

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PACIFIC WAR, APRIL 1943

BY the end of 1942 it seemed to the Allies that they were ready to enter the offensive phase of the war, and that it was desirable that President Roosevelt and Mr Churchill, with their military staffs, should meet and agree on long-range plans for victory. The outcome of this need was the Casablanca conference of January 1943 at which decisions were made which vitally affected the war both in Europe and the Pacific.

At this conference the basic strategy of the Allies—"beat Hitler first"—remained unchallenged. Both British and American leaders had decided, even before the Pacific war had begun, that, when the offensive phase of the war came, they would destroy German military power first, and then be free to bring the entire weight of their military strength to bear on Japan. This strategy was supported by the air planners. "The determination to concentrate on Germany first," wrote Professor James Cate, an historian of the United States Army Air Force, "was the most momentous strategic decision of the war, both in respect to the total effort and to the role of the AAF. Apparently accepted without dissent in the previous spring, that decision seemed less unimpeachable in the flood tide of Japanese successes. It was not to go unchallenged either within high military circles or in public, but it represented a view of the war which had long been held by the air planners and from which AAF Headquarters was never to deviate."<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the fact that Germany was undoubtedly the major strategic prize, from the air point of view it was much more accessible to air attack from Britain, while it was yet most difficult for Allied bombers to reach the Japanese homeland.

The cogency of the "Europe first" position was strengthened by the attitude of the Russians who were urging, almost to the point of rupturing relations with Britain and the United States, that they open a major "second-front" operation against western Europe. Britain and the United States had to consider that Russia might collapse or perhaps come to terms with Hitler unless they gave her greater assistance. Marshal Stalin's idea of how to win the war was: "Hit Germany hard. Synchronize the operations of Allied troops on the two fronts, east and west. Then hit the Germans from both sides where it hurts most. Hit her where the distance to Berlin is shortest. Don't waste time, men or equipment on secondary fronts."<sup>2</sup>

As far as Japan was concerned, however, Stalin would in no circumstances be drawn into a two-front war and while Germany was undefeated he would treat the Japanese as neutrals. Again, German scientists, as well

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<sup>1</sup> Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I (1948), p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by General H. H. Arnold in *Global Mission* (1949), p. 481.

as those of Britain and America, were working on the production of guided missiles, jet-propelled aircraft, an atomic bomb and other powerful new weapons to which Britain, because of her nearness to the European continent, would be exposed if German armed power could not be destroyed in time. The Allies feared the Germans might outstrip them in the race for an atomic bomb, although there was little reliable information on German progress.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the Japanese were unlikely to produce an atomic weapon and the chances of Japanese soldiers or airmen attacking the British and American homelands were remote.

However, although they reaffirmed the over-all policy of concentrating on Europe first, the leaders who met at Casablanca quickly came to the conclusion that they could not mount a major operation against western Europe in 1943, because not until the spring of 1944 could American and British military resources be mobilised in sufficient strength. It was a vital pre-requisite to this build-up that the supply line across the north Atlantic should be secured from the devastating attacks of the U-boats. In March 1943, sinkings of Allied shipping had reached a war-time record of 687,000 tons. The tonnage of merchantmen destroyed in 1942 had totalled 7,795,000. Because of these heavy losses the highest priority of all was allocated at Casablanca to the defeat of the U-boat. Another vital prelude to the invasion from Britain was that the Allied air forces should gain command of the air over Europe and carry out strategic bombardments to weaken the German war potential.

Since a cross-Channel invasion was ruled out for 1943, the question arose what to do with the forces already available, and the Americans argued strongly that a larger share of Allied resources should be used in the Pacific war. Churchill, on the other hand, was anxious to strike "at the 'under-belly' of the Axis (in the Mediterranean) in effective strength and in the shortest time", coupled with an intensified strategic bombing of Germany. Behind this Mediterranean strategy was the belief that it was necessary to keep the Germans heavily engaged until the main struggle began.

General Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the American Army, and Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations, while they believed that the Allies must concentrate on the defeat of Germany first, argued that this must be done in a major cross-Channel invasion, and feared that the operations in the Mediterranean proposed by the British would dissipate forces which should be reserved for this invasion. Marshall and King therefore opposed the British strategy and argued for a much bigger allocation for the Pacific war. Because of the slow progress there and the extreme tenacity of the enemy resistance they feared that the Allies would not be able to hold the initiative, and considered it necessary to give the Pacific commanders more men and equipment so that the gains would be held and the enemy would not be able to consolidate his defences.

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<sup>3</sup> Chester Wilmot in *The Struggle for Europe* (1952), p. 662, wrote that when in November 1944, the Allies entered Strasbourg they discovered that the German Professor Fleischmann and his associates had not succeeded in producing a chain reaction. They were about as far ahead as the Allies were in 1940.

Admiral King had caused a rough estimate to be made of the percentage of the total effort (men, ships, planes and munitions) of all the Allies, including Russia and China, then employed in the Pacific. He reached the surprising conclusion that only 15 per cent of the total Allied resources then engaged were employed in the whole of the Pacific, including the Indian Ocean, Burma and China. European and African theatres, the Battle of the Atlantic and the British build-up were getting the remaining 85 per cent. At the Casablanca Conference King and Marshall brought these figures forward, insisting that the imbalance might be fatal. They agreed that Germany was the Number One enemy and renounced any expectation of defeating Japan before Germany was eliminated; but they said bluntly that unless the United States could retain the initiative against Japan, a situation might arise which would necessitate her withdrawing from commitments in the European theatre. King and Marshall . . . insisted that the percentage of total forces deployed in the Pacific must be raised to at least 30 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

While King and Marshall adhered to the basic "Europe first" strategy, there were many leaders, of whom General MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief in the South-West Pacific Area, was perhaps an outstanding example, who felt that it was a mistake. MacArthur, late in 1942 when the situation in New Guinea was still fluid, told Mr Stimson, the American Secretary of War, that "unless decisive steps were taken to match the Japanese strength, continued and growing disaster could be anticipated". The Allies, he said, should open a "second front" in the Pacific to help Russia. There were also many military and political leaders of the Pacific countries which lived and struggled uneasily in the shadow of Japanese power, who resented what they considered was an unreasonable concentration on the European scene. General MacArthur, the Australian Prime Minister (Mr Curtin), the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army (General Blamey), and the Commander of the Allied Air Forces in the South-West Pacific, General Kenney, all made public statements urging the allotment of more aircraft to the South-West Pacific; and some newspapers both in Australia and America began a campaign to this end. The Hearst group of newspapers particularly and a group of American senators led by Senator Chandler demanded more attention to the Pacific war and more support for MacArthur.

Mr Curtin, when he heard that Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt were conferring at Casablanca, sent them a cablegram on 19th January asking for 1,500 additional operational and 500 additional transport aircraft and more naval aid. Two weeks later, on 3rd February, Mr Calwell (Labour) declared in the House of Representatives that Australia had a right to ask that sufficient aircraft should be sent for the defence of Australia.<sup>5</sup>

"The tenacity and methodical comprehensiveness of the campaign [for aid for the Pacific war]," wrote Joseph Harsch, of the *Christian Science*

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<sup>4</sup> S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI (1950), pp. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> General Arnold in his first report to the Secretary of War said: "It was necessary for us to parcel out our airplanes among the many who urgently needed them in much the same manner that water from the last canteen is distributed among a party lost in the desert. . . . We had to steel ourselves against appeals not only from the various air forces fighting so valiantly against the enemy, but also against equally determined agencies in this country."

*Monitor*, "leaves Washington curious, baffled and almost resentful." The Melbourne *Herald* of 15th April, in a leading article said: "The extent and severity of the Japanese air raid upon Milne Bay [on April 14] fully bears out the grave warnings of the Prime Minister, General MacArthur and General Sir Thomas Blamey of the seriousness of the new menace to Australia and to the Allies, of Japan's growing air strength in the north and of its concentration in the perimeter of island bases about our coasts. The tendency here to overrate our own recent successes has made it difficult for the public mind both in Australia and abroad to realise the real truth of the situation."

The Casablanca conference ended in a compromise. It came to the following decisions. The cross-Channel invasion would be delayed until 1944, but in order to assist Russia, operations would be undertaken in the Mediterranean. There would be a stepped-up combined air offensive against Germany with the object of reducing Germany's war potential and thus preparing the way for a successful amphibious assault against western Europe. General Eisenhower would be informed that an attack on Sicily was to be launched in July 1943, but the American Joint Chiefs did not commit themselves to operations in the Mediterranean after Sicily. The first charge on United Nations' resources would be the defeat of the U-boat. The second charge would be assistance to Russia followed by operations in the Mediterranean (the third charge). The fourth charge would be "the build-up in the United Kingdom". Operations in the Pacific and Far Eastern theatres came only fifth in the order of priority.

Specifically, operations approved for the Pacific in 1943 were:

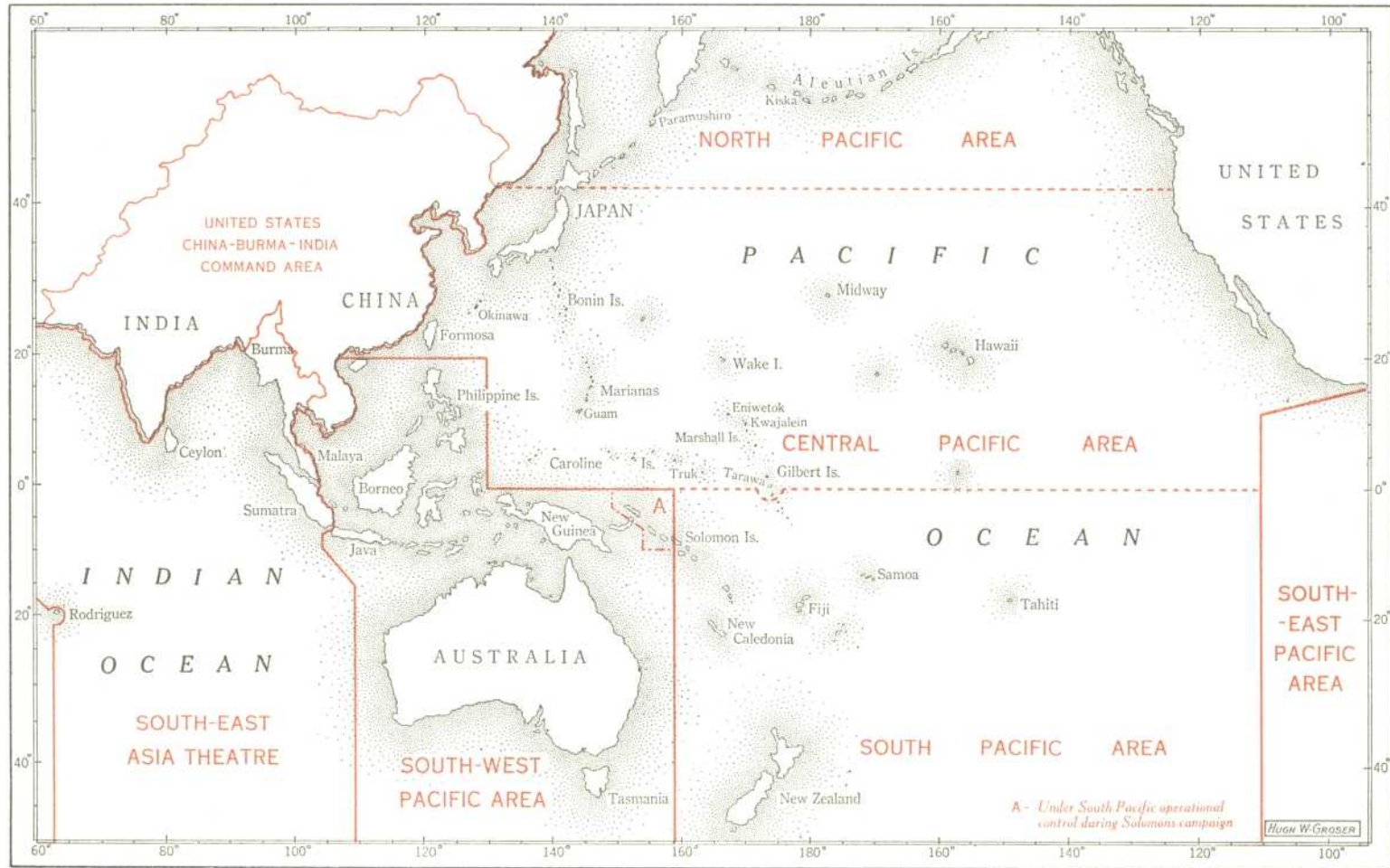
1. To continue the advance from Guadalcanal and New Guinea until Rabaul had been taken and the Bismarcks Barrier broken.
2. To advance westward towards Truk and Guam.
3. To make the Aleutians as secure as possible.
4. To advance along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis as far as Timor.
5. To recapture Burma in order to help China by (a) amphibious assaults on Ramree Island and Akyab, (b) invasion of north Burma by British and Chinese ground forces to open a land route to China and prepare for (c) an all-out offensive to re-open the Burma Road and occupy all Burma.

The first and fourth of these tasks concerned General MacArthur's South-West Pacific forces.

All air forces engaged in battle and other operational duties in the South-West Pacific Area were organised under and directed by a command headquarters known as "Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area".<sup>6</sup> Lieut-General Kenney commanded these forces, which comprised the Fifth American Air Force; all operational squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force assigned to the South-West Pacific Area, with their

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<sup>6</sup> When the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands set up "South-West Pacific Area" in 1942 they allotted strategic responsibility for it to the United States. Under MacArthur, as Supreme Commander, were set up three subordinate commands: Allied Land Forces, Allied Air Forces and Allied Naval Forces.



Boundaries of Allied Areas of Command.

service units; one Royal Air Force squadron; and one Netherlands Air Force squadron. In April 1943 Kenney's force included sixty-nine squadrons:

<i>United States:</i>	<i>Squadrons</i>
Fighters . . . . .	9
Dive bombers . . . . .	5
Medium and general reconnaissance bombers	6
Heavy bombers . . . . .	8
Transport aircraft . . . . .	8
	— 36
 <i>Australia:</i>	
Fighters . . . . .	9
Attack and long-range fighters . . . . .	2
Army cooperation . . . . .	2
Dive bombers . . . . .	4
Medium and general reconnaissance bombers	7
General reconnaissance flying-boats . . . . .	2
Torpedo . . . . .	1
Reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrol . . . . .	3
Fleet cooperation . . . . .	1
	— 31
 <i>Great Britain:</i>	
Fighters . . . . .	1
	— 1
 <i>Netherlands:</i>	
Medium and general reconnaissance bomber	1
	— 1
	— 69

Of the thirty-one Australian squadrons, twenty-four, in addition to the Netherlands bomber squadron (No. 18, armed with Mitchells), the British fighter squadron (No. 54, armed with Spitfires), and one American heavy bomber squadron (No. 319, equipped with Liberators), had been assigned by General Kenney to the control of Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command. Kenney had assigned the remaining seven Australian operational squadrons to the direct operational control of the Fifth Air Force. These squadrons were organised in an Australian formation, No. 9 Operational Group, commanded by Air Commodore Hewitt.

In addition to the thirty-one R.A.A.F. squadrons which the Australian government had allotted to the Allied Air Forces, there were eight more Australian squadrons in the South-West Pacific Area. Of these five were transport squadrons, and the remaining three—No. 43 (General Reconnaissance Flying-Boat), No. 79 (Fighter), and No. 8 (Torpedo)—were combat squadrons not yet assigned to Allied Air Forces. Two regular Australian squadrons (Nos. 3 and 10) and No. 1 Air Ambulance Unit, in addition to a number of squadrons formed under the Empire Air

Training Scheme, were serving with the Royal Air Force in the Middle East and the United Kingdom, and large numbers of individual Australians were serving with Royal Air Force squadrons in the United Kingdom, the Middle East and India.

The types of aircraft operated by the Australian Air Force in the Pacific at the end of April 1943 were:

	Serviceable (ready for operations)	Unserviceable (temporarily unfit for operations)	Total
Fighters . . . . .	299	224	523
Medium bombers . . . . .	156	228	384
Dive bombers (Vulzee Vengeance) . . . . .	18	90	108
General purpose (Buffalo, Lancer and Wirraway) . . . . .	83	86	169
Reconnaissance . . . . .	42	35	77
Transport . . . . .	31	39	70
Miscellaneous . . . . .	60	50	110
Totals . . . . .	689	752	1,441

There were then 143,992 men and women serving in the Australian Air Force, and of these 16,746 were overseas, mainly in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, and India. Of the 127,246 in the Pacific area, a total of 29,349 were still under training and 2,616 were on the sick list. There were 496 officers and 15,299 airwomen in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force.

While the Australian Air Force thus devoted its major effort to the Pacific war, it was, at the same time, responsible for contributing heavily, especially in aircrews, to the Royal Air Force in other theatres of war, whereas the Australian Army now had its entire effort concentrated in the Pacific.

The specific tasks allotted to the R.A.A.F. in the Pacific were: (a) offensive action against the enemy forward bases, particularly those established in Timor, New Britain, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands; (b) local air defence; (c) coast reconnaissance and protection of shipping; (d) cooperation with the fixed defences at Darwin, Fremantle, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Sydney-Newcastle area; (e) direct cooperation with the navy; and (f) cooperation with the field army by reconnaissance, protection against enemy aircraft and direct attack of the opposing forces.

The Fifth Air Force had 35,000 men in Australia and New Guinea and had received a total of 2,284 aircraft of which 538 had been lost in accidents and 385 to enemy action. It had 772 first-line aircraft available for immediate action, compared with 689 available to the R.A.A.F. There had been little growth in the aircraft strength of the Fifth Air

Force since October 1942 because the allocations made from American production had been only about enough to replace wastage.<sup>7</sup>

The Fifth Air Force, with its seven Australian squadrons, had responsibility for operations in Papua, New Guinea and north-eastern Australia, while R.A.A.F. Command controlled operations for the defence of the rest of Australia, in addition to having responsibility for reconnaissance and bomber operations from the Darwin area against the Japanese bases in the Netherlands East Indies. The arrangement, however, was not inflexible. Australian squadrons—for example, those in No. 9 Group—were attached to the Fifth Air Force, while the Fifth frequently furnished squadrons to Bostock's R.A.A.F. Command on request.

The Fifth Air Force, which Kenney had placed under the direct control of Major-General Whitehead, had been under considerable strain throughout the Papuan campaign and was now forced to husband its bomber strength. Of 60 Liberator bombers in No. 90 Group, only 15 could be counted on for a striking force after the campaign. The strain on bomber squadrons had been reduced, however, by the fact that it was now possible to base some of the heavy bombers at Port Moresby and Milne Bay. Six of the seven airfields lying within 30 miles of Port Moresby were in constant use and the development of Dobodura into a major operating base was well under way.

In New Guinea, Whitehead had nine American and two Australian fighter squadrons—Nos. 75 and 77. The Australians were armed with Kittyhawk aircraft. The Americans had a total of 330 fighters, including eighty Lightnings, the two-engined aircraft which was beginning to replace the Kittyhawk in the American squadrons. The Kittyhawk had not performed very successfully in air combat against the Japanese single-engined fighter because of its slower rate of climbing and its inability to operate at high levels. At 18,000 feet the performance of the Kittyhawk was sluggish and fighter pilots had reported "a feeling of hopelessness when unable to outclimb the enemy". The Lightning aircraft had a better performance; of a total of 127 Lightnings which had been received, only four had been lost in air combat to the enemy. This compared with 425 Kittyhawks received, of which 51 had been lost in combat, and 140 Airacobras, of which 33 had been lost. Because of its relatively poor performance, the Kittyhawk had to be used largely in hit-and-run attacks against enemy Zeros. The Zero was a lightly-armoured aircraft compared with the heavy construction of the Kittyhawk. It was much more manoeuvrable, but broke up easily under the fire of .5-calibre machine-guns with which the Kittyhawk was armed.

<sup>7</sup> The following table indicates the comparative strength of the force in first-line aircraft between October 1942 and April 1943:

	Oct 1942	Apr 1943
Fighter aircraft . . .	364	298
Bomber aircraft . . .	235	233
Transport aircraft . . .	62	97
Miscellaneous aircraft . . .	67	144
	<u>728</u>	<u>772</u>



Arrayed against the Allied forces in the South and South-West Pacific Areas, the Japanese, in April, had three armies, comprising eight divisions. Six of these divisions were controlled by General Imamura's *Eighth Area Army* with headquarters at Rabaul. These divisions were grouped into the *XVII Army*, which was deployed in the Solomons-New Britain area, and the *XVIII Army*, deployed on the New Guinea mainland. The *XVII Army* comprised the *6th, 17th and 38th Divisions*, and the *XVIII Army* the *20th, 41st, and 51st Divisions*. Another Army, the *XIX*, comprising the *5th and 48th Divisions*, was deployed in the islands north of Darwin. Compared with these forces the Allies had six divisions as well as a powerful fleet under Admiral Halsey in the South Pacific Area, while General MacArthur had a total of two American and twelve Australian divisions, as well as Kenney's air forces.

Opposed to the American, Australian and New Zealand air forces in the Solomon Islands-New Guinea areas were airmen of both the Japanese army and navy air forces, the latter being under Admiral Kusaka, the naval commander at Rabaul. Enemy air formations with headquarters at Rabaul were:

Army: *Fourth Air Army* { *6th Air Division*  
                                   { *7th Air Division*  
 Navy: *XI Air Fleet* { *25th Air Flotilla*  
                                   { *26th Air Flotilla*

Most of the Japanese squadrons in these formations were based at Rabaul and the northern Solomons, and the total strength, including carrier aircraft sent from Truk in March 1943 for a special offensive, was 400. Estimates made by the Allies at this time of enemy air strength were close to this figure. North of Darwin, the *23rd Air Flotilla* of the *XI Air Fleet* and a number of Japanese army air formations were operating against Air Commodore Bladin's North-Western Area force.

The over-extension of Japanese naval power into the Guadalcanal area and the attempt to take Port Moresby had greatly strained Japan's resources in ships and aircraft.<sup>8</sup> Losses could not be replaced quickly enough because of the shortage of materials and skilled labour. Nevertheless, every effort was made to expand air force strength at Rabaul and increase the aircrew training program. This was done in spite of an impending fuel shortage brought about primarily by the sinking by American and British submarines of a large number of Japanese tankers.<sup>9</sup>

The high Japanese aircraft losses in the Rabaul area were later attributed by an *XI Fleet* staff officer to the superiority of American fighter aircraft, the breakdown of the Japanese aircraft supply system, and the inability of the Japanese to replace experienced pilots and maintenance staff. After February 1943, according to this officer, the morale of Japanese pilots had fallen because they were not given home leave. They tended

<sup>8</sup> US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol II, pp. 313-26: Admiral Toyoda. (After the war a group entitled the United States Strategic Bombing Survey interrogated many Japanese officers.)

<sup>9</sup> US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations*, Vol I, p. 135: Admiral Katsumata.

to exaggerate the damage they inflicted on Allied air and surface forces; they continually discussed the relative merits of Japanese and American aircraft, and were convinced they were flying greatly inferior machines. Japanese air planners had calculated that annual losses of between 20 or 30 per cent might be expected, but this had proved too low, and after 1943 the training of pilots was reorganised on the assumption that 50 per cent of aircrews would be lost.<sup>1</sup>

After March 1943 reinforcements of carrier aircraft were sent to Rabaul from Japan. Their purpose was to join with the army air units in joint actions against Allied positions in the Solomons and New Guinea. In addition, during this period, reinforcements for the *Fourth Air Army* were ferried from Burma and Japan along the north New Guinea coast or through Truk. The *12th Army Air Regiment*, which had arrived in December from Burma, was absorbed into the *Fourth Air Army*. The *12th Regiment's* fighter pilots were the best of the army airmen at Rabaul, and to reach this area had ferried their aircraft from Burma to Surabaya, then an aircraft carrier had taken them from Surabaya to Truk whence they had flown down to Rabaul.<sup>2</sup> Three more air regiments had followed by May 1943. About 6 per cent of the aircraft were lost in accidents or from bad navigation. The *Fourth Air Army*, at its peak, had a strength of 20,000 men.

In May 1943 a conference took place between Admiral Kusaka and Vice-Admiral Kondo, commander of the *Second Fleet* at Truk, and it was decided to continue bringing reinforcements from Japan so that Rabaul, the Solomons and the Vitiav Strait area could be held. The possibility of American attacks in the Marshalls, Gilberts, Solomons and eastern New Guinea areas was realised and the *Second Fleet* was to remain at Truk to meet these threats. Admiral Yamamoto, before his death in April 1943, and Admiral Koga, his successor, believed that Japan's only chance of success in the war lay in a decisive engagement with the American fleet. Koga hoped to draw the Americans into an area where he would have the support of land-based aircraft to compensate for his weakness in carrier aircraft. Rabaul had to be held to protect Truk which was an all-important fleet base.

Many Japanese leaders considered that continuation of the war against China while involved with America was a grave error because of the vast differences in production capacities of Japan and America. The Japanese navy and army was extended with insufficient men and weapons over an enormous area. Problems were aggravated by the clash in opinion between army and navy factions and their inability to work closely together, a condition which worried the Emperor and people in general.<sup>3</sup> The defeat at Guadalcanal was publicised as a "grand sublime operation" and knowledge of the shortages of material and shipping were kept from the people, with the result that they could not (according to Admiral Toyoda) bring

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral Katsumata.

<sup>2</sup> US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations*, Vol II, p. 499: Colonel Tanaka.

<sup>3</sup> US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations*, Vol I: Admiral Ozawa; Vol II: Admiral Toyoda.

themselves to the proper state of mind called for by the Government slogan: "100,000,000 people, united and ready to die for the nation."

Reluctantly, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, had come round to accepting the decisions of the Casablanca conference which had confirmed the intention of the British and Americans to concentrate the main effort in Europe until Germany had been defeated. He said, in April 1943: "To our Allies I say that the Australian Government accepts global strategy insofar as it conditions Australia's employment as an offensive base until Hitler is beaten." Curtin agreed that the Pacific war should be a "holding war" until Hitler was beaten, but he was determined to urge that sufficient arms, particularly aircraft, should be sent to Australia so that the holding war would in fact hold. He said that Australia "would not accept a flow of materials, notably aircraft, which does not measure up to the requirements of a holding war".

The Australian Government wanted the R.A.A.F., which in April had only 31 squadrons, to be expanded during 1943 to 45 and eventually to 73 squadrons, the ultimate goal laid down by the War Cabinet in 1942. Curtin followed up his signal of January 1943 to Roosevelt and Churchill, asking for 1,500 combat and 500 transport aircraft for the South-West Pacific, by sending Dr Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, on a special mission to Washington and the United Kingdom to press Australia's case for more aircraft. On 30th March, disturbed by the slow delivery of aircraft to the Royal Australian Air Force he again signalled to Roosevelt and Churchill:

I am very disturbed at the delay in delivery of aircraft from the United States. We were told last August that 397 aircraft were to be made available to the R.A.A.F. from U.S. production, under the plan then approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for expansion to 30 squadrons. The present position is that only 160 have been shipped. As a result, it has been necessary to completely revise the development program. Air crews which have been trained and supporting units which had been formed and equipped in anticipation of receiving these aircraft allocations had to be absorbed in other directions.

General Kenney also strongly urged the sending of more aircraft. "We were going downhill fast," he wrote, "and if the replacements and reinforcements I was promised in Washington didn't start coming soon I was going to be in a bad way."<sup>4</sup> He signalled General Arnold informing him that, according to the promises given in Washington, deliveries for April were short by 224 aircraft.<sup>5</sup>

Early in April, Curtin informed Evatt that he had learnt from MacArthur that a total of 860 additional aircraft were to be made available to the South-West Pacific. Curtin added: "General MacArthur has suggested that you should aim at obtaining aircraft for the R.A.A.F. program of 73 squadrons. . . . MacArthur suggests that the aircraft for the further expansion of the R.A.A.F. should come from the allotment made to the

<sup>4</sup> G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (1949), p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> Kenney, p. 241.

United Kingdom from the United States and urges that you should press this point of view with Mr Churchill."

On 4th April however, Curtin learned from the Australian Minister to Washington, Sir Owen Dixon,<sup>6</sup> that, in consequence of Kenney's representations, it had been decided to increase the United States Army Air Corps in the South-West Pacific, but that the United States staff did not contemplate increasing the allocation of aircraft to the R.A.A.F. The surprising information had emerged that Kenney had given his opinion to the American Chiefs of Staff that it would be difficult enough for the R.A.A.F. to man the 45 squadrons to be developed in 1943 without any further increase. While, therefore, General MacArthur was urging the Prime Minister to obtain aircraft for Australia's ambitious program of 73 squadrons, his subordinate, General Kenney, was advising Washington that it would be difficult for the R.A.A.F. to man even 45 squadrons in 1943.

Mr Curtin immediately sought an assurance from Mr Drakeford, the Minister for Air, that the Air Force could use the aircraft if they were allotted, and at the same time he asked General MacArthur to support Australia's claim for additional aircraft.

In response to Mr Curtin's request, Air Vice-Marshal Jones, the Chief of the Air Staff, reported on 7th April that training capacity existed in Australia to train sufficient men to man not only the 45 squadrons already approved but a considerably larger force. His report added: "There is no question of there being insufficient aircrew to man any number of aircraft which are likely to be assigned because of the agreement with the United Kingdom that any aircrew trained for the R.A.A.F. could be retained here . . . aircraft assigned to the R.A.A.F. would be unreservedly available for employment under the orders of the Commander, Allied Air Force, General Kenney. . . . It is desired that pressure be brought to bear to ensure that deliveries are forthcoming and that a reasonably even flow is maintained so that training and planning for personnel and equipment is not taken in advance of the available aircraft with the consequent failure to develop the maximum striking force in the shortest possible time."

Accordingly, on 20th April, Curtin cabled to Evatt informing him that the 73-squadron program was within the capacity of the R.A.A.F. and asking him to dispel any doubt that might exist as to the operational use of aircraft made available to the R.A.A.F. "Such aircraft are assigned unreservedly for employment under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, SWPA," the cablegram stated. Curtin also informed Evatt that General MacArthur unreservedly endorsed the statement of the Australian needs.

Dr Evatt thereupon vigorously pressed his case in Washington.<sup>7</sup> He saw Churchill and was hopeful of securing his support, but on 5th May

<sup>6</sup> Rt Hon Sir Owen Dixon, GCMG. Justice of High Court 1929-52, Chief Justice since 1952; Aust Minister to Washington 1942-44. Of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Hawthorn, 28 Apr 1886.

<sup>7</sup> Admiral Leahy in *I Was There* (1950), p. 182, wrote: "A frequent visitor in the late spring was the Australian Minister of Defence [sic], Dr Herbert Evatt who wanted more planes of various types

Roosevelt informed him it was not possible to permit any revision of allocations and that the recent conference of high-ranking United States commanders in the Pacific had resulted in decisions materially strengthening the combined air forces in the Pacific theatre.

On 12th June, however, Evatt, just before leaving for Britain, cabled Curtin that the President approved of the allocation to Australia of approximately 475 planes for the purpose of expanding the R.A.A.F. during 1943-45. Some of the planes, "probably dive-bombers and fighters", would be sent at once. Curtin announced in the House of Representatives on 22nd June that this would mean a 60 per cent increase in the strength of the R.A.A.F., and that Dr Evatt had performed a great service for Australia in securing these additional air reinforcements.

However, the promise of additional aircraft did not produce the expected results. From American production in 1943 only the following aircraft were to be made available as a result of Dr Evatt's visit:

Vengeance	.	.	34
Kittyhawk	.	.	60
Catalina	.	.	12
Shrike	.	.	150
Mariner	.	.	12
Norseman	.	.	14
			282

Within nine months General Kenney had ordered all Vengeance aircraft out of New Guinea as being unsuitable.<sup>8</sup> Kittyhawks were being superseded overseas by Lightnings, Mustangs and Thunderbolts, all of which had a much better performance. None of the 150 Shrikes were delivered in 1943 and in any case the original order was reduced to 10, the remainder being declared "surplus to requirements". The Mariners and Norseman aircraft were used as transports, so that the net gain in operational aircraft was small.

In any case, however, the shortage of manpower, as General Kenney had contended, was making it difficult for the R.A.A.F. to increase in size. There had been an extensive call-up of Australian manpower immediately after the outbreak of war with Japan and by January 1943 this had resulted in a serious lack of balance in the Australian war effort. It was estimated by the War Commitments Committee that in order to fulfil the then-existing program for the Services and war industry up to June 1943, a monthly intake of about 35,000 persons into the Services and aircraft and munition production would be needed. Of this number, 16,000 men and 6,000 women would be required for the Services. It was con-

for the Australian Air Force. . . . Evatt specifically asked me to tell the President of the political difficulties being caused by his government's failure to obtain planes from us. I don't think I gave Dr Evatt much encouragement, . . . although we were providing Australia with such planes as could be spared from other areas where the demands were greater."

<sup>8</sup> Altogether, Australia ordered 400 of these aircraft of which all but 56 had not already been shipped when the order was cancelled. While Kenney would not have the aircraft in the South-West Pacific Area, it was being used apparently with satisfactory results in the Burma theatre, where the RAF and Indian Air Force operated several squadrons of them. However, the targets in Burma were close by British airfields.

sidered, however, that only 10,000 of the 35,000 required would be available, and that even this proportion could only be maintained by continued restrictions on the use of manpower for civil purposes. In view of the shortage of manpower, the War Cabinet decided as a general principle, that "no further commitments could be undertaken for the provision of personnel for service overseas".<sup>9</sup>

Mr Curtin elaborated on this decision a few weeks later in the House of Representatives when he said:

I consider it a fallacy to suggest that a small nation like Australia, confronted with the problem of defending a large continent with a small population, should be expected, when faced with a life-and-death struggle in its own region, to send forces to other theatres. It is not in the same position as are the great nations, which after providing for the security of their home territories have a substantial margin of strength for service in other parts of the world. The only test by which this question can be judged is the facts of the military situation. It is a plain fact that Australian strength is not sufficient to meet all the contingencies of the military situation with which it may at any time be confronted and the strength of the Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific Area is inadequate to provide for more than a holding strategy with limited offensive action.

The air force found in 1943 that actual enlistments were falling far short of the allotments of manpower made to it by the War Cabinet, and this deficiency was being reflected in shortages in formations in the battle areas. No. 9 Operational Group, in New Guinea, for example, had a deficiency of 1,000 airmen in March 1943.

In New Guinea the manpower problem was intensified by the high wastage from tropical diseases—malaria, dysentery and dengue. Indeed, from the period 31st October 1942 to 22nd January 1943, tropical diseases had accounted for 80 per cent of R.A.A.F. casualties. In June 1943 it was estimated that, by the end of that year, the R.A.A.F.'s strength would be 8,000 below establishment, while in April 1943 the army had an effective strength of 458,000, a deficiency of 55,000 on what the Commander-in-Chief, General Blamey, then considered should be the minimum.

By the middle of 1943 the situation had further deteriorated, and Curtin directed the Defence Committee and manpower authorities to examine the war effort as a whole, including the planned expansion of the air force, bearing in mind this difficult manpower situation.

In July, government policy on the conduct of the war was crystallised in a War Cabinet decision, which laid down the governing principle that Australia should make its maximum contribution to the war in the South-West Pacific Area.<sup>1</sup> The nature and extent of the Australian contribution would be subject to MacArthur's strategic plan of operations as approved by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and as related to the "global strategy" laid down by the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff. Contributions beyond the South-West Pacific Area were justifiable only when they could be peculiarly made by Australia to the efforts of the Allied nations, for example, the supply of foodstuffs to Britain. If

<sup>9</sup> War Cabinet Minute 2548, 11 Jan 1943.

<sup>1</sup> War Cabinet Minute 2968, 13 Jul.

the grand strategists assembled at Casablanca had insisted on the "beat Hitler first" policy, then Australians were equally determined that their country at least would now concentrate its main armed forces in the Pacific.

Projects which might not provide a contribution to the war effort for some time and yet absorb the labour of men and women and production resources, would not be adopted unless:

1. Recommended by the Commander-in-Chief.
2. Approved by War Cabinet by reason of the fact that they would create important and essential production resources in the post-war period.
3. Satisfactory assurances for the supply of war needs from overseas could not be obtained.

With no improvement likely in the manpower situation, the Government on 1st October 1943 at length decided that the 73-squadron plan could not be realised and decided to "stabilise" the R.A.A.F. at its "present strength" in Australia:

Operational squadrons . . .	37
Transport squadrons . . .	6
Reserve squadrons . . .	5
	—
Total . . .	48

Strength in Australia, however, could be further built up from squadrons that might be transferred from overseas and any further strength that could be maintained from a monthly intake of 2,450 men and 1,050 women allotted to the air force.<sup>2</sup>

By December 1942, some tension had developed in the higher command of the air force because of the differences of view between Mr Drakeford and the Air Board on the one hand, and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock on the other, over the precise limits of Bostock's powers as the operational commander of the formation called R.A.A.F. Command which controlled most of the Australian squadrons then engaged in action against the Japanese. The dispute had had its origin in a decision made in April 1942 which separated the operational from the administrative functions of the air force in the South-West Pacific Area. This decision was made by War Cabinet on the advice of the Advisory War Council. The decision (War Cabinet Minute 2127 of 28th April 1942) was as follows:

"On the recommendation of the Advisory War Council (Minute 916), the following interpretation of the decision relating to the assignment of Australian Forces to the Supreme Command was approved:

With the Service squadrons there is also assigned R.A.A.F. Area Headquarters, Area Combined Headquarters, all Fighter Sector Headquarters and such Station Headquarters as have been established for the operational control of R.A.A.F. service squadrons.

Operational control of the R.A.A.F. service squadrons and necessary Operational Headquarters as indicated above, is vested in the Commander of the Allied Air Forces.

<sup>2</sup> War Cabinet Minute 3065. 1 Oct 1943.

The Australian Chief of the Air Staff will be responsible for all matters associated with R.A.A.F. personnel, provision and maintenance of aircraft, supply and equipment, works and buildings and training. These functions are not assigned to the Commander-in-Chief."

Air Vice-Marshal Bostock strongly criticised the resulting dual control within the Air Force.<sup>3</sup> But he was not alone. All those who became involved in the dispute, including Mr Curtin, General MacArthur, General Kenney, Mr Drakeford, Air Vice-Marshal Jones and the Air Board, were unanimous in condemning it. In view of this unanimity it was remarkable that the arrangement was allowed to remain as long as it did.

The controversy, which had begun in September 1942, was still unresolved in April 1943 and Curtin feared that the turmoil created by the division of responsibility would have a bad effect in American quarters on the supply of the necessary aircraft, and their use by General Kenney. In the meantime, Curtin had consulted General Blamey (on 9th March), through the Secretary of the Department of Defence, asking him whether he considered that, if unified operational and administrative control of the R.A.A.F. was to be given effect, this should be done by the appointment of an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., and the abolition of the Air Board, on the lines adopted by the army where the Commander-in-Chief exercised both operational and administrative control. In the course of his reply Blamey wrote:

I am sure that it will not be possible to bring the whole weight of the R.A.A.F. to bear against the enemy until an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., is appointed and the Air Board abolished, on similar lines to those adopted in the Army. It is impossible to separate operational and administrative command since the whole object of administrative organisation is to ensure the maximum operational capacity against the enemy.

Curtin therefore recommended to the War Cabinet that they appoint an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., who would be responsible to Kenney for the operational control of the R.A.A.F. and to Drakeford for administration and all matters other than operations.<sup>4</sup> On 15th April the War Cabinet adopted this proposal, and it was agreed that Curtin should ask the Australian High Commissioner in London (Mr Bruce) to obtain from the British Government the services of a suitable Australian officer serving in the Royal Air Force. The Government directed that the position of the Air Board would be decided when this air officer commanding had been appointed and in the meantime efforts were to be continued to make the existing arrangements work.

In the meantime, the Air Board, taking the matter into its own hands, issued orders transferring Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to the posting of Air Officer Commanding, North-Western Area (a subordinate formation of R.A.A.F. Command), and Air Commodore Hewitt to the posting held by Bostock. This action was supported by Drakeford who proposed these

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of the origins and early development of this problem the reader is referred to D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*.

<sup>4</sup> War Cabinet Minute 2782, 15 Apr 1943.



changes to Curtin on 15th April, the day on which the War Cabinet met to discuss the R.A.A.F. problem. However, Curtin rejected Drakeford's proposals, pointing out that an arrangement existed whereby any changes in the appointments of commanders of the Allied naval, land and air forces would only be made in consultation with the American Government.

Curtin cabled Bruce on 28th April, telling him that there was a danger that unless the situation was firmly grasped by a capable officer, the Australian air effort might become prejudiced in the eyes of the Americans. He said: "General MacArthur's mission to Washington having secured an increased allotment of aircraft for the United States Air Force in the SWPA, Dr Evatt is accordingly concentrating on a greater allocation for the R.A.A.F. under the 73-squadron plan. It is imperative therefore that the control and direction of the R.A.A.F. should be such as to evoke the fullest support of General MacArthur in supporting our case for the provision of aircraft for the expansion and maintenance of the R.A.A.F. and in ensuring its use to the fullest operational extent." Curtin added that the United Kingdom government should even "inconvenience itself" to provide Australia with an outstanding officer, who would be invaluable not only in the present, but in the future when offensive action was taken against Japan. Curtin told Bruce that Air Marshal Drummond (Deputy Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East), an Australian, would be acceptable. His name was raised again because, despite earlier (unsuccessful) negotiations, Drummond had informed Lieut-General Morshead<sup>5</sup> that he would welcome an opportunity of serving in Australia. Bruce pressed for Drummond but the British leaders would not agree to release him.<sup>6</sup> In a cable on 22nd May, Bruce mentioned several other possibilities and gave preference first to Air Chief Marshal Joubert,<sup>7</sup> who had just completed a term as Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command, and then to Air Chief Marshal Longmore,<sup>8</sup> who was in retirement, having been removed from command in the Middle East in July 1941. Curtin consulted Blamey about Longmore, and Blamey advised that he considered that "he would be a very successful Air Officer Commanding in the circumstances obtaining in Australia". MacArthur, however, informed Curtin that it would be unwise to accept either because neither was suitable, and in the circumstances he suggested that the present arrangement, unsatisfactory though it was, should be carried on.<sup>9</sup>

Drakeford, meanwhile, pressed again for the removal of Bostock, but Curtin wrote to him on 11th June in the following terms:

<sup>5</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Leslie Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, ED. (1st AIF: 2 Bn and CO 33 Bn 1916-19.) Comd 18 Inf Bde 1939-41; GOC 9 Div 1941-43, 1 Corps 1944-45. Branch manager shipping line; of Sydney; b. Ballarat, Vic, 18 Sep 1889.

<sup>6</sup> Drummond had already been selected to take over the post of Air Member for Training on the Air Council at Air Ministry.

<sup>7</sup> Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté, KCB, CMG, DSO. (RFC and RAF: France 1914, Egypt 1916-17, Italy 1917-18.) AOC-in-C Coastal Cd RAF 1941-43, IG of RAF 1943. Regular air force offr; b. Calcutta, India, 21 May 1887.

<sup>8</sup> Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, GCB, DSO. AOC-in-C RAF in ME 1940-41; IG of RAF 1941. Regular air force offr; of Wentworth, Surrey, Eng; b. St. Leonards, NSW, 8 Oct 1885.

<sup>9</sup> War Cabinet Agendum 107/1943 of 10 Jun.

In regard to your letter of the 1st May, relative to changes in higher command appointments in the R.A.A.F. which came under discussion with the Commander-in-Chief . . . he outlined as follows the attitude which General Kenney and himself had taken with you during your visit to Brisbane:

The appointment of R.A.A.F. officers is a matter entirely for the Commonwealth Government, but—

- (a) General MacArthur had said that, if AVM Bostock were removed he would be given a letter of the highest commendation for the very able manner in which he had performed his duties at Allied Air Headquarters.
- (b) The commander-in-chief would insist on the replacement of AVM Bostock by an equally able officer.
- (c) The proposal to replace AVM Bostock by Air Commodore Hewitt was not concurred in, as the latter was not considered an adequate replacement.

In his reply on 24th June Drakeford said: "I find it difficult to reconcile General MacArthur's attitude that, while he agrees that the appointment of R.A.A.F. officers is a matter entirely for the Commonwealth Government, he 'would insist on the replacement of A.V.M. Bostock by an equally able officer', which latter condition practically amounts to an overriding right being required by the Commander-in-Chief in the selection of an officer to fill that post."

Curtin did not agree. In a letter to Drakeford on 17th July, he said: "The necessity for consultation with General MacArthur arises from his responsibility as operational commander. As such, he undoubtedly has the right to expect that he should be given an opportunity of expressing his views to the government on any change proposed in a high operational post under his command. There is no question of the exercising by him of an 'overriding right' and the responsibility of the government for appointments to high R.A.A.F. posts is not affected."

In summary, the "divided control" controversy had taken this course: War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council had decided in April 1942 to set up an R.A.A.F. organisation which divided the operational from the administrative control of the force. This arrangement was repeated during reorganisation of the Allied Air Forces in September 1942, but thereafter the Defence Committee recommended that the R.A.A.F. should be unified under one head. Mr Drakeford and the Air Board wanted Air Vice-Marshal Jones as the single commander, but MacArthur would not agree. Mr Curtin, in the position of a mediator, was not prepared to go against MacArthur's wishes, nor to force Drakeford to extend Bostock's powers. Another alternative, to bring an officer from overseas, was attempted and failed, because MacArthur was against the men nominated. No further action was taken until later in 1943 when conversations were held between Kenney, Jones and Bostock.

The R.A.A.F., therefore, had continued to be the victim of a mischievous dual control, because those responsible could not agree on a solution which would give it the unity it needed. Disputes arose over the appointment of officers, over the provision of staff for R.A.A.F. Command Headquarters, over airfield construction, training (especially advanced operational training), fighter-sector organisations, supply and



Gurney Airfield at Milne Bay.

(R.A.A.F.)



Boston medium bombers of No. 22 Squadron returning to a New Guinea airfield.

(R.A.A.F.)



A Spitfire taking off from a Darwin airfield.

*(Australian War Memorial.)*



*(Australian War Memorial.)*

Spitfire pilots resting at a dispersal base at Darwin. Left to right: P-O Leonard, F-O R. W. Foster, Sqn Ldr E. M. Gibbs, F-Lt R. Norwood (all R.A.F.), and W Cdr C. R. Caldwell.

other matters. Inevitably, too, there was a conflict of loyalties among the men of the air force, tending towards the creation of groups. These troubles are inherent in such a system of dual control.

The American Air Corps had suffered from this form of divided control during the 1917-18 war; and again, in the nineteen-thirties, the U.S. Army Air establishment had two independent elements—the G.H.Q. Air Force which was responsible for combat operation and the Air Corps, responsible for supply and training. Finally, under the stress of the disturbed world conditions in the late 'thirties, the two were consolidated by a War Department directive which made both directly responsible to the Chief of the Air Corps.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I (1948), p. 32.