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ABBREVIATIONS

AAF  Allied Air Forces
ABDA  American, British, Dutch, and Australian Command
ACNB  Australian Commonwealth Naval Board
Adv GHQ  Advanced General Headquarters
Adv LHQ  Advanced Headquarters, Allied Land Forces
Adv NGF  Advanced New Guinea Force
AHU  Army History Unit
AIF  Australian Imperial Force
ALF  Allied Land Forces
AMF  Australian Military Forces
ANF  Allied Naval Forces, Southwest Pacific Area
ANU  Australian National University
ANZAB  Australia, New Zealand, America, and Britain
ANZAC  Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
APA  amphibious attack transport
ATC  Amphibious Training Center
ATG  Amphibious Training Group
AWM  Australian War Memorial
BGS  brigadier, general staff
BFP  Berryman Family Papers
CANFSWPA  commander, Allied Naval Forces, Southwest Pacific Area
CAS  chief of the Air Staff
CAS  close air support
CCS  Combined Chiefs of Staff
CGS  chief of the General Staff (Australian Army)
C-in-C  commander in chief
CMF  Citizen Military Forces
CNO  chief of naval operations
CNS  chief of the Naval Staff
CO  commanding officer
COMANZAC  commander, ANZAC Naval Area
CoS  chief of staff
CPA  Central Pacific Area
CRA  commander, Royal Artillery
Abbreviations

CTS  combined training school
DA&QMG  deputy adjutant and quartermaster general
DCGS  deputy chief of the General Staff (Australian Army)
DMMA  Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archives
EATS  Empire Air Training Scheme
ESB  engineering special (amphibious) brigade
Forland  Forward Echelon of Blamey’s Advance LHQ based at GHQ
FRUMEL  Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne
FTP  fleet training publication (US Navy doctrine)
G-1  personnel staff
G-2  intelligence staff
G-3  operations staff
G-4  logistics staff
GHQ  General Headquarters, SWPA
GOC  general officer commanding
HQ  headquarters
IC  independent company
IGHQ  Imperial (Japanese) General Headquarters
IJA  Imperial Japanese Army
IJN  Imperial Japanese Navy
JCS  Joint Chiefs of Staff (US)
JOOTS  Joint Overseas Operational Training School
LCI  landing craft, infantry
LCM  landing craft, mechanized
LCT  landing craft, tank
LCVP  landing craft vehicle, personnel
LHQ  Land Headquarters
LSI  landing ship, infantry
LST  landing ship, tank
LVT  landing vehicle, tracked
MGGS  major general, general staff
MP  military policeman
NAA  National Archives of Australia
NARA  National Archives and Records Administration (US)
NCO  noncommissioned officer
NEI  Netherlands East Indies
NGF  New Guinea Force
NLA  National Library of Australia
NOIC  naval officer in charge
Abbreviations

NPA  North Pacific Area
NSW  New South Wales
NT   Northern Territory
PIB  Papuan Infantry Battalion
PIR  parachute infantry regiment
POA  Pacific Ocean Areas
POW  prisoner of war
PX   post exchange
RAA  Royal Australian Artillery
RAAF Royal Australian Air Force
RAF  Royal Air Force
RAN  Royal Australian Navy
SDSC Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
VII Phib Seventh Amphibious Force
SLV  State Library of Victoria
SOP  standard operating procedure
SOPAC South Pacific Area (Pacific Ocean Command, Admiral Nimitz)
SSF  South Seas Force
SWPA Southwest Pacific Area
SWPSF Southwest Pacific Sea Frontiers
TAF  tactical air force
USAAF US Army Air Forces
USAFIA US Army Forces in Australia
USAHEC US Army Heritage and Education Center
USARPAC US Army Pacific
USASOS US Army Services of Supply
USMC US Marine Corps
USN  US Navy
WRANS Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service
WVM  Wisconsin Veterans Museum
MACARTHUR'S COALITION
Introduction

From 1942 to 1945, the war in the Pacific was divided into two major theaters: the Pacific Ocean Areas (POA), under the command of Adm. Chester Nimitz (US Navy [USN]), and the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur (US Army). The POA was fundamentally an all-US command, while at the heart of the SWPA lay a coalition of allies: the United States, Australia, and the Netherlands. With the Dutch under Nazi occupation and their forces in the Far East largely destroyed in the first months of the Pacific War, they were able to play only a very minor role in the SWPA. MacArthur’s coalition was, therefore, principally a bilateral one between the United States and Australia.

Given the disparity in size, power, and status on the international stage, this was not an even partnership. The coalition that was formed in the SWPA in early 1942 was to be heavily influenced by the vast inequalities that existed between these two nations, especially in economic and military power. Power, however, is relative. In the early phases of the war, Australia was able to concentrate the vast majority of its resources in the theater, while MacArthur had to constantly haggle, harangue, beg, and plead for resources from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JSC). The JCS set the means and ends of the war against Japan; MacArthur merely controlled the ways in which the war would be fought in the SWPA. With the JCS running a two-front war across multiple theaters of conflict, in which the defeat of Japan had been relegated to a second-tier priority, MacArthur faced an uphill battle to achieve his objectives of liberating the Philippines and commanding the Allied forces in the defeat of Japan.

Complicating MacArthur’s mission was the fact that within the Pacific War the JCS saw Nimitz’s POA as the main theater of conflict. With the SWPA far down the JCS’s strategic priority list, MacArthur was forced in 1942 and 1943 to rely heavily on his Australian partners. In particular during this period, MacArthur’s ground forces were overwhelmingly Australian, as were considerable elements of his air and naval capabilities. Therefore, the coalition between MacArthur and the Australians was central to the operations of the SWPA and of significant importance to the Allied victory against Japan in the Pacific, especially during the period of 1942-1943.
This book is about the military partnership that developed between the United States and Australia at this time. In light of the competing national interests and strategic priorities that drive all coalitions, it looks to explore this relationship through a number of key questions: Why did Allied strategy lead to the creation of the SWPA? How was this military theater organized? How did the coalition in the SWPA operate on the battlefield? What where the stresses, strains, and areas of success for this coalition? These questions need to be addressed if we are to construct an understanding of how the SWPA functioned as a military command and to understand its role in the defeat of the Japanese.

For over sixty-five years, there has been a formal military alliance between the United States and Australia. During this period, Australian and US interests in the Asia-Pacific region (and globally) have been tied to each other by geography, intelligence, and security cooperation, economies, the support of liberal democracy, and a rules-based global order. Over time this relationship has been one of the closest alliance relationships in the modern era, ranging from the five-eyes intelligence cooperation (the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) to combined military operations in Korea, South Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Today thousands of US and Australian personnel serve on operations, on exchange, and in liaison and staff positions in each other’s militaries, including an Australian Army major general who currently serves as deputy commander, US Army Pacific (USARPAC).

To many, the US-Australian “alliance” was forged in the dark days of the Pacific War, and it has continued ever since. This “special” relationship is founded on a mutual understanding of two roughly similar societies. Both countries, once British colonies, aligned by a similar frontier foundation myth, and possessing complimentary values and culture, were driven together by the assault of imperialist Japan. This notion has become a part of the alliance mythology. The starting point of this relationship is seen by many to be 27 December 1941, when the Australian prime minister, John Curtin, noted, “Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.”1 Ever since Curtin wrote these immortal words, Australian prime ministers and US presidents have spoken of the long and enduring friendship between Australia and the United States and the development of this relationship through war.2

Given the strength of this alliance, its longevity, and its foundations in war, it is surprising that there has not been a comprehensive study of the
US and Australian military partnership in the SWPA. To be sure, there have been compelling histories of Australia and the United States in the Pacific War, including studies of the US-Australian relationship and its impact on social relations and at the foreign policy level, as well as a multitude of biographies of MacArthur and Curtin and other wartime military and civilian leaders. Professor David Horner has produced authoritative studies on Australian strategy, and there have been a significant number of works on individual battles and campaigns.

Horner’s masterful studies on Australian strategy have focused on policymaking and military strategy while providing fascinating glimpses into “battlefield cooperation.” However, no one has attempted to focus a work on the US-Australian military relationship in the theater. The aim of this work is to build on Horner’s studies and fill in the next layers of this relationship by focusing on the military-to-military partnership at the operational level and an analysis of the key tactical actions and relationships.

In doing so, what is stripped bare is the reality of the US-Australian relationship at this time. In the period up to World War II, there was no significant military contact between these two nations. Despite the oratory of contemporary political leaders, it is important to remember that there was no “alliance” in 1942. There was no mutual defense planning, no joint exercises, and little work on interoperability. When the SWPA command was set up in 1942, it was not an alliance but rather a coalition, that being a “temporary ad hoc arrangement, united against a specified enemy.” The alliance that the Australian public and politicians on both sides of the Pacific like to recall did not form until the signing of a formal treaty in 1951, and even then it was to be years before it matured into an important strategic partnership for both countries.

In order to explore and understand this military coalition, the book is organized around key themes and areas of study. These themes include Allied strategy, military organization in the SWPA, command, and the conduct of operations. Within these themes the focus is on key areas, such as the asymmetrical nature of the coalition and the relative balance of forces in the SWPA, command culture and doctrine, the personalities and performance of key commanders, the nature of the operating environment, operational planning, the conducting of operations, and the phases of operations and the stages of the war against Japan. These themes and areas of study are reflected in the structure and approach of the book and are woven through the fabric of the text. In approaching this topic, the book applies an analytical narrative. While themes and case studies can
allude to key areas of cooperation or failure, only by thinking through time and exploring the evolution of this relationship can we extrapolate the key principles that guided, drove, and influenced the nature and character of this coalition.9

In outlining the approach and scope of this work, it is important to note what the book is and is not. Cognizant of the depth of material that has already been produced on various aspects of both the SWPA and the US-Australian relationship, there are a number of key areas that the work will not focus on. First, intelligence: This topic has received detailed coverage in a number of works, and thus the exceptionally close and integrated US-Australian intelligence relationship in the SWPA will not be explored.10 Second, strategy: While strategy is discussed in detail, the book is not a study of Allied, Australian, or US strategy in the Pacific War. Rather, strategy is used as a context setter in order to explore how the coalition in the SWPA worked and to understand the development of operations. Third, logistics: While logistics are important at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war, this is not a major focus of the book. Instead, logistics are referred to, like strategy, as a contextual element for the conduct of operations and an important framework to understand the coalition. There is simply not the space in this work to cover logistics in the detail that it warrants and deserves.11 Finally, operations: This work is focused on the US and Australian military operations, and as such it confines itself to those battles, operations, and campaigns where there was a significant crossover in capabilities and commitment of resources, especially land forces. It does not attempt to provide comprehensive coverage of all the campaigns and battles of the SWPA.

This work is focused on the military-to-military relationship that developed in the SWPA between US and Australian military forces at the operational level from 1942 to 1945. It explores this topic through the work’s key themes and areas of focus while investigating the conduct of combined military campaigns and operations. In order to bring balance to a potentially detailed and broad topic, it narrows its focus in a number of ways. While triservice in nature, the book is more heavily focused on the interaction of the US and Australian armies. This is a product not of service bias but of the nature of the coalition, the interaction of the different services, the more platform-centric nature of air and maritime forces, the types of operations undertaken, the organization and command structure of the theater, and the relative balance and weight of the coalition.

This work is also focused in time. There is a definite and deliberate focus on the early to middle part of the war against Japan, covering the
period 1942 to early 1944. This is done in order to outline the strategic rationale for the establishment of the SWPA, to analyze its organization and structure, and to focus on the period of time in the relationship when the coalition was more symmetrical and strategic interests and objectives were more mutually aligned. In doing so, the book aims to provide an up-to-date analytical narrative of the campaigns in the SWPA through an assessment of the strategic and operational levels of war in the SWPA in the period 1942–1943. In the period 1944–1945, it concentrates on the strategic interplay between MacArthur and his Australian coalition partner.

What emerges from this investigation is a coalition that is fundamentally ad hoc, profoundly asymmetrical, and deeply dominated by its US Army commander in chief (C-in-C), General MacArthur. The dominance of MacArthur is reflected in the title of the book. MacArthur has been deliberately chosen as the lead in the title not just because of his infamous persona and name recognition but also mainly because he was the dominating force and personality in the theater. As will be revealed, it was his coalition; it was forged and evolved under his leadership, and it ultimately operated on his terms. This is also reflective of the United States being mentioned first in the subtitle. As a global power, the United States set the parameters of the relationship, and Australia, as a minor power, struggled to influence Allied strategy and the thoughts, ideas, and preferences of its new great and powerful friend.

In pursuing this topic, I have endeavored to draw as much as possible from sources from both sides of the coalition. Conscious of my own nationality, I have attempted to balance my assessment, and if there is a natural bias toward the Australians in the book, I hope it is seen as a product of the asymmetrical nature of the relationship. Traditionally there is greater emphasis on the smaller power to manage a coalition in order to exert its authority and influence on the dominant partner. As the great international affairs scholar Coral Bell wrote in her treatise on the US-Australian alliance, Dependent Ally, “the patron is high on the client’s horizon: the client (except in special circumstances) is low on the patron’s horizon.” As such, the Australian government and military were heavily focused on managing the coalition with the United States. MacArthur, however, could afford a much more narrow view concentrated on US national priorities, especially from late 1943, when US forces in the theater became predominant. This relative balance is also a reflection of the source material from each country’s archives, in particular the relative focus of US archival material on the balance of the US war effort in the SWPA.
From these boundaries flow the organization and layout of the book. Part 1 begins by tracing the evolution of Australian and US strategy in the Asia-Pacific region from the end of World War I to the beginning of the Pacific War. Chapter 1 outlines just how disjointed the two countries were from one another and how little they initially figured in each other’s strategic approach to the region. Chapter 2 explains the reasons that Australia came to prominence in US strategic calculations in the war against Japan in the period after Pearl Harbor, the failure of American, British, Dutch, and Australian Command (ABDA), and the decision to establish the SWPA in early 1942. Chapter 3 explores MacArthur’s military command: his arrival in Australia, the SWPA’s initial organization, the dominance of the US Army and MacArthur’s general headquarters, and an assessment of his three combatant commands.

Part 2 of the book moves from the strategic and organizational realms into the operational and tactical relationship during the campaigns of 1942. Chapter 4 assesses the initial development of the relationship between senior US and Australian officers and details the cultural, doctrinal, and philosophical differences that came to dominate the relationship. Chapter 5 outlines Japanese plans and intentions toward the South Pacific in 1942 and the Allied response in the SWPA in Australia and Papua. It ends with a discussion of the relationship between the two militaries in Australia during 1942, culminating in the Battle of Brisbane in November. Chapters 6 and 7 detail the battles at Gona, Buna, and Sanananda, especially the injection of the 32nd US Infantry Division into operations and the collaboration between the US and Australian forces in Advanced New Guinea Force in the period from October 1942 to January 1943.

Part 3 of the book returns to the strategic and organizational levels. It investigates the changes made to the command and organization of the SWPA as a result of the campaigns of 1942 and lays out the strategy for the theater in 1943. Chapter 8 details the strategy and plan for Operation Cartwheel—the reduction of Rabaul—and the establishment of aerial superiority by the Allies in this section of the theater with the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Chapter 9 assesses the command, organization, and doctrinal developments in amphibious warfare in the SWPA. This was a key element in the development of MacArthur’s strategic approach in the theater and an essential military capability for the development of offensive operations from 1943. It forms the area where the closest military-to-military cooperation occurred between the United States and Australia.

Part 4 returns to the operational and tactical levels for the campaign in New Guinea in 1943. Chapter 10 outlines the difficulties of coalition
collaboration in the successful battle for Salamaua. Chapter 11 investigates the details of coalition planning for Operation Postern at the theater, task force, corps, and division levels. Chapter 12 details the operations for the assault on Lae and Finschhafen, the liberation of the Huon Peninsula, the landing at Saidor, and the capture of Madang. It includes an assessment of the key turning points in the relationship in late 1943 and early 1944 when US power became preponderant and the underlying nature of the coalition changed and was subsequently reconceived by MacArthur and his headquarters.

Part 5 concludes the work. With the change in the asymmetry of the coalition in early 1944 and the exhaustion of the Australian war effort, the changes to the coalition’s arrangements were profound. Chapter 13 details the search and struggle by Australia to find a role in the SWPA in 1944, the split between the theater C-in-C, General MacArthur, and the Australian C-in-C, Gen. Thomas Blamey, and the exclusion of the Australians from the operations in the Philippines. It finishes with the final combined operations in the theater (and the Pacific War) in Borneo and a discussion of the controversies surrounding the Australian war effort in the SWPA in 1944 and 1945 and MacArthur’s role in these events. The conclusion provides an assessment of the nature and character of “MacArthur’s coalition” in relation to the themes and key areas of investigation.

As a whole, the chapters in the book trace the evolution of the US-Australian coalition in the SWPA, with a focus on the military-to-military relationship. This relationship starts from a low base and is immediately inflicted with doctrinal, cultural, and personality problems. The key themes and areas of focus form the basis of investigating how this coalition formed and worked.

With major differences on issues of command, control, and doctrine underpinned by the fact that this relationship was a temporary, ad hoc coalition, moves toward integration and interoperability were minimal. The focus on overcoming issues of cooperation became centered on the personalities and capabilities of senior officers and commanders. This individual initiative and a focus on operational and tactical problems were the key to enabling mutually supportive and effective means of collaboration. Such a system lacked a systemic organizational approach and was thus heavily dependent on individuals from both nations.

In understanding the coalition in the SWPA, the personalities of commanders and senior staff officers are critically important. The very top of the command structure in the SWPA was dominated by the challenging
relationship between MacArthur and Blamey, an association that would break down in 1944 under diverging priorities and MacArthur’s megalomaniac and narcissistic personality. Underneath these two officers, the detailed components of the coalition partnership were worked out by a group of exceptionally talented senior commanders and staff officers. These men rose above (eventually) a lot of the petty squabbling to get things done. It is here, and at the front lines, that systems and approaches to cooperation were established and worked out. This, however, was an approach that was thwarted with difficulties, not least the fact that it was very challenging to systematize such an approach. As the book details, changes in formations, units, staff officers, and commanders—for good or ill—had a major impact on the operation of the coalition.

As the book highlights, in the period of greater equity in the relationship between the two countries, when strategic interests and objectives were mutually aligned, an exceptionally high degree of cooperation, especially at the operational and tactical levels, was achieved (despite a number of issues). It was only after the true asymmetry of the relationship became apparent and strategic interests started to diverge that the relationship became strategically and operationally dysfunctional.

Ultimately, however, this was a successful coalition. Despite its ad hoc nature, it defeated the Japanese in the theater, and this is highlighted by the triumphs in battle that the Allies had. It is hoped that this work explains and explores the success in the SWPA and the US-Australian cooperation, as much as it details the more theatrical areas of sharp disagreement and discord. In the end, despite all of its issues and problems, the coalition was critical to the defeat of the Japanese in the Pacific War.