentrate on the exchange of detailed information of a tactical and operational nature. After the Bataavia Conference, the Australian Mission was to join the Singapore staff conference.

At the 3rd Singapore Staff Conference, with United States representatives present as observers, it was agreed that Australia should take over the defence of Timor and Ambon when war broke out. Australian Forces in Ambon were to be under Dutch control at the outset. The Allied Forces in Dutch Timor however, would come under Australian control on the arrival of their Army Units. The Australians would contribute to the defence of the Ambon-Timor-Darwin triangle with two Bomber Squadrons and two Army Brigades. This was later reduced to a force of about 1,200 men each for Ambon and Timor. The RAAF Units were not to be stationed permanently in Ambon and Koepang, but advanced bases would be set up at these points. An intermediate landing ground had to be established in the Tanimbar Islands, because one of the squadrons in Darwin was equipped with Wirraways, which did not have enough range.

These agreements were revolutionary. In effect the Government of the Netherlands East Indies consented to leave the defence of this immense part of the Indonesian archipelago to another, outside power. The implementation of this particular agreement would indeed prove not to be easy, as will be seen in the next pages.

The Australian Government approved the recommendations of the Conference. It was definitely unhappy at the failure of the Conference to draw up a co-ordinated naval defence plan for the Far East, and therefore urged for another conference to formulate such a plan. During the parallel American-British Staff conversations in Washington in January - March 1941 (See Chapter 1, page 90), the British secured American promises to attend the 4th Singapore Conference.

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2306 Note of conversations at UK Admiralty, 8 March 1941. DAFP, Volume IV, document 343, page 483.


2307 Commonwealth Govt to Lord Cranborne, 27 March 1941. Ibid., page 517, doc. no 366.

For the list of suggested points to be discussed at the 2nd Singapore Staff Conference, see Ibid., doc. no 378, page 537 - 538.

2307 Lord Cranborne to Australian Govt, 7 April 1941. Ibid., doc. 390, page 556.
It had been decided that because of the political implications, the movement of Australian troops to Ambon and Koepang would not take place before the British Government had been consulted, and until Australia was at war with Japan. The War Cabinet decided that in collaboration with the Dutch, radio equipment, motor transports, bombs and ammunition, aviation fuel and general stores could be sent to Ambon and Koepang in advance. The equipment and stores would bear Dutch markings and would be charged to the KNIL.\textsuperscript{2400}

\textbf{4.9.2. Establishment of Communication lines.}

As has been seen, there was already close cooperation in existence in the very important area of communications, since September 1940, between the Dutch Navy, the Koninklijke Marine, and the Royal Navy, and thus by implication also with the RAN. This had resulted in a secure W/T service link with Cypher code between the Dutch and British Naval Commanders in Chief. The link was established after the invasion of The Netherlands by the Germans, but it is unclear if the respective Governments were aware of it. The existence, and good working, of this link was confirmed in a letter of the Fleet Signals Officer China Station (Lt. Cdr H.N. Reid, RN) to the Director of Signals and Communications RAN, Cdr J.B. Newman, RAN\textsuperscript{2401}. Following the Anglo-Dutch Naval Staff Conference in Singapore on 9 and 10 January 1941, and the Anglo-Dutch-United States Naval Staff Conference in Manila from 15 to 19 February 1941, it was decided to hold a Conference of Communications Officers for further coordination. This Anglo-Dutch-Australian-U.S. Combined Services Communications Conference took place in utmost secrecy at the Naval Base in Singapore on 27 February 1941.\textsuperscript{2402}

At this Conference full disclosure was made of frequencies and station calls of ships and shore installations and air bases. The Dutch representatives disclosed the existence and call signals of the top-secret airfields Samarinda-II and Singkawang-II in Dutch Borneo, and codes and cyphers were standardised and exchanged. Appropriate extracts from the Conference Report were distributed to Australian warships and shore installations on May 1, 1941.\textsuperscript{2403} Notwithstanding these agreements, there were still problems in radio communication in December 1941, as is clear from the case of HMAS MANOORA. This merchant cruiser was on its way to Singapore with the First Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board, Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, on board and it was planned to pay a short visit to Tg Priok in order to enable Sir Ragnar to have a meeting with the CZM, Vice-Admiral Helfrich. Since the MANOORA did not have the correct recyphering tables for the Anglo-French cypher, and moreover used a different time protocol, the meeting almost did


\textsuperscript{2401} Letter dated October 30, 1940 in AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File no 2037/2/783.

\textsuperscript{2402} Present at this conference were Cdr J.B. Newman RAN, Director of Signals and Communications RAN, Lt-Cdr C. Terpoorten KM, Communications Officer N.E.I. Naval Staff, Lt-Cdr H.N. Reid RN, Fleet Signal Officer China Station, Lt. J.R. Dennis USN, Asst. Communications Officer US Asiatic Fleet, Wing Cdr T.F. Moloney RAF, Command Signals Officer Air HQ Far East, Captain J.W. Gerharz KNIL/ML, Signals Officer KNIL General Staff, Lt.Col. J.A.V. Verkuyl, HQ KNIL Staff, and Squadron Leader H.W. Berry, RAAF, Air HQ Melbourne RAAF. See Conference Report by J.B. Newman, AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File 2037/2/783, 20 March 1941, and note 210 on page 463 of Bosscher, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{2403} Secretary of the Navy to HMA Ships and NOIC, 1st May, 1941. AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File 2037/2/783.
not take place, due to the unexpected late arrival of the ship.

4.9.3. Planning for Timor and Ambon.

Based on the recommendations of the Second Singapore Conference, a meeting between Dutch and Australian Army and Navy representatives took place at Melbourne on 26 March 1941. The subject of the meeting was the scale of transport needed for transporting Army and RAAF stores and personnel from Australia to Koepang and Ambon. The meeting was attended by Cdr G.B. Salm KM and Captain D.C. Buurman van Vreeden KNIL GHQ Staff, with on the Australian side Cdr Nicholls RAN, Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN, Col. H. Wells, Lt-Col. E.G.B. Scriven and Group Captain F.M. Bladin RAAF. The conference concluded that, due to a lack of harbour facilities at Koepang, it would take at least three weeks to transport and unload equipment, and therefore the recommendation was given to have the stores and equipment transported to Koepang and Ambon before any outbreak of war with Japan.

Apparently, this recommendation was accepted, for on 19 April Cdr Salm dispatched a telegram to CZM informing him that 300 tons of military equipment, including vehicles, had been loaded in Melbourne on board the Dutch vessel BOISSEVAIN, with Surabaya as destination, from where the goods should be shipped to Ambon and Koepang. Another 60 tons of RAAF Bombs and Ammunition were shipped from Sydney on May 8, 1941 with the Dutch MAETSUYCKER.

According to the agreements reached at the Second and Third Singapore Staff Conferences, the Australian Army HQ produced a detailed plan for the reinforcement of Timor and Ambon on May 6 1941. Two battalions of the 23rd Infantry Brigade AIF would be employed. It was arranged that six Dutch military planes (Glenn Martin bombers) arrive in Darwin on May 17, leaving on May 20, with a reconnaissance party consisting of the Commander 23rd Brigade Brigadier E.F. Lind, the battalion commanders Lt-Cols L.N. Roach and G.D. Youl, and Major E.L. Sheehan of the Brigade Staff. Moreover, maintenance parties consisting of 1 officer and 7 men were despatched to each of the two areas.

The results of the reconnaissance was the recommendation to reinforce the two battalions, and to establish a direct link with Dutch military headquarters in Bandung. Lind discussed these recommendations again with the Australian Army Chief of Staff, Lt-Gen. V.A.H. Sturdee, in Melbourne in July.

The question remained as to whether Australian maintenance personnel should be allowed

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2404 Letter of the Australian liaison officer Batavia, Lt-Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN to Sec. of Naval Board, December 5, 1941. AA Victoria, Ibid., file 1877/17/19, pages 2 - 3.

2405 See Tentative Draft of Probable Requirements for the establishment of advanced bases at Koepang and Ambon. AA Victoria, Ibid. File 2026/12/193.

2406 Cdr Salm to CZM, Teleg. 1252Z/19 of 19 April 1941. AA Victoria, Ibid., file 2026/12/193.

2407 AHQ Operation Instruction no 15, May 6, 1941. AA Victoria, MP 729/7, File no 37/421/373.

2408 Telegram Col. W.M. Anderson SD/AM 12 May 1941. Ibid. The Australian reconnaissance party was instructed to wear mufti, and to observe utmost secrecy.

to accompany the equipment. The Australian Government contacted the British Government on July 10 to sound out the Dutch position. Aware of the Dutch desire concerning a U.K. guarantee, which the U.K. government was unwilling to give, it replied on August 7: "We have not so far taken any action to approach the Netherlands government further in this matter since we had felt that it would be useless to approach them with a specific proposal on the question of reinforcement of Ambon and Koepang unless we were in a position to deal with a counter request from the Dutch which they would no doubt make for some assurance of support in the event of their territory in the Far East being attacked." The Dutch position remained as stated by the Commanding Officer KNIL, Lt-Gen. Berenschot, in a telegram via CZM to Salm on May 8, 1941. No Australians were allowed, but the vehicles were to be painted in the colours of the KNIL, and Dutch maintenance personnel would be provided, "who will be instructed by so-called factory personnel in civilian clothes." This caused some confusion at Australian Army HQ, and resulted in shipping delays.

In the period July - September 1941 the Australians shipped a number of motorcycles, a few lorries (freight cars) and ten Bren-carriers to each of the two sites in Koepang and Ambon. Also shipped were ammunition, explosives, and two 6" Coastal guns to be assembled in Koepang to protect its harbour. Since its equipment would be in place at the outbreak of war, the two battalions would only need to have their personal equipment and unit weapons with them at the time of transport to Koepang and Ambon. The Dutch Government offered assistance in the servicing of the 6" gun battery at Koepang before the arrival of the Australian crews. The Australians accepted this offer, and two KNIL non-commissioned officers and 18 artillerymen arrived at Koepang, on 6 August 1941, to man the battery.

The question of the timing of the movement of Australian forces to Koepang and Ambon had meanwhile been considered at the highest political level. On the instruction of the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, the Australian PM was informed that "Apart from whether the Netherlands Government would agree in the absence of definite assurance of British support in the event of Japanese attack on the Netherlands East Indies, such a move would be regarded in Japan as a challenge in the present circumstances. As immediate measure therefore it is undesirable." Churchill did not preclude such a move however, if circumstances required such a decision. Meanwhile, all the necessary arrangements for the reception of the Australian forces were made unobtrusively with the Dutch authorities in advance.

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2412 Telegram from CZM to Cdr Salm, Code Enigma, 3 May 1941. AA Victoria, Ibid.
2413 Letter Quarter-Master general, 29 May 1941 gives an equipment breakdown and shipping schedules. Sailings were to Soerabaja on the Dutch ships OVERSTRATEN, RUYS and TASMAN. AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File no 2026/12/193.
2414 Letter D.C. Buurman van Vreeden to Cdr V.E. Kennedy, 29 July 1941. Ibid.
2415 Secretary Dominion Affairs to PM Australia, 14 June 1941. Copy Telegram in AA Victoria, MP 1185/8, File 2026/12/193.
The increasing tension in the area led to the request of the Australian Naval Commander to CZM on 10 July 1941, whether the Dutch could provide two troop transports at short notice to move 1400 troops from Darwin to Ambon and 1300 from Darwin to Koepang.2416 CZM replied that 5 KPM vessels were potentially available because of their being not too distant from Darwin2417. In the light of further events however it was decided not to proceed with the transport of the troops. They were kept at the ready at Darwin.

It was only after repeated urging by the Australian Government that at last the U.K. Government did contact the Dutch Government in exile, in early October, on the issue of larger advance parties in uniform. On October 14 Cranborne enquired about the size and composition of the advance parties and whether it was essential that they be uniformed, as the Dutch authorities did not particularly like that idea. The Australian Government answered, on October 16, that the wearing of uniforms would aid the maintenance of discipline2418. The official approach to the Dutch Government however was not made earlier than 1 November 19412419.

4.9.4. Logistics and Command Problems.

Another spanner in the works was the objection raised by the Dutch Government about having an Australian Brigadier as commander of his troops at Ambon. KNIL Forces in Ambon were commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel, and according to the ADB agreement the local Dutch commander would also command the Australian Army Units. The Dutch feared loss of respect by the very loyal local population, if an Australian seemed to be in command in Ambon2420. The Chief of General Staff therefore suggested not sending a Brigadier to Ambon, and negotiating with the Dutch authorities the possibility of a combined HQ at Ambon. In the Dutch War History of de Jong it is suggested that this plan was imposed by the Australians on the Dutch. In fact it was the other way around - it was suggested by the Australians to circumvent existing Dutch sensibilities on this subject2421.

Based on the recommendations of Brigadier Lind, the first Australian reconnaissance party was followed by an Army/RAAF reconnaissance party, which left Darwin on October 6, 1941 with a flying boat. It transported 10 officers for Koepang (arrival 6 October), 7 officers for Ambon (arrival 7 October), and 5 officers for a quick survey of both sites. These officers returned to Darwin on 12 October.2422 The officers were the company commanders of the Army Units concerned and the RAAF squadron leaders of the squadrons.

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2416 Telegram ACNB to CZM, 0936Z 10 July 1941. AA Victoria, ibid.
2417 Telegram from CZM to ACNB, 1345Z/11, 12 July 1941, ibid.
2418 Australian Archives Canberra, serial A1608, file AA 27/1/1.
2419 Secret Archives MinBuZa, London Legation, inv. nr. 1415.
2420 War Cabinet Minute, Sydney 28 April 1941, Minute no 986: Command at Ambon. AA Victoria, ibid.
2422 M.C. Langslow, Sec. Dept. of the Army: Visits of Army Officers to the Netherlands East Indies, 1 October 1941. AA Victoria, MP 729/7, File 37/421/373.
involved. Even before this new reconnaissance party left, the new Prime Minister, John Curtin, had asked the British Government to request Dutch permission for a far larger advance party in uniform. After being asked by the British to be more specific, Curtin answered that the request concerned 100 Army personnel to each place, 52 Air Force personnel for Ambon and 19 Air Force personnel to Koepang. Due to the size of the proposed advance parties, it was desirable that they should go in uniform in order to maintain discipline. S.M. Bruce discussed this request in London on 23 October 1941 with the Dutch Minister, arguing that the intention of the Japanese to open a regular air service between Portuguese Timor and the Palau Islands made such an advance party imperative. The Dutch authorities thereupon approved the Australian request on 5 November, but did not allow the stationing of all Australian troops before the actual outbreak of war with Japan, because they feared "undesirable incidents with the population", especially in Ambon.

This point of view held by the Dutch Cabinet was confirmed in a letter to the Dutch Minister in London on 22 November 1941. The Dutch Government approved a deployment of the Australian troops to Timor and Ambon, even before a war with Japan had been declared, but considered that the time had not yet come to execute that deployment. The letter stated that "As is well-known, discipline within the Australian Army is not particularly enforced, specifically when soldiers are off-duty and outside their barracks." The best western soldiers of the whole of S.E. Asia were evidently underrated by the KNIL because they were less formal in attitude.

The new Australian Premier, John Curtin, made some public statements on 18 and 20 October 1941, indicating progress in secret conversations between Great Britain, China, the Netherlands East Indies and the U.S.A., on combined action in case of Japanese aggression. He declared publicly on 20 October that "the degree of cooperation amongst these Powers was most substantial in respect to Australia's capacity to resist." The surprised Dutch Consul General supposed that this story emerged from Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, who was making a tour through S.E. Asia at that time. It is also possible that Curtin was misled by reports on the deployment of Australian troops in the eastern East Indies.

On 5 December 1941, three days before Pearl Harbour, the Netherlands East Indies Government asked the Australian Government to send aircraft to Ambon and Timór. The War Cabinet approved, and at dawn on 7 December 1941 two flights of Hudson
medium range bombers from 13 Squadron flew to Laha field in Ambon, and one flight of No. 2 squadron flew to Koepang. That day Brigadier Lind received orders in Darwin to move the 2/21st Battalion ("Gull Force") to Ambon and the 2/40th battalion ("Sparrow Force") to Timor. In 1942 Brigadier Lind wrote an outspoken memorandum, in which he severely criticized the bureaucracy which resulted in the lack of direct communications with the Dutch, the RAN and the RAAF, with as a consequence lack of fire and air support for his troops.

Anyway, when war broke out, the troops were quickly shipped to their respective destinations. According to plan, at the time hostilities started, Australia took over the defence of a large part of the Eastern portion of the Netherlands East Indies, the famed Spice Islands of the Moluccas, and Timor. It was a momentous and unprecedented event, crowning the development of closer relations between Australia and the Dutch East Indies in mutual defence.

10. Conclusions.

During the last years of peace, there was a growing awareness in both the Dutch East Indies and Australia, that both countries had parallel interests. For Australia, the integrity of the Netherlands East Indies was a vital interest, as the island chain was a barrier between the Australian heartland and Japan, and because Australia was partly dependent on its oil. To the Netherlands East Indies, Australia represented a highly-needed industrial hinterland, the need of which became even more pressing after the loss of the Mother Country by German occupation. As has been seen in this chapter, there were strong countercurrents to block the obvious alliance between the two countries. Australia was encapsulated in Imperial Defence, and the Far East had no high priority for the British, under the leadership of Winston Churchill. Therefore a guarantee of the Dutch East Indies was out of the question. For the Dutch, there was the 130-year old legacy of neutrality and aloofness, combined with lingering suspicions about "perfidious Albion". In the following pages, an analysis will be given on how the two countries overcame these barriers, and the factors that caused this to be a very slow process.

Practically unnoticed by the rest of the world, Australia developed a democratic, almost pure-white, prosperous society on a practically empty continent, bordering the rich European colonies in South East Asia. Due to their geographical isolation and ethnic background, the Australians as a nation developed a degree of loyalty towards their Mother Country, which was unequalled, let alone surpassed, by any other British Dominion and Colony, with the possible exception of even more isolated New Zealand. It resulted in a truly astounding effort to help the Mother Country in its predicaments during the First World War, in which Australians fought with distinction in the Middle Eastern and Western European fronts.

This had the unfortunate consequence that Australian Government policy and public opinion between the two world wars became strongly British-oriented. The Japanese menace had been acknowledged as such since 1904, but Australians tended to share the

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29 Lionel Wigmore, Ibid. Note 5 on page 419.

30 Australian industry and utilities used extensively Australian coal as a source of energy. Vehicles and planes however needed oil products.
British view of the Japanese, whom they did not hold in high regard. It is otherwise difficult to explain why Australia sent its fleet, air force personnel and three of its four divisions to the Middle East in 1940, notwithstanding the writing on the wall in East-Asia. In so doing it exposed its own position, on the understanding that the already depleted British Navy would steam to its rescue in the case of hostilities with the Japanese. The assumptions underlying this "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy were not challenged by the Australian political leadership at the very important Imperial Conference of 1937, partly due to an almost blind trust in British promises.

There were a number of reasons why the Australian response to the challenges of the deteriorating international situation were less than optimal in hindsight in the period September 1939 - December 19412431. The first reason was the lack of strong political leadership in Australia at that time. There had been coalition governments since 1931, with the largest political party, the ALP, in opposition. Moreover, the ALP refused to join an all-party War Cabinet, as Labour had done in the United Kingdom, in the hope of toppling the Menzies coalition cabinet. By playing the parliamentary game as if nothing had happened, the ALP reinforced an already existing tendency to continue life as in peacetime. Domestic political decisions were not made in the context of a national survival strategy. This was also the reason for a slow mobilisation of Australia's industrial resources, which only started in earnest in July 1941. The problems were compounded by the rather sudden change of Government in the last months of 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, when the ALP could indeed obtain power.

The second reason, was the strong orientation of the Australian Government towards the Mother Country, the United Kingdom. This had as a consequence, that in the thirties there was no Australian diplomatic or intelligence service, which resulted in a total reliance by the Government on British foreign policy and guidance2432. This orientation was however firmly anchored in public opinion, which in 1939 expected a replay of the First World War, with Australians fighting for the Mother Country in the Middle East and Western Europe. The Japanese menace was recognized by the Government, but the threat was underestimated by all political parties (but less so the ALP) and public opinion. The total reliance on British foreign policy and maritime power was dangerous, but imperial sentiment proved to be very strong, as illustrated by the voluntary enlistment for service overseas. The government had initiated some steps in the direction of a more independent Australian foreign policy, as illustrated by the Latham Goodwill Mission, and the appointment of Ambassadors to Washington and Tokyo, but the Government discovered too late that there was no mechanism to represent Australian interests in the Imperial War Cabinet. The question is, why both Pacific Dominions were misled by repeated promises of help that everyone in a position of power, even at that time, knew was unlikely to become available. The failure of the Australian delegation at the Imperial Conference of 1937 to challenge the British Chiefs of Staff on the strategy not to send even a small Battle fleet to Singapore, is a case in point. Wishful thinking, and the need for Dominion aid in the Middle East once war had broken out, help to explain it. Furthermore, the Australian Government seemed

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2432 Ian Hamill, op. cit., pages 264 - 265.
perfectly happy to be misled.

A third reason, was the personal failure of Menzies to face Churchill decisively on the issue of grand strategy, when he was in London for exactly that purpose from February until May 1941. Churchill proved to be the stronger personality. As Churchill underestimated the Japanese, and therefore blocked reinforcements for the Far East, that outcome would have grave consequences for Australia, but even more so for the Netherlands East Indies. As an Australian spokesman told the Dutch Consul General, Elink Schuurman, in early 1941: "For Winston, the Far East is...well,...very far" Churchill displayed superb leadership in the early phase of the War, but developed the habit of monopolising the British Grand Strategy afterwards. Some of the disasters which befall Britain and her allies before and after Pearl Harbour could have been avoided if Dominion leaders and Churchill's military advisers had been stronger personalities.

On top of that there were very serious deficiencies in the way Australian defence was organised. Politically, there was the unexplainable tendency of the respective Governments between the wars to distrust top military talent with an Australian background. This resulted in the appointment of British career officers as service chiefs, resulting in resentment and loss of morale within the Australian officer corps. Generally speaking, these British appointees served the government well, but at least in one instance it had disastrous consequences. This was the Empire Air Training Scheme, resulting in the failure of the Australian Government to develop an adequate air force for defence against Japan. Not only did the air force lack modern aircraft, it also lacked an effective command structure with trained and experienced officers. The Government bears full responsibility for its failure to renegotiate the Empire Air Training Scheme, and for its uncritical acceptance of British advice.

As the RAAF was little more than a training organisation for the RAF, the (British) Service Chief of the RAAF lacked operational control over it. This however was not an isolated case. The Chief of Naval Staff was responsible for the Australia Station of the Royal Navy, but most of the ships of the RAN were under direct Admiralty control in other theatres of war. In addition the Commanding Officer AIF got his instructions from the British Commander-in-Chief Middle East. The result was a lack of strategic direction of the three services at a most critical period.

All these factors compounded resulted in the near-catastrophe of early 1942, when Australia was directly imperiled, the British bluff called by the Japanese, and the Malay Barrier lost. Only the timely intervention of the Americans, combined with the lack of readiness of the Japanese, dazzled by their quick and unexpected successes, saved the fifth continent. It also resulted in the demise of the Dutch Colonial Empire.

In May 1940 the Germans invaded the Dutch homeland, The Netherlands. Indomitable Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch Government went into exile in London. Although the Netherlands and Britain were allied against Germany, the Dutch Governor-General refused to give up the traditional Dutch policy of neutrality (read: aloofness). As the Dutch

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a32 Letter of Consul-General to Minister of Foreign Affairs of 27 November 1941, no T4/8795/151, Sydney Archives, inv. nr. 78.
Government was in disarray and not at all sure whether Britain would win the struggle against the Nazis, the Governor-General was given considerable freedom in determining Dutch colonial foreign policy, also resulting in aloofness to the British ally, all to the amazement and irritation of the Australian government. It were the needs of the Dutch Army to rearm, which resulted in promising contacts with the Australian government, even before the German occupation of the Netherlands. The success of the military mission to Australia in 1940 coupled with the increasing aggressiveness of the Japanese, resulted in a change of policy at the end of 1940, allowing British and Dutch officers to get involved in secret staff talks. These were extended to the Australians. Even as late as October 1941 the Dutch were still very reluctant to allow Australian forces to enter their assigned areas of operations in the Moluccas and Timor.

As has been noted in the second part of this chapter, there were a number of factors, which precluded an early and effective cooperation between Dutch and Australian Governments, resulting in the loss of valuable time.

First, there was Australian adherence to the British policy of not giving any guarantee for the integrity of the East Indies, although the Australian Government had another opinion in this respect than did the British Government headed by Churchill. Australian interests were really different from Imperial interests, but Australia acquiesced. Second, there was the Dutch reluctance to change their traditional policy of aloofness, not unlike that of American isolationism, into one of active participation with the British Dominions in South-East Asia. It took time, too much time in effect. Thirdly, there was the Australian failure in all-out industrial mobilisation before Pearl Harbor. It made the Dutch very dependent on just one supplier: the United States, which also had different interests with respect to the rearming its allies.

As a fourth factor there was the blind trust by both the Australians and the Dutch in the power of the Royal Navy and of the Singapore Naval Base, even in the knowledge that there was no British Far Eastern Fleet, only an empty base. Dutch and Australian interests in having a British Far Eastern Fleet at Singapore ran parallel, but no coordinated action was undertaken towards Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff.

Maybe the most important factor however, was the vacillation and weakness of the Dutch Government in exile at London during its first year there. This point has not been treated in depth in this chapter, but in Chapter 3. It resulted in much doubt in Australian, British and American political and military circles about the will-power of the Dutch to defend themselves in the case of a Japanese attack. As a consequence there was great reluctance by the U.S. Government to export weapons to the East Indies, especially in 1940 and early 1941. Dutch political and military aloofness therefore proved self-defeating. It must be said, that at least Menzies did not share these doubts, as he instructed his Government to assist Dutch requirements, where possible, for obtaining modern weapons.

From this study it is clear, that the Dutch defence establishment in the East Indies reacted

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* In the Sydney Archives is an interesting letter of Elink Schuurman to consul Vigeveno in Wellington, dated 4 February 1942, no T3712. He reports his meeting with the Dutch Governor-General on 10 January, and he quotes the Governor General as being unhappy with the weak Government in London, with disastrous consequences for Dutch trustworthiness in Allied eyes. ARA, Sydney Archives, Inv.nr. 78.
fast to the opportunity to deal with Australia, which was created by an alert consulate in Sydney. Its chief officer, Mr. T. Elink Schuurman, had cultivated very good contacts with both the political and the military decision makers. He used this to good effect in securing permission for a small Dutch military mission to visit Australia. This mission, which was despatched with effective speed, cleared the way for closer political and military cooperation. His excellent relation with the Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Menzies, made it possible for him to prepare the groundwork for the all-important meeting between the Prime Minister and Governor-General on January 28 1941. The Koninklijke Marine also reacted quickly, when given the opportunity to have a liaison officer (G.B. Salm) in Australia, and extended an already excellent cooperation with the Royal Navy to the RAN. It was the Dutch political leadership in both London and Batavia which failed to exploit opportunities and to adapt to changing circumstances.

To conclude this Chapter, it can be stated, in all fairness, that Australia was the most positive of all the prospective Dutch allies, and most helpful in assisting the Dutch in the two difficult years following the German occupation of the Netherlands. It has not been acknowledged as such in the Dutch-language war history of De Jong, but the contents of this chapter illustrate the degree of cooperation established between the two Governments in those trying times. In May 1941, the then Chief-of-Staff of the KNIL already noted that the co-operation with the Australian counterparts was excellent, remarking that Ambon and Timor had seen more Australians in the last few weeks than in the previous hundred years.

The role of Robert Menzies in all this cannot be over-emphasized, notwithstanding the many errors he made. He alone strongly pursued a British guarantee for the Netherlands East Indies against the diametrically opposed thinking of Churchill and the British Admiralty on this subject. For this unflinching support of The Netherlands, which of course ran parallel to Australian interest, he and his Government should have received more recognition in Dutch publications. Of course, it was in Australia’s interest to have a British guarantee for the Netherlands East Indies, as was also demonstrated by the Page mission. Nevertheless Menzies was a champion of the Dutch case in a time that Australian politicians hardly dared to challenge British opinion.

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Handwritten postcard of Maj.-Gen. H. Ter Poorten KNIL to the Dutch Consul-General in Sydney Mr. T. Elink Schuurman, dated 28 May 1941. ARA Sydney Archives, Inv. nr. 78.